

It's All in a Name:

How to Boost the Sales of Plant-based Menu Items



How can food companies take advantage of the trend toward plant-based eating, and draw more flexitarians and meat-eaters to choose veg-heavy dishes? A simple fix can be the name you choose.

The below list represents the Better Buying Lab's initial findings on which language can suppress and enhance consumers' appetites for plant-rich foods. Using these learnings, restaurants and food companies can market their plant-rich offerings in ways that appeal to mainstream diners in the United States and Britain.

1 **DON'T USE "MEAT-FREE"**

"Meat-free" means less of what meat eaters like

In our study with Sainsbury's supermarket in the United Kingdom, sales of two dishes increased 76 percent when "meat free" was removed from the dishes' names and replaced with a more appealing one. It's counterproductive to communicate that a food is "free" of meat if the goal is to appeal to more meat-eaters.

2 **DON'T USE "VEGAN"**

"Vegan" means different from me

A study in the United States asked consumers to rank the relative appeal of 21 different labels used to describe food and beverages. The vegan label emerged as the least appealing of all options. "Vegan" is currently seen in a negative light by many meat-eaters, and one that creates an 'us-them' mentality with non-vegans.

3 **DON'T USE "VEGETARIAN"**

"Vegetarian" means healthy – but unsatisfying – food

Meat eaters are 56 percent less likely to order a plant-rich dish if it's contained within a "vegetarian" box on a menu, compared to the vegetarian options being spread across the menu. While vegetarian diets are perceived as healthy, they are also seen by many as boring and bland, and meat-free diets as not tasty enough.

4

DON'T USE "HEALTHY RESTRICTIVE" LANGUAGE

Healthy restrictive language like "low fat" has low appeal

In a U.S. study, respondents were given the same mango lassi to drink. Those who drank one labelled "healthy" rated it as 55 percent less enjoyable than those who drank the "unhealthy" version. Other tests looking at cookies, milkshakes and even soup have shown similar findings. If plant-rich foods are already thought of as "boring and bland," highlighting health benefits can add "not tasty" to the list of potential negative perceptions.

5

DO HIGHLIGHT PROVENANCE

Provenance can be evocative

In a market test, Panera Bread switched the name of its "Low Fat Vegetarian Black Bean Soup" to "Cuban Black Bean Soup." This easy swap resulted in a 13 percent increase in sales of the black bean soup in trial locations. Leveraging a food's provenance, meaning where the cuisine originates or even the earthly traits if plant-based, is a powerful tactic to create positive associations with a product.

6

DO SPOTLIGHT FLAVOR

Flavor gets mouths watering

A study at Stanford University gave vegetable side dishes flavor-focused names such as "Rich Buttery Roasted Sweet Corn" and "Zesty Ginger Turmeric Sweet Potatoes." Labelled this way, they were chosen 41 percent more often over identically prepared vegetables with "healthy-restrictive" names and 25 percent more often than those with "basic" names.

7

DO EMPHASIZE A FOOD'S LOOK AND FEEL

Look and feel drives appeal

Plant-rich foods come in a spectrum of colors, and color is the single biggest cue people use to set their expectations of what a food will taste like. To highlight a food's texture or sensation when eaten, chefs might also incorporate terms like "creamy," "warming," "crunchy," "smooth" and "sticky" into their dish names.

For this complete research, **visit wri.org/language-of-food.**

To learn more, visit **BetterBuyingLab.org.**