To a creative designer, designing the menu board may seem to be the most straightforward step of this process, but there's a lot more to it than creating a pretty picture.

An effective menu board design looks good and is also easy to read, easy to navigate, and most important of all, generates profits. You've already done the homework of analyzing your menu to determine the items to sell and where they should be on your board. Maybe you've also decided on the menu system that you intend to purchase, but who will take all that well-organized content and make it visually appealing and legible?

Good designers will ask you the following questions to create the right menu board for you:

How Far Away Will the Menu Board Be From the Guests?

On average, a menu board is about 5-6 feet away from the first person in line, and it is mounted about 8 feet high. However, sometimes that the board will need to be farther away depending on the physical space. Measure how far the board is from the front of the line. A good designer will consider this, so the text is legible to as many people in the line as possible.

Let the designer know that distance so that the board will be easily legible from the front of the line, and accessible to the last person in line.
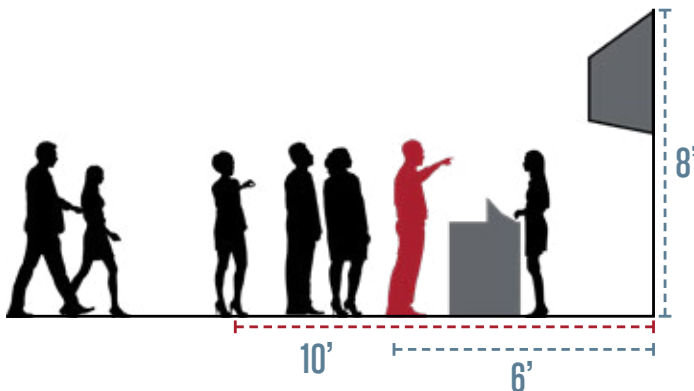
The larger the font, the easier it is to read from a distance. If you're not sure, print it out on paper at full scale and see how far away you can stand and still read it. Refer to Howard Company's Font Size Chart for Print and the Font Size Chart for Digital Screens determine the best font size.

Sizes vary from font-to-font, even if they have the same point size. Measure the actual font height in inches. Anything smaller than .375 (3/8) inch will be challenging to read from 6 feet away.

Food For Thought:
*If the customer can't read it
— they won't eat it!*

In additional to font size, keep in mind font styles that may be difficult to read, even it the text is close and large enough. Use script and serif fonts as a design element, but avoid using them as menu items and description. They take a little more time and effort for customers to read.

What is the Max Available Space?

It may seem obvious, but you also have to consider the amount of space you have. If it is tight, you may have to reconsider your product offerings, or you may have to eliminate descriptive text. Always measure the exact space where you intend to put your menu board before starting the design. If you tell your designer that the menu board needs to be 3 feet, then they will design it so.

Even if you have plenty of space, you still want to give your designer the desired board size. Without boundaries, you can't be sure what to expect, and you certainly don't want to overextend your budget.

What Hardware Will Be Needed To Hang The Menu Board?

This is a minor technical question, but it still correlates with design. Waiting until the installation of your board to find out that it is too heavy to chain mount from the ceiling can be frustrating. If you are hanging it above the registers, it might have to be mounted at an angle so customers can still read it. It should also be high enough to avoid knocking peoples' heads.

Having a solid understanding of how the menu board will be mounted will help your designer. Wall-mounting is more manageable if the board is broken up into sections. Hanging five smaller panels is easier than hanging an 8-foot long single board. Of course, the layout will be slightly different between a multi-panel and single panel board.
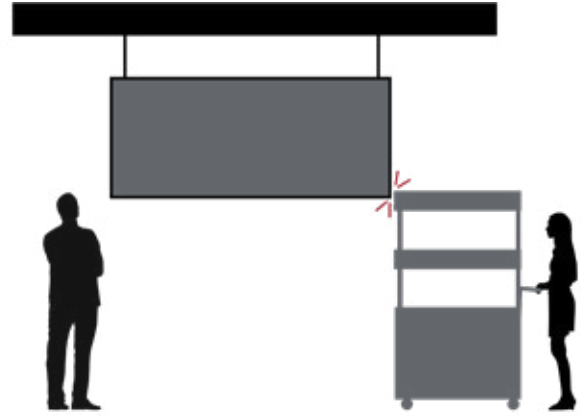
Where to Start:
The Howard Company provides hardware and installation instructions for every menu board purchased
*If you are not sure how you want your board to hang, review Standard Offerings of Mounting Hardware*

Need for Changeability?

When purchasing a menu board, you want it to last a while before you need to replace or upgrade it. The Howard Company offers multiple solutions for both illuminated and non-illuminated systems to accommodate for menu changes while keeping the expanse fairly low.

Some restaurants change menu items pricing and images more than a couple of times a year. The most time-efficient way to do this is to invest in a digital men board. Otherwise, the designers can set up your menu items and descriptions as easily-removable content and price strips. Whenever you make a minor adjustment to the ingredients, or if you want to switch out an item, you only need to replace a small section of the board. Is Changeable Pricing Right for you?

LTOs and Promos:
LTO's & Promo's displayed on your board should be in a specific section of the menu and set up so they can be easily swapped
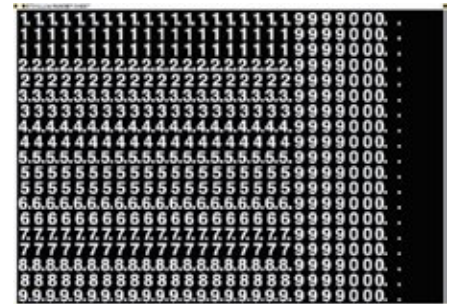
Designers will create Number Sheets to accommodate changeable pricing
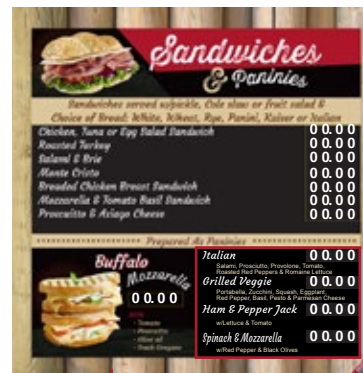
Changeable LTO & Promo

*Changeable Strips & Number Chips*

How Many Items Can Fit on a Board?

How Much the Space is Needed?

Keeping in mind that less is more (ie 7 items, or less, listed per category) — what is the minimum space needed for an outdoor menu board? First, determine the smallest size you can use while the content is legible. Refer to the Font document on page 13 to decipher that size. On average, a typical outdoor menu board will be only 5-8 feet away from a guest in the drive-thru.

Minimum Font Size for an Outdoor in Inches:
- Headings > 1.5" h (100-160pt)
- Listing > .75" h (40-60pt)
- Descriptions > .5" h (36 -40pt)

1.5"
.75"
.5"
~2"
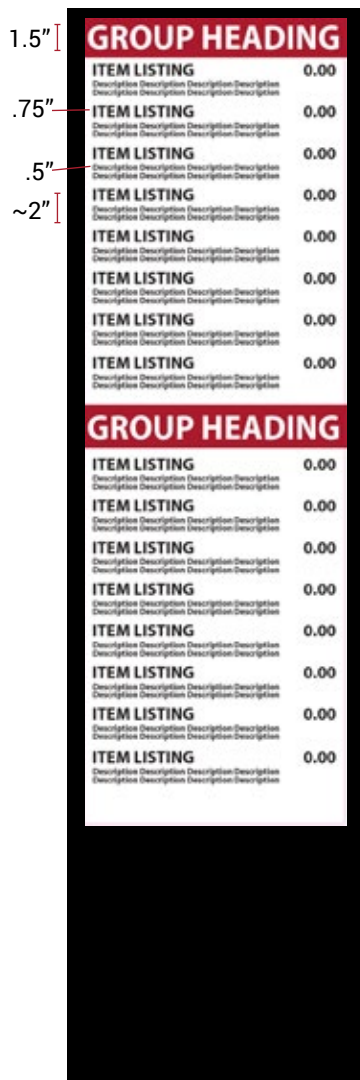
Design Tip:
Having short, brief descriptions will help your guest to browse your drive-thru & order quickly.

How much would fit on Howard's 18" Door if I wanted Text only?

For an 18" Drive-thru door, you can estimate that you'll need at least 1.5" for every header & approximate 2" for every menu item with listing. An 18" door holds a 17"w x 51.5" graphic, so you can fit about 20 menu items depending on how much description content you want to include.

As noted on page 14, adding images can grab your guest attention more than words, however, this will limit space for menu content. The images below show that one image added to your menu would be equivalent to two or three listings (with description).
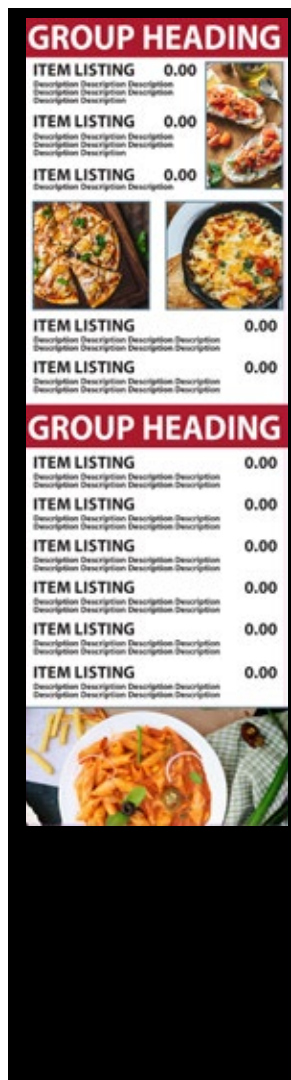
Less is More!
Guest can get overwhelmed when there's more than
7 *items under a category*

Upsell your menu items by incorporating appetizing images or posting descriptive adjectives on other point of purchase merchandise and drive-thru accessories (wings, toppers, LTO's holders)

How much would fit on Howard's 27" Door if I wanted Text only?

A 27" Drive-thru door, there's almost double the space for menu content. A 27" door holds a 26"w x 51.5" graphic, so not only do you have the same hight, you can also fit two columns of listings (see image below). Without images, you can fit about 40 menu items depending on how much description content you want to include.
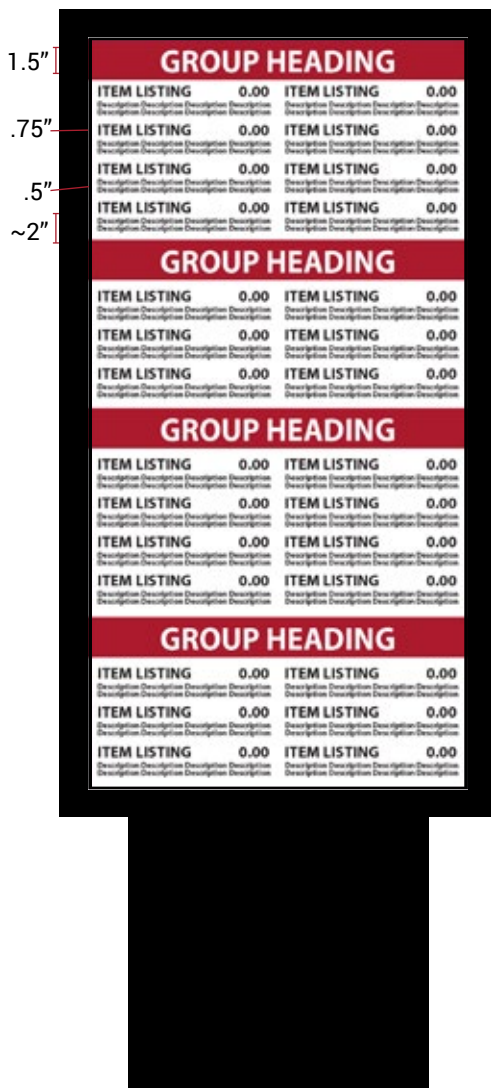
What is the Overall Look, Theme, Brand?

Think about the overall look of your restaurant design and incorporate the menu board as part of the atmosphere. For a small rustic cafe, you may consider a rustic style menu with worn wood frame and neutral colors. If you're opening a fast-food with a fun, loud, bright look, the menu board should be just as loud so that it stands out within its environment.

Include the style of your brand within the design as well to heighten a customer's trust and overall experience. If you have a logo, incorporate the same colors and typeface in the menu board to have a consistent look with your marketing.

Review designs that other restaurants are currently using and decide what you like: large images, no images, simple text, the color scheme, the generic layout. Share the ones you like with the designers, so they have a better understanding of what you want.

Remember:
Don't get carried away with clever designs and superfluous graphic details — customers want something easy to read and navigate

Using Food Product Imagery

When examining different menu board styles and how your content will look, think about adding food pictures. Use stock photography, hire a food photographer, or use custom foodservice pictures to illustrate your selections.

Pictures sell your products, especially for people who haven't been in your restaurant before, or who don't have a lot of time to make a menu decision. Studies have shown food pictures can increase sales of the item by 15% and more! Keep this in mind when laying out your menu, especially for your **BAM's** and **Specials**.

Pictures also visually break up a menu board and make it more interesting to read. Visit photo sharing sites like istockphoto.com or shutterstock.com for photo ideas.

Using Colors

Warm colors, such as red and yellow, are known to help stimulate the appetite. Yellow is associated with energy and happiness. They remind us of summer when we tend to be the most active and eat more. Cold colors (blue, purple, grey) tend to decrease appetite as they remind us of winter when we slow down and hibernate.

Using different colors help distinguish between entrées, side, and beverages. A complementary color scheme can add "pop" to specific listings when used as an accent color or background. Use dark-colored type on light backgrounds, and light-colored type on dark backgrounds.

Use Pantone color swatches in your design, so that the color is printed exactly as intended and will be consistently matched in future reprints. Printing graphics using CMYK/RGB swatches will be inconsistent on different printers. Using Pantone colors is the only way to guarantee an exact color match.

Free Stock Solutions:
The Howard Company provides alternative solutions to using free images that does not infringe on copyright law

Simplify Pricing

Pricing should be straightforward for customers at first glance. Avoid showing pricing with dollar signs as studies show that people will order more items from a menu without the symbol. The dollar sign represents money, and customers start thinking about their budget as they order - not the best way to induce them to order higher-priced entrees.

Display the total price of combos, rather than add-on pricing. Listing the bundled items separately - "add fries and a drink for just .99 each" - makes people overthink about the additional cost. It is best to roll the entire bundle into one price.