Let us Cater You! Enhancements in Hospital Catering

The Problem
With continual budget cuts and food regulations, traditional hospital catering business has decreased 20% in the last fiscal year. During that time, staffing equivalents have been reallocated to patient-centered care as volume has increased over 120 extra trays per day. In addition, the menu and ordering system were outdated and inefficient. Customers and managers experienced difficulty processing, keeping track, and executing orders, as evidenced by the experience from the Food Service Department as well as anecdotally reported in the customer loyalty focus group.

Aim/Goal
By implementing a new menu (both in product and online ordering system), the aim is to improve selection, reduce consumer confusion that slows down the ordering process at the point of sale, help staff more accurately prepare the orders and overall increase satisfaction of all parties on the process and end product. Improving efficiency by reducing ordering and processing errors and enhancing customer loyalty will ultimately increase sales by 5% in 1 year.

The Team
Shantee Procter, Catering Manager
Stephanie Rioles, Sous Chef
Michael Hanley, Operations Manager
Kristina DiMaggio, Ops Manager
Christopher Weiss, Assistant Director

The Interventions
- Focus Group was held on April 27, 2015. The goal of the focus group was to give an in depth look at what our current customer base is looking for, providing samples of both internal and external catering options in hopes to compare perception of quality, value and presentation.
- Redesigned the online menu system by strategically arranging menu categories within the pages of the menu, and item placement within a menu category. This strategic placement of categories and items will help simplify the ordering process for the customer and the team. We worked on the Catering menu for three months and launched it on November 22nd 2015.
- Conducted market research to be up to date on all the latest food trends
- Researched rates of other catering companies in the Longwood Medical area and compared the price of similar menu items as well as selection/variety.
- Adjusted pricing to attract customers to our menu over a company with similar or lower prices while accommodating associated labor and food cost.
- Revamped and launched the new catering website
- Trained staff on new menu items
- Scheduled follow up focus group to discuss issues and the implementation of new items.

The Results/Progress to Date
Example of the new menu products and menu categories:

Lessons Learned
Data of ordering shows that the original opinion of the Food Service catering team of having a “tired” menu as compared to our frequent customers purchasing did not align. Those tried and true items may be what keeps them coming back meeting after meeting such as our BIDMC cookies or muffins. By looking at previous customized orders and reviewing where the consistencies were, we were able to maintain and enhance already popular items.

The focus group was a helpful tool for acquiring feedback regarding our products compared to our competitors. The group discussion gave food service data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group setting.

Next Steps/What Should Happen Next:
- Prepare a binder of recipes and pictures to make sure any new staff will be able to replicate the changes made.
- Schedule ongoing focus groups to taste new items and teach the new CaterTrax menu.
- Continue to work creatively during Norovirus “no shared food” policy to reduce cost and provide variety.

For more information, contact:
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