



**Developing a Winning
Concept and Establishing Your**
BRAND

Your First Step to Restaurant Success

Introduction

People come up with ideas for new restaurants every day. What is going to make your idea unique? What is going to make you stand out? Too often new restaurant owners mistakenly believe the myth “If I build it, they will come.” The fact is, nothing could be further from the truth. To go even further, simply knowing that you want your restaurant to be a “Farm to Table” or “Casual Mexican Fare”, only scratches the surface of creating a concept.

The internet and the popularity of reality television shows have given customers easy access to everything the world has to offer. This means that people are no longer only looking for great food but for the complete package – the dining experience. Most customers have done their homework before even setting foot in your door so it is important that you have done yours too. To offer customers a memorable dining experience.

The Relationship between Concept and Brand

Concept and brand are often used interchangeably; however, a brand cannot be established without having a strong concept. Your concept is the first step toward starting your restaurant business. A strong concept is what will lead the way and give direction to your business and help create a powerful brand. It's not just your customers; your staff too is looking for a cohesive dining experience. Creating such an experience begins with a detailed concept that will morph into your identity and eventually your brand.

Start With a Business Plan

A business plan is a lot more than financial estimates and projections. Your Business Plan is your ‘Restaurant Playbook’ and will include your strategies, plans, and commitment to help you achieve your goals.

The restaurant industry is a very competitive market and you need a detailed plan to win it over.

There are plenty of variables that need to be considered to make your restaurant a success. You need to pay very close attention to the small details to make your business stand out, and your business plan helps you do just that.

Ask Yourself Lots of Questions

- What type of a restaurant do I want? Family, fine dining, quick serve, casual, etc.
- Who is my competition and what makes my concept/service/experience different from them?
- How much money will I invest?
- How will I arrange all that money?
Where else can I get money?
- What is my price point going to be?
- Who is my target market?
- How big will the restaurant be?
- What will be on the menu?
- What type of location would be most suitable? Residential, strip mall, free standing, by schools, by businesses?
- Will I be serving alcohol?
- What type of people would I want to/need to hire?
- What will the staff wear?
- What type of music will I be playing?
- Will I offer delivery and take-out?



Is Your Concept Unique?

If your concept is Italian fare, and if there are already a number of similar businesses in the area then you will need more than an 'awesome sauce' to make yours **STAND OUT!**

- What percentage will my catering business be?

These questions might seem irrelevant at this point. In fact, most business owners take care of these details once they have arranged for the finances and have already rented the premises. But it's best to address these points early on.

Analyze Your Answers and Ask Yourself More Questions

It is all these factors that help build your brand and form an association and value for your customers. Once you have answered these questions, you will have the beginning concept of your brand and a better idea of whether or not the business can sustain and prosper in the current times at a specific location.

These second set of questions will allow you to tweak your concept and give you a better chance at attaining success by eliminating most hidden pitfalls:

- Is your concept unique enough for the area?
- Will the customers understand the concept? You might want to introduce your customers to new flavors and ingredients, but you don't want to educate them on who you are. Best way to understand if your restaurant will be accepted by those you wish to cater to is to introduce your idea to your friends and family and see if they understand it without too much explanation. Being different isn't always an advantage, especially when it is not relatable.
- Can the target demographic afford the price you set? You can only charge what your targeted market can bear. Destination restaurants are particularly tricky and are difficult to succeed so be mindful when conceptualizing.
- Does your menu concept allow you to work within a reasonable budget and food cost? You should be able to use the same ingredients in different dishes in order to cut costs and reduce waste. For instance, you can use the trim from filet mignon for

another dish or the stems from mushrooms to make sauce. When conceptualizing the dishes, make sure you keep the food costs in mind.

- Most importantly, do people even want what you are selling? Eventually it is about the customers, and it is only after you give them what you want, will they give you what you need - business.

Your Elevator Speech

When someone asks about your concept you need to be brief and clear. Put together a short, one or two sentence summary that is quick and simple and defines your concept. Write it down a few different ways until you feel it accurately portrays your vision, and has a seamless flow. This will not only help you focus on your concept, but it will gain you credibility when you tell it to others.