



Double or Nothing ...

A few weeks back, I spent a day down in Tokyo busy with the 'souvenir shopping' that had to be done before heading off on the trip to Canada. It was a very nice and warm day, and when noon approached, I thought it would be nice to have lunch outdoors, instead of inside a restaurant. I was near Ueno, so headed over to the street market area of Ameyokocho, where I knew I would find any number of small eateries under the 'arches' of the overhead trains.

I came to a place where there were two food stalls side by side, both apparently run by foreigners, one Chinese, and the other Middle Eastern, perhaps Lebanese. The Chinese place was packed, with only the odd seat available in the customer seating area. The Lebanese place was totally deserted.

Now we all know the 'rule' when it comes to such things. Trust the locals. There is almost certainly a very good reason for an imbalance of this sort, and we can easily guess what it might be!

But as I stood there perusing the two menu boards placed in front of the shops, it seemed to me that there was another possible reason for the difference. The menu for the Chinese shop was pretty straightforward, with a Lunch A, Lunch B, etc. etc. The customers simply had to choose between a few options. But the menu of the other place was nowhere near as easy to understand. There was a large photo of their main product, which seemed to be something pita bread something something. Next to the photo was a price - 500 yen - and then below this another couple of prices - 600 yen and 700 yen. What these were for wasn't clear at all. Different sizes? Added options? I had no idea.

On a whim mostly, I went up to the counter to order lunch from the Lebanese place, although at this point I wasn't actually quite sure what they were actually offering. So I stood there and waited for him to speak first. "For one?" "Yep." He then began to get one of the concoctions ready, asking me a couple of further questions about spicyness and sauces. As he passed over the finished product he simply asked for 500 yen, which I paid, and I then went to sit down among the empty chairs and tables. So it *had* actually been very easy to order.

As I nibbled away at my (delicious!) lunch, I watched the parade of people passing by. Plenty of them were apparently looking for a place to eat lunch, because they stopped to inspect the two menu boards, just as I had done. I couldn't hear their conversations, but the body language was crystal clear. A couple would look at the menu for the Lebanese place, then look at each other in confusion. One or the other would shrug their shoulders to indicate 'I don't get it,' and they would then move forward to the Chinese menu. A minute later, one of two things would happen; they either just walked on, or they went into the Chinese place.

During the 20 minutes or so that I sat there, I saw this same scenario play out over and over again. The reason for the emptiness of the eatery was clear - his menu was difficult to understand 'at a glance'. And this was something that could be rectified very easily indeed. Just get rid of the 600 and 700 yen options. Whatever they were for, it just wasn't worth it.

What to do? Should I put on my 'consultant's hat', and make an offer to the owner? "I know how to double your business overnight. What would you pay me for that?"

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In the end though, I of course did nothing. I ate my lunch quietly, then moved on with my own business, nodding a 'thank you' to the owner as I left.

But you know, all the rest of the afternoon I couldn't help but think of one thing. What are people 'seeing' when they visit *my* business (the web site)? It's *so* easy for us to see what's wrong with somebody else, and so difficult to see our own shortcomings!

Can anybody out there let me know how I could double *my* business overnight? I'll buy lunch for you! I know this nice little place ... and it's never crowded!

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