

NEWS

The stove, the screen, and the first snake

How a master baker retired her chalkboards.

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Marlene Bauer is the third generation to run the bakery, and until recently, the same chalkboards that had hung above her counter in her grandfather's day were still there. Beautiful boards. Curved lettering, rewritten every morning. The only problem was - what was written on them rarely stayed the same for long.

Even if the whole-grain bread was sold out by nine, it would still remain listed at the top of the board, and customers would keep asking for it until someone reached up with a sponge to wipe it off. The lunch snacks didn't appear until one of the saleswomen remembered to write them down. On some days, the store didn't sell its best items simply because no one knew they were available.

The change came about unspectacularly, with three screens above the counter. Marlene was skeptical, to be honest. She was worried the place would look like a fast-food restaurant at a highway interchange. It didn't. The displays look the same as always the same curvy font except now they update automatically.

Today, the menu updates itself. Breakfast in the morning, hot dishes starting at 11, and cake in the afternoon - everything at the right time, without anyone having to wipe anything off. When the whole-grain bread runs out, it disappears from the board when ScreenWay syncs the display with the cash register. Items that are no longer available are no longer listed at the top. And the almond croissant, which used to get lost in the basket, now appears as an image on the big screen at lunchtime. Marlene says she's selling twice as many of them.

The screens are now up at the second location on the market square as well. Marlene manages both from a tablet in the office above the bakery. Once a promotion is set up, it runs at both locations. She used to drive over there herself, with a stack of laminated signs on the passenger seat.

She kept the chalkboards. One now hangs in the Café-Eck, featuring the quote of the day, handwritten because some things are meant to stay that way. The screen takes care of everything else. And the first line in the morning, Marlene says, moves faster now because no one asks for something that's long since come out of the oven and been sold out.