

## Offer Better Snacks to Build Your Sales



**Everyone snacks between meals. Learn how different and better snacks can set your operation apart from the competition while satisfying consumer demand.**

With interest in snacks on the rise, it pays to up your game on finger foods, small plates, and other snack-worthy menu items.

For many food service operators, snacks are where it's at. According to Datassential, the number of snacks on menus has grown 12.7% since 2013, to colonize 4.2% of US restaurant menus. And given that the bulk of that snack menuing occurs at chains, that spells opportunity for other types of operations.

For consumers, a snack is anything eaten outside of what's considered a regular meal, regardless of daypart, and by that definition a whopping 91% of respondents have a snack on any given day, and many average four to five snacks a day.

That's why it pays to offer snack items that are more appealing than the competition's.

**For more information on snacks, see below.**

Almost any food item that's smaller than a full-meal portion can be menued as a snack, from cut vegetables and fruit with a dip to protein-based specialties to cookies. Whether these are offered during traditional dayparts (such as dinner or lunch, when they can do double duty as an appetizer or small dessert) or between meals (mid-afternoon, late-night, etc), depends on the specific type of operation and clientele served, but the rules of engagement are similar.

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Offer something that's a little different or a little better than what customers can get down the street—a signature snack, in other words. Many of these can be created with ingredients that are already on the menu in other forms, or can be cross-utilized in other items.

**Sausages**—As meat and charcuterie assortments become more popular, offering a selection of different sausages can make sense, especially as a shareable. Experiment with varieties like kielbasa, bratwurst, chorizo, spicy Italian `nduja (a kind of spreadable salami), or locally made/artisanal sausages, sliced and served with condiments.

**Savory or Sweet Hand Pies**—Empanadas, mini calzone, English meat pies, and Greek spanakopita, as well as individual handheld fruit-filled and other sweet pies are perfect for snacking, with the added advantage of portability.

**Fries and Other Spuds**—French fries are a longtime favorite, but that's no excuse for boredom. Substitute another potato product, like tots, waffle chips, or sweet potato fries. Offer them with a choice of sampling of flavored salts, dusts, and/or sauces, for a customizable experience. Borrow the poutine model and load fries with interesting toppings; items that are already on the menu, like clam chowder and bacon, can be used to create New England-style Chowder Fries.

**Mini Sandwiches**—Take the slider concept up a notch with other miniaturized sandwiches, from three-bite lobster rolls to snack-size grilled cheese to deli-style sliders. These can even be smaller versions of full-size sandwiches already on the menu, offered specifically as snacks.

**Mexican Street Snacks**—From individual tacos to taquitos to roasted seasoned corn on the cob, the classic handheld street foods of Mexico are perfect snack fare here, north of the border. Investigate the corn-based category of foods called antojitos for more inspiration.

**Toasts and Tartines**—There may be a few customers who've never heard of avocado toast, but in truth this whole category is booming, especially in the age of Instagram where toasts and the open-face French sandwiches known as tartines can be topped off with all manner of beautiful seasonal produce, cheeses, bites of meat, and more. Sweet versions can include toppings like Nutella and banana or cream cheese and jam. Also worth considering: bruschetta, crostini, and other bread-based specialties.

**Chicken Wings**—Buffalo-style are fine, but chicken wings (as well as nuggets and other chicken snacks) represent a great vehicle for flavor innovations. Try a spicy Korean barbecue sauce, jerk chicken, sticky Thai-style, or other globally inspired treatment, or take a page from the chicken wing chains and offer a list of different sauces with various levels of spicy heat.

**Nachos**—Here's another oldie but goodie that's easy to transform into an on-trend signature. Move beyond the usual tortilla chips with multicolored corn chips, housemade potato or other vegetable chips or planks, chicharrons, pita triangles, or another carrier. Top with an interesting protein like Nashville hot chicken bites, gyros meat, or fried shrimp. Accessorize with a global sauce like queso, tzatziki, or spicy remoulade.

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**Dim Sum**—These Chinese small snacks are trending in translation, and can encompass everything from egg rolls with interesting fillings to meat- and vegetable-filled bao and buns, shrimp toast, skewered seasoned meats, and traditional shumai, har gow, and other savory dumplings. Made in-house, they're great for product cross-utilization, but the availability of prepared Asian snacks is also on the rise.

**Sweet Snacks**—Cupcakes, cookies, and other individual baked goods are a natural for snacks for the sweet tooth, but there are plenty of other possibilities, including muffins in interesting flavors like pumpkin cheesecake, beignets or specialty donuts, fruit-and-grain bars, or even cut fruit with a sweet dip.

Source: Datassential Keynote Report: Snacking, March 2017

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## DID YOU KNOW?

- 96% of operators offer "snackable" menu items (such as ice cream or fried appetizers), but only 32% of them label them specifically as snacks
- Snacks appear on 21.2% of national chain menus, but only 4.8% of regional chains' and 3.3% of independents'