



CERTIFICATION

GUIDE

Version 1.0

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the restaurant business is experiencing active growth with new restaurants and cafes popping up daily. This rapid growth is certainly welcomed by consumers. It allows them to try a wide variety of different cuisines without leaving their city or country. Competition among restaurants raises the quality and expectations bar higher and higher. Those who can surpass that bar remain in business and thrive. Those who fall short will give way to new names.

Unfortunately, we have to admit that not all restaurants use honest methods in this competition. Some of them try to appear better than they really are. For consumers, the huge number of restaurants, the attractive photos, and the many promotions make it difficult to decide between them. How do you choose where to go out today if all the restaurants look so good?

Well, far away from the colorful pictures and catchy slogans there is a reality. The mission of the TopPlacer team is to protect consumers and make sure that restaurants meet their declared level of quality and are ready to deliver what they promise.

TopPlacer Award is a new international restaurant award designed to protect customers and give them confidence that when they come to a restaurant they will not be disappointed in their expectations. Today, there is no widely spread award or recognition for restaurants that reflects real customers' needs and expectations.

Existing certifications are usually divided into mandatory state inspections that check the basic minimum requirements or high-end awards that are granted to a relatively small number of restaurants. For an ordinary customer, these are usually not very useful. Mandatory government audits only establish the minimum acceptable performance, without which the restaurant cannot even operate. Restaurants marked with a high-end award are few in number and may not be available in your city.

TopPlacer Award is designed to give a real and meaningful assessment to most restaurants in your city. The TopPlacer Award emblem on the door is an indicator that the restaurant successfully meets the key expectations that people have.

Unlike regulatory audits, when the audit date is known and the restaurants are well-prepared for it, our auditors come as a mystery guest and without advanced notice. We try to check the maximum number of criteria while remaining unnoticed. Thus, our certification evaluates the real level of service that an ordinary customer can get.

We also pay attention to the parameters that are traditionally overlooked by the regulatory audits:

1. Whether the pictures in the menu, on posters, and in advertising correspond to what customers get in reality.
2. How informative the menu is and whether it provides all the necessary information.
3. Whether the restaurant ensures that the vegetarian menu is truly vegetarian and protected from cross-contamination.
4. Whether bad practices (e.g. pushing expensive menu items, hidden service charges, etc.) are used.

At the same time, we pay special attention to cleanliness and hygiene. An insufficiently clean dining area is subconsciously associated with poor food quality. Also, recent world events show that cleanliness and strict adherence to sanitary rules help to prevent not only food-borne illnesses but also other transmissible diseases.

TopPlacer offers 3 levels of certification. The table below shows the depth of the audit and the criteria that will be checked for each level.

	Bronze	Silver	Gold
Expectation Management & Advertising	✓	✓	✓
Communication and Interaction	✓	✓	✓
Cleanliness	✓	✓	✓
Personal Hygiene	✓	✓	✓
Food Safety	✓	✓	✓
Information Availability		✓	✓
Digital Presence and Fairness			✓
Process Management			✓

1. EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT AND ADVERTISING

Advertisement and promotion are important for any type of business to let customers know about them and entice them to try their products or services. At the same time, customers are looking for the choices that best suit their needs. Customers often rely on promotions and marketing messages from restaurants when choosing where to dine or order food. Quite often advertising transmits a message based on exaggerated promises, altered meal photos, or misleading menu item names.

Restaurants should stick to fair advertising and marketing methods to ensure that the representations they make to the public are truthful and easy to understand. Advertisements should set realistic expectations that restaurants can meet.

There are multiple ways to set client's expectations: photos, advertisements, descriptions that emphasize specific characteristics, staff recommendations, and more. Successful restaurants ensure that the experience and the food they deliver meet the expectations they've set.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate expectation management and advertising.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
1.1	The order corresponds to the photos shown in the menu and advertisements. It includes the presentation, the ingredients, and the portion size.	✓	✓	✓
1.2	Menu item descriptions set correct expectations. They don't form false impressions about the dominant ingredients or portion size. Names match the commonly used industry standards.	✓	✓	✓
1.3	The order has expected weight, size and serves the expected number of people. Expectations can be set by different means such as photos, descriptions, or staff advice (e.g. "serves 2 people," "shareable," "party tray," etc.).	✓	✓	✓
1.4	The order looks attractive and well-composed.	✓	✓	✓
1.5	The order is served at the expected temperature for its type of food.	✓	✓	✓
1.6	All menu items are available throughout the day or within the specified time periods (e.g. breakfast or lunch menu).	✓	✓	✓
1.7	"To Go" order packaging/containers protect the integrity of the content so that the food within is not exposed to damage or contamination.	✓	✓	✓

2. COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTIONS WITH CUSTOMERS

All businesses that interact with customers rely on good first impressions. When a guest enters your restaurant, they will make immediate judgments about it based on the appearance and courtesy of the staff, as well as the appearance of the restaurant itself. These first impressions tell the customer about the kind of experience they will have in your restaurant.

Many common problems in restaurants result from poor communication with customers and could be avoided by implementing simple workplace procedures. Creating proper two-way communication policies can help you avoid misunderstandings and disgruntled customers.

Regardless of the appearance of the restaurant and its food quality, long waiting times can kill a good impression of the business. It's important to ensure that the order is ready within a reasonable period of time. But things go wrong sometimes, and if you realize that an order is taking longer than the anticipated time, policies should be in place to communicate this to the customer. Being informed, a customer feels important to your business and remains satisfied.

If a customer raises questions about a menu item, it is very important to get them answered. So it's important to have wait staff who are well informed about menu items and can explain the dish composition and ingredients.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate communication and interaction with customers.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
2.1	Staff is welcoming at the entrance.	✓	✓	✓
2.2	Staff can provide essential information about menu items.	✓	✓	✓
2.3	Staff can advise on allergy issues.	✓	✓	✓
2.4	Staff can handle misunderstandings/disputes, e.g. wrong order, missing ingredients, the order doesn't meet expectations, etc.	✓	✓	✓
2.5	Staff uses appropriate, courteous language when speaking to customers.	✓	✓	✓
2.6	Staff are available to respond to customers, and wait times are appropriate.	✓	✓	✓
2.7	Staff can provide appropriate containers for "To Go" orders.	✓	✓	✓
2.8	No commonly recognized bad practices are used (pushing expensive menu items, not bringing change, hidden service charges, etc.)	✓	✓	✓

3. CLEANLINESS

Cleanliness is an essential part of customer service. Having a clean dining area is as important as serving good food in terms of whether a customer will want to come back. It shows that you care about your customer’s experience while they are dining. A neat environment also helps in making that crucial good first impression.

If a restaurant looks dirty, customers are going to associate that with poor kitchen sanitation and might be concerned over the safety of the food they are consuming. No customer wants to worry that the kitchen where their food is prepared is covered in germs.

Dining out is not only about food, but it is also about the experience of going out to eat and socialize. Customers choose one restaurant over another not only because of the food, but also because of the ambiance the restaurant creates. A clean restaurant creates a positive ambiance. But stained seats, dirty floors, or dusty lights put a damper on the experience.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate cleanliness.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
3.1	Restaurant premises are clean and in good condition. No visible damage and deterioration.	✓	✓	✓
3.2	No food smell in the dining room.	✓	✓	✓
3.3	Floors are clean, dry, and in good condition. Floors are free from food spillage, silverware, broken glassware, loose mats, torn carpets, or other hazards.	✓	✓	✓
3.4	Portable signs are used to indicate wet-mopped floors or temporary hazards.	✓	✓	✓
3.5	Tables are dry, clean, and in good condition.	✓	✓	✓
3.6	Tables are provided with necessary utensils and/or condiments, if applicable.		✓	✓
3.7	Utensils are dry and clean. No food traces on utensils.	✓	✓	✓
3.8	Dishes and utensils are clean and in good shape. Dishes and utensils are taken out of service and discarded when chipped, cracked, or broken.	✓	✓	✓
3.9	Restrooms are clean, stocked, and free of odor.	✓	✓	✓

4. PERSONAL HYGIENE

4.1 Handwashing and Personal Hygiene

Good personal hygiene, such as regular hand washing, along with good policies regarding employee illness are key factors in limiting the transfer of disease and contamination. Unwashed hands are probably the most significant way that contaminants are transferred in restaurants. Food safety experts advise that handwashing procedures should be implemented and strictly monitored.

Here are some common occasions when hands should be washed in a food-processing environment.

- Immediately before food handling
- After touching body parts
- After using washrooms
- After coughing, sneezing or using a tissue
- After changing tasks, especially if switching between working with raw meat and working with ready to eat or cooked foods
- After handling money, garbage or tools/equipment
- After touching dirty surfaces
- After picking up something from the floor
- After engaging in any activity that contaminates hands

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate personal hygiene.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
4.1.1	The restaurant has an established and enforced personal hygiene policy.	✓	✓	✓
4.1.2	Employees wash their hands with soap and warm water before starting work, immediately after using the washroom, and any time needed to prevent cross-contamination.		✓	✓
4.1.3	Employees wash hands after bussing or wiping tables and before handling place-settings and serving food.	✓	✓	✓
4.1.4	Employees wash their hands when changing job duties or after touching any part of their body.		✓	✓
4.1.5	Employees wear clean uniforms and shoes.	✓	✓	✓
4.1.6	Employees' hair is properly confined.	✓	✓	✓

4.2 Employee Health

Allowing workers who have specific symptoms of a communicable disease to continue working as usual in a restaurant poses a risk of transmitting disease to customers or co-workers. Best practices suggest implementing a health control policy which will prevent transmission of diseases from employees to customers.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate employee health.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
4.2.1	All employees are visibly healthy and have no open cuts and sores.	✓	✓	✓
4.2.2	The restaurant has established and enforced a health control procedure that prevents sick employees from interacting with food or customers.		✓	✓

5. FOOD SAFETY

5.1 General

This section contains the basic requirements without which it is impossible to ensure the proper level of food safety. Personnel should be provided with the tools necessary to fulfill their duties while ensuring food safety, and all staff should know and follow the key rules to ensure food safety. These criteria must be met for all certification levels.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate general food safety.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
5.1.1	Staff are equipped with the necessary tools to provide food/process safety.	✓	✓	✓
5.1.2	Personnel are uniformed appropriately for their duty.	✓	✓	✓
5.1.3	The restaurant has established sanitizing procedures, and the procedures are enforced.	✓	✓	✓
5.1.4	Cutting boards are washed and sanitized whenever the use switches between raw food and cooked or ready-to-serve food.	✓	✓	✓
5.1.5	Employees wash hands after bussing or wiping tables and before handling place settings and serving food.	✓	✓	✓
5.1.6	All food handlers wear gloves. No bare hand contact occurs with ready-to-eat foods.		✓	✓
5.1.7	Food waste, rotten food, and food with expired "best before" dates are not stored together with fresh food.		✓	✓

5.2 Best Before Management

Although certain national codes may allow using products beyond their “best before” or expiry dates, it is highly recommended not to use such products. While they are likely safe to eat, the manufacturers cannot guarantee that the nutritional composition remains stable. As a result, meals may have a significant difference between published and real nutrition value.

For items that do not have a manufacturer’s expiry date, such as produce, it is best practice to set up an internal system for this purpose.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate “best before” management.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
5.2.1	There are no “best before” expired ingredients.		✓	✓
5.2.2	“Best before” tracking procedure is established and enforced.		✓	✓
5.2.3	“Best before” is traceable for raw products.		✓	✓
5.2.4	“Best before” is tracked and traceable for ready meals and pre-cooked ingredients.		✓	✓

5.3 Temperature Management

Temperature is the most important factor in providing healthy food. Properly maintaining temperatures of food inhibits pathogen growth and reduces the risk of spoilage. The longer food is in the temperature danger zone, the more time pathogens have to grow. Restaurants should reduce the amount of time food spends in the temperature danger zone (basically “room temperature”). It is a good practice that if food is held in this range for four or more hours, you must throw it out. Continuous temperature monitoring of food and food storage areas can improve safety and reduce food spoilage.

Restaurants should have and enforce temperature control procedures. Although local codes and requirements may vary, it is recommended that at least the following products should be subject to temperature control.

- Raw and cooked meats or edibles that contain meat
- Dairy products such as custards, milk and some desserts
- Seafood (not include fish that are kept live)
- Any processed produce
- Cooked rice and pasta
- Products that contain beans, eggs, nuts or other protein-rich foods
- Any edibles that may contain any of the above like soups or sandwiches

It is recommended that all potentially hazardous food should be stored at a temperature of 4°C (40°F) or less. This includes foods that have been prepared and cooked to be served cold.

Potentially hazardous foods that have been prepared and cooked, and are to be served hot, should be held at a temperature of at least 60°C (140°F).

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate temperature management.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
5.3.1	Temperature management rules are defined and enforced.		✓	✓
5.3.2	The temperatures in cold/hot holding units are regularly tracked and logged.		✓	✓
5.3.3	Temperature checks are recorded consistently and correctly.		✓	✓

5.4 Food Storage

Stored items must be protected from contamination such as water leakage, pest infestation, or any other unsanitary conditions. Food storage and safe handling can prevent your customers from getting sick.

To ensure that your food stock is of the highest quality, restaurant staff need to follow the “first in, first out” rule (FIFO). Stock rotation is a restaurant’s first protection against potentially spoiled food being served to guests by making sure that new food is placed behind older food when it is delivered. This will also help to prevent food wastage by ensuring nothing goes out of date.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate food storage.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
5.4.1	All food, ingredients and precursors are stored in appropriate sanitary conditions and at a designated temperature.		✓	✓
5.4.2	No food is stored on the floor.		✓	✓
5.4.3	“First in first out” policy is implemented and followed.		✓	✓

5.5 Cross-Contamination Management

Cross-contamination occurs when ingredients are unintentionally transferred to a food product that doesn't normally contain that ingredient. This can be very important in cases of food allergens or vegetarian dishes. In addition, cooked foods can become contaminated by microorganisms (bacteria and viruses) when stored near uncooked ingredients.

There are three main ways cross-contamination can occur:

- Food to food
- People to food
- Equipment to food

Restaurants should use precautionary measures to avoid the possibility that food could be unintentionally exposed to an allergen or other contaminant during preparation and any time after.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate cross-contamination management.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
5.5.1	Cross-contamination is not apparent in any station or storage area.			✓
5.5.2	Cross-contamination is not apparent for special diets and allergens.			✓

6. INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

A well-executed menu is not simply a menu that has a beautiful layout and nice pictures, but one that gives the customer all the information they need and want about the dishes.

Displaying nutritional information in restaurants can increase the ordering frequency of labeled menu items. This is because labeling makes consumers confident about the nutritional and caloric values of the items they order. So customers can select food items that will maintain their health and meet their dietary restrictions.

Allergies have always been an issue for restaurants, and in the past few years, the number of people with gluten and other allergies has increased. If your restaurant manages allergies well, you could gain the loyalty of customers who will feel safe dining with you.

Moreover, all people have different taste preferences: some people prefer very spicy food while others cannot tolerate spicy food at all. So it is good practice for restaurants to inform customers about the spiciness level by appropriate marks on the menu.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate information availability.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
6.1	A menu is easily available and visible.	✓	✓	✓
6.2	Nutrition information is easily available and includes such key elements as ingredients, weights, energy value, etc.			✓
6.3	Special diet menu items are marked and easily recognizable (e.g. vegetarian, gluten-free).		✓	✓
6.4	Spicy food is appropriately marked with a "hot indicator."		✓	✓
6.5	Menu items are marked with allergy warning signs if any typical allergens are present.			✓
6.6	A consumer advisory is used for raw or undercooked animal food.			✓

7. TRAINING AND LEARNING MANAGEMENT

Restaurant management should ensure that every team member from wait staff to kitchen staff to managers receives solid and continuous training. Restaurant employees must know proper food-handling practices to ensure food safety. For example, a well-trained staff would know how to store certain products at required temperatures and the need to wash hands before handling food. Good food safety training will help prevent food spoilage or waste and will make sure your restaurant meets all food safety codes.

A good training program in a restaurant covers quality standards among other aspects of the business. Training reminds employees about principles, procedures, and policies to ensure that they consistently fulfill their duties in accordance with these standards.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate training and learning management.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
7.1	Staff are regularly trained and records of training are available. Mandatory training is completed before starting certain operations.		✓	✓
7.2	Staff are aware of the menu items and their ingredients.		✓	✓
7.3	Staff are aware of common allergy hazards.		✓	✓
7.4	Staff are aware of appropriate serving/storing temperatures.		✓	✓
7.5	Staff are trained to handle non-standard situations, e.g. if a fire alarm triggered.			✓
7.6	A knowledge management system is implemented.			✓

8. DIGITAL PRESENCE

Technology is drastically changing the way restaurants communicate with both existing customers and potential customers. People turn to the internet for information on just about everything these days, and that includes selecting restaurants. An official website or a profile page on popular local resources can significantly influence the decision, set virtual expectations, and differentiate a particular place among the others.

Considering how much the internet influences our lives today, the difference between the “real world” and the “online world” is becoming less obvious. The internet is a place where people can embellish reality or let others use their imagination to fill in some blank spots. But experience shows that what we see on many websites and on social media is often not a realistic version of what we get in real life.

It is vitally important for your restaurant to use this powerful tool fairly and sincerely to form correct expectations. Your digital presence should realistically show the experience that you provide to your customers.

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate digital presence.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
8.1	The restaurant has an official web site or a dedicated page on major local web resources. The site is up to date and doesn't contain misleading information.			✓
8.2	The menu is available on the website or on major local web resources and is up to date.			✓
8.3	The restaurant is present on popular local map services in your region (e.g Google Map, Yandex maps, OpenStreetMap, etc.)			✓
8.4	Address, business hours and contact information are present and up to date.			✓
8.5	Photos used on the Internet reflect the actual condition of the facilities and food.			✓

9. GENERAL MANAGEMENT

Client satisfaction depends primarily on the quality of food and the level of service. Good food and a high level of service are inextricably linked with good management and processes. To get the highest mark, it is necessary to demonstrate the presence of key management processes. Of course, approaches to management depend on many factors (restaurant specialization, country, applicable laws, etc.), and these can differ significantly from one situation to another. TopPlacer respects the freedom of restaurant owners to choose the management methods that they consider appropriate to their business. Nevertheless, the experience of most successful restaurants indicates certain similarities in their approaches to management. TopPlacer has chosen the key elements utilized by most successful businesses.

Applicants applying for a TopPlacer Gold Award must show established practices in the following areas:

- Quality Management
- Equipment Management
- Supply Chain Management
- Food Traceability
- Incident Management

The TopPlacer team uses the following set of criteria to evaluate general management.

Certification Checklist

		Bronze	Silver	Gold
9.1	Food incident management system is in place.			✓
9.2	Incident reports are being tracked, and follow up actions are taken.			✓
9.3	No outstanding critical or non-critical violations. The restaurant should be free of other critical food safety violations.			✓
9.4	The restaurant has established a supplier management system. The product quality is verified, tracked, and maintained.			✓
9.5	A product traceability system is implemented.			✓
9.6	A waste management system is implemented.			✓
9.7	No waste product is reused under any circumstances.			✓
9.8	“Best before” tracking procedure and write-off procedure is defined and implemented.			✓
9.9	Deliveries are handled in a timely manner. No food is stored on the floor or out of its normal temperature conditions.			✓

9.10	All equipment is in clean and good condition.			✓
9.11	Regular equipment maintenance and calibration takes place.			✓
9.12	If equipment is supplied with disposable elements, they are not used beyond their proper lifetime (e.g. coffee filters, water filters, etc).			✓

DISCLAIMER

The government may impose different requirements on restaurant operations than the ones outlined in this guide. In case of contradictions between regulatory requirements and the requirements of this guide, the regulatory requirements supersede the requirements of this guide.