Digital Menu Boards for Restaurants: What to Know Before You Buy

A practical guide to displays, screen placement, software, installation and budgeting before you request a proposal.

Replacing printed menus with screens may seem straightforward: choose a few displays, put your menu on them, and mount them above the counter. In practice, the best digital menu board projects start well before anyone orders a screen.

The equipment needs to fit the restaurant, the menu needs to be readable from where customers actually stand, and someone needs a dependable way to update prices and items. Getting those decisions right early can prevent expensive adjustments later.

Why restaurants consider digital menu boards

Digital menu boards can make it easier to update prices, change seasonal offerings, introduce promotions, and schedule different menus for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. For operators with several locations, the right software can help maintain a consistent look and menu across the business while still allowing individual restaurants to make approved changes, such as updating local specials, adjusting location-specific prices, or removing items that have sold out.

But digital boards are not automatically the right investment for every operation. A restaurant with a short, stable menu and limited space may be perfectly well served by printed signage. The real question is whether easier updates, better content control, or a more flexible presentation would solve a business problem.

1. Choose the display for the environment, not just the size

A television that looks excellent in a living room is not necessarily designed for the hours, installation position, or environmental conditions of a restaurant. Commercial signage displays offer model-specific operating-hour ratings, mounting options, brightness levels, warranty terms and device-management features.

Look at how many hours the screen will operate each day, whether it will be mounted horizontally or vertically, and how much ambient light reaches it. A display above an indoor counter has different requirements from one facing a sunny storefront window. Outdoor and drive-through boards require their own evaluation for weather exposure, sunlight, enclosure, and service access.

Screen brightness is measured in nits. Simply put, the higher the number, the brighter a display can be. A screen installed in a brightly lit restaurant or near a window may require more brightness than one installed in a dimly lit dining area. The goal is a menu customers can comfortably read throughout the day, not the highest possible brightness rating.

Some commercial displays have ambient-light sensors that automatically adjust brightness as lighting conditions change. Others offer scheduled brightness settings or require manual adjustments. These features can make the menu more comfortable to view and may reduce electricity consumption. Check whether the

particular model you are considering actually offers them.

For a real-world example, LG rates its 43-inch UH5N-M commercial display at 500 nits and for 24/7 operation. The model includes an automatic brightness sensor. LG also lists typical power consumption of 83 watts and a maximum of 127 watts. Those are useful reference points, not a recommendation for every restaurant.

2. Plan the number and placement of screens with the full customer view in mind

Before deciding whether you need one, two, three, or more screens, stand in the customer queue and look toward the intended mounting area. What can people see from the back of the line? Are there hanging lights, menu headers, or other visual obstructions? Can someone read the essential items and prices without moving closer?



CONCEPT VISUAL | An illustrative restaurant counter with three menu displays and one promotional display. Sample menus and prices are fictional. Not an actual Maxi Signs installation.

Divide the menu into logical groups and test the layout at actual viewing distance. A compact café may be able to use one well-organized display; a larger counter-service menu may benefit from separate sections for main items, beverages, and specials. Extra screens only help if the content remains organized.

Keep item names, prices, and key choices visible. Photos and motion can be useful, but they should not repeatedly replace the information people need to order. Professional AV industry guidance makes this same point: the menu's primary job is clear communication, not a constant promotional show.

Additional displays can also create opportunities beyond the menu. Restaurants can use them to promote featured dishes, seasonal specials, new products, or short videos. Some operators may explore paid advertising or promotional partnerships with complementary local businesses as a possible additional revenue stream. The key is to keep promotions relevant and tasteful, and separate from the essential information customers need to order.

3. Decide how menu updates will happen

Ask who will actually maintain the menus once the system is installed. Will the owner make changes from a laptop, or will a manager update prices at each location? How quickly do sold-out items need to disappear? Do menus switch automatically by day or time?

A content-management system (CMS) may support remote updates, scheduling, templates, permissions and monitoring. Some displays include a built-in signage platform; others work with a separate media player. Those approaches can both be valid, but software compatibility and ongoing licensing need to be confirmed before equipment is purchased.

If your restaurant uses a point-of-sale system, do not assume its menu data will automatically synchronize with the displays. Ask the provider to identify the exact integration, the fields it updates, any additional subscription charges, and what happens when the connection fails.

Also ask an operational question: If the restaurant loses internet access at noon, will the last approved menu stay on the screens? Solutions designed for locally stored or cached playback can reduce dependence on a live connection, but behavior varies by player and platform.

4. Treat menu content as part of the system

The best hardware cannot rescue a confusing menu. Organize choices so customers can scan categories quickly. Use consistent names and prices, adequate text size, good contrast, and photographs that genuinely represent the food. If the menu changes frequently, create templates that staff can update without redesigning every screen.

Do not underestimate the importance of good food photography. A beautifully prepared meal can lose much of its appeal if the image is poorly lit, badly composed, or unappetizing. Quality photos and thoughtfully produced video can make a real difference in how customers perceive your offerings. If you are investing in digital menu boards, give the content the attention it deserves.

Plan an approval process for prices, spelling, limited-time offers, and location-specific differences. Decide whether a general manager, marketing employee, or outside provider has final publishing authority.

Accessibility matters too. Restaurants should consider customers who cannot easily read an overhead screen and ensure staff can communicate menu information effectively. For covered businesses, applicable accessibility obligations go beyond the choice of display alone.

Some restaurant groups also need to address federal nutrition-labeling rules. FDA menu-labeling requirements generally apply to qualifying chains with 20 or more fixed locations operating under the same name and offering substantially the same menu items. Covered establishments have additional calorie and information-disclosure obligations. Verify the rules that apply to your operation before designing the final menu layouts.

5. Plan power, mounting, network access and maintenance

Professional planning should account for the wall structure, suitable mounts, safe electrical access, cable routing, network availability, ventilation and future service access. A clean installation should not leave visible cords across the customer area or make a failed player difficult to reach.

Where practical, evaluate wired network connectivity along with Wi-Fi. Confirm which devices need internet access, whether your network policy permits them, and how administrators will receive failure alerts. For restaurants undergoing construction or remodeling, these decisions are easier to handle before walls and ceilings are finished.

Do not forget the operating environment: heat, grease, humidity, sunlight and cleaning routines can affect equipment selection and placement. Mounting and electrical work should be evaluated by qualified installers and carried out according to applicable requirements.

6. Understand the complete cost, not just the price of a screen

Two proposals with identical display sizes may cover very different projects. To compare them fairly, separate one-time expenses from recurring ones.

Typical upfront categories:

- Displays, mounts, media players or other required hardware.
- Site survey, mounting, electrical work, cable routing and network preparation.
- Menu design, templates, photography, setup, testing and staff training.

Typical continuing categories:

- Software or per-screen licenses, connectivity and electricity.
- Content changes, remote management, technical support and maintenance.
- Future hardware replacements or expansion to additional locations.

Ask whether warranties and support are included, who responds when a board goes blank, whether replacement equipment is available, and what the monthly or annual software commitment will be. A lower initial price is not always the lower long-term cost.

Electricity is another cost worth considering, especially when several displays operate all day. Ask about each display’s typical power consumption, energy-saving features, and automatic on/off scheduling. Estimate electricity costs using the equipment’s wattage, daily operating hours, and your electric rate. Include any external media players or other powered equipment, too.

7. Choosing the right digital signage provider

Choosing the right provider can make all the difference. Installing a television is one thing. Planning a digital menu board system that supports your restaurant’s daily operations is another.

Look for a provider who takes the time to understand your business, your customers, and what you are trying to accomplish. Ask about their experience, customer references, software knowledge, and what kind of support they offer after installation.

Remember, your digital menu boards should not become a project you finish and forget about. Menus change, promotions come and go, and technology occasionally needs attention. Establish who will handle those responsibilities before making your investment.

The right provider should be more than an equipment supplier. Ideally, you are building a relationship with someone who can help your business get lasting value from the technology.

8. Avoid these common buying mistakes

- Buying displays before confirming sightlines, actual menu density and operating hours.
- Choosing an indoor screen for a sunny window or drive-through location without checking environmental requirements.
- Underestimating the work of keeping prices, photos and promotions accurate.
- Assuming a POS integration or offline playback feature exists without testing it.
- Comparing hardware-only prices against complete installed proposals.
- Leaving electrical, network and service access decisions until installation day.

What to prepare before asking for a digital menu board proposal

A little information up front helps a provider recommend a better-fit system and explain the likely scope of work:

- Restaurant address, number of locations and whether the project is new construction, remodeling or replacement.
- Photos or measurements of the intended screen locations and the customer viewing area.
- Operating hours, lighting conditions, and whether any board faces a window or is outdoors.
- Current menu, pricing, images, languages and anticipated update frequency.
- Number of people or locations that need permission to edit the menu.
- Existing POS, network, electrical and display equipment, if any.
- Automatic brightness, energy-saving features, and expected daily operating hours.
- Who will create, approve, and regularly refresh photos, videos, and menu content.
- Provider references, post-installation support options, and responsibilities for keeping displays current.
- Desired launch timing, installation constraints and expected support responsibilities.

A better menu board project starts with a better plan

The goal is not to buy the most expensive displays or install the largest number of screens. It is to build a menu system that customers can read, staff can manage, and the business can maintain as it changes.

Planning digital menu boards for your restaurant? Maxi Signs helps coordinate complete projects, from initial planning and equipment selection to content creation, installation, menu updates and ongoing technical support. Installation is handled directly or through qualified partners as appropriate. Support arrangements are tailored to each project, and extended coverage can be discussed when needed.

Ready to plan your restaurant's digital menu boards? Visit the Maxi Signs Contact page to request an initial consultation: https://maxisigns.biz/contact

Sources and further reading

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