VANILLA MIEL

THE MENU MATRIX

A one-page way to work out what deserves more room in your business, and what is quietly taking up space.

Two inputs per item: how much people want it, and how much it makes you. Everything else follows from those two.

WHAT YOU NEED	HOW LONG	WORKS FOR
Your sales list and rough cost per item	About twenty minutes, once a quarter	Menus, product lines, services, anything sold

THE FOUR BOXES

STARS	QUESTION MARKS	CASH COWS	DOGS
protect	fix before cutting	lift the margin	question the role

WHY WE ARE SENDING THIS AROUND

We run this on our own menu every quarter. It is not complicated and it does not need software, but it has changed what we put on the counter more than once. Enough people have asked how we decide what stays and what goes that it seemed easier to just hand over the sheet.

Save it, fill it, and come back to it when the list starts feeling too long.

HOW IT WORKS

Five steps. The only discipline that matters is step two and three: score by rank, not by instinct.

01 **LIST EVERYTHING YOU SELL**

Every item, product or service. Do not pre-edit the list. The things you would have left off are usually the ones worth looking at.

02 **RANK BY DEMAND, THEN SCORE**

Sort the list by units sold over one fixed period. Split the sorted list into five equal groups. Top group scores 5, bottom group scores 1.

03 **RANK BY MARGIN, THEN SCORE**

Now sort the same list by margin per unit, which is selling price minus direct cost. Split into five groups again and score 5 down to 1.

04 **PLOT EACH ITEM**

Two scores put every item in one of four boxes. Score 3 or above counts as high. Patterns show up faster than they do in a spreadsheet.

05 **DECIDE ONE ACTION PER BOX**

Not per item. Four decisions is a plan you will act on. Forty is a document you will not open again.

WHY RANK INSTEAD OF JUST PICKING A NUMBER

Because you already have an opinion about every item you sell, and the opinion is the thing the matrix is supposed to test. Ranking scores each item against the rest of your own list, so the result can disagree with you. That disagreement is the entire value of the exercise.

PICKING YOUR TWO INPUTS

WHAT COUNTS AS DEMAND

- Units sold over a fixed period
- Order or booking frequency
- Repeat purchases by the same customer
- Enquiries, saves or clicks if you sell online

WHAT COUNTS AS MARGIN

- Contribution margin per unit
- Gross profit per unit
- Selling price minus direct cost
- Anything consistent, applied to every line

Whatever you pick, use the same definition for every line. A list scored two different ways is not a matrix, it is a mood.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE FILLED IN

An invented cafe, eight items, one quarter of sales. The figures below are illustrative, not a real menu. Units and margin come first, and the scores follow from the ranking.

ITEM	UNITS	MARGIN	POP	PROFIT	LANDS IN
House Drip Coffee	820	₹48	5	3	STAR
Carrot Cake Slice	410	₹62	3	5	STAR
Ginger Lemon Tea	640	₹18	4	1	CASH COW
Grilled Veg Sandwich	560	₹22	4	2	CASH COW
Hazelnut Cold Brew	180	₹58	2	4	QUESTION MARK
Quinoa Salad Bowl	120	₹64	1	5	QUESTION MARK
Sticky Toffee Pudding	95	₹34	1	2	DOG
Packaged Water	210	₹6	2	1	DOG

THE ITEM THAT CHANGES THE CONVERSATION

The Sticky Toffee Pudding is the one the owner talks about. It is on the signage, it is the thing staff are told to recommend, and it lands in Dogs. Ninety five units and a thin margin, carried by everyone's belief that it defines the place. That is not an argument to remove it. It is an argument to stop giving it the best shelf and to be honest about what it costs to keep.

Notice the spread. Two items in each box is normal. If everything you sell lands in one corner, the scoring has gone wrong, usually because the ranking was skipped.

WHERE THOSE SCORES CAME FROM

Nobody picked these numbers. Each list was sorted, split into five groups, and scored from the top down.

SORTED BY UNITS SOLD

House Drip Coffee	820	5
Ginger Lemon Tea	640	4
Grilled Veg Sandwich	560	4
Carrot Cake Slice	410	3
Packaged Water	210	2
Hazelnut Cold Brew	180	2
Quinoa Salad Bowl	120	1
Sticky Toffee Pudding	95	1

SORTED BY MARGIN PER UNIT

Quinoa Salad Bowl	₹64	5
Carrot Cake Slice	₹62	5
Hazelnut Cold Brew	₹58	4
House Drip Coffee	₹48	3
Sticky Toffee Pudding	₹34	2
Grilled Veg Sandwich	₹22	2
Ginger Lemon Tea	₹18	1
Packaged Water	₹6	1

STEP ONE: SCORE YOUR LIST

Fill in units and margin first. Rank the column, then write the score. One fixed time period throughout.

ITEM	UNITS SOLD	MARGIN / UNIT	POP	PROFIT	BOX

Demand can be units sold, order frequency, repeat purchases, enquiries or saves. Margin can be contribution margin, gross profit per unit, or simply price minus direct cost. Pick one definition of each and hold it for the whole list.

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Mark the three that surprised you. That is where the useful conversation starts.

STEP TWO: PLOT THE MATRIX

Score 3 or above is high. Write each item into its box. These are prompts, not verdicts.

HIGHER MARGIN

QUESTION MARKS

HIGH MARGIN, LOW DEMAND

Fix before you cut. These usually have a visibility, naming or placement problem, not a quality problem.

STARS

HIGH MARGIN, HIGH DEMAND

Protect these. Keep them consistent, keep them visible, and work out what they are teaching you about the rest.

DOGS

LOW MARGIN, LOW DEMAND

Ask what job it does. If it has a real strategic reason to exist, write the reason down. If you cannot, simplify or stop.

CASH COWS

LOW MARGIN, HIGH DEMAND

People already want these. Look at portion, price, add-ons and input cost before you touch anything else.

LOWER DEMAND

HIGHER DEMAND

On the framework: this is an adapted BCG-style tool. The original Growth Share Matrix plots market growth against relative market share. The axes here are deliberately different, because the decision is about what you sell rather than which market to be in.

STEP THREE: MAKE THE DECISIONS

The matrix is not the output. One decision per box is the output.

STARS

What do we protect, feature more, bundle or build on?

OUR DECISION

QUESTION MARKS

Is it genuinely good but under-discovered? What changes: naming, placement, visuals, trial, staff recommendation?

OUR DECISION

CASH COWS

Can we lift margin without breaking the reason people love it?

OUR DECISION

DOGS

Is there a strategic reason to keep this? Write it down, or let it go.

OUR DECISION

THREE CHECKS BEFORE YOU CHANGE ANYTHING

- A weak quadrant is not an automatic cut. Some items exist to bring people in, and they earn their place that way.
- Read categories, not only items. When a whole category sits low, the problem is usually the pricing or the positioning, not the recipe.
- Run it again after you change something. It works as a habit, not as a one-off workshop.

THAT IS IT.

The frameworks that work are the ones you actually come back to. Use it once, make four decisions, then open it again when you have fresh numbers.

If you run this and something in it surprises you, we would genuinely like to hear about it.

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THE LATEST VERSION OF THIS WORKSHEET LIVES AT
NLYTEN.COM/MENU-MATRIX