PUSHPULL · FOUNDER'S FIELD GUIDE

GET ON THE MENU

An on-premise playbook for earning the back bar, the cocktail list, and the pour that sells itself

For the founder who knows the shelf is only half the fight.

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A LETTER BEFORE THE WORK BEGINS

To the Founder Holding This

A bar is not an account. A bar is a stage, a newsroom, and a jury, all pouring at once. When your bottle earns a spot on a menu, something happens that no shelf can do: a professional recommends you, out loud, to a stranger, dozens of times a night. That is the most valuable advertising in the beverage business, and it cannot be bought. Tied-house laws make sure of that, and thank goodness, because it means the menu has to be earned, and earning is something you can outwork everyone at.

I have sat on both sides of this table for 39 years. I have watched founders charm a room and lose the placement because they never learned the difference between the bar manager and the beverage director, and I have watched quiet founders win the list because they did the pour-cost math before they walked in. This book is the earning, laid out in ninety days.

Truthfully,
Sam

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THE LAY OF THE LAND

How a Bar Actually Buys

Before the tactics, the room. On-premise accounts sit at tier three of the three-tier system, which means two things forever: your product reaches them through a distributor or, in some states, self-distribution, and nothing of value may flow from you to them. No free kegs for a placement, no paying for a menu slot, no comped cases. Feature them, thank them, teach them: all legal, all powerful. Pay them: never.

The road your bottle travels. The bar is tier three, and the law guards that door.

Inside the account, three people matter and they are rarely the same person. The bartender pours and recommends. The bar manager runs the day and often owns the well and the back bar. The beverage director or owner owns the menu and the money. Founders lose months pitching the wrong one. Learn all three names before you pitch anybody, and know this about menus: they change on a calendar, not on your enthusiasm. Most rooms reprint quarterly or seasonally. Your job is to be the obvious answer when the window opens.

BEFORE THE TACTICS

How the Buyer Thinks

Every failed pitch I have ever watched failed for the same reason: the founder answered questions nobody in the room was asking. So before the principles, here is the inside of the buyer's head, laid out as who, what, when, where, and how.

Who decides

Three people, three agendas, rarely one person. The bartender wants drinks that build fast and make regulars happy; win them and they hand-sell you all night. The bar manager runs the ordering, the well, and the back bar; win them and you are stocked. The beverage director or owner answers for every dollar on the menu; win them and you are printed. Learn all three names before you pitch anybody, because a yes from the wrong one is a very pleasant no.

What they weigh

Three numbers and a sentence. Pour cost: what the liquid in the glass costs against what the glass sells for, with most rooms living between 18 and 24 percent. Velocity: whether it moves, which your ledger from the other playbooks proves. Menu fit: whether your serve fills a hole in their list or duplicates something they already pour. And the sentence: one retellable line the staff can say table-side without rehearsing.

When it happens

Menus change on reprint windows, usually quarterly or seasonal, and the decision is made weeks before the printer runs. Visits happen in the quiet hours, Tuesday through Thursday, two to four in the afternoon. Pitch during a Friday service exactly once in your life; the memory will keep you honest forever.

Where the wins live

Independents decide on the spot and should fill your first list. Within the room, know which shelf you are asking for: the well is volume, the back bar is visibility, the by-the-glass and cocktail list is the prize, because it sells while you sleep.

How they say yes

When the staff already likes you, the math is already done, the serve fits the price band, and the ask lands inside the reprint window. Which is to say: the yes is assembled in the weeks before the question. The rest of this book builds it in that order.

PART I

The Mindset

Principle 1: Be a regular before you are a rep

The worst first impression in this industry is a stranger with a bottle bag. The best is a familiar face who finally mentions they make something. Drink in your target rooms first. Tip well. Learn what they pour, what moves, what the crowd asks for. When you finally pitch, you are not interrupting their night. You are a regular with a relevant idea.

Nobody wants a salesman at the bar. Everybody wants a regular with a good idea.

Principle 2: The staff sells what the staff loves

A menu line gets you ordered once. A bartender who loves your product gets you ordered all night. The path to the menu runs through the staff tasting, the story they can retell in one sentence, and the serve simple enough to build during a Friday rush. Make the people behind the bar look good and they will hand-sell you like it was their idea.

The menu is paper. The bartender is the medium.

SAM SAYS

> *“If the staff cannot make your drink in under ninety seconds on a Friday night, you do not have a menu drink. You have a hobby.”*

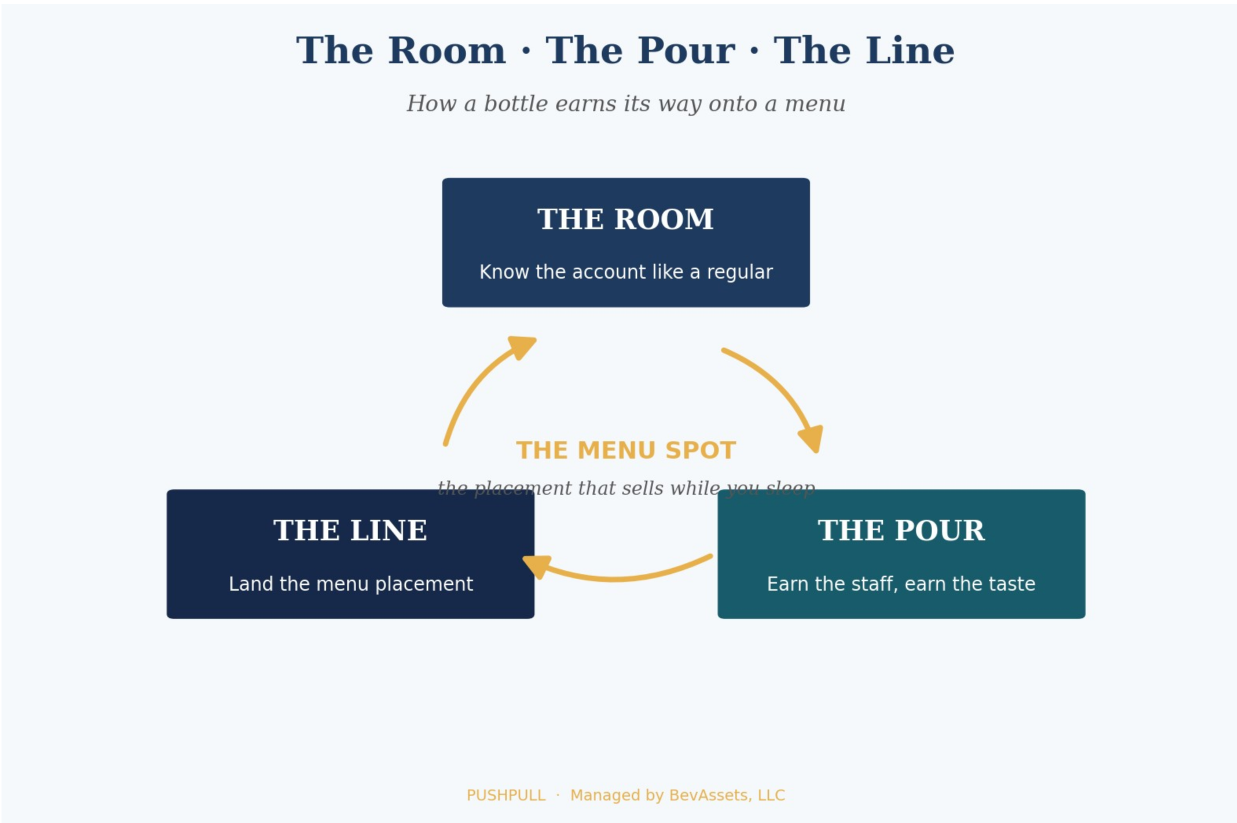
Principle 3: Menus are real estate, and rent is margin

A beverage director thinks in pour cost: what the liquid in the glass costs against what the glass sells for. Most rooms want cocktails landing around a fifth of the menu price in cost, give or take by market and concept. Walk in knowing your bottle's cost per ounce, what the drink builds to, and what the room can charge. When you do that math out loud, unprompted, you stop being a founder with a dream and start being a vendor who respects the business.

- Know your cost per ounce cold, at their buy-in price, not yours.
- Build the serve to fit their price band, not your ego.
- Bring the math written down. Buyers keep the sheet that does their homework for them.

PART II

The Operating System: Room, Pour, Line



The loop. The menu spot in the middle sells while you sleep.

Chapter 1: The Room

Fifteen target rooms across your two markets, chosen because your drinker already sits in them. For each: the three names, the menu format, the price band, the gap your product fills. If their list already has a hometown hero in your category at your price, that is not your room this quarter. Find the room with the hole.

> **SCENARIO: THE GAP READ**
> *A founder studies a gastropub's cocktail list: eight drinks, none built on her category, and a crowd that keeps ordering espresso martinis from the bar next door. She does not pitch 'carry my brand.' She pitches 'your list has no answer to the drink your customers keep leaving to get.' The beverage director hears a solution, not a favor.*

Chapter 2: The Pour

The pour is earned in the quiet hours. Tuesday, two in the afternoon, when the bar manager has time to taste. Bring the bottle, the one-sentence story, and a serve with three ingredients and two steps. Offer the staff tasting and show up when they say, even if that is 3 p.m. on a Sunday. Then the discipline nobody keeps: the fourteen-day follow-up, where you come back with proof you sent people to their room, not with the same ask repeated louder.

> **SCENARIO: THE TASTING THAT TRAVELED**
> *Six staff members taste a founder's product on a dead Tuesday. Two love it. Saturday, one of them hand-sells it eleven times as an off-menu call. The bar manager notices the empty bottle and asks the distributor rep about a case. The founder never pitched the manager once. The staff did it for her.*

Chapter 3: The Line

When the menu window opens, bring the whole answer: the serve with a name, the spec card the bar can laminate, the pour-cost math at their price, and the launch support you will do free and legal: staff training, featuring the room to your audience, showing up on launch night. Then verify it like a professional: photograph the menu line, date it, ledger it, and support it every week after, because menus that do not move get erased at the next reprint.

SCENARIO: THE PLACEMENT THAT STUCK

> *Two brands land menu lines the same month. One founder disappears, satisfied. The other posts the room's drink weekly, trains the two new hires in month two, and drops off fresh spec cards when the originals get sticky. At reprint time, one line quietly vanishes and one gets moved up the list. The difference was never the liquid.*

PART III

The Frameworks

Framework 1: The Fifteen-Room List

Fifteen on-premise targets, by name, each passing three tests: my drinker already sits there, I can reach it weekly, and its list has a gap I genuinely fill. Rank them by gap size, not by glamour. The neighborhood room that needs you beats the famous room that does not.

Framework 2: The Pour-Cost Reality Check

The Pour-Cost Cheat Sheet

The number the buyer is doing in their head while you talk

CATEGORY	TYPICAL POUR COST	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR PITCH
Well / rail	around 30%	High volume, low glory. Hard to win early.
Call brands	around 25%	Named but not precious. A workable entry.
Premium	around 20%	The band most craft placements pitch into.
Super-premium	around 15%	Big margin for the room. Your story must earn the price.
Wine programs	low 20s%	BTG pours often priced near bottle wholesale.
Beer	around 20%	Draft usually beats bottles on cost.

WORKED EXAMPLE

$24 bottle (750 ml) = 0.95$ an ounce. A 1.5 oz serve plus $0.75 of ingredients = 2.17$ in the glass.
At a $14 menu price that is a 15.5% pour cost. Say that math out loud and watch the meeting change.

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The cheat sheet. The live calculator version is in your PUSHPULL member hub.

One page per target room: their menu price band, your cost per ounce at their buy-in, the serve's total liquid cost, and the resulting pour cost against roughly a twenty percent target. If the math does not land inside their band, fix the serve or fix the room choice before you pitch. Never make the buyer discover the problem for you.

Framework 3: The Serve Spec

Three ingredients, two steps, ninety seconds, one name worth saying out loud. Write it as a card: name, build, glass, garnish, price band it fits. If a brand-new barback can nail it on the first read, it is a spec. If not, it is a recipe, and recipes do not survive Friday nights.

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PART IV

The 90-Day Plan

Ninety days to the menu. Each block earns the next.

Days 1 to 30: Know the Room

1. Build the Fifteen-Room List across your two markets, by name.
2. Sit in each target room as a paying customer at least once. Watch what actually gets ordered.
3. Learn the three names at every room: bartender, bar manager, menu owner.
4. Map each room's menu format, price band, and reprint rhythm.
5. Write the gap sentence for each room: the hole in their list you fill.
6. Build your Serve Spec and run the Pour-Cost Reality Check for your top five rooms.

Days 31 to 60: Earn the Pour

7. Make the quiet-hour visit to your top ten rooms: bottle, story, spec, thirty seconds.
8. Book and pour at least four staff tastings, on their schedule, not yours.
9. Leave the spec card and the pour-cost sheet everywhere you taste.
10. Feature one target room a week to your audience, free, tagged, expecting nothing.
11. Show up at two industry nights and buy nothing but goodwill.
12. Run the fourteen-day follow-ups with proof, not repetition.

Days 61 to 90: Land the Line

13. Ask the menu owner directly for the line or the by-the-glass spot, math in hand.
14. Time every ask to the room's reprint window.
15. Close at least one placement and support its launch: training, content, presence.
16. Photograph and date every menu line and back bar placement you win.
17. Ledger the reorders and the weekly movement for each placed room.
18. Ask every placed room for one referral: 'Who else should be pouring this?'

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TRUTHFULLY

The Line That Outworks You

There will be a night, some months from now, when you are home doing nothing, and a bartender you trained pours your product for a table of strangers, tells your story in one sentence, and sells three more rounds of it. That is what a menu line is: your best pitch, working shifts you are not on. Earn enough of those and the distributors start calling you. Every one of them is earned the same way: the room, the pour, the line, in that order, with no shortcuts, because the shortcuts are all illegal anyway.

Truthfully,
Sam

Crush it.

THE BACK POCKET

Scripts, Cards, and Take-Withs

The bartender introduction

'I'm [name]. I make [brand], and I've been drinking here long enough to know your crowd would order it. Can I leave you a taste for after your shift? No pitch, just tell me what you honestly think next time I'm in.'

The menu-owner pitch

'Your list has nothing in [category or style] and your crowd is ordering it elsewhere. Here is a serve that fits your [price band] at about a twenty percent pour cost, your staff already tasted it and two of them love it, and I will train the team and push the launch to my audience myself. What would it take to get it on the next reprint?'

The after-tasting follow-up

'Thanks for letting me pour for the team. [Name] said the [serve] would sell on the patio, and I sent about forty locals your way this weekend with the post I tagged you in. I'll check back before your next menu window. What date should I have in mind?'

Print these two

Pin This Behind the Bar of Your Mind

The daily discipline, one card

TODAY I WILL

Visit or call one on-premise account at its quiet hour.

Know one more name behind one more bar.

Practice the thirty-second serve pitch out loud.

Thank the last bartender who poured me, publicly.

And when the beverage director goes quiet:

JUST PICK UP THE PHONE.

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The daily card for the on-premise grind.

Get On The Menu Bingo

Mark them as they happen. Every square is survivable.

Beverage director 'circles back'	Menu reprint is 'next quarter'	Staff tasting at 3pm, two people show	Your spec card gets laminated	Bartender invents a better serve than yours
'We already pour a competitor'	GM loves it, owner vetoes	First by-the-glass pour	Happy hour feature	Menu typo in your brand name
The 'house pour' conversation	'Leave a bottle, we'll see'	**FREE: JUST PICK UP THE PHONE**	Back bar photo: top shelf, too top	Cocktail named after the bar's dog
Sunday brunch salvation	Distributor rep takes the credit	You bus a table during the rush	'What's your pour cost?'	Menu launch night, printer dies
86'd because it SOLD OUT	Barback knows your name	You fix the table tent yourself	The reorder text at 1 a.m.	Industry night pays off

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On-premise bingo. The 1 a.m. reorder text is the best square in the game.

APPENDIX

Glossary: How the Room Talks

Pour cost. Liquid cost divided by menu price. The number the beverage director is doing in their head while you talk.

BTG. By the glass. The wine and spirits list slots sold as single pours, often the easiest first placement.

Well. The default bottles in the speed rail, poured when nobody names a brand. High volume, low glory, hard to win early.

Back bar. The display shelves behind the bartender. Visibility real estate, and a photograph-worthy win.

Spec. The exact build of a drink: ingredients, amounts, glass, garnish. Laminate yours.

86'd. Removed or sold out. Getting 86'd because you sold out is the good version.

Reprint window. When the menu physically changes. All placement asks live and die by this calendar.

Industry night. The slow night when hospitality people drink where their friends work. Your best networking, no lanyard required.

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