

# Starting a Mobile Food Stand Business

## Getting Started in Your New Food Concession Stand Business

Many people long for a job that gives them independence, enjoyment and, at the same time, a decent wage. A Food Concession Stand business can be just that kind of job. But that does not mean that it won't take effort, careful planning and diligence. This business guide is designed to show our customers how to start their new business with a minimum of cost and, hopefully, avoid any snags and nasty surprises.

There are essentially about 8 steps in starting a Food Concession Stand business. These steps involve the cart operator doing some necessary preparation work in advance of heating up your first meal for your first customers. These steps are as follows:

1. Evaluate Food Concession Stand locations.
2. Select the right Food Concession Trailer.
3. Obtain a Business License and Location Permit.
4. Obtain a Health Department Permit.
5. Set up Key Suppliers.
6. Secure Financing.
7. Order your Food Concession Trailer.
8. Follow the Trailer Operations Manual.

These steps do not absolutely guarantee success. However, if you add hard work and determination, it is more likely that you are going to start on an enjoyable new career with less hassle and grief. Now let's look at each of these 8 steps in detail.

### **Evaluate Food Concession Stand Locations.**

You first need to carefully evaluate different possible locations for setting up your concession stand. The military has a saying: "Time spent on a recon (reconnaissance) is seldom wasted". Therefore scout out and find the best locations in your area and check to see if they are available. You may find that you will have to pay rent to private or commercial owners for a really lucrative location in a mall or busy parking lot. If so, you will need to consider whether the cost of the rent will be worth it. That is, will the

location pay for itself. As a rule of thumb, the monthly rent should not exceed 10 percent of your monthly sales.

You may also need to acquire a location license in addition to your business license if you want to park your stand on a public property like a park, side walk or street. Check with your municipality for details regarding locations and permit requirements. This is discussed further in the section concerning business licensing.

The best locations for a food vending trailer have a lot of pedestrian traffic. They should be located near a large population of workers, visitors or shoppers. The location should enable your stand to be highly visible to this flow of foot traffic. It should also be easy to access for you to load your daily supplies or park the trailer. It is also better if there are no other competing food businesses nearby.

Here are some examples of possible permanent locations for a Food Concession Stand:

- Parking lot of large retail store, factory, plaza, or mall.
- Industrial park or commercial complex.
- Park, beach, pier, zoo, golf course.
- Downtown street corner or parking lot.
- University, college, high school.
- Court house, military base, government complex.
- Office building, hospital, call center.
- Transportation center such as bus, train, subway, airport, marina, truck stop, service station, car wash.

In addition to having a regular daily permanent location many mobile Food Stand operators also set up at temporary locations to catch extra business after regular hours. These special event locations can be very profitable. Here are some examples of these that you should investigate:

- Sporting events such as soccer, baseball, football, little league and amateur through to professional.
- Car shows and rallies, farm shows, boat shows, air shows, industrial shows, home shows, county fairs, cultural events, carnivals, fishing derbies, auctions, parades, flea markets, music festivals, antique and craft shows, tourist attractions.
- Grand openings, open houses, large sales events, business anniversaries, company picnics & banquets, conventions.
- Charity events, church /club /school functions.
- Large construction sites.
- Catering parties and anniversaries.

While these special event locations will generate a large one time income if they are large enough, it is important to have a regular permanent location to provide you with a steady

income. Do not sacrifice your consistent dependable presence at your permanent location in order to serve a one time temporary location. Your regular customers will come to depend upon your daily service. You need to maintain that loyal customer base. It will prove more reliable and profitable to you in the long term.

### **Select the Right Food Concession Trailer for You.**

Now you need to carefully determine which of the WillyDogs Concession Trailers is the best for your business. Go to the Food Concession Stand section of our web page. Select a Food Concession Trailer based on your perceived daily sales volume and the menu items you plan to offer. Determine the equipment options and trailer features that you will need to operate efficiently, safely, legally and effectively. Check with our customer service group for expert assistance in this critical phase of your Food Concession Stand start up.

### **Obtain a Business License and Location Permit.**

The next step is to get a business license from your local city government. This will generally cost anywhere from \$60.00 to \$400.00 depending on your city. The larger cities tend to charge more for these than do the smaller towns.

The municipal government may also require that you to obtain a separate vendor location permit for each and every location that you plan to use. Some large cities have a limited number of approved vendor locations available and there is often a waiting list. So you will need to apply and get on that list if that is the case in your area.

Special Event permits may also be required for setting up your food cart at special temporary locations such as those listed above in the locations section.

Check with your local municipal authorities about all three of these types of licenses. In some places, all three are required. In other places, only the business license is needed. At the same time, be sure to check on the local by-laws for food vendors. This can often even be done on-line at the city's web site. A bit of research in these areas can make sure that you avoid fines and the loss of your business license.

### **Obtain a Health Department Permit.**

This permit may cost between \$50.00 and \$250.00 depending on the county. Check our Links section on this web site to locate and contact your local county health department. They are listed there by State.

The local health department wants to make sure that both you and your new food vending trailer meet local standards and will provide a safe healthy service to the general public. In order for them to ensure this, the health department will specify certain technical

requirements for your food trailer. These vary from region to region, and from county to county. Generally though, these requirements are for the mobile kitchen to be made in such a way that it will be safe and clean and capable of providing healthy uncontaminated food.

The health authorities may ask you to submit details regarding your Food Concession Stand specifications. They want to check that your mobile kitchen will meet all of their local health codes. These details, drawings and specifications can be downloaded from our web site in the Trailer Selection section that shows the pictures and schematics of all the various Food Concession Stands.

Some county health departments will require that food preparation equipment be "NSF approved". The NSF (National Sanitation Foundation) is a quality assurance agency that provides guidelines and certification for food equipment. They have detailed specifications that manufacturers of food service equipment must meet regarding standards of design, operation and materials of construction. As a leader in Food Concession Stand design and manufacture, this approval is not a problem for us. However, because it involves some extra time and work, NSF approval is a chargeable option on our Food Concession Stands. If NSF certification is required by your county health department, you must mention this when ordering so that the proper certification paperwork and procedures will be done on your Food Concession Trailer while it is being built.

Familiarize yourself with all of the health code regulations for your area. These may affect the types of foods that you can serve from your Food Concession Trailer, the options that you will need to order with your new food stand, and thus also the size and model of trailer that you pick.

An example of this is with regard to types of food that are allowed to be served from a mobile vending cart. Some counties are very strict in this regard. For instance, they may not allow any sea foods to be cooked in a mobile kitchen. They may specify that only pre-cooked meats in the form of weiners, sausages or patties are allowed to be reheated and served on a bun. This code will affect your menu and your source of supply.

The local county health department may also want to physically inspect your mobile food stand when you receive it and before you start operating. The inspector will check over the trailer to ensure it is in full conformance with local standards and will then issue you with a certificate. This will also involve a one time inspection fee.

In addition, you may be required to take a course in safe food handling. This is actually a very good idea even if it is not a legal requirement in your area. A safe food handling training course may range anywhere from 4 hours in length to a couple of full working days. At any rate, it will fully inform you of all of the local county health requirements for your Food Concession Stand. Plan on paying a separate fee for this course. It may be

offered by the health department directly or by another authorized food service company.

The Food Concession Stand Operations Manual found here on our web site is also a good place to start for general operating procedures for conforming to most health codes. Keep in mind that it is a general summary of health guidelines. Local health codes may be more or less strict in nature from what we have presented and your local health department may have slightly different specific requirements or procedures. Check on these requirements first before ordering your Food Concession Stand.

If you have any further questions regarding meeting health code regulations, we are happy to assist you.

### **Set up Suppliers.**

You will need to find quality, well priced, local suppliers for all the different consumable items you will be using in operating your Food Concession Stand. These items include the meat, condiments, drinks and side order foods you will sell, as well as cleaning supplies, paper goods, propane gas, etc.

You may find it beneficial to get set up with a local commissary. A commissary is a licensed food establishment (such as a deli) that will prepare and store certain perishable food items for you. Because they are already set up to properly receive, prepare and store foods, it will help you to avoid dealing with many of the stringent health department regulations regarding preparing and storing perishable foods such as meat and cheese. In addition, you don't have the cost of the refrigeration equipment.

Having a commissary will also provide a location for your food stuffs to be delivered. Basically, for a fee, the commissary provides refrigeration equipment and a storage area, prepares some of the perishable foods for you, and conforms to all the health department regulations for these services. This simplifies your business and reduces your workload. They will store your meat for you and prepare your daily supply of chopped onions or grated cheese. So having a good rapport with a quality commissary is a real asset to your business.

You will need to comparison shop for suppliers of other items. These include condiments, potato chips, sodas, other beverages, plastic cutlery, napkins, take-out bags, cleaning supplies, sanitizing solution, and propane gas. These items can be sourced from specialized restaurant supply companies, big box stores, discount supermarkets, commercial cleaning supply companies, and so on. While many of these can be stored in your home office, take care that even non-perishable items are stored in a manner that conforms to any local health code regulations. These are detailed in the Operations Manual.

## **Secure Financing.**

If you require financing to start your new business, you will need to go see your bank about a business loan or a line of credit. Alternatively, we can put you in touch with our own financing and equipment leasing specialist.

To deal with the bank or financier you may need to compose a simple straight forward business plan. You can get business planning software at a business supply store. Otherwise help may be available through a local government organization that assists new business start ups.

Before they give you money, the bank or finance company wants to see that you have done your homework regarding your new business. They want to know that you are prepared for what you are getting into and are therefore a good risk.

To begin with, you will need to make a list of your business start up expenses. This list will include not just the purchase cost of the Food Concession Trailer but also all the costs of the various licenses, permits, inspections, training, location rent, etc., that we have discussed in the above sections. Other start up expenses include the initial inventory cost of the food and other supplies, commissary expense, any auxiliary equipment purchases, insurance, and any other business expenses such as a cell phone and bank accounts.

The finance company will want to be sure that your new business is viable. So they will want to see that you have done some marketing research before hand. You should do some serious scouting and recording of details regarding your location including the population of the potential customer market, the lunch time traffic volume, the number of and location of your competitors, and so on. This can give a realistic idea of your market potential.

## **Order your Food Concession Trailer.**

Place your order. You will need to send a 50% down payment to start your order. The last 50% is due when the trailer is ready to ship. Be sure to include all of your needed options at time of order. Check with your health department to ensure that it will meet all of their local requirements such as water volume, NSF certification, etc.

The trailer delivery will vary depending on order volume and supplies at time of order. You should be given an idea of delivery when you order. Use this time in between ordering and receiving the trailer to tie up any loose ends such as with other suppliers, the commissary, the health department, and the location landlord. This would be an excellent time to take that food service safety training course.

## **Follow the Operations Manual Guidelines.**

Become familiar with the contents of our Food Concession Stand Operations Manual. In fact, keep a copy with your cart at all times. If you have employees, make sure they have read it and understand it. The information in the manual has been carefully researched and organized to help you get off to a good start and stay that way. It will save you time, money and frustration. The operations manual will help you through the daily operations procedure and will keep you, your mobile kitchen and your customers happy and healthy.

If you require additional information that is not covered in the manual, please contact us. If you think we have missed anything or if you have information or experience that you think we should include, please let us know. We wish you the very best on your mobile concession stand enterprise.