



Navigating Foodservice on the Street

Food Trucks, From the Inside Out



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David Weber



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From the mainstream success of 2010's *The Great Food Truck Race* on Food Network to an everyday increasing street presence in most metropolitan cities in the U.S., cuisine from a "cart" may seem to be relatively new or trendy. The truth is mobile munchies go back to the Forum days of Ancient Rome. The toga-wearing traders of old might be surprised at the diverse gourmet foods now offered on the sidewalk, or shocked by the use of social media like Twitter telling diners where to find them. But what's most amazing about 21st-century food carts is how they overcome the challenges of tiny kitchens in vehicular venues to bring restaurant-quality cooking to the masses.

spotlight

The Benefits of Serving "Meals on Wheels"

Among the names responsible for the recent surge in gourmet street fare is New York's **Rickshaw Dumpling Bar**. David Weber and business partner Kenny Lao debuted the Asian "fast casual" restaurant in Manhattan in 2005, "and opened our first food truck in 2008 as a sort of R&D vehicle to learn more about our brand and our customers. It was a great, low-cost way to get some more exposure and it gave us such direct access to our customers, it proved irresistible." Showing his dedication to the concept, Weber started the not-for-profit **New York Food Truck Association** as an advocacy group in 2011.

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food for thought

by David Rolston
President and CEO

What do you expect?

One of television's early reality shows placed contemporary families in homes of other eras in which they would have to live with the same appliances and furnishings as the original occupants. For virtually all, it was not an easy transition, and more than one participant wondered aloud, "How could people have lived that way?"

The simple fact is that the people of the past were able to live "that way," and to find satisfaction in their lives, because their situation was what they expected. Those who had to chop and carry wood to feed a large cast-iron range for heating and cooking did not complain because they lacked radiant heat and microwave ovens. In fact, each generation found satisfaction in the advances they enjoyed over the lifestyles of their ancestors. The key word here is "satisfaction," which might be defined as the situation that exists when a product, a service, a situation, or even another individual, meets or exceeds our expectations.

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on the menu

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the big tickets



TRADE EXHIBITIONS

April 2012

- Food & Hotel Asia
April 17 - 20
Singapore Expo
Singapore, Republic of Singapore
- GastroNord
April 24 - 27
Stockholm Exhibition and Congress Center
Stockholm, Sweden
Booth #A12:42
- Northwest Foodservice Show
April 29 - 30
Washington State Convention Center
Seattle, WA, USA
Booth #126

May 2012

- National Restaurant Association Show
May 5 - 8
McCormick Place, Chicago, IL, USA
Booth #2218
- Seoul Food & Hotel
May 8 - 11
Korean International Exhibition Center
Seoul, South Korea
- Bakery China 2012
May 10 - 12
Shanghai New Expo Center, Shanghai, China
- Thaixex - World of Food ASIA
May 23 - 27
IMPACT Exhibition Centre, Bangkok, Thailand



Dining on Fish and Chip-erman's Wharf



San Francisco,
California, USA



specialty of the house



It's over 5,000 miles from the underground tubes of land-locked London to the bay-front walk at Fisherman's Wharf, but food cart owner Suzanne Aceverdo doesn't mind the gap. When she moved across the Atlantic ten years ago, she brought her own knowledge from working fish and chips stands in England, as well as her recipe for homemade batter. For the past ten months, she's been busily frying her way to success as the fairy *Codmother of the Wharf*.

As with most dishes, "the key is in the ingredients. We use the best fresh Alaskan cod, and we hand-cut the fries from Idaho potatoes each morning. It means more set-up time, but delicious dishes can only come from great food and hard work." Suzanne admits that getting her first food operation off the ground has meant a lot of hours, and a few breakdowns along the way.

"Propane pump or power problems, oil fires in the exhaust pipes...food trailers and carts face some challenges brick-and-mortar restaurants don't," she points out. "Like, at the end of every day, I'm personally hand straining the forty-five gallons of water we used that day. What I wouldn't give for a little plumbing!"

Her hard work has been rewarded with rave reviews – many of which not only love the namesake fish and chips, but also her deep-fried treats such as Oreos and Snickers bars – which also come with a history: "The deep-fried Mars bar started in Scotland before Twinkies were being breaded here in the U.S. Between the fish and chips and the sweets," says Suzanne, "I'm serving some comforting English fare out of my small kitchen on the bay."

For details, and reviews of Suzanne's bit of Britain in the Bay Area, please see the Codmother page on yelp.com. ■

Fried Pineapple Ice Cream Cones with Raspberry Sauce

Ingredients:

1 fresh pineapple	confectioners' sugar (optional)
8 oz (227 gm) self-rising flour	4 oz (113 gm) raspberry jam
8 oz (237 ml) soda water	1/8-1/4 c (30-60 ml) water
2 tsp (10 ml) granulated sugar	1 waffle cone
2 oz (57 gm) coconut flakes	2-3 scoops of coconut ice cream, to taste
flour (for dusting pineapple)	

Instructions:

Cut peeled pineapple into chunks. Squeeze the pieces to remove excess juice.

Sift flour (to avoid a lumpy batter). Mix flour and soda water with whisk, until smooth. Add granulated sugar and coconut — whisk until batter is the consistency of double cream.

Dust fresh pineapple pieces with plain flour. Dip into the batter, drain excess batter, and place into fryer at 375 degrees F (191 degrees C), until batter turns golden brown. Drain on paper towels. Dust with confectioners' sugar (optional).

In a saucepan on medium heat, melt the raspberry jam and add water to desired consistency.

In waffle cone, layer coconut ice cream and fried pineapple pieces. Drizzle raspberry sauce on top. ■ 3

From Pyramid to MyPlate

USDA Offers a New Way of Seeing Healthy Habits

When is a pyramid more than just a building in Egypt? When it has become – like the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food Pyramid – an instantly recognizable icon for healthy eating habits. As many as 85% of Americans recognize the Food Pyramid on sight as a tool for balancing the five food groups in one’s daily diet. But has that mega-popular polyhedron been effective in pointing us toward becoming a healthier nation? Not always. In order to better educate and inspire a changing – and, alas, ever-growing population – the USDA recently overhauled its popular symbol. The result is the **MyPlate** food icon, and its companion website **ChooseMyPlate.gov** – the latest, and perhaps simplest, approach in a long history of informing the American consumer about improving their daily nutrition.

The Evolution of How to Eat

According to Dr. Robert Post, "The history of federal food guides goes back more than a hundred years." Post is the Deputy Director of the USDA’s Center for Nutritional Policy and Promotion and helped to develop the current **MyPlate** design as a powerful prompt to remind consumers about building healthy plates at meal times. "Federal nutrition guidelines," says Post, "have been published since the late nineteenth century. Today, they continue to be updated to reflect the latest nutritional science." (see Sidebar)

By law, every five years, the USDA updates its Federal nutritional guidance based on the latest scientific research in nutrition, as well as the state of the union’s health and fitness. Post and his team create plans to educate the public at large about how to use this new information to improve their diets. It was such consumer-centered thinking that first gave the USDA the idea for an image or icon to visually remind Americans what a balanced daily diet looked like – and 1940’s Basic Seven food wheel was born.

The Geometry of Good Eating

The most successful revision in terms of public recognition came in 1992 with the Food Guide Pyramid. Post calls the Pyramid, "a powerful tool for education. In terms of teaching in the classroom, or communicating the idea of portions and proportions for consumption, the Pyramid has proven to be an extremely effective device." Part of its power lies in its simplicity: the shape is one that even the youngest schoolchildren recognize, and it encourages by showing (not telling) moderation, variety, and proportion, in eating habits.



A Pyramid Plate for the 21st Century

Post and the USDA, however, eventually came to realize that "while the Food Pyramid was great for the classroom, it was less effective in influencing consumers in the kitchen. Though 85% of those polled recognized the pyramid, only about 3% actively followed the recommendations." What was needed was something that was attention grabbing – an image that would be a great reminder and also point consumers to a website where nutrition guidance could be personalized and easily and effectively communicated to the American family.

So, in 2010, the USDA took the first of two huge steps toward increasing awareness of daily nutrition, and personalizing it for the everyday consumer: the **MyPlate** icon and the **ChooseMyPlate.gov** website. **MyPlate** replaced the MyPyramid as an icon that simply and clearly represents the five food groups from which healthy choices can be

made. Post says the choice of a plate was simple: "Since it’s a universal symbol for eating, it can also act as an almost literal guideline. Fill your plate with half fruits and vegetables, and more grains than proteins. A glass of milk, or some small side of dairy, and you’re done! This is a new way of showing, not just telling, what to eat. The key is that it suggests portion size – and for a country with increasing obesity, especially in children, it’s important to get people thinking about not just *what*, but *how much* they eat."

On the SuperTrack to Health

Also helping in the war of the waistline is the USDA’s all-new SuperTracker – found at **ChooseMyPlate.gov**. "SuperTracker is a free and fun, interactive way for people of all ages to plan, analyze, and track not only the foods they eat, but their levels of exercise and activity as well," says Post. "It’s been online for just under two months and already we’ve seen great success, with millions of visitors – and over 400,000 active, registered users. I think that shows that people really are interested in getting healthy. We’re just offering the best tools we can think of to aid them in that process. That’s the primary goal of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion."

As dietary needs have changed, so have the ways the USDA informs the American public. As Post points out, "In the early 1900s, there wasn’t as much food to go around, so 'healthy eating' meant eating more – however, now the opposite is true. Over the last hundred years, we’ve had to stay on top of getting out the right message for the times." With or without pyramids, this is contemporary America, not ancient Egypt – and Post and his team are doing all they can to keep the American consumer from denial of proper nutrition and fitness. "Nearly everyone has a busy life and a lot on their plate – both time wise and food wise," Post says. "We’re doing our best to help Americans stay healthy." ■

Pie Graphs to MyPlate: A Timeline



1940s: The first iconic visualization of Federal recommendations was a wheel-shaped diagram featuring seven food groups, including a single category for butter and margarine.



1984: The Food Wheel updated the earlier format, while recommending daily amounts of each of five food groups. Moderation was recommended when eating from within the "Alcohol, Fats, and Sweets" group.



1992: Teaching the foundation of a healthy daily diet, the Pyramid introduced the visualization of relative portion size between the food groups.



2005: The Pyramid was simplified and personalized – and for the first time incorporated a "physical activity" category, as part of a healthy way of life.

2011: The **ChooseMyPlate** plate icon (see article) offers a universal visual cue that shows an appropriate balance between the four food groups on the plate and the serving of "Dairy" on the side. ■

"Food Trucks" from page 1



The food truck, food cart, and food trailer model of business, has been successful across the country – and has diners waiting in line up and down the west coast as well, from Seattle's Space Needle to San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf. Whether serving dumplings, donuts, pizza, or fried fish, the appeal to food truck operators remains the same: close customer contact. "It's gratifying to be serving my own homemade food," says "Codmother" Suzanne Aceverdo, "but what really makes this job enjoyable is the people." Suzanne operates **The Codmother Fish and Chips** – a concession trailer at Fisherman's Wharf (see Specialty of the House) widely praised for its friendly customer service. She notes, "Food carts operate with such a slim staff – usually just me and maybe one other person – that everything's fully face-to-face, which helps make work feel like fun."

Yi-Chun Lin, part-owner of **Seattle's Street Donuts**, agrees: "We started this business in part to get out from behind our desks and away from the corporate-world model of the workplace. Unlike the standard brick-and-mortar restaurant, we can use that face time to better our business almost instantaneously." In addition to sourcing ingredients locally and according to seasonal availability, Lin and her partners can cater directly to demand. "When your customer orders and eats your food within twenty feet of you, feedback is quick in coming. And since everything you need is right within reach – often in a cramped space – you can react to that input in real time."

A Look "Under the Hood"

Lin brings up one of the greatest challenges to food truck ownership: space. "Whether

you're parked on the side of the street, or catering a large event – your kitchen is only as large as your vehicle." The key to success, then, is in planning how to maximize your equipment and improve the flow of service.

Lin and her co-owners used their professional backgrounds in both design and foodservice to engineer the best truck possible, even installing the fixtures themselves.

Tania Ramirez of **Food Carts USA** can speak well to the space limitations of mobile foodservice. She runs Miami, Florida's first and largest custom food truck manufacturer.



According to Tania, "The two most important factors in designing your cart or truck are your menu and your local health codes. We keep up-to-date on the varying regulations of all the major cities – which are always changing. Like any restaurant, you have to work within the constraints of your location – even if that location can move at any time."

That being said, Ramirez insists that when it comes to what you can serve from the side of a truck, the only limit is your imagination. "We've equipped carts that serve burgers, tacos, sushi, cupcakes, gelato – you name it. The more unique, the better – both for the sake of our own creativity in building it and for the sake of a successful food truck business. One idea that I'd love to be challenged with is converting a double-decker bus – maybe with the kitchen on the bottom and dining space on top. The sky's the limit!"



Streetza™ Pizza, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is "One of America's Favorite Food Trucks," according to *The Food Network*.

David Weber brings things back down to earth by pointing out that while the benefits are many, "due to the space and power constraints, every aspect of foodservice is more challenging on a food truck. But food trucks are exciting because their cost structure is lower, so they allow more room for fun and experimentation. I think of them as 'hospitality incubators.' Whether as extensions of existing restaurants or (as most are) stand-alone operations, they're a great way to try out a new concept or idea for not much capital." Lin agrees: "In operation, it's like having a pop-up restaurant every day – with all the good and bad that goes with that."

How to Get Rolling

Entrepreneurs shifting into high gear on food trucks find that flexibility to be a big draw – there are just so many ways to do it! **Food Carts USA** offers high quality custom builds, but an equal number of operations are run out of used trucks that have been refitted to meet their owners' needs. Additionally, not every food truck has to be on-the-go on a daily basis, or updating Twitter with their every move (as many do). **Street Donuts** – especially in the chilly Seattle off-season – favors private events such as weddings, corporate meetings, or established "food truck round-ups." **The Codmother Fish and Chips** – while technically mobile – is a "concessions trailer" with an established, leased location at Fisherman's Wharf.



For those restaurateurs considering a food truck expansion, or self-starters thinking of a new business, the key to success is equal parts research and imagination. "Plan ahead," counsels David Weber. "Plan what kind of truck can best serve the food you want to make; plan how to lay out the equipment to optimize capacity and production; plan how you can do those things while meeting local health codes." To aid in putting those plans together, David Weber recently wrote

and published *The Food Truck Handbook: Start, Grow, and Succeed in the Mobile Food Business*. The book is available online.



The food truck business has changed a lot in the past few years – with greater exposure, mainstream popularity, and a wider diversity of culinary offerings. But it's much more than a fad; it's really an extension of the millennia-old need for on-the-go grub. "There've been food carts in New York since the city was called New Amsterdam," Weber points out. "Mobile foodservice isn't going anywhere... except maybe across town. You'd better check Twitter to be sure." ■

Background © Pontuse | Dreamstime.com

"food for thought" from page 1

We've all had the experience of looking forward to something that, when we finally achieved it, failed to live up to our hopes. Maybe it was a "dream car" that continually required repairs, or a vacation that we were glad to see end. The high divorce rate proves that relationships with people are just as susceptible to disappointment as those with products or experiences.

In my professional experience, I have seen this happen with both employers and suppliers who seemed to be just the right fit but, in the end, could not measure up to what we had hoped. Maybe this is not surprising in view of the fact that many individuals and companies are fixated on "getting the job," and that a whole industry ranging from résumé assistance services to books to video coaching has arisen in support of that end. We all know the value of a positive first impression. Unfortunately, not enough

emphasis is placed on the long-term importance of performing up to the expectations created by the interview.

A successful career is all about relationships, both with coworkers, other individuals, and with the job itself. A positive interview serves as an introduction, but it is the ability to continue to perform to a high standard that determines ongoing success.

My experience over the years in dealing with prospective employees and suppliers has also led me to question my own expectations. In some instances, I might have been too anxious to fill a position, while in others I might not have known enough about the job we were seeking to fill to ask the right questions. As an optimistic individual who has had the good fortune to be part of a great team, I am sure that I am more likely to cast a favorable light on

people in general and to believe that they can do what they say they can.

Experience may have made me a little more cautious and possibly more skeptical and caused me to involve more individuals whose opinion I respect in the evaluation process. At the same time, I have to admit that my faith in both employees and suppliers remains high because, despite the occasional failures and disappointments, the many people and suppliers who have exceeded my expectations are, and continue to be, a real source of satisfaction. As a recipient of our newsletter, please consider yourself among them.

Sincerely,

David Rolston

David Rolston
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product profile

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