

RDF Gen Tea Byline

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Refresh Your Beverage Menu to Welcome the “New Normal”

The highly anticipated return of restaurant dining post pandemic has operators planning for their big welcome back to patrons. Whether you are an already established restaurant, or a brand-new operation, now is prime time to evaluate what customers are looking for in their dining experiences. Everything from the first sip of a drink order to the last bite of dessert should be exciting, unique, and delicious to make that novel on-premise dining experience stand out.

One way to impress guests from the get-go is to have a strong beverage menu, as drink orders are typically taken upon arrival. Consider building out a menu that has variety, creativity, and flavors that are versatile enough to appeal to a wide range of customers. Incorporating tea into your menu will help boost drink sales with Gen Tea, the 159 million Americans that drink tea on any given day and consume 3.8 billion gallons of tea a year, according to the Tea Association of the USA. These consumers appreciate the simplicity of tea and its ability to stand alone as a preferred thirst quencher or serve as a base for flavorful concoctions fit for trendy drinks like zero-proof cocktails.

Elevating your drink menu with simple tea upgrades will help your establishment stand out with a hand-made touch that will keep customers coming back. Here are some ways to capitalize on this staple that is second only to water as the world’s most consumed beverage, to increase sales throughout the day.

- **Offer a tea flight**
 - Offering a tea “tasting” helps boost engagement and encourages customers to try something new. It’s a great tactic that serves as an introduction to the meal or to a signature feature on your menu. Putting this into practice may lead to multiple sales per ticket if the flavors pique interest among all diners at the table.

- **Appeal to the quality and artisanal aspect of tea**
 - Consumers enjoy learning about the in-depth flavor profile that a tea beverage can offer. Create a separate tea menu with descriptors similar to that of a wine menu for a memorable experience. Keep in mind that your customers will be discerning of the type of tea you are serving, so be sure to be selective with what is on your menu—quality, taste and color matter.

- **Experiment with zero-proof cocktails**

- The versatility of tea lends itself well as a staple base for a slew of cocktails and mocktails. With trending zero-proof drinks on the rise, take advantage of offering hand-crafted drinks to impress customers. Shake up a tea drink with fresh fruit and ice for a handcrafted feel.
- **Flavor is key when it comes to tea**
 - Stay on top of trending flavors that you can incorporate into your tea offerings. Passionfruit, ginger, mango and hibiscus are all popular flavors that are beyond a typical lemon or peach offering.
- **Offer trending sweetening alternatives**
 - Some unique sweeteners include monk fruit and sugar swizzle sticks. Plus, sweeteners can appeal to health-minded tea drinkers too. Looking ahead, consumers are expected to use more stevia, agave, honey and demerara within their beverages.
- **Format matters**
 - Depending on where you reside, certain types of tea are in high demand. Understanding what your customers want and when will help you decide if you need to have hot tea and iced tea available throughout the entire day to satisfy customers with a specific preference.

Restaurant operators that work these tips and tricks into a drink menu will be sure welcome back guests with a fresh take on beverages and keep the Gen Tea consumer coming back throughout the entire day. The next time you think about enhancing your beverage program, be sure to work with a trusted partner that can support your operation with the necessary tools to boost sales and promote innovation.

Emily Wood Bowron is the VP of Strategic Marketing at *Red Diamond, Inc.* in Birmingham, Alabama. Bowron has worked tirelessly to grow and raise the profile of the 115-year-old, prominent Birmingham-based coffee & tea company. With the execution of successful marketing strategies, Bowron has secured a dedicated customer base, propelled new product development and managed sales launches that have help build the Red Diamond® brand. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Emily Wood has exhibited a stellar talent for overseeing and collaborating on facets from marketing and manufacturing to distribution and sales.