

## **Know Your Customers**

“Find a need and fill it.” – Ruth Stafford Peale

The above quote highlights one of the pillars of a successful business. To succeed you need to respond to the needs and wants of your customers. Knowing the make up of your customers is invaluable in determining your menu and targeting your marketing.

When you are taking the steps to select a suitable location you want to know the make up of the community that you are planning to become a part of. Does the cultural make up of your community dictate that you offer certain types of condiments? Does the health or religious concerns of the community dictate that you offer kosher products? Would there be any benefits to offering vegetarian sausages or gluten free buns? Knowing your community ahead of time is helpful in making those important business decisions.

Also if you do offer these products that appeal to special interest groups in your community this can give you a competitive edge if other businesses in your community are not filling the needs of these groups.

What can help us to get to know our customers and those in the community? If you have been a resident of a certain community for any amount of time you may have had the opportunity to build upon your existing knowledge. But the best way to find out about someone's want and needs is to ask them. You want to be proactive in seeking feedback from your customers and prospective customers.

This could be done in a few different ways. One option is conduct focus groups. For example when you purchase your new hot dog cart you are going to want to take it for a test drive, and become familiar with it before you open for business to make sure that you become properly familiar with all the features of the cart. So this could present the perfect opportunity to invite close friends and family members to a hot dog fest. Make sure you include those who would feel comfortable in offering honest and open feedback. So you can obtain feedback for the existing products you plan on offering. But you can also survey them to help determine what adjustment can be made to enhance their eating experience. For example were there any condiments that they felt were missing? Do they offer you any other suggestions which could be used to help fill the needs of those in the community?

Also when you are making efforts to introduce yourself to the community, this may also give the opportunity to seek feedback. For instance you may be handing out flyers to the businesses in the community. If appropriate you may be able to ask those you talk to the make up of the business. For example you may determine that with the business hours of those in the community that it could be advantageous to offer some breakfast items or coffee (but you would need to be aware of the local health policies in connection with this). Also this could help establish your hours of operation. It is hard to fill the needs of your customers if you are not there to fill it.

Once you have your hot dog cart vending business up and running you want to continue to seek feedback. One possible suggestion is offer feedback cards and a comment box that they can place these in. This can further help determine the wants and needs of your customers. You are not necessary going to start offering a certain product just because one person desires it. This could have an adverse effect on food costs if this results in unnecessary waste. But if you get a number of comments which makes a specific suggestion, then the course of wisdom is to respond to that. By doing so, you let your customers know that there feedback is truly important to you. You are allowing them to become partners in the direction of your business. This in turn will help build a loyal base of regular customers.

Once again, remember to “Find a need and fill it.” Do this and you will succeed.