

ENTREPRENEUR'S GUIDE TO OPENING A SUCCESSFUL ICE CREAM STORE



Thank you for downloading our guide on how to open a successful ice cream store. We hope you find it helpful and informative.

You may be wondering why we give away such valuable information. The reason is simple, really - we want you to be successful.

We offer this guide free of charge because we see it as your first step towards success.

If you're considering getting into the ice cream business, we want to make sure that you have as much information as possible before you decide to take the next step. By reading through this guide, you'll have a better understanding of what it takes to open a successful ice cream store.

Maybe in the end you'll decide it's not the best business decision for you, and that's fine. Or maybe you'll become even more excited about starting your own ice cream store.

Whatever choice you make, we want it to be a well-informed one. And if you do decide that the ice cream business is right for you, we'd love to provide you with the equipment and guidance you'll need to succeed.

Wishing you a future filled with sweetness,

Tim Cook

Table of Contents

1. [Do Your Research](#)
2. [Develop a Store Concept](#)
3. [Create a Business Plan](#)
4. [Secure Financing](#)
5. [Find a Good Location](#)
6. [Draw up a Schedule and Budget](#)
7. [Finalize the Menu](#)
8. [Get the Necessary Licenses & Permits](#)
9. [Design the Store Layout](#)
10. [Hire a Reputable Contractor](#)
11. [Purchase Equipment](#)
12. [Find Suppliers](#)
13. [Outline Your Marketing Plan](#)
14. [Hire and Train Employees](#)
15. [Open Your Store](#)

1. Do Your Research

The very first step towards opening a successful ice cream store is doing research. No, it doesn't sound very glamorous, but it's the best thing you can do to ensure your success.

So what type of research do you need to do? Well, for starters, you need to learn more about the ice cream industry and all of the work that's required to get a store up and running. This guide is a great place to begin, but there's a lot more information you need to gather, including:

Target Market

One of the most important questions you'll ever have to answer in regards to your business is "Who is my target market." In other words, who are you trying to attract to your ice cream store? What type of people are most likely to visit your shop and buy your products?

Answering this question is vital to the development of your business. Once you know your target market, you can use that valuable information to make decisions about location, menu, hours of operation, décor, marketing plans, etc.

When defining your target market, make sure to include information on gender, age, family size, income level, etc. The more specific you can be, the better you can tailor your business to meet their needs.

Cost Projections

You also need to have an idea how much it will cost to start and run your business. At this point in the process, you can create just a rough estimate and make any necessary changes over time. But you should still try to be as accurate as possible when figuring your initial budget to avoid unexpected roadblocks later on.

When figuring costs, don't forget to include:

- Rent
- Improvements made to the property
- Legal fees
- Equipment
- Furniture and fixtures
- Supplies
- Utilities
- Wages for employees
- Marketing

Sales Estimates

Once you've calculated how much it will cost to start and run your business, you can then figure out approximately how much money you'll be able to make per month. A good way to gauge this is to look at other ice cream stores in locations with similar demographics.

Ask questions such as: How many people are they serving per day? How much are they charging for their products? How much money do customers spend on average?

Keep in mind that the figures you come up with probably won't be an exact match to what you end up producing. You need to consider that there are a variety of other factors that can affect sales such as location, marketing efforts, seasonality, etc.

2. Develop a Store Concept

The next step in the process is to determine what kind of ice cream store you'd like to open. There are several factors to think about including the type of product you serve, the style of the store, how many flavors to offer, etc.

For example, do you want to run an old-fashioned-style shop with hand-dipped ice cream that's made locally? Maybe you prefer a store that offers self-serve frozen custard and toppings that are priced by weight. Or do you envision running a high-end ice cream shop that serves unique artisanal flavors?

Whatever your vision, make sure that you can clearly articulate it before progressing to the next step. You should also be able to define what will separate your store from the competition. If there's already an ice cream store nearby with the same characteristics, how will you compete effectively?

3. Create a Business Plan

Though it might sound like a daunting task, creating a business plan is a vital step towards success in the ice cream industry. It is especially necessary if you need to secure outside funding to open your shop. But even if you don't require financing, your business plan will still serve as a blueprint for your business, helping to guide your decisions along the way.

The good news is that you might not need to draw up a lengthy 50-page business plan. The purpose of a business plan is to have all the vital information about your business clearly presented in one document. If you can effectively communicate that in a shorter, less formal document, then that's all you need.

Here's what you should include:

A Description of Your Business

You need to give a basic overview of your business in a brief paragraph or two. Provide information such as who you are, where you're located, the purpose of your business,

and what type of legal entity your business will be (LLC, sole proprietorship, corporation, etc.)

Products and Services

You'll also need to provide information on the type of products and services your business will offer and explain why customers will find these appealing. In this section, you can also detail how your business will differentiate itself from its competitors

Market Analysis

The market analysis section of your business plan will include descriptions of your target market, niche, competition, market trends, and expected market share.

Marketing Strategies

In this section, you should provide details about how you plan to promote your business.

Financial Data

And last, but not least, you need to take all the information you learned from your cost projections and sales forecasts and organize it in one easy to read statement. Make sure that you can clearly explain how the financial figures were calculated – potential investors will want assurance that your numbers are reliable.

4. Secure Financing

One of the biggest barriers to starting your very own ice cream business is lining up the necessary funding. While some people might be able to self-fund, most prospective owners don't have tens of thousands of dollars sitting in their bank accounts, just waiting to be invested.

If the latter description sounds familiar, then you're in luck – there are plenty of banks and other financial institutions that make their money by investing in businesses like yours. So with your business plan in hand, it's time to look for financing.

The best place to start is with local banks and credit unions – this is one of the most common ways that new ice cream stores get funded. It's always good to meet with several lenders and shop around to make sure you get the best rates.

Generally speaking, you should have few issues receiving a business loan from the bank if you have good credit, are able to provide collateral, and can demonstrate profitability. If banks are reluctant to fund your venture outright, there are other ways to get the financing you need.

For example, you could take out a home equity loan or borrow against your 401k to fund your business. Other options would be borrowing from friends and family or starting a crowdfunding campaign. You should also investigate small business loans that are offered through the U.S. government.

5. Find a Good Location

Once your funding is lined up, it's time to look for a good location. There are a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration when choosing your location.

Store Concept

You first need to consider the store concept that you came up with in step two. There's a big difference between a stand-alone kiosk where customers order at a walk-up window and an up-scale café on multiple floors. The location you choose quite obviously depends on the type of ice cream shop you'll be running, so make sure that the two line up perfectly.

Target Market

You also need to keep your target market in mind when looking at a location. Notice what type of neighborhood it's in, who lives nearby, if there's a lot of foot traffic, if there are any schools nearby, what kind of businesses are in the area, how much parking is available, etc.

Visibility

Visibility is another factor to keep in mind when selecting a location. You might be tempted to rent space on the outskirts of town to save money, but it'll cost you in the long run. You want to be located in a place that's highly visible and convenient for your target market with plenty of foot and vehicle traffic. Don't make your customers go out of their way to find you; chances are, they won't.

Competition

You also need to consider how close you are to the competition. If you find a great place close to your target market with plenty of foot traffic but there's another ice cream shop nearby, you need to move on; it's not the perfect location if nearby competition decreases your chances of success.

Amenities

Does the interior of the building have everything that you need? Or will you need to hire numerous plumbers, electricians, and contractors to make costly upgrades before opening? Be sure to evaluate these factors before making a decision. What seems like a bargain initially could end up costing you a lot of money if significant changes need to be made.

Floor Space

You need to consider how big the space is and whether it will meet your needs when looking at possible locations. Keep in mind that it's not just the serving and seating areas that you need to include. You'll also need to think about having enough space to

wash dishes, prep food, do paperwork, take breaks, clock-in employees, make phone calls, etc.

Affordability

Another vital consideration is how much the space costs. You've taken time to calculate your expected costs and sales – don't blow those figures completely out of the water by falling in love with a location you can't afford. Be sure to stay within your budget if you want to run a successful ice cream store.

6. Draw Up a Schedule

If you hadn't figured it out by now, planning has a lot to do with the success of your business. Once you've secured a location, it's time to sit down and outline what needs to happen before you open and when each task should be completed. The few months before opening your store can be chaotic – having this schedule on hand will help keep you on track.

For example, if you have a schedule drawn up, you'll know exactly what needs to be done three months before opening. You'll already know that you should:

- Have a supplier in place
- Make a deposit for your equipment
- Be purchasing supplies
- Have business insurance lined up
- Be hiring and training employees

To create this type of schedule, you first need to determine your opening date. You should then make a list of everything you need to accomplish before opening your doors to the public. Go through the task list and create a weekly schedule that you can easily follow. If you're not sure what all you need to do or in what order, consider working with a consultant who can help you through the process.

7. Finalize the Menu

Now's the time to sit down and create a set menu for your ice cream store. Changes can be made at a later date, of course, but you need to have a good idea what you're going to offer before you get into licensing, design, and construction.

So you're going to serve ice cream – we already know that. But what kind of ice cream will you be serving? Hand-dipped or soft serve? Will you offer shakes, mixers, malts, and floats? What about ice cream cakes – is that an option you're interested in providing?

Is ice cream all that you're going to sell? What about beverages - will you be offering bottles of water, cans of coke, fountain drinks, coffee, or flavored sodas?

And don't forget about baked goods, which are another popular addition to ice cream shop menus. You could appeal to a broader audience by selling brownies, cookies, cupcakes, and slices of pie. Or how about carrying salty foods like popcorn or pretzels to balance out the sweet taste of ice cream?

Take some time to really think about the menu you'd like to offer. What items would most appeal to your target market? How could the menu help your business become more profitable?

8. Get the Necessary Licenses & Permits

Paperwork is an unfortunate necessity when setting up your own ice cream store. It's one of those things that isn't particularly enjoyable, but it has to be done.

When it comes to getting the proper licenses and permits, one of the first calls you need to make is to your local health department. Some restaurant owners may see their relationship with the health department as being adversarial, but that doesn't need to be the case. The health department is there to ensure the safety of everyone involved, so you should view them as your ally.

Get to know your local health inspector. Take some time to learn all the regulations you need to follow to have a successful ice cream store.

For example, what temperature does your walk-in freezer need to be set at? Are there any limitations on the way employees dress? How many drains do you need in the work area? Do employees need to have food handling training? All of these regulations can differ from state to state, so be sure to check to check with your local authority.

Permits from the health department are vital, of course, but they're just the tip of the iceberg. Some other licenses and permits you may have to apply for include building permits, a business license, and sign permits. If you need help sorting through all the paperwork required to run your business, try working with a consultant or legal professional who can help you successfully navigate through the process.

9. Design the Store Layout

Designing the layout for your ice cream store is actually a lot harder than it sounds. It's not just a matter of setting up a counter and a few places to sit; your goal is to create a space that's both inviting and practical.

Décor and furniture selection have a lot to do with making your interior inviting. People will want to sit somewhere that's comfortable and attractive so they can thoroughly enjoy their ice cream.

That part of the equation is pretty self-explanatory. But you also have to keep in mind how traffic flow can affect the customer experience. For example, if the line to get ice cream ends up snaking around tables and chairs, it's going to cause your patrons some

discomfort. Who wants to be looking at another person's backside while they eat ice cream?

That's why your layout design needs to be both practical and beautiful. If you design just for aesthetics, you could end up with a lot of irritated customers.

An impractical design could also lead to some disgruntled employees. Imagine if the work space is too small or supplies are hard to reach. Not only will that frustrate your workers, it also means that it will take longer for customers to get served, which affects your bottom line.

When you create a layout for your ice cream shop, make sure that it's as detailed as possible. Where will you place the napkin holders? Where should you display your product? What's the best place for the sink? Where does each piece of machinery belong? Should the trash cans be by the counter or by the door? Where will the bathrooms, store room, and break room be located?

Be as thorough as possible. It's far better to spend time designing a well thought out floor plan than to try and make changes after opening.

10. Hire Reputable Contractors

When your store layout has been finalized, you then need to find contractors to complete the necessary work. The tricky part here is finding contractors you can trust. If you wind up hiring someone who fails to complete the project, doesn't finish on time, or does poor quality work, it'll negatively impact your business in a big way.

There are a number of ways to protect yourself from bad contractors. The first thing to do is to check the contractor's ratings and references. You can start by looking your contractor up online to see what past customers have to say about them.

Some of the best places to check are The Better Business Bureau, Facebook, Yelp, and Angie's List. You can also just type the company name into a search engine, like Google, to find ratings, reviews, and other information on the company you're considering.

But looking online isn't the only thing you can do to check on a company's reputation. You should also ask the contractor to provide you with a portfolio of past work and references. If possible, talk to other business owners in the area to see who they would recommend.

Even after you hire the contractor and they begin work, you should still make sure that things are progressing as they should. If the contractor said they would have the drywall up in a week and painting done in two weeks, then make sure that's what's happening. Don't let delays pile up and catch you off guard.

You can also build some safeguards into your contract. For instance, you can arrange for the contractor to be paid a bit at a time, dependent upon their progress.

Let's say your project is expected to take 90 days. You can specify in your agreement that the contractor has to provide a progress report at the 45-day mark in order to get the next payment. This is an excellent way to make sure the contractor stays on track and completes the work on time.

11. Purchase Equipment

Once you've got the contractors lined up, it's time to start ordering the equipment you'll need to run your ice cream store. The required equipment is, of course, dependent upon the type of shop you'll be running and the products you're offering.

The most basic piece of equipment you'll need is an ice cream machine. You need to decide if you want a machine that's a counter-top or floor model, air cooled or water cooled, new or used. You also need to determine how many barrels each machine should have.

In addition to your ice cream machine, you'll also probably need to invest in a high-quality dipping cabinet. Make sure that the dipping cabinet you order will fit into the space you have available in your shop. You might also need equipment like a milkshake machine, refrigerated topping holders, a waffle cone maker, freezers, a coffee machine, ice cream cone dispensers, etc.

When you order your equipment, make sure that you're working with a reputable dealer who offers solid warranties, especially when purchasing used machinery. You'd hate to get stuck with an ice cream dispenser that breaks down and needs to be repaired every couple of weeks.

Education is another consideration to keep in mind when ordering equipment. Do you want to work with someone who just sends you the machine and mails you the bill? Or would you rather buy your equipment from someone who will train you in how to operate and maintain your machinery? Your best bet is to find an equipment dealer who will invest time in training you to ensure your ongoing success.

12. Find Suppliers

Suppliers are an integral part of your business. Hire the wrong supplier, and you could end up with poor quality items, inflated bills, delayed shipments, and inconsistent service. It's vital that you thoroughly investigate all your options before settling on your suppliers.

The first place to start looking for a supplier is online. Check to see if there are any local companies that you can visit in person. If you know anyone who's already in the ice cream or restaurant business, it's a good idea to talk to them to find out who they'd recommend.

Be sure to always get multiple quotes – don't just check with one vendor. In order to get an accurate quote, you should already have a complete list of items that your business will need for operation.

Keep in mind that the lowest quote isn't always the best quote. Make sure that the products you'll be receiving are decent quality. You should be looking for a good balance between quality and affordability.

13. Outline Your Marketing Plan

Now it's time to start outlining your marketing strategy and reaching out to your potential customers. You don't want to wait until the doors are open to begin advertising – start your efforts months in advance to generate a sense of anticipation.

In today's market, it's always a good idea to have an online presence. You can stick to a Facebook page, if that's all you want. Or you could diversify your efforts by having an optimized website, Instagram profile, and Twitter account. Take a bit of time to investigate your options before deciding which outlets appeal to you. If you won't have time to take pictures and update your Instagram feed, then don't bother setting up an account.

When devising your marketing plan, you always need to keep your target market in mind. You need to make sure you go where the customers are – don't just put an ad in the local newspaper and hope that it sparks some interest. How do your ideal customers get their news – by TV, radio, newspaper, or social media? Advertise in the medium that your target market is most likely to use.

But that doesn't mean you can only invest in one promotion. Try to think outside of the box and come up with creative ways to reach your customers. For example, you could give coupons out at the country fair, hold a contest to name your flavors, or sponsor a local event, like a classic car show. There are a lot of different ways to start generating buzz in the local community.

14. Hire and Train Employees

Opening day is drawing near, which means it's time to start hiring and training your employees. It's a good idea to outline what you're looking for in an employee. Do you prefer to have your counter manned by high school students, adults, or retirees? What kind of experience would you like them to have? What skills do they need to be good at their jobs?

Once you've determined the type of person you're looking for, you'll also need to figure out how to conduct the application and interview process. Will you have paper applications that need to be picked up in person or do you plan to have an online form available? What questions will you ask to determine the best candidate for the job? Will you require any sort of skills tests prior to employment?

After you've hired your initial crew, make sure to train them well. Opening the store with a bunch of untrained employees is a recipe for disaster! Every employee should be clear on what their exact role entails and what's expected of them. You might even consider creating an employee handbook so your crew can easily find the information they need.

15. Open Your Store

It's finally here – the day you've been dreaming of and working so hard for: opening day! The day you open your ice cream store is a day you'll never forget. Imagine an event filled with nerves, joy, excitement, fear, and relief, all rolled up into one.

There are actually a couple of ways to approach your opening. Many restaurants, cafes, and other food service businesses opt to have a soft opening a few days before the grand opening takes place.

With a soft opening, you invite friends and family to visit your ice cream store. This gives you and your employees a chance to get used to the layout, environment, and procedures while serving some friendly faces.

Having a soft opening is a wonderful opportunity to get valuable feedback, perform additional training, make last-minute changes, and avoid embarrassing mistakes. It also is a great way to get the word out about your new business and expand your client base – the friends and family members who attend your soft opening are sure to tell others about their experience and recommend a visit.

While a soft opening is all about working out the kinks, your grand opening is the perfect excuse for a party. It's a great opportunity to create a lasting impression on your customers and the local community. Here are a few things you can do to make it a memorable event:

- Give away door prizes
- Provide live entertainment
- Have a local radio station on hand
- Hand out branded items like pens, balloons, and magnets
- Give discounts to people who post about the event on social media
- Provide kid-friendly activities like balloon animals or a bouncy house
- Have a local celebrity on hand to sign autographs

Of course, none of these are requirements, they're just ideas. You should feel free to do as much or as little as you feel comfortable with. But keep in mind, a lively grand opening could bring in a lot more business - the happier your initial visitors are, the more likely they'll return and recommend your ice cream store to others.

The Next Step

We hope you've enjoyed this brief guide on how to open your own ice cream store.

So what's the next step for you? Would you like to learn more about the ice cream business before moving forward? Are you wanting to talk about machine specs? Do you want a partner to walk with you step-by-step as you build your business?

Wherever you are in the process, we'd love to talk to you. Just give us a call at 888-555-3333 or send a message to timcook@icecreamequipment.com. We look forward to helping you pursue your ice cream dream!