

*Food 'Truck' for Thought***Summary of Case**

Garrett and Susan, operators of the Intergalactic Food Truck, have been successfully serving customers in Western North Carolina for the past three years. Despite some natural growing pains early on, the operators have seen steady increases in business and have established a mutually beneficial relationship with a local microbrewery. However, the operators are worried about growing competition and the everyday responsibilities of running a business.

Learning Outcomes and Targeted Audience

The case study presents a food truck operations scenario and is focused on a number of operationally specific considerations and challenges. As the number of food truck business in the United States continues to grow (Esparza, Walker, & Rossman, 2013), the need to incorporate them into hospitality management curriculum is more prevalent. The case study aims to present relevant issues in food service operations and business management in the hospitality and tourism industry. Upon completion, students will be able to identify common issues related to food trucks or food service operations, as well as recognize and develop core aspects of an operator's manual (user guide). The case study may be utilized in classes focusing on food service operations, customer service, as well as menu development and cost control with all levels of undergraduate hospitality students and possibly graduate students focusing on food service or food and beverage management.

By the end of the class session/s students should be able to:

- Identify key aspects of food truck operations, being able to compare and contrast their operations with that of freestanding restaurants.
- Connect small business and entrepreneurial life cycle components to the food truck industry segment and the specific case described.
- Offer the food truck operators in the case with suggestions for strategies for contending with issues facing their business.
- Provide a brief SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) analysis of the various strategies recommended.
- Determine key aspects of competitiveness advantages for food trucks and make pertinent decisions to increase the advantage.
- Develop specific recommendations in key areas for food truck operators, including menu development, cost control, marketing, and customer service.
- Establish the foundation of a credible operator's manual (user guide) for food truck operators.

Using the Case Study for Your Class

Prior to Use. Students should have a basic understanding of general hospitality management concepts. They should be prepared to discuss the following foundation topics: menu planning, cost control, social media, customer service, technology, and entrepreneurship. More advanced topics include: food and beverage pairings, cross-utilization of ingredients, social media marketing, and laws and regulations.

Prior to Class. Prior to class, students will be asked to read the case study and any additional information on the foundation topics, as needed. For senior-level or graduate-level students additional reading material would be provided on the advanced topics.

Questions Related to the Case Study

- What are the unique aspects of food truck operations compared to freestanding restaurant operations?
- How might Garrett and Susan improve their current operation?
- How could the operators of the Intergalactic Food Truck increase their competitive edge as more food trucks begin to operate?
- What strategic planning should be done in order to remain successful in the future?
- What should be included in a food truck operator's manual? Why?

Class Instruction**Plan One, Competitive Advantage Options**

Learning Outcomes One and Two

Approximately 45 to 80 minutes

Begin class with an open discussion of food truck operations in your local area. Determine the students' current experiences with food trucks in your local area or other (their hometown or a vacation spot) area (5-10 minutes). Carefully review food truck operations in your location; highlight any direct activity you or your school has with the trucks in your area (5-10 minutes).

Separate your students into work groups (5-6 per group) and start by having them identify the unique aspects of food trucks compared to what they know of freestanding restaurants. Be sure to have them identify what they believe are positive and negative (challenging) similarities and differences between food trucks and freestanding restaurants (10-15 minutes). Provide each group an opportunity to briefly share their ideas; perhaps selected students could record the group ideas on a whiteboard (5-10 minutes).

Next, have the student groups identify and develop key aspects for food trucks (I.e. Intergalactic Food Truck) to recognize and expand their competitive advantage. The students should be able to use spe-

cific examples for the case study to support the need for their idea/s and to be able to relate their idea/s back to the reason/s needed by the operators (Garrett and Susan) in the case study (15-20 minutes). Have each student group report to the class their top (one-three) ideas (5-10 minutes); the class could then vote and/or eliminate ideas to create a top (two or three) list (3-5 minutes).

Plan Two, Advancing the Concepts

Learning Outcome Three

Approximately 30 to 50 minutes

Considerations for plan two:

- Plan two has the ability to be incorporated with either plan one or plan three or as a supplement to another lesson on a related topic/s.
- Instructor/facilitator must determine what advanced topic/s will be concentrated on during this session. Topics include food and beverage (beer) pairings, cross-utilization of ingredients or menu development, social media marketing, or laws and regulations.

Begin the class (or session/section) with a quick review of the concept/s to be focused on (5-10 minutes). A short video clip could be shown on the selected advanced topic and then discussed briefly (5-10 minutes). Separate the students into work groups and assign them a specific task/s to complete. Provide them time to develop and create their ideas (15-20 minutes). Each group's idea/s should be supported by the case study presented. Next, have each group present their ideas to the class (5-10 minutes).

Example:

The selected topic is food and beverage pairings. Since the food truck in the case study has established a partnership with a local microbrewery, the student groups will each be assigned a specific style of beer and then must create a new menu item for the food truck. The menu item/s could be in the categories already discussed (burgers or sandwiches), in a new/not current area (appetizer, dessert), or a special (unique, possible not reoccurring).

According to the Brewers Association (n.d.) common beer types include porters, stouts, pilsners, lager, and specialty (fruit, seasonal, location). Each group could be assigned a specific beer style, which would be paired with their created menu item/s. For an additional relevance, have the student groups select a microbrewery in their local area to create menu item/s for specific beers offered by the microbrewery identified.

Plan Three, Operator's Guide

Learning Outcome Four

Generally established as an out-of-class assignment

Considerations for plan three:

- This plan can be an additional or optional in-class activity or could be utilized as an independent project or additional project for student learning.
- The project is intended to be completed by students working in groups, where (1) student groups will create an entire manual and submit for a grade or (2) each student group will concentrate on one (assigned) section and then all sections would be combined to create the manual.

Create a food truck operator's manual and justify its content.

Analyze the scenario provided and develop a food truck operator's guide. The guide should focus on general guidelines for operators and the topics listed above, including: laws and regulations, menu design and pricing, useful marketing strategies, technology and equipment considerations, and effective customer service. Additionally, helpful considerations for entrepreneurs and strategies for enhancing competitiveness should be included. Students should consider the following:

- The manual should be created in a generalizable fashion, thus not specific to any one food truck operation (including the case study), though specific information from the case study may be used to justify a reason for inclusion of information.
- Though opinions and ideas are appropriate, students should utilize textbooks, books, trade publications, and research articles to support their ideas.

Suggestions for Additional Reading Material

- Bean, R. L. (2011, July). Mobile kitchens: Just keep on truckin! *Chef Magazine*, 20-22.
- Caldwell, A. (2012). Will tweet for food: Microblogging mobile food trucks, online, offline, and in line. In P. Williams-Forsen & C. Counihan (Eds.), *Taking food public: Redefining foodways in a changing world* (pp. 306-321). New York: Routledge.
- Dougherty, G. (2012). Chicago's food trucks: Wrapped in red tape. *Gastronomica*, 12, 62-65.
- Faw, B. V., & Tuttle, J. L. (2014). Mobile food trucks: California EHS-Net study on risk factors and inspection challenges. *Journal of Environmental Health*, 76(8), 36-37.
- Global Entrepreneurship Institute (2015). Entrepreneurial life cycle. Retrieved from <http://news.gcase.org/entrepreneurial-life-cycle/>
- Hernandez-Lopez, E. (2011). LA's taco truck war: How law cooks food culture contests. *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review*, 43, 233-268.
- Jackson, K. (2014, January). Food truck nation. *Prepared Foods*, 70-76.
- Lewis, V. L., & Churchill, N. C. (1983). The five stages of small business growth. *Harvard Business Review*, 61(3), 30-50.
- Mukhija, V., & Loukaitou-Sideris, A. (Eds.) (2014). *The informal American city*. Boston: MIT Press.
- Schrambling, R. (2010, November). A retail spin on the food-truck model. *Entrepreneur*. Retrieved from <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/217413>
- Shouse, H. (2011). *Food trucks: Dispatches and recipes from the best kitchens on wheels*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Tanyeri, D. (2011). Food truck follies: What not to do when you hit the road.

Restaurant Business, 26-32.

Weber, D. (2012). *The food truck handbook: Start, grow, and succeed in the mobile food business*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

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- Esparza, N., Walker, E. T., & Rossman, G. (2013). Trade associations and the legitimization of entrepreneurial movements: Collective action in the emerging gourmet food truck industry. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 43*(2), 143-162. doi:10.1177/0899764013512723.