

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Running a Food Truck

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Create a business plan to
set yourself up for success

Harness PR and social media
to build your following

Stay profitable and expand
your business

Richard Myrick

Editor-in-Chief and founder
Mobile Cuisine magazine,
mobile-cuisine.com

Running a Food Truck

**for
dummies**[®]
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by **Richard Myrick**

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Running a Food Truck For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Part 1: Rolling into the Food Truck Industry	5
CHAPTER 1: Food on Wheels: The Lowdown on Food Trucks.	7
CHAPTER 2: Deciding What Kind of Food Truck Is Right for You	17
CHAPTER 3: Understanding and Researching Your Local Food Truck Market.....	39
Part 2: Getting Your Food Truck Ducks in a Row	53
CHAPTER 4: Writing a Food Truck Business Plan.	55
CHAPTER 5: Securing Financing for Your Food Truck.	79
CHAPTER 6: Understanding Business Structures, Licenses, and Other Legal Stuff.	93
CHAPTER 7: Parking and Presenting Your Food Truck	111
Part 3: Preparing to Open Your Service Window	125
CHAPTER 8: Creating Your Food Truck Menu	127
CHAPTER 9: Finding a Commercial Kitchen for Your Food Truck	143
CHAPTER 10: Purchasing and Managing Supplies.	155
CHAPTER 11: Hiring and Training Your Food Truck Team	169
CHAPTER 12: Setting Up Your Office and Managing Money Matters.....	195
Part 4: Keeping Your Food Truck Running Smoothly	209
CHAPTER 13: Running a Safe, Clean Food Truck and Keeping It on the Road	211
CHAPTER 14: Evaluating the State of Your Food Truck Business	237
Part 5: Generating Buzz and Growing Your Food Truck Business	251
CHAPTER 15: Mastering Food Truck Marketing and Public Relations	253
CHAPTER 16: Handling the Art of Social Media	269
CHAPTER 17: Attracting and Retaining Your Customers	291
CHAPTER 18: What's Next? Determining the Future of Your Food Truck Business.	305
Part 6: The Part of Tens	319
CHAPTER 19: Ten Myths about Food Trucks	321
CHAPTER 20: Ten Tips for Preventing Food Truck Failure	327
CHAPTER 21: Ten Tips for Dealing with Food Truck Health Inspections	335
Index	341

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions	2
Icons Used in This Book	3
Beyond the Book	3
Where to Go from Here	3
PART 1: ROLLING INTO THE FOOD TRUCK INDUSTRY	5
CHAPTER 1: Food on Wheels: The Lowdown on Food Trucks	7
Checking Out a Typical Day in the Life of a Food Truck Owner	8
9 a.m. to noon	9
High noon to 12:30 p.m.	9
12:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	9
5:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.	9
6 p.m. to 2:30 a.m.	9
2:30 a.m. to 5 a.m.	10
Discovering Whether You Have What It Takes to Run a Food Truck	10
Monitoring your motivations	10
Tracking key traits	11
Doing Some Initial Work to Start Your Food Truck	12
Preparing to Launch Your Business	13
Keeping Your Food Truck Business Running Well on All Levels	14
Luring (and Keeping) Crowds	14
CHAPTER 2: Deciding What Kind of Food Truck Is Right for You	17
Generating Your Food Truck's Concept	18
Focusing on your food options	18
Starting the selection process	20
Narrowing your concept according to your customer base	22
Understanding the importance of atmosphere as you generate your concept	22
Evaluating Different Types of Vehicles	24
Trucks	24
Carts	25
Trailers	26
Buses	27
Figuring Out How to Get the Vehicle of Your Choice	29
Leasing a vehicle	29
Buying or building a new vehicle	30
Purchasing a previously owned vehicle	31

	Naming Your Food Truck	32
	Coming up with name options	32
	Researching and registering your chosen name	34
	Another Possibility: Joining a Franchise	35
	Picking out the pros	36
	Checking out the cons.	36
	Getting more information	37
CHAPTER 3:	Understanding and Researching Your Local Food Truck Market	39
	Understanding the Importance of Competition in the Food Truck Industry	40
	Connecting Profitability to the Competitive Response Cycle	41
	Identifying and Analyzing Potential Customers	42
	Delving into the demographics of your target customers.	42
	Listing your truck's features and benefits	45
	Keeping an Eye on the Competition	45
	The differences between direct and indirect competitors	46
	What you need to know about your competitors.	46
	Where to find data on your competitors	47
	Building Your Food Truck Battle Plan	49
	Creating a competitive analysis.	49
	Drawing up a SWOT analysis	50
	Acting on the data you've compiled	52
	PART 2: GETTING YOUR FOOD TRUCK DUCKS IN A ROW	53
CHAPTER 4:	Writing a Food Truck Business Plan	55
	Understanding Why a Business Plan Matters	56
	Looking at the Parts of a Business Plan	57
	The executive summary	57
	The table of contents	61
	The market analysis	61
	The financials	63
	The management team	64
	The appendix	64
	The Bottom Line: Looking Deeper at the Financials.	65
	Beginning with a few basic guidelines	65
	Forecasting sales	66
	Forecasting expenses	70
	Analyzing your break-even point.	73
	Estimating profits	74
	Projecting cash flow	74
	Creating a balance sheet	75

CHAPTER 5:	Securing Financing for Your Food Truck	79
	Do the Math: Knowing How Much Money You Need for the First Year	79
	Figuring out start-up costs	80
	Accounting for operating reserve	81
	Considering the Use of Your Own Funds.....	82
	Understanding Different Types of Capital Funding	84
	Debt capital: Getting a business loan	85
	Equity capital: Finding investors	88
CHAPTER 6:	Understanding Business Structures, Licenses, and Other Legal Stuff	93
	Identifying the Help You Need.....	94
	Cross-examining attorneys	94
	Auditing accountants	96
	Investigating insurance providers.....	97
	Surveying Different Structures for Your Food Truck Business.....	99
	Sole proprietorships	99
	Partnerships.....	99
	Corporations	101
	Familiarizing Yourself with Local Laws.....	103
	Looking at Food Truck Licenses and Permits	104
	Examining some of the paperwork you may need.....	104
	Going through the paperwork process	106
	Buying the Insurance You Need	107
	Covering insurance basics	107
	Adding additional insured certificates	109
CHAPTER 7:	Parking and Presenting Your Food Truck	111
	Discovering Where the Street Traffic Is	112
	Relying on others' research	113
	Calculating foot traffic yourself	113
	Exploring Other Excellent Parking Options	115
	Food truck meet-ups/events	116
	Business parks and office complexes.....	116
	College campuses and local parks	116
	Farmers' markets.....	117
	Airport cell phone lots	117
	All Dolled Up: Presenting Your Vehicle.....	117
	Knowing what to include on the exterior.....	118
	Creating a memorable logo for your food truck.....	118
	Deciding how to decorate your truck	120
	Figuring out who should wrap your truck	121

PART 3: PREPARING TO OPEN YOUR SERVICE WINDOW	125
CHAPTER 8: Creating Your Food Truck Menu	127
What Do You Have Today? Making Major Menu Decisions.	128
Matching your menu to your concept	128
Building your menu with a few handy hints	129
Linking your menu to your equipment	129
Validating Your Menu with Taste Tests Before You Go	
Prime Time	131
Pricing Principles: Figuring Out How Much to Charge	133
Determining your food truck menu's price points	134
Checking out menu pricing methods	135
Applying psychology to your pricing.	137
Designing Your Menu Board	137
Honing your menu board's colors, fonts, layout, and	
descriptions	138
Considering additional menu presentations.	139
Hiring a Consultant (If You Need One) to Help with Your Menu ...	141
Deciding When to Change Your Menu	142
CHAPTER 9: Finding a Commercial Kitchen for Your Food Truck	143
Getting to Know Commercial Kitchens.	144
Exploring commercial kitchen options.	144
Finding commercial kitchens.	145
Evaluating commercial kitchens	145
Exploring Other Kitchen Options	151
Renting from a restaurant	152
Checking out churches and synagogues	152
Considering social clubs	153
Scoping out schools	153
CHAPTER 10: Purchasing and Managing Supplies	155
Assembling Your Supply List	156
Working with the Best Suppliers for Your Food Truck.	157
Finding potential suppliers.	157
Interviewing and choosing potential suppliers.	159
Negotiating with your selected suppliers.	160
Establishing good supplier relationships.	161
Building an Efficient Inventory System.	162
Determining your proper inventory level	162
Calculating and monitoring weekly food costs	163
Preventing theft.	165
Reducing waste	166

CHAPTER 11: Hiring and Training Your Food Truck Team	169
Finding and Hiring the Staff You Need	170
Identifying your dream team	170
Sourcing your staff	172
Writing an effective job description	174
Interviewing candidates and choosing staff to hire	176
Providing must-have forms for new hires	178
Using E-Verify for Employment Eligibility Verification	179
Setting Up and Using Policies to Live By	179
Knowing what to include in your employee handbook	180
Taking disciplinary measures	182
Training Your Staff	185
Making Staff Schedules	187
Motivating and Retaining Your Staff	189
Offering competitive wages	189
Providing basic employee benefits	190
Considering creative benefits	191
Conducting performance reviews	192
Boosting morale in other important ways	192
CHAPTER 12: Setting Up Your Office and Managing Money Matters	195
Deciding Where to Set Up Your Office	196
Home offices versus commercial offices	196
What to look for in a commercial office	197
Creating Lines of Communication with the Right Office Equipment	199
Relying on your computer	200
Using the phone	201
Tracking sales (and so much more) with a point-of-sale system	202
Investigating Payment Issues	203
Deciding whether to go cash-only	204
Processing credit-card payments	205
Exploring mobile payment options	206
Handling returns and refunds	207
PART 4: KEEPING YOUR FOOD TRUCK RUNNING SMOOTHLY	209
CHAPTER 13: Running a Safe, Clean Food Truck and Keeping It on the Road	211
Making Sure Your Food Is Safe	212
Prepping, cooking, and storing food correctly	213
Combating cross-contamination	215
Implementing proper hand-washing procedures	216

Keeping Your Food Truck Clean	218
The cleaning supplies you need	218
Truck cleanliness 101	219
Thinking like a health inspector.	221
Protecting Your Food Truck Customers and Staff Members	224
Avoiding injuries	224
Stocking your food truck's first-aid kit	228
Taking action in an emergency	229
Keeping Your Truck Comfortable in All Temperatures	229
Fueling, Maintaining, and Repairing Your Kitchen on Wheels	231
Keeping your fuel costs down	231
Understanding the importance of regular maintenance.	232
Finding a mechanic	233
Knowing what to do in the event of a breakdown	234
CHAPTER 14: Evaluating the State of Your Food Truck Business	237
Investigating Key Performance Indicators.	238
Listing the most useful KPIs.	238
Putting KPIs to use.	242
Evaluating and Using Feedback.	243
Paying attention to customer feedback.	243
Listening to employee feedback	247
Dealing with food critics	248
 PART 5: GENERATING BUZZ AND GROWING YOUR FOOD TRUCK BUSINESS.	 251
CHAPTER 15: Mastering Food Truck Marketing and Public Relations	253
Defining Your Marketing Message	253
Doing your homework on your target customers	254
Crafting your marketing message step by step	254
Communicating Your Marketing Message with Public Relations	256
Going solo.	257
Getting some help	258
Putting Together Press Releases.	259
Creating a Compelling Website for Your Food Truck	261
Recognizing the traits of a good website.	262
Identifying the essential components	263
Creating a website people can find with search engine optimization	266

CHAPTER 16: Handling the Art of Social Media	269
Sounding Off on the Importance of Social Media to Your Food Truck Business	269
Talking about Twitter	270
Getting a handle on Twitter terms and functions.	271
Writing a Twitter bio that works	272
Sending tweets.	275
Dealing with negative Twitter comments	278
Paging through Facebook	279
Setting up and using your Facebook Page the right way.	280
Avoiding having your account banned.	283
Determining whether advertising on Facebook is right for your food truck.	284
Checking In with Foursquare	285
Setting up an account for your food truck.	286
Attract More Business with an Instagram Account	287
Considering Other Social Media Platforms	288
Pinterest	288
Yelp	288
Klout	289
CHAPTER 17: Attracting and Retaining Your Customers	291
Getting a Handle on Who Your Customer Really Is	292
Figuring out a few traits of food truck followers.	292
Knowing versus understanding your followers	293
Observing and listening to your guests	294
Walking through a typical customer experience.	295
Setting and Exceeding Expectations	296
Setting expectations for your food truck.	297
Going beyond your customers' expectations	297
Always Treating Customers the Right Way	298
Establishing Email Lists to Promote Special Deals	299
Distinguishing Your Food Truck from Your Competitors with a Catchy Line	300
Converting Unsatisfied Guests into Repeat Customers.	302
CHAPTER 18: What's Next? Determining the Future of Your Food Truck Business	305
Expanding Your Fleet	306
Evaluating economies of scale.	306
Focusing on financing.	307
Keeping an eye on the competition	307
Embracing a change in your role.	308

Providing Catering Services	308
Franchising Your Food Truck Business.	310
Opening a Brick-and-Mortar Restaurant Based on Your Food Truck's Concept	311
Rebranding Your Truck If Your Concept Just Isn't Working	312
Knowing when you need to rebrand	312
Noting a few considerations before you begin	313
Taking action	314
Staying aware of potential challenges	315
Selling Your Food Truck	316
Recognizing that you may be ready to sell	316
Setting your sales price.	317
Using a business broker	318
PART 6: THE PART OF TENS	319
CHAPTER 19: Ten Myths about Food Trucks	321
Running a Food Truck Is Easy	321
I'll Get Rich by Owning a Food Truck.	322
I Love to Cook, So I Should Open a Food Truck	322
I've Worked in a Food Truck, So I'm Ready to Run the Show	323
I'm Going to Be a Celebrity Chef	323
Food Trucks Compete Unfairly with Restaurants.	324
Food Trucks Don't Pay Rent	324
Food Trucks Go Only to Trendy Areas	325
Food Trucks Create More Traffic and Pollution than Restaurants Do	325
The Health Department Doesn't Inspect Food Trucks	326
CHAPTER 20: Ten Tips for Preventing Food Truck Failure	327
Develop an Identity and Stick to It	327
Analyze Your Market Carefully	328
Write a Business Plan	329
Plan for a Year's Worth of Capital	329
Hire and Train Wisely	330
Have a Grand Opening	330
Ensure Consistency	331
Control Your Food Costs.	331
Solicit Opinions Other Than Your Own	332
Be a Present Leader	332
CHAPTER 21: Ten Tips for Dealing with Food Truck Health Inspections	335
Inspect Your Food Truck Every Month	336
Schedule a Mandatory Staff Meeting to Delegate Tasks	337

Figure Out What to Fix from the Past.....	338
Ask for an Inspection by an Exterminator.....	338
Check Your Refrigeration.....	338
Keep Your Cooler Shelves Clean.....	339
Check Your Water Temperature.....	339
Clean Your Drinking Glasses.....	340
Proactively Make an Appointment for an Inspection.....	340
Inform Your Staff that the Health Inspector Is Coming — It's Showtime!.....	340
INDEX.....	341

Introduction

Years ago, eating out was an event reserved for special occasions or weekends. In today's flourishing food service industry, however, you can find a lot of options for any time of the day or week, and because of a number of factors, the food truck has surfaced as a new and exciting way to bring food to the customer.

A lot of people dream of success in the mobile food industry, but due to the relative freshness of the industry and a lack of experienced mentors, many have entered it with misconceptions. Keep in mind that a food truck business is just that — a business. You must crunch numbers, make sales projections, and watch labor costs just like every business. Ultimately, your success will be judged on your profitability, like any other business.

Whether you're a long-time restaurant operator or a fresh, new culinary school grad, reading this book is a wonderful step in launching your own mobile food business. After reading it, you should know whether you have what you need to be successful.

About This Book

No food truck industry trade organization will test you to determine whether you have what it takes to successfully enter the mobile food industry. But after you read this book, you'll have a good idea whether this business is right for you — and you'll have the knowledge to get started on the right foot. You can devour this book from start to finish (no pun intended), or you can check out only the sections you need — either option works. No matter what your level of experience is, you'll find this task-oriented reference book your step-by-step guide to entering and staying in the food truck industry.

To help you navigate this book, I use the following conventions:

- » I use *italics* for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms followed by a definition.

- » I **boldfaced** text to indicate keywords in bulleted lists or the action part of numbered steps.
- » I use monofont for web addresses.

When this book was printed, some web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So when using one of these web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

You don't have to read every word in this book if you don't want to. I know your time is valuable and you don't have much time to spare. Therefore, to help you speed things up a little, feel free to skip over anything with a Tech Stuff icon next to it. The information in those paragraphs isn't really necessary for understanding the topic. Also, the sidebars (those shaded gray boxes) are fun and interesting, but they're a bonus for people who have the time to read them. Feel free to skip them if you must.

Foolish Assumptions

Food truck owners have to make assumptions about the customers who will be approaching their service windows, and authors have to do the same thing — we have to make assumptions about our readers. I've come up with the following list of assumptions about why you picked up this book:

- » You're thinking about opening your own food truck, and you want practical, how-to advice to accomplish your goals.
- » You've worked in the food truck industry, and now you're thinking about spreading your wings and getting behind the wheel as an owner.
- » You've never worked in a restaurant, let alone a food truck, but you've been a success in other professional endeavors and possess skills that you can apply to this business.
- » You're fresh out of culinary school and thinking about putting those skills to work in your own truck.
- » You currently own or operate a food truck and seek advice to keep it running smoothly and successfully.
- » You buy every book that sports a yellow and black cover.

Icons Used in This Book

In this book, I use small pictures, called icons, to highlight important information. Here's a guide to what the icons mean and what they look like.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon indicates ideas that you should take away from this book, no matter what.



TIP

This icon points out helpful ideas that can give you the upper hand on your road to food truck success.



WARNING

Whenever you see this icon, watch out! It alerts you to potential pitfalls to avoid. Reach out for advice from a professional on these matters.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

I use the Technical Stuff icon to flag information that's interesting but not essential for a food truck rookie to know.

Beyond the Book

This book comes with an online Cheat Sheet that includes additional helpful information. To get the Cheat Sheet, go to www.dummies.com and type Running a Food Truck For Dummies Cheat Sheet in the Search box. (No access code required.)

Where to Go from Here

If you want to know everything involved in owning and operating a food truck, start at the beginning of this book and read it straight through. However, if you're looking for certain aspects of running a food truck, you can refer to the table of contents or the index to find the specific topic you want. Each chapter is meant to stand alone, and the information each chapter contains isn't dependent on your reading previous chapters to understand it.

If you're brand-new to the mobile food industry and aren't sure where to start, Chapter 2 helps you understand the different types of vehicle platforms to choose

from that best suit your concept. Interested in tips to create or improve your menu? Turn to Chapter 8. Want to find out how to attract more customers to your service window with the help of social media? Chapter 16 has your name all over it.

You can jump around, start wherever you want, and finish when you feel like it, so buckle in and hit the road.

1

Rolling into the Food Truck Industry

IN THIS PART . . .

Getting to know the mobile food industry and determining whether you can cut the mustard

Planning out a specific road map for your food truck business, from concept to cuisine

Figuring out how to deliver your future culinary creations

Understanding your local market and determining who your customers will be

IN THIS CHAPTER

Understanding a day in the life of a food truck owner

Deciding whether you have what it takes to run your own truck

Walking through the initial stages of starting your mobile food business

Getting ready to open your food truck

Making sure your truck runs smoothly

Drawing crowds to your truck (and getting them to come back)

Chapter 1

Food on Wheels: The Lowdown on Food Trucks

So you've just finished watching the latest episode of *Eat Street* or *The Great Food Truck Race* and think that owning a food truck looks like fun. Or maybe you stumbled upon a food truck in your area, watched the busy lines, and noticed that the staff appeared to be having a great time. With these observations, it wouldn't be a huge leap for you to think, "Hey, these trucks get huge crowds, and the employees seem to be happy, so maybe I should run my own."

When on the outside looking in, you can easily miss all the hard work that's involved in getting a food truck business started and ready to serve the community. As the owner, you have to manage every detail of the business, including hiring the

staff, designing the menu, and even picking up trash left by your customers. A food truck can quickly become more work than fun if you aren't aware of all you'll be required to do.

This chapter serves as your starting point into the mobile food industry. I take you on a quick tour of a day in the life of a food truck owner and then give you a guide to help you look a little deeper at your motivations and expectations for entering the industry. I also walk you through the steps of starting and running your own truck, from deciding what kind to run to getting (and keeping) followers.

Checking Out a Typical Day in the Life of a Food Truck Owner

Running a food truck is no stroll in the park. In fact, operating a food truck can involve downright dirty, draining, and difficult work. When your employees drop the ball, it's up to you to pick it up. When a tire goes flat, often you'll be the one who has to repair it. You'll work the most (and longest) hours. You'll work every job in the business, from line cook to mechanic to accountant. To create a successful food truck business, you'll need to develop a culture of hard work, with you being the one setting the example for your staff.

After weeks (or months) of refining your recipes and spending numerous hours on the phone, waiting in line, and filling out reams of paperwork, you're finally ready. Your truck has been outfitted with the perfect kitchen. The sign company has called to inform you that the graphics and menu board are complete. It's time to fire up the grill and open for business. Now comes the easy part, right? Sure, it can be a 9-to-5 job, but not in the way you may expect. The following sections provide you with a look into a day in the life of a food truck owner. (Keep in mind that your schedule will look different if you opt for a different service time, such as breakfast or lunch.)



REMEMBER

When I say a 9-to-5 workday, I bet the following sections aren't quite what you're expecting. I didn't include this information to scare anyone but rather to provide a look into a typical day of a food truck owner. Many truck owners I've spoken with have told me that nothing is glamorous about running a food truck. Why do they do it then? According to most, the feeling they get when they see their customers' laughs and smiles after taking bites of the items they just ordered off the menu makes it all worth it — they do it for a love of cooking and serving the public.

9 a.m. to noon

The alarm goes off, and you crawl out of bed; it's 9 a.m. While the coffee brews, you boot up your computer so you can check any important emails, tweets, Facebook messages, and the like that may have come in overnight. From the time you wake up until approximately two hours later, you're busy going over your calendar of events and planning for your day. After you complete your correspondence, you start planning for upcoming events. With 30 minutes to go before meeting with your team members, it's time to get ready and drive to your meet-up location, the commercial kitchen.

High noon to 12:30 p.m.

You meet with your team to discuss your notes, daily specials, and suggestions from lessons learned the previous day. Your team shares with you what they've heard overnight from local news and from customers and competitors. Sharing this information keeps everyone in the loop, part of the team, and, in most cases, in high spirits.

12:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

During this time, the team goes to the market and bakery or to inventory the food shipments that have been delivered. After getting the food needed for the truck, everyone heads to the commercial kitchen to chop fruits and vegetables, blend the sauces, and grill the meat (if you serve it). Those team members not involved in the food prep will organize the truck to ready it for the work night, fire up their Twitter and Facebook accounts to notify followers of the truck's location(s), and conduct another round of correspondence and phone calls.

5:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Time to head to your "office"; you now take the truck from the commercial kitchen's lot to your first stop.

6 p.m. to 2:30 a.m.

It's time! It's time to open the doors, practice your trade, and make your mark on your community. When you reach your destination and a line of people are already at the curb, the sight is both invigorating and terrifying. It's invigorating because you already have loyal followers who have found your location and are waiting to be served a meal from your heart. It's terrifying because you need to park and start cooking quickly so you aren't keeping your customers waiting too long.



REMEMBER

You'll have little to no awareness of what's going on outside the truck during this period. Your eyes will shift from the growing queue of ticket orders to the fryers to the main cooking surface while you're preparing the orders as they come in. Now is when you must enjoy your job; now is the point where you'll know whether you've made the proper choice in opening a food truck. If you're distracted or dislike your environment, you may want to start planning how to sell your investment and head to another career.

2:30 a.m. to 5 a.m.

The night's service is over, and you've made your way back to the commercial kitchen. You clean out the truck and wash it down so it's ready for the next shift. You break down and marinate the meat and, in some cases, even order the bread for tomorrow's pick-up or delivery.

You store the food and lock up the truck. It's finally time to head home.

On the trip home, you reflect back on the day and are very thankful that the oil in the fryer didn't explode or that you were able to start the truck without any issues, and finally, you see it — home sweet home. After a final round of reading emails and listening to phone messages, you go to bed. Your 9-to-5 workday is over, only to start again in a few hours.

Discovering Whether You Have What It Takes to Run a Food Truck

Have you ever wanted to start your own business? If you're self-motivated and have a love of food and people, opening your own food truck can be a great career option for you. Not everyone is cut out for this diverse industry, though. Are you? You can find out with the help of the following sections.

Monitoring your motivations

Owning your own food truck takes a special type of person. A successful food truck owner needs to have some business sense. Patience is an important asset in owning your own mobile food business, as are good people skills.



REMEMBER

Before you invest any more time or money in the process of starting up your food truck empire (except for purchasing and reading this book), you need to find out the real reasons you're motivated to do this. Be as honest with yourself as possible; fooling yourself is only going to hurt you and your pocketbook in the long run.

People have many reasons to want to own and operate a food truck; some of my favorites include the following:

- » They like the business aspect of owning a food truck.
- » They have a passion for food.
- » They want to provide a service to their community.
- » They're self-motivated.
- » They like being around other people.



WARNING

The following list contains some reasons that *shouldn't* be motivation for starting a food truck:

- » Thinking it'll be easy
- » Thinking it'll make you rich
- » Wanting to be a celebrity chef
- » Being tired of having a "real" job



REMEMBER

If you happen to be motivated by any of these reasons, don't fret. Just make sure they're not your only (or primary) motivators to enter this industry.

Tracking key traits



REMEMBER

A food truck's success isn't based on any magic formula, but most food truck owners who do well share many of the same personality traits. They're a special breed of culinary entrepreneurs who are highly motivated, caring, and curious individuals. They effectively balance their personal and business goals, take advantage of others' expertise, and continually seek to figure out the best practices exhibited by their competition. Some common traits shared by food truck owners include the following:

- » **Hard workers:** Successful food truck owners work hard and play hard, too. They get up early; they rarely complain; they expect high performance from others, but they expect extraordinary performance from themselves.

- » **Self-reliant and not afraid to take responsibility:** Successful food truck owners don't worry about blame, and they don't waste time complaining. They make decisions and move on.
- » **Focused on the future:** Food truck owners who have thrived are good at both short and long-term planning. They're as likely to have a well-thought-out plan for the day-to-day running of their business as a road map for how to run the business for years.
- » **Eager to learn:** Strong food truck owners are always reading, educating themselves, and asking questions. They ask for advice, try things out, consult experts and amateurs, and always look for a better, faster, and cheaper solution.
- » **Action oriented:** Successful food truck owners are proactive and always differentiate themselves from their competitors. They're less worried than other small business owners about the state of the economy and are more likely to look at adversity as a sign to keep moving forward.
- » **Tech-savvy:** Perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise that the best food truck owners invest both time and money on improving their website and are likely to rely a great deal on technology, such as social media and point-of-sale systems, to help make their business more efficient.

Doing Some Initial Work to Start Your Food Truck



REMEMBER

Starting a food truck business may not be as expensive as opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant. With that said, it still costs more money than most people have on hand, and it can still be as potentially risky as opening a diner or fine-dining establishment. Because of this, you have to plan ahead and get your ducks in a row. Here's what you need to do so:

- » The first thing everyone thinks of when discussing the mobile food industry is the vehicles the food is served from. Depending on your area and the laws there that regulate the industry, you need to determine which type of food truck platform best suits your needs. Chapter 2 covers the pros and cons of each type of truck as well as what you need to consider when determining which will be the best for your business.
- » Even if you have the best truck on the streets and the most delicious menu offerings, without understanding the needs of your marketplace, a food truck