

Designing the Perfect Sound System for Your Restaurant

If you're in the restaurant business, investing in a professionally designed sound system and licensed, branded music can make all the difference in boosting guest dwell times, enhancing your restaurant's brand, creating a pleasant workspace for your employees, and increasing sales overall.

Establishments with open floorplans feel more casual and energetic, but the lack of sound-dampening abatements such as walls, low ceilings, and carpeting result in a much noisier environment. Turning up the volume to compensate for increased ambient noise only adds to the commotion, making for a poor dining experience for your guests and a harmful working environment for your staff.

You can provide your guests with a flawless, personalized dining experience by choosing an audio system that complements the architectural styles of modern eateries and providing professionally curated on-brand music that is properly licensed for commercial use.

Here is an easy guide for designing the perfect sound system for your restaurant.

Content, Coverage & Control

There are three essential elements you should consider when designing a commercial sound system for your restaurant.

They are the "three Cs":

- Content
- Coverage
- Control

Pay attention to the three Cs and your restaurant's audio system will consistently provide the perfect dining experience for your guests, while enhancing your business, supporting your brand, and providing a safe working environment for your staff.

Content

Content refers to the music played over a restaurant's sound system. The quality of your patron's dining experience rests on the theme and volume of the music you choose to play.

The research firm Forrester conducted a study which revealed that customer experience accounts for 47% of loyalty. Consumer Reports and Zagat have also conducted similar studies, demonstrating that the ability to hold a conversation is one of the most important factors in providing a positive experience for restaurant guests.

Mobile technology also plays an important part in guests looking for a satisfying dining experience. There are phone apps which use crowdsourced data to measure and share the level of noise in a restaurant or bar in decibels, allowing customers to avoid visiting establishments that are too loud.

You don't want your restaurant to appear on a list of venues which are too noisy for guests to enjoy. By working with a skilled commercial audio system designer to strategically approach both song selections via curated playlists and music volume, you can improve customer and employee experiences, while boosting sales and enhancing your brand.

Coverage

Taking the time to choose a high-quality restaurant sound system is one of the most important decisions you'll make to ensure your long-term success. You should choose not only the most appropriate audio equipment for your needs but also determine where the equipment should be placed for best effect.

First, you'll want to identify the various "zones" in your restaurant, and whether it would be strategic to provide a custom audio experience for each zone. Audio content should then be curated for the zones you wish to target, such as dining areas, cashier and host stands, or restrooms.

Second, you should invest in commercial-grade audio equipment for each zone. Using equipment that's more suited for a home environment can result in equipment failures and a poor aesthetic experience for your patrons. Commercial audio gear is designed to withstand the rigors of daily use in a commercial environment, by resisting overheating and cancelling out external frequencies which can result in poor audio output.

Your content has the potential to create a truly memorable experience for your patrons, but without proper attention to the various zones in your establishment and the audio requirements for each, you may not see the return on investment you're hoping for. Choose durable, commercial-grade equipment and opt for installation by an expert in commercial audio systems.

Control

Once you've selected the content and coverage that will provide your customers with a branded, personalized dining experience, your next step is planning how to safeguard your audio system. Controlling who has access to your equipment is crucial in protecting your investment.

Ideally, you should have your audio equipment installed in a centralized location that is easy to get to, but which is also out of the way of patron and staff foot traffic and damaging environmental factors, such as excessive moisture or extreme heat. After you set up your control center in a secured location, you should ensure that only key staff has access to it, to prevent unauthorized changes or repairs.

You've worked hard to select branded and licensed content that's individualized to the various zones in your establishment. When customers or staff have easy access to your control system, you not only are at risk of someone making changes that can directly impact your patrons' overall dining experience, but potential hefty fines if they select unlicensed songs.

The Science of Sound Design & Sound Mapping

Open floorplans, hard, glossy surfaces and high ceilings can have a detrimental effect on your patrons' audio experience, if the audio components haven't been properly mapped and installed for best effect across your unique space. For some restaurateurs, it's tempting to get around these architectural challenges by adding more speakers, or by turning up the volume of an existing system, neither of which makes for a pleasant experience.

By working with a commercial sound designer to map your audio needs across the structural and environmental variables of your various spaces in line with your goals for each space, you can save money and create individualized soundscapes that keep your patrons coming back for more!

Your Sound Map

A *sound map* is a blueprint that outlines how a commercial audio system should be installed in a space to support the marketing and aesthetic goals of the business. Your professionally designed sound map will take into account the architectural and environmental factors in your space that can have an effect on the quality of your audio content.

You can directly impact how a patron enjoys and remembers their experience in your restaurant by taking the time to work with a professional commercial audio company to craft the perfect audio atmosphere. You can create a unique audio experience that reflects your brand across any zone in your restaurant.

For example, individualized controls allow you to provide a more energized audio experience in the bar while offering a more relaxed soundscape in your primary dining areas. You may also opt for a quieter sound design in areas requiring clear communication, such as waiting areas or cashier and host stands.

Sound Dispersion

Your commercial audio designer will work with you to assess the type, number, and location of speakers necessary to achieve peak acoustic impact across the various 'zones' in your space.

The ideal dispersion of sound is based on the type and location of the areas you wish to include in your map, such as cashier stands, outdoor waiting areas, restrooms, or dining areas. You can ensure an optimum audio experience by paying attention to the two types of sound dispersion.

The first is *edge-to-edge dispersion*, in which each speaker disperses sound in a circle, with no circles overlapping. As people move out of one sound circle, they move into another.

The second is *center-to-edge dispersion*. With this type of dispersion, the border of one circle-of-sound runs through the center of the next, ensuring that no matter where a guest is located in your space, they are never out of reach of a sound zone.

When you pay attention to the science behind sound mapping and work with a commercial audio professional, you can balance your branded soundscapes perfectly and provide an enjoyable experience for your guests, while giving you years of increased guest satisfaction, return visits, and boosted sales.

Engage and Delight Your Guests and Staff with Branded Playlists

According to the [industry blog FastCasual.com](#), playing off-brand music can reduce overall sales by 4%. Studies showed that people listening to on-brand music were more likely to buy extra items than when listening to random music, with sales of desserts, shakes and smoothies increasing by more than 15 percent, while sales of sides increased by more than 11 percent.

The style and pace of your playlists is especially important and should be mapped as carefully as the audio equipment itself. The [National Restaurant Association](#) recently released surprising statistics about music's effect on guest behavior:

- Customers chew food 30% faster when they listen to up-tempo music, decreasing eating times and increasing table turnover.
- Men buy more drinks when they listen to up-tempo music and drink them faster.
- Customers increased the average ticket size of their bill by 23% by ordering more drinks, desserts and coffee while listening to slower music.

Increased sales - A recent study by [HUI Research](#) demonstrated that, “Revenues are 9.1 percent higher when brand-fit music is played instead of no-brand-fit music...music affects customers’ emotions...[even though they] often are unaware of the in-store music.” Matching the music to your brand directly affects your bottom line.

Time at location – Studies by Sounds Like Branding revealed that strategically branded music makes almost 4 out of 10 patrons stay longer in a business, with 31% of guests returning, 21% recommending the business to friends and 14% stating they’d buy more while visiting. You can easily increase dwell times of your establishment by providing a branded audio experience.

Welcoming spaces – Restaurant guests typically spend more and stay longer in spaces featuring intelligently mapped audio soundscapes. Supporting research by Stanford demonstrated that music can be as powerful as medication in its effect on our moods and states of mind. Once you’ve mapped your branded audio to your space, it’s easy to please your guests by providing a consistent and welcoming audio experience on a daily basis.

Improved staff engagement, morale and productivity –Playing music at excessively high volumes presents a health hazard to your staff and may even violate occupational work and safety laws, especially for employees working back-to-back shifts. By providing branded music at an appropriate volume, you can boost employee safety, morale and productivity.

A more memorable brand - Choosing branded audio content translates directly into guests not only staying longer but also in return customers, and increased sales. You’ll see a huge return on investment when you work with an experienced commercial audio provider to make sure your music is the best fit for your patrons at the right time of day.

By taking advantage of the powerful psychological effects of the precise styles of music played at an appropriate volume, you’ll be able to provide a pleasant and rejuvenating experience for your guests and employees, no matter their location in your restaurant.

Avoid Copyright Penalties by Investing in Licensed Music

While it may seem like an easy solution to your audio needs, playing music from your private collection or simply streaming your favorite playlists can not only have a negative effect on your guests’ experience, but can also result in hefty fines for playing songs illegally.

Choosing the right content goes beyond smart branding—making the wrong choice of non-licensed music can be a significant liability for your establishment.

Restaurateurs are obligated by law to secure appropriate licensing and to comply with copyright statues before playing music for patrons and employees. Performing rights organizations such as Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI) and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) levy fines often in the five-figures against restaurants and bar owners who willfully or accidentally play music for which they do not have the appropriate license.

Subscribing to a music streaming service that offers options for commercial use is one of the smartest moves you can make. Popular commercial audio streaming options include:

- [Rockbot](#)
- [Jukebox](#)
- [Soundtrack](#)

You'll be able to rely on music that is already fully licensed for commercial use, is pre-screened for appropriate lyrics and content for your audience, and is interruption-free, ensuring that your patrons have a consistent and positive experience, no matter when they visit.

By working with a skilled commercial audio designer, you'll benefit from individually curated, on-brand media from which to craft the best playlists for your space.

Choosing the Best Audio Installation Provider

Now that you've planned and mapped your commercial audio system and selected on-brand, licensed music, you need to choose an audio installation company to bring your audio soundscapes to life.

In order to select the best provider, you'll want ask a few basic but very important questions:

- Are they certified in audio installation, and are they bonded, and insured?
- Can they provide you with positive, recent references for their work?
- Have they been in business long enough to establish not only their expertise but to provide reliable support and repairs?
- How quickly can they help you with any problems with your system or equipment?
- Will they properly train you in how to use and manage your new audio system?
- Last, do they provide individualized contracts and warranties?

Great Service in a Timely Manner

Once your commercial audio system is installed and functional, you'll want to ensure that your provider will be with you for the long haul. After installation, a high-quality provider should be available when needed to provide additional training or support to key restaurant staff.

Be sure to identify what kind of support you can expect from your installer. Do they provide support via email, direct calls, or online support portals? How quickly will they respond to support issues? Has the contract or warranty been customized to meet your needs and protect your investment?

When you work with an experienced commercial audio installation provider from the start, you can avoid the pitfalls and additional costs associated with a poorly planned audio system. By taking the time to choose a high-quality restaurant sound system and branded playlists, you'll enjoy the benefits and cost-savings for years to come!