



FOR HOSPITALITY OPERATORS

The Fourth Lever **your menu is missing.**

Sales volume, food cost and labour cover three quarters of the story. Guest feedback is the missing piece.

3

Levers already
shaping your menu

1

Overlooked menu
engineering lever

4

Blind spots, closed
by guest data

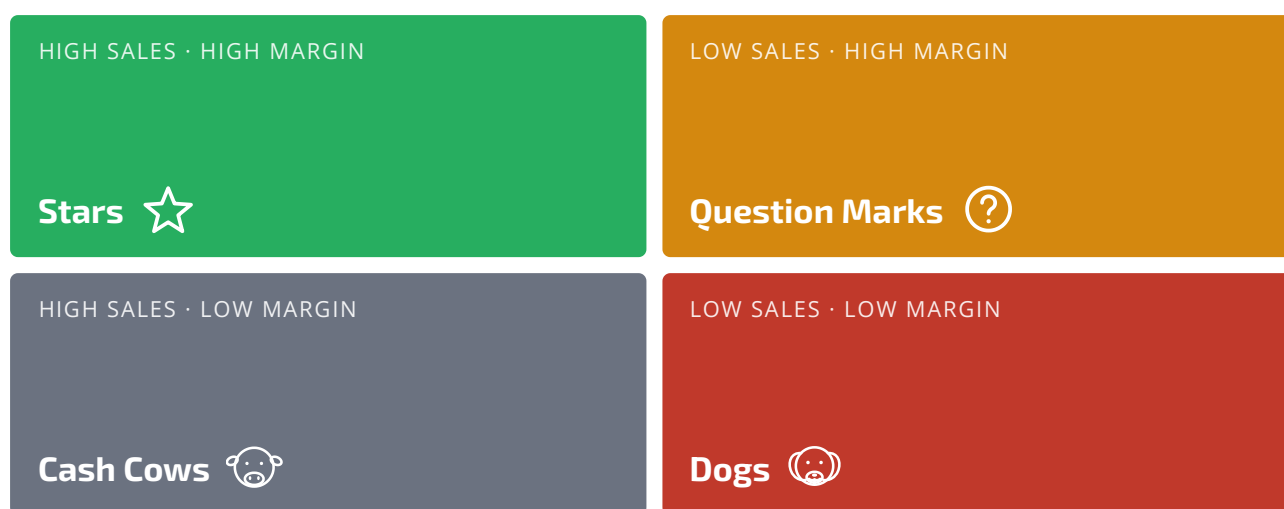


01

The classic menu engineering grid.

Two variables. The industry standard since 1982.

Every operator uses some version of this. Kasavana & Smith laid it out in 1982 and it's been the industry-standard menu engineering tool ever since. Two variables: how popular a dish is, and how much margin it contributes.



Sales volume against contribution margin (price minus food cost).

Promote your Stars. Rework or reprice your Cash Cows. Reposition your Question Marks. Drop your Dogs. The rules are clean and the framework is powerful.



But look at what the grid **actually** measures. Sales volume on one axis. Food cost baked into the margin on the other. That's two levers. Not three. Not four.



02

Labour is the lever most operators forget to plot.

Left off the grid on purpose in 1982. It shouldn't stay off in 2026.

The original framework left labour out on purpose. In 1982, labour was treated as a fixed cost – the chef is already on shift, so calculating labour felt artificial and hard to measure.



Same menu price. Very different labour costs.

The most commercially-savvy operators net labour off dish by dish – sometimes called “prime cost” (food + labour). Most don’t. Labour sits in a P&L report somewhere, not next to the menu decision.

A slow-braised lamb shank isn’t a chicken salad. A plated dessert isn’t a scoop of ice cream. If two dishes have the same food cost and the same price but one takes four times as long to produce, they don’t belong in the same quadrant.



If you’re only pricing off food cost, some of your Cash Cows are hiding real cost, and **it’s a labour problem, not a margin problem.**



03

Even with sales, food cost and labour, one thing is missing entirely.

Pick your top ten dishes. See how many of these you can answer.

THE FIVE QUESTIONS

1. Do guests rate the taste of this dish above or below your menu average?
2. Would guests pay more for it – or does the current price already feel like a stretch?
3. Is this dish driving repeat visits, or filling a slot on the menu?
4. Does the presentation match the price point guests are paying?
5. Are guests choosing this dish or defaulting to it because nothing better catches their eye?

Most operators can answer one, maybe two. Sales and cost data don't tell you any of this.

Add guest data to your menu engineering grid and something interesting happens:

Guest feedback

How guests rate every dish – taste, value, presentation, portion, temperature, satisfaction

MENU DATA: **Stars**

GUEST DATA: → **Confirmed hero**

High sales, high satisfaction. A genuine hero – protect the recipe don't touch it.

MENU DATA: **Question Marks**

GUEST DATA: → **Confirmed cut**

Low sales, low satisfaction. Stop investing in it, replace with something guests actually want.

MENU DATA: **Cash Cows**

GUEST DATA: → **Price opportunity**

High taste and value perception. Raise the price – guests think it's worth more.

MENU DATA: **Dogs**

GUEST DATA: → **Hidden gem**

Guests who order it love it. Low sales are a positioning problem, not a product problem.

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04

Guest feedback changes the decisions.

Here's what this looks like inside a hospitality business:



Tortilla — 60+ sites, UK's largest Californian-Mexican chain

CLIENT STORY

Under new central-operations leadership, Tortilla had spent two years overhauling its food: new rice, new salsas, better ingredients. Food quality scores were the highest they had ever been. **Value-for-money scores were not moving with them.**

Emily Bagshaw's team turned to HGEM's guest feedback to work out why. **Portioning was the answer.** The team went back to their portioning guide and found it had not been updated since 2020 — dishes built to spec were coming out smaller than the brand's own "generous" positioning promised.

So they rebuilt the portion guide. Retrained the teams. Rolled it through regional operations managers, then general managers, then every store, on one coordinated go-live day — three months of preparation for one focus, held for a full quarter.

+49.2%

NPS

+18.7%

Food quality

+23.9%

Value for money

-12.7%

Negative portion-size mentions

Sales mix and margin could not have surfaced this. Guest feedback did. That is the fourth lever, in one operator's own numbers.



05

What is the fourth lever actually worth?

Every input below is a question sales and cost data can't answer.

This is where menu engineering meets guest experience. Take the formulas below, apply your own figures, and see what the fourth lever could be worth to your business.

THE GREEN & GRAIN - WORKED EXAMPLE

WEEKLY COVERS / SITE

1,400

AVG SPEND / COVER

£19

NUMBER OF SITES

30

1 Charge more on dishes with value headroom

Some dishes are priced below what guests would pay. Guest value scores tell you which. A small price rise on high-satisfaction dishes drops straight to the bottom line.

DISHES WITH HEADROOM

1

PRICE UPLIFT / DISH

£1.50

COVERS ORDERING / WK

95

Covers/wk × sites × 52 × price uplift

£222,300

2 Cut complex dishes guests don't love

Some dishes eat kitchen time and ingredients for no guest reward. Guest data reveals them. Cutting saves the combined waste and labour cost behind every cover.

DISHES TO CUT

1

SAVING / COVER

£2.20

COVERS ORDERING / WK

30

Covers/wk × sites × 52 × saving/cover

£102,960

3 Push hidden gems – low sales, high satisfaction

Dishes guests love but rarely order are a positioning problem, not a product problem. Reposition them and their share grows – and because margin is higher, revenue lifts.

HIDDEN GEMS TO PROMOTE

1

INCREMENTAL COVERS / WK

25

MARGIN UPLIFT / COVER

£14.50

Incremental covers/wk × sites × 52 × margin uplift

£565,500

4 Guard the hero dishes carrying your menu

High sales can hide a quiet decline. Guest data flags it early, protecting the recipe and consistency that built it.

HERO DISHES TO GUARD

1

REORDER-RATE AT RISK

3.84%

COVERS ORDERING / WK

160

Covers/wk × sites × 52 × spend × reorder uplift

£182,108

TOTAL ANNUAL OPPORTUNITY

£1,072,868

Notice something: every input above is a question – how many dishes have headroom, which are complex and unloved, which are hidden gems, which hero dishes need guarding – and guest feedback is the only data that can answer them.

06

Guest perception data, dish by dish, site by site.

Two decades in, guest data still shapes the menu at wagamama and Peach Pubs.



CLIENT STORY

Food is at the heart of the wagamama experience, so being able to view dish-level statistics is vital to supporting both **innovation of new dishes** and the **impact of any changes to ingredients or cooking processes**.

Most wagamama surveys present an image-based menu with the ability to capture ratings and comments on individual dishes. **This helps the kitchen and food development teams monitor changing guest perceptions**, such as value for money.



CLIENT STORY

Good food is such an integral part of the Peach experience, and **Product Ratings** help them keep the **menu fresh and exciting**.

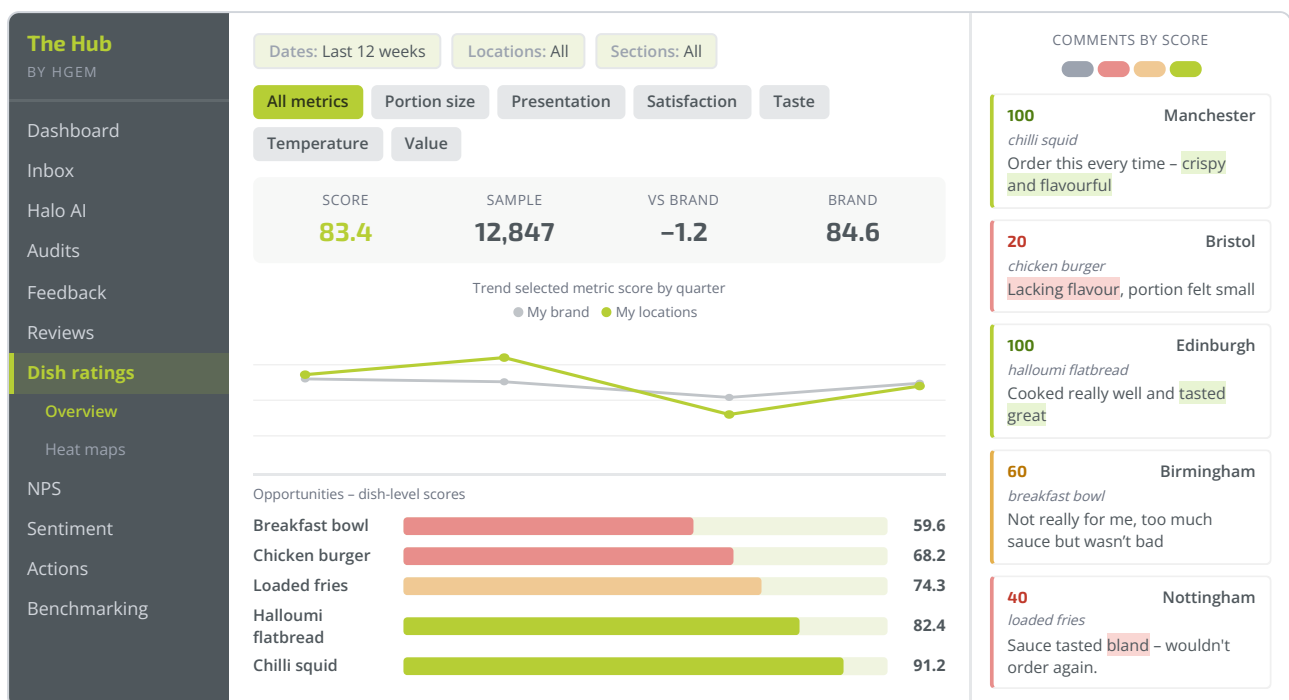


07

Product Ratings, filtered by site, region or shift.

Not just a report. A live view of every dish, updated as feedback lands.

Product Ratings capture how guests rate every dish on your menu across taste, value, presentation, portion size, temperature and overall satisfaction. It runs alongside Feedback and Mystery Audits, so you get the operational picture and guest picture in one place.



The Hub · Dish Ratings module · illustrative mockup with fictional data.

With Halo – HGEM's AI assistant – this data doesn't just sit there. It recommends actions, tracks changes, and predicts the revenue impact before you commit.

SEE IT ON YOUR MENU

Ready to put **the fourth lever** on your menu?

Book a 30-minute walkthrough with the HGEM team. We'll show you what your menu decisions could look like with guest feedback data – using your dishes, your sites, your numbers.

TALK TO US



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HGEM