

Menu and Pricing

When opening your hot dog cart business one of the more exciting aspects is determining your menu. Along with determining which items to include on your menu, you need to determine how much to sell it for.

To begin with we will focus on selecting items for your menu.

Menu

An important aspect of coming up with an appealing menu is to know the make up of your clientele. Knowing the cultural make up along with any potential health concerns will help you to figure out the variety that should be carried. Of course, there is a large number of regional ways of preparing hot dog and sausages. Here are some examples of regional variations which can give you ideas of the types of hot dogs that you could offer.

All The Way Dog: this is a popular variation served in West Virginia, which is a hot dog on a bun and features yellow mustard, chopped onions, chili and cole slaw.

Arizona Desert Dog: hotdog wrapped in bacon on a bun, topped with chopped tomatoes, chopped onions, salsa sauce, jalapenos, mustard, mayo, ketchup & grated cheese. This is a variation of the Sonoran Dog, where the dog is grilled in either a processor or a griddle. Some variations could also include pinto beans.

Chicago Dog: a Vienna beef hot dog topped with chopped onions, diced/wedged tomatoes, dill pickle spear, pickled hot peppers (“sport peppers”), pickle relish, mustard, and celery salt served on a poppy seed bun. No ketchup is put on a truly authentic Chicago dog.

Coney Island Dog: hotdog on a bun with mustard, all-meat bean less chili and chopped onions. The Coney Island dog is widely used in connection with the White Hot, a spicier and stronger variety of the traditional pork hot dog. Some localities also include shredded cheese. In Ohio, they have the Cheese Coney, where the hot dog features Cincinnati chili and the chili is also topped with cheese.

Dragon Dog: This is a creation of a Vancouver eatery which features bratwurst infused with century-old Louis the 13th cognac (\$2000 a bottle) on a bun, topped with Kobe beef seared in olive and truffle oil, fresh lobster and a secret picante sauce. At a hefty price tag of \$100 this is the first hot dog to sell for triple digits. As a street vendor you probably couldn’t get away with using the cognac or charging \$100. But you may be able to come up with a cheaper (much cheaper) variation.

Italiano: to add international flare to your menu, this is popular hot dog variation in Chile. It consists of chopped tomatoes, mashed avocados and mayonnaise.

Japanese Fusion Dogs: this pairs the traditional hot dog with Asian condiments such as wasabi, kimchi and teriyaki.

Kansas City Dog: a pork sausage on a sesame seed bun topped with brown mustard, sauerkraut and melted Swiss cheese.

Kraut Dog: hotdog on a bun with Sauerkraut and spicy mustard. The New York style dog is very similar, but it also comes with red onion sauce.

New England Dog: hotdog on a bun with fried onions, mustard and melted cheese.

Potato Dog: diced stewed potatoes combined with brown mustard served on a spicy hot dog.

Seattle Dog: grilled hot dog on a toasted bun with cream cheese. It could also include polish sausage. Other popular toppings include sauerkraut, grilled onions, scallions, jalapenos and other peppers, mustard, and Sriracha sauce.

Southern Slaw Dog – hotdog on a bun topped with mustard, chili and cole slaw.

Texas Dog: hotdog on a bun with chili sauce, cheese, and jalapeño peppers.

These are some of the possible ideas for Hot Dog variations that could be featured with your hot dog cart business. The potential variations are limitless. Keeping in mind the make up of your community, don't be afraid to be creative. This can help set you apart from the competition. As a word of caution, make sure that all ingredients and preparation procedures are in accord with local health department regulations.

Along with the condiments and ingredients of different hot dog variations, you will also have to determine if there is a need to feature certain products due to the religious or health concerns of those in your community. Is there a need for kosher or vegetarian sausages? What about whole wheat or gluten free buns? You want to avoid unnecessary waste by featuring items that are not going to sell. But if there is enough of a demand, ordering a few of these types of products from your suppliers can help you to find a need and fill it. This could also be advantageous if no other local businesses are offering these types of products.

Pricing

Along with deciding what items to offer, you have to determine how much to charge. One way to ensure competitive pricing is to research the local street vendors and other food establishments selling similar products. It is not considered unreasonable to charge 25% more than your competitors if you offer a superior product. The variety you offer and a convenient location can be factors that will allow you to charge a bit more.

Also another general rule in connection with pricing is according to food cost. This does vary, but the general rule of thumb is between 30-35%. For example if the food you are serving costs you \$1.20 to prepare you would want to charge a minimum price of \$4. This may seem high, but this allows you to cover all other associated expenses and still make a profit.

Along with coming up with an appealing menu and reasonable prices, you also want to make sure that the menu items and prices are clearly marked and displayed for your customers. This makes the ordering process easier. This will also improve your efficiency during the busy lunch hours because you don't have to answer unnecessary questions concerning what items you sell and how much they cost.

By giving proper thought to your menu and pricing this will help establish your loyal fan base.