



TASTY SOUNDS

How Music Affects the
Taste of Food in
Restaurants

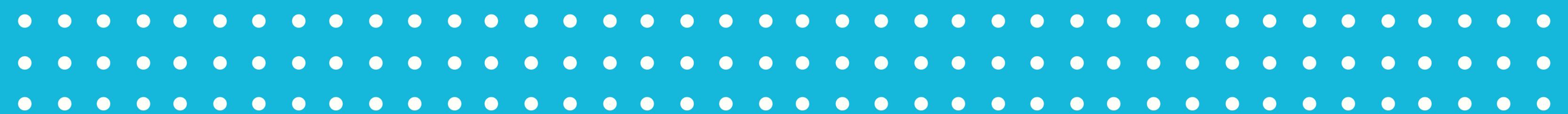




ABOUT RIGHTSIFY

We help brands grow their business with music.





TASTY SOUNDS

When it comes to a good dish, nothing beats quality ingredients that are skillfully prepared. Still, as our understanding of sensorial perception and neurology grows, it turns out there are a lot of unexpected factors weighing in.

A MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCE

Most people are well aware of the link between taste and smell. This is why food tastes dull when we pinch our noses. Interestingly, taste does not come about solely in the mouth. Our tastebuds only collect a part of the image that is created within the brain. That's right, taste is an image created in the brain. In this report, we will focus on how sound and music affect our tasting experience. But let's start off with some other environmental cues to start understanding the mechanisms at work.

Did you know, for instance, that it matters how we serve our food? A heavier cup or plate actually boosts the perceived quality of the drink or food that is served in or on it. Scientists also found that positive certifications on packaging such as "biological" or "free range" boost our tasting experience. In fact, even a "fair trade" stamp, which has no impact on the chemical composition (actual taste) of the food, is shown to make foods and drinks more tasty in our perception.

Other non-tastable interventions turn out to affect how we perceive taste as well. One study showed how people rate wine as better tasting when a higher price is displayed with it. Interestingly, when no prices were displayed, more expensive wines were rated lower than cheaper examples, perhaps due to the fact that untrained tasters prefer the simpler taste of cheaper wines.

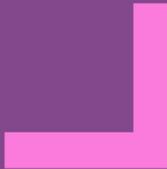




KEEPING THINGS MANAGEABLE

The above are biases that occur as a result of how we perceive the world around us. Just imagine how much information is coming in through our senses at any given moment. It would be impossible to consciously analyze all of that input all the time, so our brains are wired as the ultimate pattern recognizers. Combinations of sensory input are combined and quickly categorized and acted upon. This means we can identify situations and act within no time. Think of this simple example: we do not consciously analyze a loved one's eyes, mouth, forehead, posture and tone of voice, still we recognize within milliseconds whether he or she is happy, angry, sad or indifferent.

It is much the same with taste and it pays for hospitality professionals to have an understanding of these mechanisms. They allow you to maximize your positive impact on your guests, in a very efficient manner. Below, we will share some ideas on how to use sound and music in this very way.

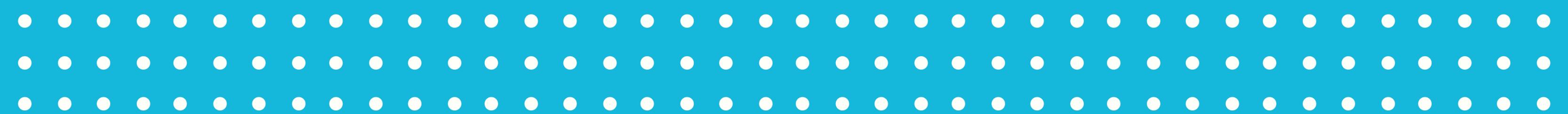




Setting the mood with music

At the highest level, you aim to set a certain mood in your venue. Whether your business is hip and happening, classically romantic, a haven of tranquility on a busy street or a buzzing hotspot, music is a powerful tool in confirming your identity. Studies have shown that music aids in message reception and retention in marketing and branding, if it is in line with the brand and message. Ill-fitting and off-brand music will hurt your brand image and make for a messy atmosphere, but just the right genres will drive home your message. Your Rightsify music expert can help design a sound that is perfect for you.

One American study showed that background music in restaurants directly affects perceived taste as well. The researchers found that emotional foods, such as chocolate were rated as better tasting when music was playing. Non-emotional foods, for instance bell peppers, were not affected. They found that music genre was of influence as well. Jazz music showed a greater effect in this venue than classical, rock and hiphop did. As this example shows, our taste experience is driven by various, sometimes surprising factors.



FUN FACT

40% increased spending on drinks at bars and restaurants when slower music is playing

Environmental Sounds

Besides music, it also pays to review your atmospheric noise and acoustics. An open kitchen, hard concrete or glass surfaces and rattling cutlery all make for a lively vibe, but are shown to trigger the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol in guests. This results in shorter visit durations, lower satisfaction and lower average spending. Make sure your guests can converse comfortably, without raising their voices, at all times.

Now let's have a look at lower level influences of sound and music on how we perceive taste. These might not be as directly applicable in your business as the above, but it is still valuable and highly entertaining to see the underlying mechanisms.

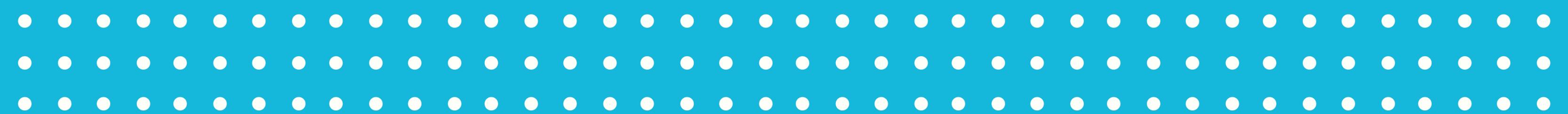


SOUND FRESH

Some products are best when crunchy; chips, bread crust, cookies and fresh veggies and fruits, for instance. There is a distinct mouth-feel to these products. We immediately sense when the product is stale due to a softness or chewy-ness that is less enjoyable than the fresh, crunchy alternative.

Interestingly, research shows that a large part of this sensation is due to sound. Participants in the study were provided with headphones while tasting crunchy foods. The sound of the bite was either dampened or boosted through the headphones. As it turns out, the evaluation of both freshness and taste were directly related to the loudness of the crunch, regardless of mouth feel.





FUN FACT

Switching from silence to music can lead to
a 27% increase in perceived product value



FREQUENCY RANGE AND TASTE

We can easily arrange a set of different colors from warm (e.g. brown) to cool (blue) or from low intensity (pale pink) to high intensity (saturated magenta). We can apply the exact same adjectives to sounds: from warm bass notes to cool sounds, such as shattering glass. Or from soft whispers to high intensity shouts. It appears our senses share some common vocabulary and associations when analyzing our surroundings.

You could try to do the exact same thing with taste. Any good chef knows that you want to balance the bass notes of bitters or fats with high notes of sweets or sour, around a middle range of umami or salts. This seems to run perfectly parallel to how a music producer would aim to complement his bass lines with guitars and vocals in the middle and sizzling cymbals and high notes for the perfectly balanced mix.

One fascinating study showed that the examples above align very well in practice. As a matter of fact, the taste frequency range and the music frequency range even influence each other. The researchers proved that playing bassy, low frequency sounds, emphasized the reported bitterness of chocolate, while high-pitched sounds would do the same for the sweetness. It goes to show how intermingled our senses are, that switching sounds actually affects the taste of the exact same piece of chocolate.

WHEN MUSIC MEETS WINE

Music and drinks have always gone together very well (ask any rockstar for anecdotal evidence), but it turns out music actually affects the taste of your drinks as well. A scientific study had people participate in a wine tasting. While the tasters thought they were given different wines, it was actually only the background music that was changed across tastings. From light hearted Baroque music to heavy symphonies from the Romantic era.

As it turns out, people immediately started to attribute the music's qualities to the wine's taste. Under the baroque condition, the wine was reported to be light and fresh, while under Romantic music it was rated much more full-bodied and heavy.



DESIGN A MULTI-SENSORY DINING EXPERIENCE

In hospitality, food and atmosphere are often treated as two separate entities; The food and drinks provide the taste, the decor provides the mood. As our understanding of taste perception grows, the two entities start to merge. We are learning that every little detail matters and actually affects how we perceive the dish itself. Music and sound have a massive impact in this respect and deserve close attention and management. At Rightsify, we are happy to help you grow into a multi-sensory dining experience!





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