

Mobile Kitchen Trailer Operations Manual

This manual is designed as a general guide book for the day to day running of a typical Food Concession Trailer. We have carefully researched and compiled the information in an easy to understand and logical format.

The Operations Manual is broken down into 3 main sections as follows:

1. General Food Service Guidelines

- Meat Handling, Storage and Preparation
- Storing, Preparing and Serving Condiments
- Other Healthy Food Guidelines

2. Daily Operations, Procedures and Maintenance

- Trailer Kitchen Daily Operations
- Trailer Safety Guidelines
- Routine Trailer Maintenance
- Equipment Trouble Shooting

3. Business Management Guide

- Bookkeeping Made Easy
- Selling and Customer Relations
- Landlords and Locations
- Tips for Success
- Guide to Employees
- Dress and Department Code
- Health Code Guidelines
- Rules of Conduct

General Food Service Guidelines

It is highly recommended that a Food Concession Trailer operator take a Safe Food Handling Training Course before beginning to operate a food service business. These courses do not cost very much and are usually conducted or sponsored by the local or state health department. In fact, taking such a course is often a mandatory requirement in obtaining an operating permit for a new food vendor. Check the local city or health department website for details on these courses.

It is also highly recommended that you check with your local city or county health department for the exact local codes pertaining to food vending trailers in your area as these do vary from place to place. For instance, some County Health Departments will not allow Mobile Food Kitchens to serve dairy based condiments such as mayonnaise, grated cheese or even squeeze bottle cheese. Many will not allow mobile

food vendors to cook raw meats. This is because these foods are considered hazardous. They are prone to rapid bacterial growth when improperly stored or cooked. Such hazardous foods include meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy products, garlic-in-oil mixtures, cooked rice and cooked potatoes.

The guidelines included in this manual are generally universal in nature and are designed to keep you, your kitchen, and your food safe and appealing. We have basically tried to select the best information from all the various federal, state and county health organizations. The material is presented in a format that is intended to be easy to understand and easy to put into practice. Keep in mind that as a mobile food vendor you are considered a food handler by the health department officials and therefore must operate under their specific guidelines. Failure to comply will endanger the health of your customers, likely result in the loss of your operations permit and incur fines. Even worse, unsafe food handling could result in your customers becoming very sick.

Meat Handling, Storage and Preparation Guidelines

Many local health departments only allow Mobile Food Kitchens to serve certain pre-cooked meat products in the form of wieners, sausages, or patties that are to be barbequed and/or grilled in the trailer. They may not allow what are considered to be hazardous raw meats (such as beef, ground beef, pork, and poultry) to be cooked in the trailer. Always check with your local County Health Department for the allowable menu items for a Mobile Food Concession Stand.

Cooked meat must be continuously held above the temperatures specified by the health department. This required holding temperature also varies from place to place. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), for instance, recommends a holding temperature of 140°F or above. This also requires the food vending trailer must have a thermometer on hand to monitor this temperature.

Refrigerated meats must be stored below the specified cold temperature. The IDPH specifies that potentially hazardous foods such as meats must be kept stored at or below 41°F (4°C). This will require the mobile food vendor to have another thermometer on hand to monitor this cold storage temperature. The temperature in the refrigerator or ice box should also be checked by the kitchen operator at regular intervals throughout the day. Every 2 hours would be a good idea. Care should be taken to ensure that refrigerator doors or ice box covers are not left open resulting in the interior temperature rising above this specified cold storage level. Check food temperatures when you receive them from a supplier and reject any that fall outside of the accepted ranges. Then put all such perishable foods away promptly in appropriate storage units.

Fresh meats and pre-cooked meats must be cooled to the refrigerated storage temperature within a certain prescribed time after they have been prepared. For example, the IDPH dictates that cooked meat must be cooled to 70°F (21°C) within 2 hours and cooled to 41°F (4°C) within another 4 hours (6 hours total). Fresh meats must be cooled from room temperature to 41°F (4°C) within 4 hours.

Following the above rules keeps the product fresh and prevents the growth of bacteria. To summarize, a health department typically will require hot foods such as sausages to be held above 140°F (60°C) and cold perishable items to be stored below 41°F (4°C). The danger zone for bacterial growth and food spoilage is between 41°F (4°C) and 140°F (60°C).

Health departments will require that you first heat certain foods to certain temperatures before allowing you to serve them to people.

Pre-cooked hot dogs for example, must first be re-heated to at least 165°F (74°C) before serving or hot holding. To accurately determine this temperature insert the thermometer lengthwise into the center of the hot dog. Be sure not to pass through the meat and touch the cooking surface as this will give you a false

high temperature reading. Never rely on equipment thermostats to accurately achieve set temperatures. Always measure food temperatures with a thermometer. This basic procedure should be followed for all the different types of food items being cooked.

Previously uncooked meats must be cooked to the following internal temperatures according to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH):

Chicken = 180°F (82°C)

Beef – Medium = 160°F (71°C)

Beef – Well Done = 170°F (77°C)

Ground Beef = 160°F (71°C)

Pork = 170°F (77°C)

The above internal temperatures must be reached and also maintained for a certain minimum amount of time to facilitate complete cooking before serving. For example, the IDPH recommends that beef, fish, poultry or pork in the form of steaks, chops or intact pieces must reach the required temperature for a minimum of 15 seconds. Once these initial cooking temperatures have been reached for the specified times, the meat can now be put in a holding area and held there above the specified temperature (140°F or 60°C) until served to customers.

During preparation and cooking you must take great care to avoid cross contamination between meats and any other food items. Be especially careful when handling raw, fresh or frozen meats. Meat carries potentially hazardous bacteria that can make you and your customers very sick or even cause death. The area used for preparing meats must be washed and sanitized before being used to prepare any other food items! For example, if using a cutting board to separate frozen meat pieces, that cutting board must be washed and sanitized before using it to chop onions. Similarly any utensils used on the meat would have to be washed and sanitized after coming into contact with meat and before being used on the onions.

A sanitizing solution may be made by adding 1 teaspoon (5mL) of chlorine bleach to 1 quart (1L) of water.

Do not place cooked meats back on the plate or surface used to prepare or transport the uncooked (raw, fresh or frozen) meat. For example, if you used a tray to bring frozen sausages from the ice box to the grill for cooking, you must not put the cooked sausages back onto that same tray. It has been contaminated by the uncooked meat and must be washed and sanitized before being used again.

Do not use the same utensils to handle cooked meat that was used to handle raw, fresh or frozen meat. Raw, fresh, and frozen meats must be regarded as hazardous and anything that touches them has also been contaminated. This would include, for example, knives, forks or tongs used to handle the meat. They would have to be washed and sanitized before being used again.

Raw, fresh or frozen meats must be stored on a shelf below and separate from any other food items. This will prevent them from contaminating any other food items such as by dripping on them. For example, a Mobile Food Kitchen vendor using ice boxes to store refrigerated items would need to have one ice box for storing meat and another for storing non-meat items. Meats stored in a refrigerator with other foods must be kept on the bottom shelves below the other foods. Never store meat directly on the floor or the ground. Foods must always be stored on a shelf raised up off of the floor or ground.

Remember to always thoroughly wash and sanitize food preparation surfaces, equipment and utensils between uses.

Storing, Preparing and Serving Condiments

Many local health departments will not allow Mobile Food Kitchen vendors to serve any dairy based condiment products such as mayonnaise, grated cheese or even squeeze bottle cheese. Some health departments will only allow condiments that do not require refrigeration after opening to be served from a trailer. So it is very important to check first with your local health department for the specific local codes before beginning operations. If such perishable condiments are allowed, it is very important to follow the health guidelines to ensure that these condiments are maintained in healthy condition throughout your business day. If refrigerated condiments are allowed, keep them below the specified temperature (usually about 41°F or 4°C and below). This will of course require a thermometer to monitor that temperature.

Condiments must be kept in clean, washable containers and must be kept covered to prevent insects, dust, leaf litter, or rain to enter. Jars with screw lids may not be acceptable as serving containers by some local health departments. If condiments do become contaminated during the day, the containers should be emptied, cleaned and refilled with fresh material. Alternatively condiments can always be served in small plastic single service packages.

Do not store condiments directly on the floor or the ground. Always store foods on a shelf raised above the floor or the ground. This includes foods that are prepackaged such as some condiments. Do not store your condiments in the same cooler as meats or on shelves below meats. Do not store your condiments near any cleaners or chemicals. All these rules are designed to prevent the condiments from becoming contaminated somehow.

Other Healthy Food Handling and Equipment Guidelines

Do not work in food preparation or service when you are sick. This includes when you are sneezing, have a runny nose, sore throat, diarrhea, vomiting, dark urine or yellowing of the skin (jaundice) or fever. Do not handle food if you have an infected cut or burn, pus or boil. Always wear food service gloves over any cuts, abrasions, or burns.

Never touch food with your bare hands. All food items should be handled using gloves, tongs, forks, spoons or other utensils. Always keep a clean supply of spare utensils in a clean covered container. Remember that if anything falls and hits the ground, whether it is food or a utensil, it is considered dirty. Such contaminated food must be thrown out. Such contaminated utensils must be washed in soapy warm water and sanitized before being used again. A sanitizing solution usually consists of 1 part chlorine bleach in 200 parts water. There are also off-the-shelf pre-mixed chemical sanitizing solutions that can be purchased.

Always have a supply of food wrappers and proper utensils available to your customers so that they never directly touch any food items with their hands. Kindly provide instructions to customers as needed so they maintain food hygiene.

Clean and sanitize all your food service utensils at each days end and store them in a clean washable covered container. Never mix clean and used utensils in the same container as the used items would contaminate the clean ones.

The local health department will require you to have a sink for washing utensils. Most health departments actually require Mobile Food Kitchens to have 4 sinks. One sink is for ware washing, one is for sanitizing in chlorine bleach, and one is for rinsing the utensils and dishes. The fourth sink is to be used solely for hand washing and nothing else. Check carefully with your local health authorities for the specific regulations in your area.

Hand sanitation is especially critical when serving food to others as many diseases and bacteria are passed on by unwashed hands. A Mobile Kitchen therefore should have hand soap, hand sanitizer and disposable

paper towels on hand at all times.

As a food service operator you are required to wash your hands immediately after using the toilet, coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose, handling money, or after touching garbage or any or unsanitary or toxic item. You must also wash your hands when you re-enter the food service work area (the Mobile Food Kitchen) even if you have just washed them in another place such as in a nearby washroom. You must also wash your hands after eating, drinking, smoking, washing dishes, washing other equipment, sweeping or mopping the floor, handling raw, fresh or frozen meat or any other food items, and even before putting on gloves to handle food.

Hands should be washed using hot water and soap. The IDPH specifies that hand washing water be at least 110°F. You should lather your hands for 15-20 seconds. Attention should be given to removing any dirt or contamination under the finger nails. Then dry your hands using a single use towel (such as paper towels), a clean towel on a roller dispenser, or by an air dryer. Multi-use hand towels such as are used at home are not acceptable in the food service industry as these can store and transfer contamination and bacteria.

The use of gloves should never be seen as a means to short cut proper hand sanitation. Gloves can become contaminated and pick up and spread germs. For example, you would not use gloves to handle raw meat and then also to serve cooked food as this would transmit bacteria from the raw food to the cooked food.

Proper headgear such as a hat or hairnet must be worn to contain hair and prevent it from falling and contaminating the food. You do not want your customer to find a hair in their food. It would surely cost you customers and your hard earned reputation as a quality food vendor.

Keep your finger nails clean and trimmed short. It is unwise to wear finger rings as these can trap and carry food particles and bacteria and transfer them to clean food. Rings can also cut through gloves making them useless.

Do not smoke, chew tobacco, eat or drink when serving or preparing food. You must leave the food preparation and serving area for any of these activities. Move a short distance away from your trailer to eat, drink or smoke. Remember that you must then wash your hands when you return to the kitchen.

You are however allowed to drink from a closed beverage container while in the food service area. Such a beverage container would need to have a lid on it. It must also have a handle to prevent your hand from touching the area that your mouth touches. Otherwise it could have a drinking straw that would accomplish the same purpose. Always wash the container between uses or discard it.

Your clothing must be kept clean and neat. Soiled clothing can store and transfer bacteria. A fresh change of clean clothes must be worn each day or each work shift.

Never store food on the ground or floor. To do so would subject it to contamination from dirt, insects, water, and any spills. Food must always be stored on a shelf raised off of the floor or ground.

Do not store cleaning chemicals alongside food or food preparation utensils. They must be stored completely separate from food to prevent contamination and poisoning. Keep all such chemicals clearly labeled so they are not misused.

Have a garbage container on hand at all times. Never allow it to over-flow. Dispose of any garbage as required. Sanitize the garbage container at the end of each day to prevent odor.

Always keep your food preparation and serving areas looking clean. Clean up spilled condiments and wrappers to keep the area looking neat and clean.

Mobile Food Kitchen Daily Operations, Procedures and Maintenance Guide

Trailer Kitchen Daily Operations

Keep a binder on hand in your trailer that includes the following information: your business license, location license or location rental agreement, your health department permit, a copy of the local health codes for quick reference, and this operations manual. If you are serving at a special event, have the permit with you that allows you to operate at that special event. It is best to keep all these papers in clear plastic sheet protectors so that they stay un-frayed, clean and readable. Always keep on hand the directions and maintenance manuals for any of the other equipment or appliances that you are using on the trailer.

Also keep on hand and use a Daily Check List for the items you use and things you need to do in order to get operating each day. Do a daily check of your trailer, the equipment and contents before you start up each day. This prevents any unpleasant surprises or snags after you get started working. It is best to always work from written checklists and not from memory.

Wash the trailer every day before and after use. First wash the trailer with hot soapy water to remove any dirt or spilled food. Then use a sanitizing solution to kill any remaining bacteria. A sanitizing solution may be made by adding 1 teaspoon (5mL) of chlorine bleach to 1 quart (1L) of water. Other pre-mixed bottled chemical sanitizing solutions can be purchased from commercial cleaning supply or restaurant supply companies. Wear rubber gloves as these sanitizers are very hard on the skin.

Use this same cleaning and sanitizing procedure on all surfaces and appliances used to store, prepare, cook or serve food, and all utensils and containers. Also clean sinks and faucets. Even the garbage cans should be cleaned to prevent any undesirable odor.

Fill the trailer's fresh water tanks each day with all new fresh potable water. Do not keep water from one day to the next.

Always empty the trailer's waste water tanks at the end of each day or work shift. These waste water tanks should also be washed to prevent odor.

Make sure that the propane tanks and propane gas equipment and appliances are in good safe working order. This is both an operational and a safety issue. Replace or repair any defective gas equipment when a problem is discovered. Do not delay! Check that hoses are free of wear and hose connections are secure and will not come loose. Always keep an extra fully filled propane tank on hand so that you never find yourself out of gas in the middle of a work day. Always turn off the tank valves at the end of each day.

Use wheel chocks to hold the trailer securely in place at locations where the trailer is positioned on a slope. You can make these yourself from short lengths of wooden 4x4's.

Arrive at your location well before you are expected to begin serving food. This will give you plenty of time to clean and properly set up. Being early will avoid the temptation to cut any corners on proper start up and preparation. It will also avoid rushing and the associated stress.

Be sure to have an adequate supply of coins and small bills so as to be able to give correct change for the entire day. Being short on correct change is an unnecessary time consuming aggravation and is very unprofessional.

Be regular, consistent and reliable. Customers will come to depend upon you. This will help build a loyal regular customer base for your food service business.

Be friendly, cheerful and smile. Greet each and every customer. Learn the names of your regulars as this will further build customer loyalty. They will be your best advertisers by spreading news of you by word of mouth to their friends and co-workers.

Display a menu of items that you serve. This will save time during the busy lunch hour rush. It will enable customers to decide before they order. It can be made for a reasonable price at a professional vinyl graphics sign company.

Be a good neighbor to the other businesses in the area. Never let your business interfere with or detract from theirs. Instead it should compliment and enhance their businesses. This may involve you doing small simple things such as providing a trash can for your customers and cleaning up any litter in the area at the end of the day.

Food Trailer Safety Guidelines

Fire

Fires in a well maintained Mobile Food Kitchen are certainly rare but can happen. It is suggested that a fire extinguisher be kept on hand for such an event. Keep equipment clean and grease free to prevent such an event. Always follow the manufacturers guidelines for food preparation equipment especially griddles and deep fryers.

The other area of concern is that of clothing catching fire. This may occur if an operator gets too close to hot burners with polyester clothing. This can cause the clothing material to melt or ignite and possibly burn the person. For this reason a proper approved butcher's apron of fire resistant material should always be worn. Clothing should be kept clean and free of accumulated oil and grease.

First Aid

Always keep a small first aid kit in the trailer to treat the inevitable small burns, nicks, cuts and abrasions that will occur. It should include some disinfectant and an assortment of various sized "Band-Aids". Check the first aid kit regularly and restock it with needed items.

Towing the Trailer

Always check that the trailer's trailer hitch is pushed all the way down and fully locked onto the ball. Make sure that the ball is the correct size for the hitch as a hitch will connect to an undersized ball but it may disconnect during towing. Always connect the safety chains between the trailer and the tow vehicle. If you have the detachable tongue option on the trailer, double check that it is properly re-installed before towing.

Connect the electrical wires and check that signal and brake lights are functioning properly.

Remove the wheel chocks and raise the corner jacks before driving away. Make sure all items on the trailer are fully secured and ready for transport before towing.

Check the tires for proper inflation pressure as a partially deflated tire can fail at highway speeds causing you to lose control.

Mobile Food Kitchen Routine Maintenance

A Mobile Food Kitchen must be maintained in top condition at all times. If not, the owner/operator risks being unable to do business and thereby losing money.

Inspect the trailer daily in the same manner as a pilot conducts a preflight or “walk-around” inspection of his aircraft.

Check the tires for wear and correct air pressure. Have the wheel bearings inspected by a mechanic every year. Replace the tires when the treads are worn.

Check that the trailer lights (running, braking and turning) are all working. Always keep a set of spare light bulbs on hand.

Inspect the electrical wires that connect from the tow vehicle’s lights through to the trailer lights. Some sections of these wires are especially prone to wear. These areas include where the wires rub when passing through channeling. Use electrical tape or flexible plastic wire conduit to cover and protect the wire insulation.

Check electrical connectors for corrosion. Because a Mobile Food Kitchen is regularly washed, electrical connectors are especially prone to corrosion.

Wear or corrosion in the electrical system will cause serious failure. A short circuit can blow the fuse in the tow vehicle or burn out the trailer electrical adaptor. As a result, none of the trailer or tow vehicle lights will work. An open circuit due to parted wires or connectors will likewise result in lights not working. This is a real serious road safety issue.

Make sure that the propane tanks and propane gas equipment and appliances are in good safe working order. This is both an operational and a safety issue.

Inspect the propane tanks and hoses. Propane leaks can be detected using soapy water. Any leaks will be shown by expanding bubbles. Check and replace any worn hoses. Do not attempt to repair hoses by yourself such as by using electrical or duct tape to cover over the leaks in the hose! Replace or repair any defective gas equipment when a problem is detected. Do not delay! Check that gas hose connections are secure and will not come loose.

Ensure that the propane tanks are firmly secured in place and will not shake loose during transport. Likewise, make sure that all doors close and lock firmly so they won’t spring open during transit.

Trouble Shooting

Gas Burner Will Not Start:

- * Check that the valve at the propane tank is open.
- * Check that the propane tank line is connected to the burner.
- * Check that the propane tank has gas in it.
- * Check that the burner gas control is ON and set to MAX.

Gas Burner Was On But Now Has Gone Out:

- * Check that the propane tank line is connected to the burner.
- * Check that the propane tank has gas in it.

Flames Appear Under the Gas Appliance:

- * Shut off the propane gas supply at the tank.
- * Allow area to cool.
- * Check that the propane gas supply lines are not loose or detached from the burner element.

Road Lights on the trailer Do Not Come On:

- * Check that the electrical plug on the trailer is connected to the adaptor on the towing vehicle.
- * Check that one of the wires from the tow vehicle are not severed somewhere along their length.
- * Check the fuse box in the tow vehicle to see if the fuse for the brake, signal or marker lights is blown. If it is, replace it, but also check for a short circuit in the trailer's lighting wires that may have caused it. Also keep in mind that the electrical adaptor leading to the trailer may also have an internal fuse that has blown. Test the output voltage from the adaptor – if it is less than 10 volts it is likely damaged.
- * Check the electrical lines on the trailer for damage such as wear caused by rubbing against the chassis or channeling. Replace worn wire.
- * Check the electrical connectors for corrosion. Replace worn or corroded connectors. Seal them to prevent moisture from causing future corrosion.
- * Check for faulty ground wire connections on the trailer. Oftentimes corrosion or a loose connection prevents a good electric return path and lights will not activate.
- * Check that the light bulbs are not broken.

Wheels Squeak with Moving trailer:

- * Have a mechanic check the wheel bearings and lubricate or replace as necessary.

Electrical Appliances Will Not Work:

- * Extension cord from outlet may have become unplugged.
- * Fuse inside building supplying power may have blown.
- * Check entire length of extension cord for wear or breaks. It may have been severed.

DC Refrigerator Is No Longer Keeping Food Cold:

- * Check thermostat setting on fridge.
- * Battery may be depleted and need re-charging.
- * Battery internal electrolyte level may be low and needs refilling. If adding water use distilled water available from a drug store.
- * Wires from battery to refrigerator may have become damaged, disconnected, or the connections corroded.

AC Refrigerator Is No Longer Keeping Food Cold:

- * Check thermostat setting on fridge.
- * Extension cord from outlet may have become unplugged.
- * Fuse inside building supplying power may have blown.
- * Check entire length of extension cord for wear or breaks. It may have been severed.

Business Management Guide

Owning your own Mobile Food Kitchen business is going to be rewarding and enjoyable. The guidelines in this section should help you to be successful whether you work alone or have several employees.

Managing employees can be difficult and frustrating if not done properly. This section provides some ideas, guidelines and forms to use in managing your human resources effectively.

Please note that laws governing employees and sub-contractors vary from place to place. Make sure that you conform to these in every respect.

Both you and your employees should be familiar with the Mobile Food Kitchen Operations Manual, the Employees Rules of Conduct guide, and the Dress, Department and Hygiene Code. Review these with them in person and have copies of them in the trailer for reference. Have employees sign them.

Bookkeeping That Works.

A simple, straight forward bookkeeping system is important to you and your business. It is the foundation of a successful business. Good bookkeeping will enable you to analyze your business on an ongoing basis. Good bookkeeping will also save you much time and minimize frustration.

Keep It Simple

A key rule of thumb is the KISS principle (Keeping It Simple is Smart). Many people think that bookkeeping and financial statements are highly complicated activities reserved for the realm of accountants only. For a small business, this simply is not the case. The only skills required are to be able to count, record, add and subtract. Some simple forms for inventory control and profit / loss statements make this even easier.

One method used in keeping the accounting simple and easy is to pay CASH up front for all your supplies. This has a few important advantages:

1. You should get better prices for paying up front compared to paying on account in 30 days.
2. You are able to quickly determine the success of your recent activities.
3. There will be no surprises at the end of the month when the bills come in.
4. Your accounting will be kept to a few minutes each day rather than a time consuming burden at the end of the month.

Keep Accurate Records Daily

CASH does not mean that you don't get receipts or are involved in shady activities such as dodging taxes. It is simply a tool to keep accounting simple and to get the best prices for supplies.

You will need to keep all your receipts in order to keep accurate records both for your own information and to show government agencies at tax time. Without accurate records, you will find it difficult to take advantage of all the business deductions and credits to which you are entitled.

Never rely on your memory. Put it in writing. Keep records. Keep receipts.

Keeping your records simple and up to date will also save you money when you actually do need an accountant at tax time.

Keep receipts of all business related expenses including day to day supplies, equipment purchases, employee pay, office supplies, business loan interest, and vehicle mileage or fuel (spent driving to work, suppliers, business meetings, etc). These various expenses are all deductions at tax time and they will really add up over the year.

Keep business expense items on separate bills from other personal expense items i.e. business food supplies versus personal groceries. Mark on the receipt what the items were for i.e. a special event or weekly supplies. You may have to write in what the items actually are as many stores use acronyms in their

descriptions that military pilots would find mind numbing. This will prevent much confusion.

Keep your records in a safe place such as a filing cabinet or banker's box. Keep separate labeled file folders for the different types of business expenses such as consumable food supplies, equipment purchases, uniform expenses, advertising and promotion, loan interest payments, employee pay, office supplies, vehicle expenses, rent payments, licensing and training, etc. Note that different expenses have different rates of deduction or different places to go on the tax form. Keeping them separate will save a ton of time and money at year end tax time.

Make up new record folders for each new fiscal year.

The Psychology of Selling

How to Motivate Your Customers to Buy and to Return

Successful selling involves more than just putting up a sign and waiting for customers to beat a path to your trailer.

While a Mobile Food Kitchen presents different marketing challenges than, for example, operating a grocery store, the basic philosophy of selling holds true for all businesses. Customers must first be attracted to your sales site and then encouraged to buy your products. At the point of sale you must anticipate and satisfy your customer's needs and expectations.

It is the selling cycle – attracting customers, encouraging sales and satisfying customer needs – that is essential in assuring the continued growth and success of your business.

Remember the cardinal rule: it is easier to keep an old customer than to attract a new one!

The Sale:

Once your customer has been attracted to your vending site, there are four factors that go into completing a successful sale:

1. The customer must have a clear idea of what is being sold and at what price.
2. All signs should be simple and professionally made.
3. You must be able to service the customer even if you get many customers all at once.
4. You must ask for the sale.

Up-Sell:

Always make sure you and your employees up-sell. It's very simple. Just ask a positive question. Or give positive suggestions.

Do not ask "Would you like a drink with that?"

Instead ask "What kind of drink would you like with that?"

The second question is positive and affirmative.

If a customer is indecisive or unsure, help them, say something like: “Why don’t you try one of our Smokin’ Willydog’s? Most of the guys seem to like them.”

Help your customer to make selections by asking leading questions like: “Would you like cheese on that?” “Would you like to try the Red Onion sauce?”

Customers will not see this as “up-selling” but rather as you showing a personal interest in them.

Pricing:

There are no hard and fast rules on pricing.

A good start is to first poll your competitors or other similar businesses in your local area.

Do not be afraid to charge more for your product. Charging 25% more than your competitors is not unreasonable.

The reason for this is simple. If you do a superior job, offer a superior product, offer superior service, and do it in a unique way, your customers will be very happy to pay more. There are many very successful food service franchises that follow this philosophy.

The convenience of your location is another reason why customers will be willing to pay more.

Customer relations:

How you speak to your customers is as important as what you say. Always be friendly, positive and upbeat.

Make sure everything is continually kept neat and clean.

Make sure all employees understand and apply the above principles

How to Negotiate for a Location with a Landlord:

See it from the land lord's point of view.

Keep in mind that the small amount of rent that you will generate is not likely to be the Landlord’s greatest concern or motivation. His primary concern is his own primary line of business. If he is a property manager overseeing a plaza or a business complex, he will be concerned about how your business will affect his other tenants. If he is a large store owner, he will be concerned about how your business reflects on his establishment.

Motivate the Landlord. Highlight the benefits that your Food Concession Trailer will bring to his establishment:

- Your trailer will draw more business to his business.
- Your trailer will not take away from existing business but will enhance it by adding variety.
- Your trailer will improve employee and customer morale.

- Your trailer will keep his employees from leaving the area for lunch and taking long breaks.
- Your trailer is attractive and can be used in promotional ads.

Impress the Landlord. Emphasize how you intend to operate your Food Concession Trailer in a manner that will enhance his business environment:

- You will operate your trailer in a professional and safe manner (meeting all health guidelines, snappy uniform, area clean-up, etc.).
- You will create a positive atmosphere that will be good for his business as well.
- You can be flexible and reasonable to deal with.
- Show the Landlord your Business License and Health Dept Permit as these will establish your credentials as a professional food service.
- Show the Landlord your employee rules of conduct policy and vendor trailer dress and deportment policy as these will allay his fears and build his confidence in you as a reputable vendor.
- Show the Landlord a picture of the trailer you intend to use as well as its specifications and features.

Sell Yourself as a Professional Business Person:

- Negotiate in person. Look professional. Dress the part.
- Men should be clean shaven. Dress in business clothes and wear a tie.
- Women likewise should dress as business person not in casual or revealing clothes.
- Rehearse your presentation so as to be able to handle any questions or objections in a professional manner.

Other points to keep in mind:

- Know exactly what you want and need from him to be successful – the location and amount of space you will use, AC power, hours of operation, etc.
- Have a copy of a simple rental agreement for him to sign.
- Monthly rent should not exceed two days gross sales.
- Rent for special events should not exceed 15% of gross sales.
- Do not allow the Landlord to dictate your working hours

Tips for Success

Be Reliable.

Customers will depend on you for lunch. Be there regularly. Become part of their routine. This will build a loyal regular customer base.

Be Friendly.

Greet each customer. Be cheerful and smile. It costs nothing but makes a huge difference. Get to know your

regulars by name. That builds loyalty. They will spread the word about you and draw more customers to your business. The best advertising is by word of mouth and it costs nothing.

Keep a Clean, Tidy Shop.

People are turned off by mess especially where they buy their food. Clean your trailer daily before and after use. Clean all the equipment including condiment trays and bottles. Keep your garments and personal appearance clean and neat.

Maintain Quality.

A good reputation is priceless. Don't scrimp. Don't risk it by cutting corners using old product.

Be a Good Neighbor.

Don't let your business interfere with theirs – make it compliment and augment their business. This may include simple things such as providing a trash can for your customers and picking up litter at days end.

Know Local Eating Habits.

This requires foods that reflect your local culture such as grated cheese, chili, hot mustard, etc. Even within a city, one neighborhood may be more health conscious, reflect a unique cultural flavor ie: require Kosher food. Ask. Listen. Learn. Adapt. Serve those needs. Advertise it. It means business.

Post a Simple Menu and Price List.

Most people won't buy unless they first know the price. Prominently displaying what you sell will save you time explaining especially during a busy lunch hour. It enables your customers to decide before they order. Attach your Menu / Price List to your trailer with Velcro under a plexiglass cover (to protect it from dirt, rain, and facilitate easy cleaning and changing). Get it made professionally at a local vinyl graphics sign shop. It won't cost much and it will look professional.

Take Phone Orders.

Post your cell phone number on your trailer and keep a phone order log sheet. Have business cards made up that you can give to customers for them to have so they can call their orders in ahead of time. Print off some simple ½ page menu sheets like take-out restaurants do.

Many workers are so busy that they prefer to call their food orders in ahead of time and just pick them up. Often one person will pick up lunch for many. They save time not having to wait. You avoid long line ups and generate more business. It's another way to adapt to your customers needs and develop a loyal customer base.

Introduce Yourself to a New Area.

When you set up your trailer in a new area, advertise yourself. This will get your new location off to a running start.

Print up some quality flyers and take them around to the businesses in the area so they will be familiar you. Maybe include a nice picture of you and your new concession trailer. Drop these off in business mailboxes. Post them on information boards. Hand them directly to business owners, managers, receptionists, and other employees. Dress neat and professionally while doing this as you are making that all important first impression of your quality food service vending trailer!

The flyer should include your hours of business, location, menu, and cell number for phone orders. It should show that your trailer is licensed and meets all the Health Code requirements.

Keep it to one page in length and one sided so it can easily be posted in a lunch room. Include introductory discount coupons at the bottom of your flyer to encourage first time customers.

Signage and Graphics.

Have a vinyl graphics company make up some large quality graphic signs for your trailer. This will help identify you and your products and draw customers. Include your cell phone number for placing phone orders. Put up sandwich board signs 200 yards down the road to pull in traffic. Install vinyl lettering on your vehicle to advertise your trailer. Include your regular trailer location. Tie a colorful helium balloon to your trailer to get noticed from a distance.

Employer's Guide to Employees

Great care must be taken in hiring and firing employees. Many problems with employees can be avoided by following a few simple and reasonable steps. These guidelines are important even if the employees are family members.

Personnel are any company's most valuable asset. That is why large companies have departments called Human Resources devoted solely to managing this crucial resource. Many companies with incredible products failed because they mismanaged their human resources.

The best course is:

1. Selection
2. Education
3. Direction
4. Prevention

Selection

Select only quality employees that look and act the part. Don't be pressured or rushed into hiring. Check references. Referrals from friends and acquaintances are always your best source for good employees.

Education

Educate employees on what is expected of them and how to do the job required of them. Show them how to do it and then have them do it by themselves while you observe. Give them all the tools needed to do their job. Include written directions such as the "Mobile Food Kitchen Operations Manual" so they can refer to it.

Direction

Give kind dignified direction and correction when necessary. Give commendation for a job well done. Check up on their performance regularly. Reward excellence. Keep your promises. Show appreciation.

Lead by example.

Prevention

Have them read and sign the “Employee Rules of Conduct” and the “Dress, Department, and Hygiene Code”. Quiz them to ensure these rules are clearly understood. This will prevent many problems and misunderstandings. Give written warnings for any serious violations or problems and have them sign it and you keep a copy. Firing is a last resort. Never fire in anger. Always maintain a calm, serious and professional bearing.

Finding and Interviewing, Hiring and Firing

Where to Look for Good Help:

Referrals:

Referrals from friends and family are the best source as the candidates are known and easily checked. Good employees or former employees are another source. Ask if this person is someone they would be willing to work with. Good people know good people.

Classified Ads:

Place classified ads in the local newspaper “Help Wanted” section. This will likely draw a lot of response but a lot of the response will be unqualified or poor quality. You will have to sift through them carefully.

Schools:

High schools, colleges, universities and trade schools are a good source for part-time, weekend and seasonal help. They often have a job placement center or a job bulletin board. Place an ad on the job placement bulletin board. Make a personal appointment with the job counselor if they have one. Or ask a teacher or professor who they would recommend. Clearly outline the job and the kind of person you want. They will often give you a list of quality candidates.

Community Organizations:

Boy scouts, church groups, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, etc. usually know of bright young people looking for work.

Government Employment Agencies:

Unlike private agencies, these services are free to both employers and employees. The best results occur by talking personally with a placement officer.

Help Wanted Sign:

Posting a sign on your vendor trailer will draw a lot of response but also may prove time consuming. It may attract a lot of poor quality respondents. At the same time, the applicants will have a very clear understanding of what the job entails.

Keep records of all good applicants in case any don't work out or have to leave. This would include names and phone numbers.

Be clear and direct about the job description and hours of work. Do not sugar coat it as you will just waste your time.

Interviewing

Ask questions to determine what kind of worker they will be. Ask about past work history and why they left those jobs.

Get at least 2 references from previous employers and check them. If these references are reluctant to answer questions or the applicant is reluctant to provide them, this is a clear indicator of a bad employee. Ask the previous employer if they would hire the person again if they are unwilling to provide details concerning the reason the person left their company. Sometimes people feel guilty for dismissing someone and will want to help them find replacement work so beware of vague details or evasive wording. If you can not reach any of the references previous employers ask for another. If they can't provide, do not proceed.

How a person dresses when appearing for an interview or applying for a job is a good indicator of their quality. If they don't appear clean, presentable, respectful, honest, reliable, and personable for the interview, do not proceed.

If they are late for a specific interview appointment, it is a good indicator that they are unreliable.

Qualify the applicant for the job they will be performing. For example, role play as a customer to test whether they can add up the prices of various items and provide correct change.

Give the applicants a clear picture of what is required of them and spell out their earnings potential. This will avoid having them quit after a few days because the job didn't meet their expectations. Only hire after they have been informed of and agree to the rate of pay, hours of work, and when you will pay them.

Ask them if they have any reservations or difficulties about the job and its requirements for them.

Hiring:

Have the new employees read and sign the Employee Rules of Conduct, the Dress, Department, and Hygiene Guide, and the Mobile Food Kitchen Operations Manual. Review it with them.

Give adequate training and supervision. A good rule of thumb is to work with each new employee for 3 days before leaving them on their own. Train them by having them do the work while you watch as opposed to you working and they watch. People forget what they see but remember what they do. Hands on training is best.

Even the best employees can develop bad habits if not supervised. Give correction, direction and counsel as required.

Avoid vague and subjective instructions like "keep the trailer clean". Instead, give specific instructions such as "Wipe down the equipment every 2 hours. Clean the trailer at the end of the shift."

Any serious shortcomings should be handled in writing. The warning should be clear and specify what was done wrong and what conduct is expected. Get the employee to sign it. Keep a copy for yourself and give a copy to the employee.

Give commendation for work well done. This will have the same effect as a raise in pay.

Two part time workers may give you more security and flexibility than one full time worker.

Firing:

You can be held liable for certain penalties or even legal action if you terminate an employee without good cause or adequate warnings.

As previously mentioned, employees should be warned in writing prior to termination. Keep a record on file of these. Verbal warnings for smaller infractions should be noted in their file.

Employers may lay off or terminate employees because of lack of work or to meet other staffing needs provided that the decision to terminate is not based on age or race or another discriminatory reason.

Employees can be fired for "good cause" which generally means unsatisfactory job performance. Good Cause is determined by a 2 part evaluation:

1. A test of reasonableness. Was the employee terminated for failing to carry out a reasonable rule of the employer? For example, having the employee consistently make correct change for a customer is a reasonable rule.
2. A test of knowledge. Did the employee have knowledge of this rule. Employees can not be required to comply with rules of which they have no knowledge.

Keep forwarding addresses of all employees and former employees. If dealing with minors such as teenagers, get the addresses of their parents. You may need these for mailing forms at year end.

Have the terminated employee sign the termination form as a condition of receiving their final pay check.

Concession Trailer Dress and Department Code

1. A person's overall appearance must be neat and clean to convey the attitude of professionalism required of the food service industry.
2. Clothing must be clean without stains.
3. A fresh change of clothing must be worn each day.
4. Clothing should not be frayed or worn out.
5. If the vendor does not have his own company shirts or hats, those worn must not have logos or messages that are offensive. Clothing without such logos or messages are preferred.
6. Males must be freshly shaven.
7. Hair must be clean and neat.
8. The cash apron must clean and neat.
9. An employee must at all time conduct themselves in a mature, professional manner that is conducive to business and the food service industry.

10. Employees must follow health department guidelines while preparing and handling food.

Health Code Guidelines:

Poor personnel hygiene, especially lack of or improper hand washing, is the number one cause of food borne disease outbreaks in the United States. It is also very preventable. In this case the old axiom “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is very true. One such incident could ruin your business.

The Mobile Kitchen Trailer Operations Manual health code guidelines must therefore be strictly followed.

Concession Trailer Employee Rules of Conduct

1. Employees must arrive at work on time and ready for work. Employees must arrive at Vendor location according to the prescribed schedule.
2. Employees must conform to the Concession Trailer Dress and Department Code.
3. Employees must always convey a friendly positive professional attitude especially when dealing with customers.
4. Employees conduct, hygiene, and dress must always conform to the standards required of the local Department of Health for the Food Service Industry.
5. Employees must read and conform to the guidelines provided for workers in the food service industry including instructions on personal washing, cleaning equipment, and handling food.
6. All monies collected from sales will be deposited into the cash box at the end of each working day or shift. All monies collected from sales will be counted and logged at the end of each working day or shift. An inventory of remaining foodstuffs will also be counted at this time. Any reasons for discrepancies should be noted in writing at this time. Employees will not borrow from the company cash box.
7. Employees will not sell any unauthorized products of their own from the food trailer or on company time.
8. Employees will conform to the posted menu prices and will not extend special pricing to any friends, relatives, customers or themselves unless authorized by the company owner or supervisor.
9. Any thefts of products or money will result in the employee’s immediate work termination and will be reported to the appropriate authorities.
10. Any departure from the above guidelines may result in the employee’s immediate work termination.
11. This instruction guide is binding and is to be read and signed by each employee.