

# California Hotdog Cart Operations Manual

This manual is designed as a general guide book for the day to day running of a typical American hot dog stand. We have carefully researched and compiled the information in an easy to understand and logical format.

This manual is broken down into the following 12 sections:

1. General Food Service Guidelines
2. Meat Handling, Storage and Preparation Guide
3. Storing, Preparing and Serving Condiments
4. Other Healthy Food Guidelines
5. Daily Operations
6. Safety Guidelines
7. Routine Cart Maintenance
8. Trouble Shooting
9. Business Management & Book Keeping
10. The Psychology of Selling
11. Tips for Success
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## General Food Service Guidelines

It is required by law in California that a hot dog cart operator take an approved food safety handling course before beginning to operate his or her cart. These courses are usually conducted or sponsored by the local or state health department. Taking such a course is a mandatory requirement in obtaining an operating permit for a new food vendor. Check the local city or health department website for details on these courses.

It is also highly recommended that you check with your local city or county health department for the exact local codes pertaining to vendor carts in your area as they do vary from place to place. For instance, some health departments will not allow hotdog carts to serve dairy based condiments such as mayonnaise, grated cheese or even squeeze bottle cheese. Many will not allow mobile food vendors to cook raw meats. This is because these foods are considered hazardous. They are prone to rapid bacterial growth when improperly stored or cooked. Such hazardous foods include meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy products, garlic-in-oil mixtures, cooked rice and cooked potatoes.

The guidelines included in this manual are generally universal in nature and are designed to keep you, your cart, and your food safe and appealing. We have

basically tried to select the best information from all the various federal, state and county health organizations. The material is presented in a format that is intended to be easy to understand and put into practice. Keep in mind that as a hotdog vendor you are considered a food handler by the health department officials and therefore must operate under their specific guidelines. Failure to comply will endanger the health of your customers, likely result in the loss of your operations permit and incur fines.

## **Meat Handling, Storage and Preparation Guidelines**

Many local health departments only allow hotdog vendors to serve certain pre-cooked meat products in the form of wieners or sausages that are to be barbecued and/or grilled on the cart. They may not allow what are considered to be hazardous raw meats (such as beef, ground beef, pork, and poultry) to be cooked on the cart.

Cooked meat must be continuously held above the temperature specified by the health department. The California Retail Food Code specifies a holding temperature of 135°F or above. The Cal Code also requires the hotdog vendor cart to have a thermometer on hand to monitor this temperature.

Refrigerated meats must be stored below the specified cold temperature. The Cal Code specifies that potentially hazardous foods such as meats be kept stored at or below 41°F (4°C). This will require the cart vendor to have another thermometer on hand to monitor this temperature. The temperature in the refrigerator should also be checked by the cart operator at regular intervals throughout the day. Every 2 hours would be a good idea. Care should be taken to ensure that refrigerator doors are not left open resulting in the interior temperature rising above this specified cold storage level. Check food temperatures when you receive them from a supplier and reject any that fall outside of the accepted ranges. Then put all such perishable foods away promptly in appropriate storage units.

Following the above rules keeps the product fresh and prevents the growth of bacteria. To summarize, a health department typically will require hot foods such as sausages to be held above 135°F and cold perishable items to be stored below 41°F (4°C). The danger zone for bacterial growth and food spoilage is between 41°F and 135°F .

The Cal Code requires that you first heat certain foods to certain temperatures before allowing you to serve them to people.

Pre-cooked hotdogs for example, must be re-heated to at least 165°F for 15 seconds before serving. To accurately determine this temperature insert the thermometer lengthwise into the center of the hotdog. Be sure not to pass through the meat and touch the cooking surface as this will give you a false high temperature reading. Never rely on equipment thermostats to accurately achieve set temperatures. Always measure food temperatures with a thermometer.

The above internal temperatures must be reached and also maintained for a certain minimum amount of time to facilitate complete cooking before serving. The Cal Code specifies that hot dog wieners must reach the required temperature of 165°F for a minimum of 15 seconds. Once these initial cooking temperatures have been reached for the specified times, the meat can now be put in a holding area and held there above the specified holding temperature of 135°F until served to customers.

During preparation and cooking you must take great care to avoid cross contamination between meats and any other food items. Be especially careful when handling raw, fresh or frozen meats. Meat carries potentially hazardous bacteria that can make you and your customers very sick and even kill. The area used for preparing meats must be washed and sanitized before being used to prepare any other food items! For example, if using a cutting board to separate frozen meat pieces, that board must be washed and sanitized before using it to chop onions. Similarly any utensils used would have to be washed and sanitized after coming into contact with meat. A sanitizing solution may be made by adding 1 teaspoon (5mL) of chlorine bleach to 1 quart (1L) of water.

Do not place cooked meats back on the plate or surface used to prepare or transport the uncooked (raw, fresh or frozen) meat. For example, if you used a tray to bring frozen sausages from the refrigerator to the grill for cooking, you must not put the cooked sausages back onto that same tray. It has been contaminated by the uncooked meat and must be washed and sanitized before being used again.

Do not use the same utensils to handle cooked and raw, fresh or frozen meat. Raw, fresh, and frozen meats must be regarded as hazardous and anything that touches them has also been contaminated. This would include, for example, knives, forks or tongs used to handle the meat. They would have to be washed and sanitized before being used again.

Raw, fresh or frozen meats must be stored on a shelf below and separate from any other food items to prevent them from contaminating the other items such as by dripping on them. Meats stored in a refrigerator with other foods must be kept on the bottom shelves below the other foods. Never store food directly on the floor or the ground. Foods must always be stored on a shelf raised up off of the floor or ground.

Remember to always thoroughly wash and sanitize food preparation surfaces, equipment and utensils between uses.

## **Storing, Preparing and Serving Condiments**

Many local health departments will not allow hot dog cart vendors to serve any dairy based condiment products such as mayonnaise, grated cheese or even squeeze bottle cheese. Some health departments will only allow condiments that do not require refrigeration after opening to be served from a cart. So it is very important to check first with your local health department for the specific local codes before beginning operations. If such perishable condiments are allowed, it is very important to follow the health guidelines to ensure that these condiments are maintained in healthy condition throughout your business day. If refrigerated condiments are allowed, keep them below the specified temperature (usually about 41°F and below). This will of course require a thermometer to monitor that temperature.

Condiments must be kept in clean, self sealing, washable containers and must be kept covered to prevent insects, dust, leaf litter, or rain to enter. Jars with screw lids are not be acceptable as serving containers by the health department. If condiments do become contaminated during the day, the containers should be emptied, cleaned and refilled with fresh material. Otherwise condiments can always be served in those small plastic single service packages.

Do not store condiments directly on the floor or the ground. Always store foods on a shelf raised above the floor or the ground. This includes foods that are prepackaged such as some condiments. Do not store your condiments in the same cooler as meats or on shelves below meats. Do not store your condiments near any cleaners or chemicals. All these rules are designed to prevent the condiments from becoming contaminated.

## Other Healthy Food Handling and Equipment Guidelines

Do not work in food preparation or service when you are sick. This includes when you are sneezing, have a runny nose, sore throat, diarrhea, vomiting, dark urine or yellowing of the skin (jaundice) or fever. Do not handle food if you have an infected cut or burn, pus or boil. Always wear food service gloves over any cuts, abrasions, or burns.

Never touch food with your bare hands. All food items should be handled using gloves, tongs, forks, spoons or other utensils.

Always keep a clean supply of spare utensils in a clean covered container. Remember that if anything falls and hits the ground, whether it is food or a utensil, it is considered dirty. Such contaminated food must be thrown out. Such contaminated utensils must be washed in soapy warm water and sanitized before being used again. A sanitizing solution usually consists of 1 part chlorine bleach in 200 parts water. There are also off-the-shelf pre-mixed chemical sanitizing solutions that can be purchased.

Always have a supply of food wrappers and proper utensils available to your customers so that they never directly touch any food items with their hands. Kindly provide instructions to customers as needed so they maintain food hygiene.

Clean and sanitize all your food service utensils at each days end and store them in a clean washable covered container. Never mix clean and used utensils in the same container as the used items would contaminate the clean ones.

The local health department may require you to have a separate sink just for washing utensils. Many health departments actually require hotdog carts to have as many as 3 or 4 sinks on the cart. For example, some counties specify that a hot dog cart have one sink for washing and rinsing utensils and one for sanitizing in chlorine bleach. The third sink would be devoted solely to hand washing. Check carefully with your local health authorities for the regulations in your area.

Hand sanitation is especially critical when serving food to others as many diseases and bacteria are passed on by unwashed hands. A vendor cart therefore should have hand soap, hand sanitizer and disposable paper towels on hand at all times.

As a food service operator you are required to wash your hands immediately after using the toilet, coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose, handling money, or after touching garbage or any or unsanitary or toxic item. You must also wash your hands when you re-enter the food service work area (the hotdog cart) even if you have just washed them in another place such as in a nearby washroom. You must also wash your hands after eating, drinking, smoking, washing dishes, washing other equipment, sweeping or mopping the floor, handling raw, fresh or frozen meat or any other food items, and even before putting on gloves to handle food.

Hands should be washed using hot water and soap. The Cal Code specifies that hand washing water be at least 120°F. You should lather your hands for 15-20 seconds. Attention should be given to removing any dirt or contamination under the finger nails. Then dry your hands using a single use towel (such as paper towels), a clean towel on a roller dispenser, or by an air dryer. Multi-use hand towels such as are used at home are not acceptable in the food service industry as these can store and transfer contamination and bacteria.

The use of gloves should never be seen as a means to short cut proper hand sanitation. Gloves can become contaminated and pick up and spread germs. For example, you would not use gloves to handle raw meat and then also to serve cooked food as this would transmit bacteria from the raw food to the cooked food.

Proper headgear such as a hat or hairnet must be worn to contain hair and prevent it from falling and contaminating the food. You do not want your customer to find a hair in their food. It would surely cost you customers and your hard earned reputation as a quality food vendor.

Keep your finger nails clean and trimmed short. It is unwise to wear finger rings as these can trap and carry food particles and bacteria and transfer them to clean food. Rings can also cut through gloves making them useless.

Do not smoke, chew tobacco, eat or drink when serving or preparing food. You must leave the food preparation and serving area for any of these activities. Move a short distance away from your cart to eat, drink or smoke. Remember that you must then wash your hands when you return to the cart.

You are however allowed to drink from a closed beverage container while in the food service area. Such a beverage container would need to have a lid on it. It must also have a handle to prevent your hand from touching the area that your mouth

touches. Otherwise it could have a drinking straw that would accomplish the same purpose. Always wash the container between uses or discard it.

Your clothing must be kept clean and neat. Soiled clothing can store and transfer bacteria. A fresh change of clean clothes must be worn each day or each work shift.

Never store food on the ground or floor. To do so would subject it to contamination from dirt, insects, water, and any spills. Food must always be stored on a shelf raised off of the floor or ground.

Do not store cleaning chemicals alongside food or food preparation utensils. They must be stored completely separate from food to prevent contamination and poisoning. Keep all such chemicals clearly labeled so they are not misused.

Most health departments require a roof, canopy or umbrella to be installed over a cart to protect the food service area from rain, falling leaves, blowing debris and bird droppings.

Have a garbage container on hand at all times. Never allow it to over-flow. Dispose of any garbage as required. Sanitize the garbage container at the end of each day to prevent odor.

Always keep your food preparation and serving areas looking clean. Clean up spilled condiments and wrappers to keep the area looking neat and clean.

## **Hotdog Cart Daily Operations & Procedures Guide**

Keep a binder on hand in your cart that includes the following information: your business license, location license or location rental agreement, your health department permit, a copy of the local health codes for quick reference, and this operations manual. If you are serving at a special event, have the permit with you that allows you to operate at that special event. It is best to keep all these papers in clear plastic sheet protectors so that they stay un-frayed, clean and readable. Always keep on hand the directions and maintenance manuals for any of the other equipment or appliances that you are using on the cart.

Also keep on hand and use a Daily Check List for the items you use and things you need to do in order to get operating each day. Do a daily check of your cart, the

equipment and contents before you start up each day. This prevents any unpleasant surprises or snags after you get started working. It is best to always work from written checklists and not from memory.

Wash the cart every day before and after use at the commissary. First wash the cart with hot soapy water to remove any dirt or spilled food. Then use a sanitizing solution to kill any remaining bacteria. A sanitizing solution may be made by adding 1 teaspoon (5mL) of chlorine bleach to 1 quart (1L) of water. Other pre-mixed bottled chemical sanitizing solutions can be purchased from commercial cleaning supply or restaurant supply companies. Wear rubber gloves as these sanitizers are very hard on the skin.

Use this same cleaning and sanitizing procedure on all surfaces and appliances used to store, prepare, cook or serve food, and all utensils and containers. Also clean sinks and faucets. Even the garbage cans should be cleaned to prevent any undesirable odor.

Fill the cart's fresh water tanks each day with all new fresh potable water from the commissary. Do not keep water from one day to the next. Always empty the cart's waste water tanks at the end of each day or work shift at the commissary. Do not empty waste tanks onto the street or down a street sewer grate. These waste water tanks should also be washed to prevent odor.

Make sure that the propane tanks and propane gas equipment and appliances are in good safe working order. This is both an operational and a safety issue. Replace or repair any defective gas equipment when a problem is discovered. Do not delay! Check that hoses are free of wear and hose connections are secure and will not come loose. Always keep an extra fully filled propane tank on hand so that you never find yourself out of gas in the middle of a work day. Always turn off the tank valves at the end of each day.

Use wheel chocks to hold the cart securely in place at locations where the cart is position on a slope. You can make these yourself from short lengths of wooden 2x4's.

Arrive at your location well before you are expected to begin serving food. This will give you plenty of time to clean and properly set up. Being early will avoid the temptation to cut any corners on proper start up and preparation. It will also avoid rushing and the associated stress.

Be sure to have an adequate supply of coins and small bills so as to be able to give correct change for the entire day. Being short on correct change is an unnecessary time consuming aggravation and is very unprofessional.

Be regular, consistent and reliable. Customers will come to depend upon you. This will help build a loyal regular customer base for your business.

Be friendly, cheerful and smile. Greet each and every customer. Learn the names of your regulars as this will further build customer loyalty. They will be your best advertisers by spreading news of you by word of mouth to their friends and co-workers.

Display a menu of items that you serve. This will save time during the busy lunch hour rush. It will enable customers to decide before they order. It can be made for a reasonable price at a professional vinyl graphics sign company.

Be a good neighbor to the other businesses in the area. Never let your business interfere with or detract from theirs. Instead it should compliment and enhance their businesses. This may involve you doing small simple things such as providing a trash can for your customers and cleaning up any litter in the area at the end of the day.

## **Vendor Cart Safety Guidelines**

### **Thunder Storms and Lightning**

Our hot dog carts are generally designed to be operated year round in all kinds of weather. There are some exceptions though and lightning is certainly one of them. Because the vendor cart is made with a large amount of steel, the possibility that it will attract a lightning strike is very real.

If a lightning storm is seen approaching, the operator should close down the cart immediately and seek appropriate shelter. Cart operations should only be resumed when the storm has passed and the threat of a lightning strike is not possible.

### **Fire**

Fires in a well maintained hotdog cart are certainly rare but can happen. It is suggested that a fire extinguisher be kept on hand for such an event.

A common source of fire is a grease fire on the BBQ. Small flare ups can be contained by turning down the gas setting and spraying the fire with water. A full spray bottle of clean water should be kept on hand for such occurrences. Be careful of scalding by steam when spraying with water.

In the case of a larger grease fire flare up, turn off the propane control valve to the BBQ burner and let it burn out or douse it with water. Be very careful of scalding by steam when dousing the burner with water. Keep your hands and face clear of the super-heated steam cloud that will rise up. Also the source of the grease supplying the fire, usually fatty meat, should be removed from the BBQ grill using a pair of long handled tongs. The burner can then be re-lit and any grease remaining will burn off in a more controlled manner. If a serious fire persists and continues to grow, turn off the propane valve at the tank, and use the fire extinguisher.

The other potential source of fire is a propane leak. This occurs most often under the BBQ itself where the gas supply tubes connect to the control knobs and the burners. In such a case, switch off the propane gas supply at the tank. This will stop the supply of gas to the fire and it should stop immediately. Allow the area to cool down. Then reconnect the loose gas fitting or tube and secure them so they can not become loose again. Once this has been done, open the gas supply valve again and carefully re-light the burners. Check the area under the BBQ for flame before resuming cooking operations.

The final area of concern is that of clothing catching fire. This may occur if an operator gets too close to hot burners with polyester clothing. This can cause the clothing material to melt or ignite and possibly burn the person. For this reason a proper approved butcher's apron of fire resistant material should always be worn when operating a hot dog cart.

### **First Aid**

Always keep a small first aid kit in the cart to treat the inevitable small burns, nicks, cuts and abrasions that will occur. It should include some disinfectant and an assortment of various sized "Band-Aids". Check the first aid kit regularly and restock it with needed items.

### **Sun Safety**

Prolonged sun exposure and sun burn are constant health hazards to hotdog cart operators because they are usually located out of doors at peak sun periods during the day. Wear a hat. The cart umbrella may not always be positioned so as to shade you from the direct sun. The best hats will completely cover your head and the tops of your ears.

Use a high SPF sun block on any exposed skin. Be sure to cover areas that are exposed to a lot of sun and those difficult to reach spots. These include your nose, top lip, ears, neck, chest and especially the back of your neck. In the case of sun safety, an ounce of prevention is worth a ton of cure.

Wear quality sun glasses to prevent eye strain.

Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration and sun stroke. Drinks with high sugar content such as sodas are okay but you will likely need to drink a lot of them which is not very healthy. Drink lots of water. If your urine is dark or you did not urinate all day, then you did not drink enough water and are dehydrated which is very unhealthy.

### **Towing the Trailer**

Always check that the cart's trailer hitch is pushed all the way down and fully locked on the Make sure that the ball is the correct size for the hitch as a hitch will connect to an undersized ball but it may disconnect in transit. Always connect the safety chains between the trailer and the tow vehicle. If you have the detachable tongue option on the trailer, double check that it is properly re-installed before towing.

Connect the electrical wires and check that signal and brake lights are functioning properly.

Remove the wheel chocks and corner jack before driving away. Make sure all items on the cart are fully secured and ready for transport before towing.

Check the tires for proper inflation pressure as a partially deflated tire can fail at highway speeds causing you to lose control.

## **Hotdog Cart Routine Maintenance**

A mobile hotdog cart must be maintained in top roadworthy condition at all times. If not, the owner/operator risks being unable to do business and thereby losing money.

Inspect the cart daily.

Check the tires for wear and correct air pressure. Have the wheel bearings inspected by a mechanic every 6 months. Replace the tires when the treads are worn.

Check that the trailer lights (running, braking and turning) are all working. Always keep a set of spare light bulbs on hand.

Inspect the electrical wires that connect from the tow vehicle's lights through to the trailer lights. Some sections of these wires are especially prone to wear. These areas include where the wires exit the trunk of a car and where the wires rub when passing through channeling. Use electrical tape or flexible plastic wire conduit to cover and protect the wire insulation.

Check electrical connectors for corrosion. Because a hotdog cart is regularly washed, electrical connectors are especially prone to corrosion. Wear or corrosion in the electrical system will cause serious failure. A short circuit can blow the fuse in the tow vehicle or burn out the trailer electrical adaptor. As a result, none of the trailer or tow vehicle lights will work. An open circuit due to parted wires or connectors will likewise result in lights not working. This is a real serious road safety issue.

Make sure that the propane tanks and propane gas equipment and appliances are in good safe working order. This is both an operational and a safety issue. Inspect the propane tanks and hoses. Propane leaks can be detected using soapy water. Any leaks will be shown by expanding bubbles. Check and replace any worn hoses. Do not attempt to repair hoses by yourself such as by using electrical or duct tape to cover over the leaks in the hose! Replace or repair any defective gas equipment when a problem is detected. Do not delay! Check that gas hose connections are secure and will not come loose.

Ensure that the propane tanks are firmly secured in place and will not shake loose during transport. Likewise, make sure that all doors close and lock firmly so they won't spring open during transit. A factory supplied tight fitting cover is an excellent way to protect the trailer from rain and contamination during transit.

## **Trouble Shooting**

### **Gas Burner Will Not Start:**

- Check that the valve at the propane tank is open.
- Check that the propane tank line is connected to the burner.
- Check that the propane tank has gas in it.
- Check that the burner gas control is ON and set to MAX.
- Is it windy? If so, the wind is likely blowing out the flame. Either shield the burner from the wind or move the cart to a spot sheltered from the wind.

### **Gas Burner Was On But Now Has Gone Out:**

- Check that the propane tank line is connected to the burner.
- Check that the propane tank has gas in it.
- Is it windy? If so, the wind is likely blowing out the flame. Either shield the burner from the wind or move the cart to a spot sheltered from the wind.

### **Flames Appear Under the Gas Appliance:**

- Shut off the propane gas supply at the tank.
- Allow area to cool.
- Check that the propane gas supply lines are not loose or detached from the burner element.

### **Road Lights on the Cart Do Not Come On:**

- Check that the electrical plug on the cart is connected to the adaptor on the towing vehicle.
- Check that one of the wires from the tow vehicle are not severed somewhere along their length.
- Check the fuse box in the tow vehicle to see if the fuse for the brake, signal or marker lights is blown. If it is, replace it, but also check for a short circuit in the cart's lighting wires that may have caused it. Also keep in mind that the electrical adaptor leading to the cart may also have an internal fuse that has blown. Test the output voltage from the adaptor – if it is less than 10 volts it is likely damaged.
- Check the electrical lines on the cart for damage such as wear caused by rubbing against the chassis or channeling. Replace worn wire.
- Check the electrical connectors for corrosion. Replace worn or corroded connectors. Seal them to prevent moisture from causing future corrosion.
- Check for faulty ground wire connections on the cart. Oftentimes corrosion or a loose connection prevents a good electric return path and lights will not activate.
- Check that the light bulbs are not broken.

### **Wheels Squeak When Moving Cart:**

- Have a mechanic check the wheel bearings and lubricate or replace as necessary.

### **Electrical Appliances Will Not Work:**

- Extension cord from outlet may have become unplugged.
- Fuse inside building supplying power may have blown.
- Check entire length of extension cord for wear or breaks. It may have been severed.

#### **DC Refrigerator Is No Longer Keeping Food Cold:**

- Check thermostat setting on fridge.
- Battery may be depleted and need re-charging.
- Battery internal electrolyte level may be low and needs refilling. If adding water use distilled water available from a drug store.
- Wires from battery to refrigerator may have become damaged, disconnected, or the connections corroded.

#### **AC Refrigerator Is No Longer Keeping Food Cold:**

- Check thermostat setting on fridge.
- Extension cord from outlet may have become unplugged.
- Fuse inside building supplying power may have blown.
- Check entire length of extension cord for wear or breaks. It may have been severed.

## **Business Management & Book Keeping Guide**

Owning your own hotdog cart business should be rewarding and enjoyable. The guidelines in this section should help you to be successful whether you have one hotdog cart or have several units with employees running them.

Owning and operating several hot dog carts in different locations is a way to increase profits but it also comes with special challenges. Managing employees can be difficult and frustrating if not done properly. This section provides some ideas, guidelines and forms to use in managing your human resources effectively.

Please note that laws governing employees and sub-contractors vary from place to place. Make sure that you conform to these in every respect.

Both you and your employees should be familiar with the Hotdog Cart Operations and Maintenance Manual, the Employees Rules of Conduct guide, and the Dress, Deportment and Hygiene Code. Review these with them in person and have copies of them in the cart for reference. Have employees sign them.

## **Bookkeeping That Works.**

A simple, straight forward bookkeeping system is important to you and your business. It is the foundation of a successful business. Good bookkeeping will enable you to analyze your business on an ongoing basis.

Good bookkeeping will also save you much time and minimize frustration.

A key rule of thumb is the KISS principle (Keeping It Simple is Smart). Many people think that bookkeeping and financial statements are highly complicated activities reserved for the realm of accountants only. For a small business, this simply is not the case. The only skills required are to be able to count, record, add and subtract. Some simple forms for inventory control and profit / loss statements make this even easier.

One method used in keeping the accounting simple and easy is to pay cash up front for all your supplies. This has a few important advantages:

1. You should get better prices for paying up front compared to paying on account in 30 days.
2. You are able to quickly determine the success of your recent activities.
3. There will be no surprises at the end of the month when the bills come in.
4. Your accounting will be kept to a few minutes each day rather than a time consuming burden at the end of the month.

## **Keep Accurate Daily Records**

Cash does not mean that you don't get receipts or are involved in shady activities such as dodging taxes. It is simply a tool to keep accounting simple and to get the best prices for supplies.

You will need to keep all your receipts in order to keep accurate records both for your own information and to show government agencies at tax time. Without accurate records, you will find it difficult to take advantage of all the business deductions and credits to which you are entitled. Never rely on your memory. Put everything down in writing.

Keeping your records simple and up to date will also save you money when you actually do need an accountant at tax time. Keep receipts of all business related expenses including day to day supplies, equipment purchases, employee pay, office supplies, business loan interest, and vehicle mileage or fuel (spent driving to work, suppliers, business meetings, etc). These various expenses are all deductions at tax time and they will really add up over the year.

Keep business expense items on separate bills from other personal expense items i.e. business food supplies versus personal groceries. Mark on the receipt what the items were for i.e. a special event or weekly supplies. You may have to write in what the items actually are as many stores use acronyms in their descriptions that military pilots would find mind numbing. This will prevent much confusion.

Keep your records in a central safe place such as a filing cabinet or banker's box. Keep separate labeled file folders for the different types of business expenses such as consumable food supplies, equipment purchases, uniform expenses, advertising and promotion, loan interest payments, employee pay, office supplies, vehicle expenses, rent payments, licensing and training, etc.

Note that different expenses have different rates of deduction or different places to go on the tax form. Keeping them separate will save a ton of time and money at year end tax time.

Make up new record folders for each new year.

## **The Psychology of Selling.**

### **How to Motivate Your Customers to Buy and to Return**

Successful selling involves more than just putting up a sign and waiting for customers to beat a path to your cart. While a hotdog cart presents different marketing challenges than, for example, operating a grocery store, the basic philosophy of selling holds true for all businesses. Customers must first be attracted to your sales site and then encouraged to buy your products. At the point of sale you must anticipate and satisfy your customer's needs and expectations. It is this selling cycle – attracting customers, encouraging sales and satisfying customer needs – that is essential in assuring the continued growth and success of your business.

Remember the rule: it is easier to keep an old customer than to attract a new one!

### **The Sale:**

1. Once your customer has been attracted to your vending site, there are four factors that go into completing a successful sale:
2. The customer must have a clear idea of what is being sold and at what price.
3. All signs should be professionally made. (no homemade "marker on cardboard" signs)

4. You must be able to service the customer even if you get many customers all at once.
5. You must ask for the sale.

### **Up-Sell:**

Always make sure you and your employees up-sell. It's very simple. Just ask a positive question. Or give positive suggestions.

Do not ask "Would you like a drink with that?". Ask "What kind of drink would you like with that?". If a customer is indecisive or unsure, help them, say something like: "Why don't you try one of our spicy dogs? Most of the guys seem to like it."

Help your customer to make selections by asking leading questions like: "Would you like cheese on that?" "Would you like to try the Red Onion sauce?". Customers will not see this as "up-selling" but rather as you helping and showing a personal interest in them.

### **Pricing:**

There are no hard and fast rules on pricing. A good start is to first poll your competitors or other similar businesses in your local area. Do not be afraid to charge more for your product. Charging 25% more than your competitors is not unreasonable if you offer a better product.

The reason for this is simple. If you do a superior job, offer a superior product, and do it in a unique way, your customers will be very happy to pay more. There are many very successful food service franchises that follow this philosophy. The convenience of your location is another reason why customers will be willing to pay more.

### **Customer relations:**

How you speak to your customers is as important as what you say.

- Always be friendly, positive and upbeat.
- Make sure everything is continually kept neat and clean.
- Make sure all employees understand and apply these principles.

## **Tips for Success**

**Be Reliable.**

Customers will depend on you for lunch. Be there regularly. Become part of their routine. This will build a loyal regular customer base.

### **Be Friendly.**

Greet each customer. Be cheerful and smile. It costs nothing but makes a huge difference.

Get to know your regulars by name. That builds loyalty. They will spread the word about you and draw more customers to your business. The best advertising is by word of mouth and it costs nothing.

### **Keep a Clean, Tidy Shop.**

People are turned off by mess especially where they buy their food. Clean your cart daily before and after use. Clean all the equipment including condiment trays and bottles. Keep your garments and personal appearance clean and neat.

### **Maintain Quality.**

A good reputation is priceless. Don't scrimp. Don't risk it by cutting corners using old product.

### **Be a Good Neighbor.**

Don't let your business interfere with others – make it compliment and augment their business. This may include simple things such as providing a trash can for your customers and picking up litter at days end.

### **Know Local Eating Habits.**

Hot dogs are subject to regional differences. This may require condiments that reflect your local culture such as grated cheese, chili, hot mustard, etc. Even within a city, one neighborhood may be more health conscious, reflect a unique cultural flavor ie: require Kosher food, or prefer Red Onion sauce on their dog. Ask. Listen. Learn. Adapt. Serve those needs. Advertise it. It means business.

### **Post a Simple Menu and Price List.**

Most people won't buy unless they first know the price. Prominently displaying what you sell will save you time explaining especially during a busy lunch hour. It enables your customers to decide before they order.

Attach your Menu / Price List to your cart with Velcro under a plexiglass cover (to protect it from dirt, rain, and facilitate easy cleaning and changing). Get it made professionally at a local vinyl graphics sign shop. It won't cost much and will look professional.

### **Take Phone Orders.**

Post your cell phone number on your cart and keep a phone order log sheet. Have business cards made up that you can give to customers for them to have so they can call their orders in ahead of time. Print off some simple ½ page menu sheets like take-out restaurants do.

Many workers are so busy that they prefer to call their food orders in ahead of time and just pick them up. Often one person will pick up lunch for many. They save time not having to wait. You avoid long line ups and generate more business. It's another way to adapt to your customers needs and develop a loyal customer base.

### **Introduce Yourself to a New Area.**

When you set up your cart in a new area, advertise yourself. This will get your new location off to a running start.

Print up some quality flyers and take them around to the businesses in the area so they will be familiar you. Maybe include a nice picture of you and your quality built hot dog cart. Drop them off in business mailboxes. Post them on information boards. Hand them directly to business owners, managers, receptionists, and other employees. Dress neat and professionally while doing this as you are making that all important first impression of your quality food service vending cart!

The flyer should include your hours of business, location, menu, and cell number for phone orders. It should show that your cart is licensed and meets all the Health Code requirements. Keep it to one page in length and one sided so it can easily be posted in a lunch room. Include introductory discount coupons at the bottom of your flyer to encourage first time customers.

# Vendor Cart Dress Code & Rules of Conduct

## Dress Code:

A person's overall appearance must be neat and clean to convey the attitude of professionalism required of and expected in the food service industry.

- Clothing must be clean without stains. A fresh change of clothing should be worn each day. Clothing should not be frayed or worn out.
- If the vendor does not have his own company shirts or hats, those worn must not have logos or messages that are offensive. Clothing without such logos or messages are preferred.
- Males must be freshly shaven.
- Hair must be clean and neat.
- The cash apron must clean and neat.

## Rules of Conduct:

- Employees must arrive at work on time and ready for work. Employees must arrive at Vendor location according to the prescribed schedule.
- Employees must conform to the Vendor Cart Dress and Department Code.
- Employees must always convey a friendly positive professional attitude especially when dealing with customers.
- Employees conduct, hygiene, and dress must always conform to the standards required of the local Department of Health for the Food service industry.
- Employees must read and conform to the guidelines provided for workers in the food service industry including instructions on personal washing, cleaning equipment, and handling food.
- All monies collected from sales will be deposited into the cash box at the end of each working day or shift. All monies collected from sales will be counted and logged at the end of each working day or shift. An inventory of remaining foodstuffs will also be counted at this time. Any reasons for discrepancies should be noted in writing at this time. Employees will not borrow from the company cash box.
- Employees will not sell any unauthorized products of their own from the food cart or on company time.
- Employees will conform to the posted menu prices and will not extend special pricing to any friends, relatives, customers or themselves unless authorized by the company owner or supervisor.
- Any thefts of products or money will result in the employee's immediate work termination and will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

Any departure from the above guidelines may result in the employee's immediate work termination. This instruction guide is binding and is to be read and signed by each vendor cart employee and kept on record by the company owner.