

THE GUIDE TO
CREATING A
COCKTAIL MENU



Matthew Clark

YOUR GUIDE TO CREATING A COCKTAIL MENU

How to get started creating a cocktail menu, the drinks you should list, how to make them your own and make sure that you're selling them!

Matthew Clark

We're a national alcohol and drinks wholesaler with over 200 years' experience. We've built up an unrivalled range of over 7,500 products that we supply to 1000's of the UK's very best bars, restaurants, pubs and hotels. But for us, it's not just moving boxes. It's delivering expertise in category development, product and staff training and marketing support. Sharing our knowledge, if you'd like it, to help you grow your business.

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INTRODUCTION

The cocktail market is worth more than half a billion pounds in the UK, with 41,000 of venues having them available; 6.7% more outlets offer cocktails than did a year ago¹. Cocktails have proven to be a hugely beneficial addition to your drinks range¹. They can differentiate you from your competition and increase your customers spend per head.

As a general rule, a cocktail is an alcoholic mixed drink that contains three or more ingredients, at least one of the components must be a spirit, one should be sweet or sugary and one sour or bitter. As with everything, there are exceptions, a Martini, for example, is just vodka or gin with vermouth and yet is one of the most famous cocktails in the world.

Cocktails fell out of fashion in the second half of the 20th century, as the popularity of vodka and ready to drink serves started to grow. However, today we are experiencing the cocktail rebirth as consumers become more interested in the provenance of a product, the 'foodie' culture and a desire for theatre on a night out that can't be replicated at home.

It can, therefore, be a little daunting constructing a new cocktail list, especially if you're just starting with cocktails. How many cocktails should you have on your list? What types of cocktails should you choose? Every bar is different so unfortunately, there is no single set of recommendations, but over the next few pages, we aim to give you a solid base of knowledge to get started!

Source

1 - CGA Mixed Drinks Q1 2019

WHY SELL COCKTAILS?

You may be forgiven for thinking that the cocktail trend is only relevant to bars. When we imagine cocktails in the on-trade, most minds will drift to dimly-lit dens filled with jazz music. While 74% of the nation's bars offer cocktails, the data shows that these serves are becoming familiar sights right across the on-trade landscape¹. Venues such as pubs and restaurants are increasingly offering cocktails, allowing them to increase customer spend and opportunities.

Serving cocktails opens up a large market of customers, there are 8.3 million consumers drinking cocktails in the on-trade¹. These consumers visit the on-trade more regularly than non-cocktail drinkers, are of higher value and are more likely to revisit².

Demand is growing; 28% of cocktail consumers drink cocktails more frequently than they did six months ago¹. On average, cocktail consumers spend £24 more out of the home than non-cocktail consumers¹. The price of cocktails is less of a consideration, the expected spend has increased and the drinking occasion is just as important a factor in decision making.

There is enormous opportunity to appeal more to general spirits consumers too, moving them from serves with a mixer to higher margin cocktail serves. So these are the main reasons why cocktails are essential to your outlet. They can help you create an experience that brings back people that are willing to spend more, and as cocktails command a higher price tag, it means higher margins and more profit for you.

Source

1 - Mixed Drinks Q3 2018 CGA

2 - BrandTrack, July 2018 CGA

HOW MANY SHOULD YOU LIST?

The very first thing you should consider, whether creating your first cocktail list or your hundredth, is the skills of staff and the space and equipment available in your outlet. If you have well-trained and experienced cocktail staff, then they should be able to produce cocktails from an extensive menu consistently. If you have a team embarking on cocktails for the first time – less is more.

As a ballpark figure, small lists should contain 6-8 cocktails. For mainstream outlets, think pubs and bars with limited cocktail expertise, we recommend cocktails popular in the market place with 3 or 4 ingredients that can be made quickly and easily. Although the Pornstar Martini is a time-consuming cocktail, it's the On-Trade's most popular and is, therefore, a must stock.

If you have more space, time and expertise, a big list of 12-14 cocktails will be more suitable. Specialist cocktail bars could have more than this of course, with anywhere up to 50 cocktails plus the option for customers to request something off the menu. With every additional cocktail you add to your list, consider the extra prep work and additional ingredients you will need. With many cocktails requiring fresh fruit or other perishables, remember to factor in the potential for waste, you don't want to see your money poured away.

Food-led outlets can have more flexibility in the number of cocktails they offer. Most consumers drink cocktails at the beginning of a meal, offering an aperitif is a great way to encourage this. Matching a cocktail range to your style of food is essential, 49% of consumers drink cocktails during their meal, as utilising cocktails as a tool to increase spend – for example, offering Bellini's with your weekend lunch menu to entice the brunch crowd.



WHICH COCKTAILS SHOULD I LIST?

The cocktails you choose to put on your list will depend on your type of venue, theme and typical customers. That said, all menus can be made up of three categories of cocktails.

Firstly, there are cocktails that suit the venue. Take the time to consider your outlets' theme and typical customers, making a mental note of a few descriptive words that sum up what kind of cocktail represents you. For example, a fine-dining French restaurant is perhaps best represented by the likes of the Champagne Cocktail, the Kir Royale and the Boulevardier.

Then we have cocktails with strong name recognition. Remember that most guests are looking for something they know they like, so be sure to also offer some safe serves such as the Mojito, Cosmopolitan or Long Island Ice Tea. That isn't to say you should give up on your theme, but instead consider if you can make any tweaks that make these cocktails your own.

Finally, we have the big hitters. These are the cocktails that are trending across the UK and seeing strong sales. The top-selling cocktails in the on-trade are;

1. Pornstar Martini
2. Mojito
3. Long Island Iced Tea
4. Sex on the Beach
5. Daiquiri
6. Woo Woo
7. Espresso Martini
8. Martini
9. Pina Colada
10. Collins

Source: Mixed Drinks Q1 2019 CGA

the colours of summer

Bright greens, luscious lilacs and pastel pinks. The colours of summer are here!

Developments in the market dictate that if you tap into some key trends such as serving low abv, pink and coloured serves, you can not only cater for your customers wants and needs but also gain access to higher profit margins and maximise footfall in your venue.

Cocktail

Midsummer Salty Dog

Glassware: Cocktail Glass

Ingredients

25ml Hendrick's Midsummer Solstice,
125ml red grapefruit Juice, 1 grapefruit slice.

Method

Salt the rim (optional) of a highball glass. Fill with ice and combine all ingredients in glass. Lightly stir and serve. Garnish with a thin wedge of pink grapefruit.



Cocktail

Edinburgh Rhubarb and Ginger Tom Collins

Glassware: Hi-Ball

Ingredients

50ml Edinburgh Rhubarb and Ginger Full Strength Gin,
25ml lemon juice, 25ml sugar syrup, soda water,
lemon wedge.

Method

Combine gin, lemon juice and sugar syrup in a glass over ice. Gently stir. Top with soda water. Add garnish.



Cocktail

Whisky Sour

Glassware: Tumbler

Ingredients

60ml Bourbon, 15ml simple syrup, 30ml lemon juice, cherry and lemon peel for garnish, pasteurised egg white.

Method

Shake all ingredients with ice and strain into ice-filled tumbler glass. Add garnish.



Cocktail

Margarita

Glassware: Margarita glass

Ingredients

35ml AquaRiva Blanco or Reposado Tequila, 25ml fresh lime juice, 15ml of AquaRiva Organic Agave Syrup, lime wheel.

Method

Shake all ingredient with ice and strain into margarita glass. Rim the glass with an orange zest and salt. Garnish with a lime wheel.

Cocktail

Marie Love

Glassware: Wine glass

Ingredients

50ml part de Parfait Amour, 100ml rosé wine, 50ml tonic, orange peel.

Method

Build all ingredients in large wine glass. Add ice & stir. Garnish with orange peel.



PUTTING YOUR OWN SPIN ON IT

With people looking for a unique experience when they trade in their hard-earned cash, signature cocktails are to be found on more and more menus. It's all about ensuring that your venue and your list stand out. These can be completely new creations or twists on the classics. Signature cocktails add an extra layer to the drinkers experience and rumour has it, the opportunity for a higher price that is justified in the buyer's mind.

There are many ways that you could make a cocktail your own. From serving it in a unique way to swapping out ingredients, bartenders across the country revel in making drinks that are unique to them. The important thing is that it fits in with your venue. The cocktail selection, the names of your cocktails and your menu design should all work together in creating a cohesive experience for your outlet. In short, if you serve Mexican food and don't have a Margarita on your list, then what is going on?

Whatever you do, you should remember that your new drink needs to taste great, never swap style for substance when it comes to cocktails. Secondly, you need to ensure that the drinks remain easy to make when you're ten deep at the bar. While people will forgive waiting a while for a cocktail, at the end of the day, the quicker it takes to serve, the more you can sell. Finally, don't forget the bottom line, there's no point making a drink that tastes delicious but costs you more to make than you make in selling it. Similarly, where possible, try and make use of products and ingredients you already have available, this will keep wastage down and quality up.



STARTING FROM SCRATCH

While putting twists on existing drinks is useful in making a cocktail list your own, nothing says more about your venue than the original cocktails you create. Of course, not every site should be creating cocktails from scratch. Most consumers are happy to select from a list of recognisable, trusted favourites.

To create from scratch, you need to be passionate about creating something. This will initiate curiosity and will drive you to research a little on what you want to make and what others have created. Learn some key classics and how they are made; you will find that many ideas stem from other cocktails.

Once you've got the original piece of inspiration, the next steps are to think about the concept of the drink and its core ingredient. You need a theme or a concept to begin with. It could be something along the lines of an after-dinner cocktail, a seasonal serve, a brand-led drink or combinations of a couple of these. Try to work with one specific ingredient to start with, think about the flavour profile and what it pairs or contrast with.

Next up, it's time for some experimentation, creating cocktails is meant to be a fun activity after all! Play around with sweet and sour as well as sweet and bitter there are loads of combinations available. Once you have the second ingredient, then look to add something that either enhances or lengthens the experience.

Think about the flavour that you want to achieve, making sure the balance between sweet and sour is there. When a drink is balanced, each of the elements will cancel its opposite out, creating an enjoyable drink that customers will enjoy time and time again.

If the tart overpowers the sweet or the strong overpowers the weak the drink will not be balanced and one of the four 'building blocks' will influence the flavour too much. The Daiquiri is a great example of how this system works - the rum gives you the strength, the dilution from the shaken ice gives you the weak, the fresh lime adds the tart, and the sugar syrup adds the sweet.

Cocktails with 3-4 ingredients have stood the test of time and are still prominent today; the Margarita, the Daiquiri, the Old Fashioned, the list goes on. Keeping it simple will allow the ingredients to shine through which in turn, does the work for you. If you're adding more than six ingredients, you may be over complicating it.

Remember the practicalities of your new drink. There is no point putting a drink together that costs £7-8 to make as you would have to charge £30 to sell it. Think about how easy it is to create and how easy it is to get hold of specific ingredients readily. Think about syrups, foams and tinctures, if it takes you days, weeks or even months to make an ingredient from scratch then you need to think about lead times when you need to make some more.

The final piece of the puzzle is how your drink is served. Glassware and garnish are as important as the drink itself, adding to the theatre and look of the drink. Consistency is vital, ensure that your drink can be easily made and served every time.

Make sure that you make good notes of the process; you want to be able to write up the specifications and method once you're happy with your creation. For consistent cocktails getting the right measurements is vital - just like preparing the perfect meal.

CURRENT COCKTAIL TRENDS

The past few years have seen explosive growth in the UK for the spritz; not least for the Aperol Spritz. These serves are at the centre of perfectly converging trends for sparkling wine, lower calorie cocktails and adventurous drinks. While the basic formula of three parts Prosecco, two parts spirit or liqueur and one part soda stays the same, the spirit or liqueur used can be tailored to suit a wide range of tastes and occasions.

There is significant growth in the low and no alcohol area too, admittedly from a small base but part of a long-term trend towards healthier lifestyles. Shim cocktails, which swap strong spirits such as vodka and gin for lower ABV products such as vermouth and sherry are appearing on more menus, as are mocktails and drinks made with alcohol-free spirits such as Ceder's. The days of a soda and lime for the abstainers are numbered, with the potential for high margin low and no alcohol cocktails to take its place.

With the organic market rising, the number of people identifying as Vegan or Vegetarian growing and businesses being put under pressure to cut plastic waste, there is a clear need for outlets to show that they take the ethical considerations of guests seriously. This may mean using more local ingredients and banning the straw or using spirits brands that embrace sustainability and avoid animal products.

As consumers generally are becoming more health conscious, moving away from convenience for the good of their wellbeing, it's clear to see that the cocktail market will move in this direction. Expect to see more 'skinny' and low alcohol cocktails in future.



THE LIST ITSELF

Your primary selling tool for your new range of cocktails is your cocktail menu. There are many schools of thought on how to describe the cocktails on your list. The golden rule is that the description should entice your guest to purchase the drink but leave a little bit of intrigue and mystery.

List some ingredients and give an idea of the flavour, adding emphasis on any elements that elevate the cocktail, for example, making a note of using a premium brand. 39% of cocktail consumers choose a cocktail based on the quality of spirits brands – shouting about the spirits you use, offering branded cocktails and increasing the quality of spirits contained in your drinks should have a positive effect on your sales.

If you need to name some cocktails, remember that it needs to be easy to pronounce, think about how many customers shy away from wine listings like Gewurtztraminer and Nero d'Avola because they don't know how to pronounce it. Base your name on the story you wish to tell when you serve it, but you don't need to take the naming too seriously. It can have a historical theme on the origin of the drink or spirit used, it can be funny, cheeky or merely a good pun.

Think about the structure of your cocktail list – the layout can influence what choices people make. Ensure it is designed well and easy to read so the consumer can navigate how you want them to - comfortably! This will involve sectioning your list and using more personal language such as 'bartender favourites'; this gives the consumer confidence when ordering their drink. Finally, remove the pound signs from your pricing; this can increase sales by 12%.

GETTING PRICING RIGHT

The cost of a cocktail should be directly related to the cost of the ingredients. The cost of the ingredients should fall somewhere between 18% and 24% of the price to the customer. Your prices should reflect the local area, the type of outlet and your customers.

Mainstream outlets should aim more towards 23/24% while more premium, city centre outlets should look more towards 18/19%. Where using highly premium ingredients, consider moving that proportional ingredient cost up into the 20%'s as otherwise the price may limit sales on what should be a high cash margin serve.

You should consider breaking down your cocktail menu into two or three sections, along the lines of basic, standard and premium cocktails. In each of these sections, you should aim to equate cocktail prices as closely as possible by lowering or raising the proportion of ingredient cost. This allows more consumer choice at a given price point, necessary when cocktail consumers choose a cocktail mostly based on flavour and price.

Furthermore, these sections will allow the opportunity for customers to trade up and your staff to upsell. Ensure that all of your team have tried each of the cocktails on your list and know the ingredients.

As cocktails offer a high cash margin, they provide the opportunity for promotions. Many places offer two for one at quieter times or a selection of cocktails at a lower mark up to attract customers. Insight shows that 98% of drinkers buy cocktails on promotion, far higher than any other category. Consider how you could offer some promotions on your range, remembering to factor this into your pricing strategy.

Example pricing for a Cosmopolitan

Ingredient	Size (litres)	Price	£/25ml	Amount used (25ml)	Cost
Vodka Citron	0.75	17.3	0.77	1.5	1.16
Triple Sec	0.75	12.7	0.56	0.5	0.28
Lime juice	1	7.85	0.26	0.5	0.13
Cranberry juice	1	1.5	0.05	1.5	0.07

Garnish	Portions	Price	£/portion	Amount Used	Cost
Lime	8	0.25	0.03	1	0.03

Total (£) 1.67

Ingredient Cost	Sell Out
18%	£9.30
19%	£8.80
20%	£8.35
21%	£7.95
22%	£7.60
23%	£7.25
24%	£7.00



**EXAMPLE
MENUS**

SMALL MAINSTREAM

With the exception of the Long Island Iced Tea, a cocktail consistently popular in the On-Trade, cocktails with 3 or 4 ingredients that can be made quickly and easily are best suited to mainstream outlets. The cocktails selected below are quite safe bets, each of them sells well in the on-trade and are easily made with minimal chance of wastage.

- Long Island Iced Tea
- Pornstar Martini
- Sex on the Beach
- Woo Woo
- Cosmopolitan
- Dark and Stormy
- Lynchburg Lemonade

LARGE MAINSTREAM

If you have more space and expertise you can expand your menu out in many ways. You could add cocktails that take a little bit more time to prepare or if you have a more premium venue, you can consider swapping some cocktails for some 'classics' such as the Negroni, Manhattan or Tom Collins. However, here we are going to keep it simple.

Add the following to the small list;

- Tequila sunrise
- Mojito
- Pina Colada
- Daiquiri
- Kir Royale
- Moscow Mule

SMALL WET-LED

In wet-led outlets where you have more space for cocktail stations, you can produce serves that require some extra preparation time, but elevate the customer experience and spend. The Pina Colada and Espresso Martini are popular choices so should be offered if you have the capabilities, with fresh cream and coffee required respectively.

- Long Island Iced Tea
- Mojito
- Espresso Martini
- Bellini
- Pornstar Martini
- Pina Colada
- Whiskey Sour

LARGE WET-LED

While we're picking out some trusted favourites to get you started with, wet-led outlets should try adding some cocktails with their own signature twists to make their list unique. Signature cocktails are those unique to an outlet, these can be completely original or twists on the classics. They go beyond what is usually expected, adding an extra layer to the drinkers' experience.

Add the following to the small list;

- Bramble
- Cosmopolitan
- Dark and Stormy
- Daiquiri
- Vodka Martini
- Manhattan

SMALL FOOD-LED

In a food-led environment, cocktails find a place when waiting in the bar to be seated, with a dessert (or as a dessert!) or even paired with the food. Matching a cocktail range to your style of food is important, for example, there is no Margarita on the list below, but if you serve Mexican food it's a must

- Bloody Mary
- Mojito
- Espresso Martini
- Bellini
- Bramble
- Kir Royale
- Aperol Spritz

LARGE FOOD-LED

We believe that many restaurants can capitalise on the trend for evening and late night drinks in more relaxed environments; using cocktails to capture the after-work crowd and those that want to avoid noisy late night bars. For this, we think a larger cocktail menu is key.

Add the following to the small list;

- French 75
- Pornstar Martini
- Negroni
- Daiquiri
- Cosmopolitan

KEY POINTS

- The cocktail market is worth over half a billion pounds and still in growth.
- Cocktail differentiates your offer and helps win a lucrative customer's group.
- Cocktail consumers drink out more and are more likely to revisit an outlet.
- If starting out, a list of 6-8 cocktails that contain 3 or 4 ingredients is a good place to start.
- Mojitos and Long Island Iced Teas are more difficult but very popular.
- If you have the expertise, around 12-14 cocktails is a manageable list size.
- Remember, that every additional cocktail increases the risk of waste and inconsistency.
- Cocktails should be selected on the basis of fitting with your venue and recognition.
- Make your list your own by adding twists to existing cocktails or creating your own.
- Ensure all cocktails are quick and easy to make and are profitable.
- Creating a cocktail from scratch takes inspiration and plenty of trial and error.
- Your menu is your main selling tool, make sure it pulls its weight.
- Take the time to build a structured approach to pricing your cocktails.
- Consider running promotions on your range, they are very important to consumers.

WHY MATTHEW CLARK

Delivering your customers the perfect spirit or cocktail is as important to us as it is to you. History meets modern purity throughout our range, offering you something old and something new for the heart of your back bar.

Drawing on our unique insight into what's available to suit our diverse customer base, as a dedicated spirit supplier to the On-Trade, we have a market-leading portfolio and unique links with brand owners.

We're sure that our range has the perfect products for outlets and consumers of all styles, however, if you are interested in a particular product, but not sure we stock it, talk to us and we can look at sourcing it for you through our unparalleled 'extended range' of world, craft and boutique spirits.

We offer a truly unique composite drinks supply solution making Matthew Clark an efficient, reliable and well tested service partner;

Visit <https://www.matthewclark.co.uk/contact> or call 0344 822 3910 for more information.



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the experience matters