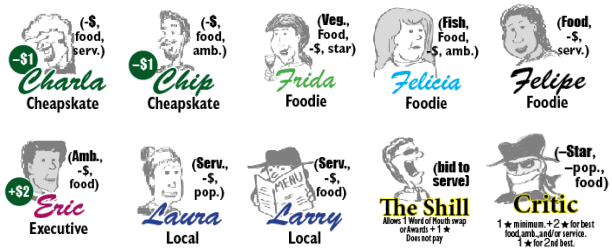
Restaurant Row
Official "Neighborhood" Variant

A criticism of Restaurant Row that I often hear is that the Word of Mouth track makes things too random and hard to plan for. I can't entirely disagree with this. If you like to have games decided almost entirely through player decisions, the shifts of the Word of Mouth track may frustrate you, especially when the customers are randomly drawn every day.

This variant, which I call the "Neighborhood" variant, will make the shifts a little more predictible by making the make up of the customers in the game more stable.

In the first day of the game and before any items are bid upon draw nine Customer tokens randomly and lay them face up on the table. Add The Critic to this group to make it 10 tokens. This is the starting population of the neighborhood.*

Through the course of the game, additional customers are added to this group of customers.



If these were the people in your restaurant's neighborhood, how would this affect your strategy?

You can use the information that you gather in this initial draw to plan your decisions during the first day's shopping round. You would be able to tell if the neighborhood had a lot or Tourists, or Scenesters, or Executives or The Shill, and so forth, and shop accordingly. The other 20 customers would be placed face down on the table.

After the shopping in the first day is done, put the 10 starting customers into the Customer bag to be drawn randomly. As customers are added into the population with each population increase, take them from the face down pile and add them to the bag.

With this revision, The Critic no longer needs to be the 10th Customer chosen, but simply drawn like any other customer which will add unpredictability to his visits.

With the makeup of the customer base more stable in this revision, the types of goods that will be valuable in the future should become more clear, and even the chaotic-seeming Word of Mouth track could become predictable.

If the initial customer population includes three Locals, it'd be a good bet that Service will rise in the Word of Mouth rankings through the course of the game. You won't see a day in which you have three Locals followed by a day in which you have none. The presence of meat foodies would make the barbecue grill valuable. The absence of meat foodies would make the barbecue grill almost worthless until one shows up. If the initial draw included no Executives, you might bet on Ambiance to fall in the rankings and avoid making many Renovations.

The flip side of being too chaotic is becoming too predictable. My hope is that the continued drawing of additional customers in every round will maintain the sense of change and development within each game which I believe makes the game fresh.

After the first round, the customer tokens are put into the cloth bag until it is time for customers to be drawn during the next day.

So if you've found the game too chaotic in the past, I hope you'll try this variant to see if it fits your taste. You might like it, or you might find that you prefer the original rules, instead. Either way is fine with me.

Bon appetit!

-Greg Lam

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