The 90-Day Restaurant Opening Checklist

A day-by-day countdown from concept lock to your first paying guest

What this is: a working countdown playbook for opening a restaurant, organised into seven blocks of days and one post-opening block. It covers the lease clauses that decide your economics, the permit sequence that decides your opening date, the equipment and system build, hiring and training, and the first thirty days of trading. **Who it is for:** first-time and second-time operators, and anyone taking over a site who wants a sequence rather than a wish list. Print it, write on it, and work the blocks in order.

Free operator resource · Version 1.0 · Updated August 2026

Practical guidance only. Permit names, tax rules and employment law vary by jurisdiction - confirm specifics locally with your lawyer, accountant and public health authority.

How to use this playbook

This is a countdown, not a to-do list. Every block below is anchored to a number of days before you serve your first paying guest. The sequence matters more than the individual tasks: a permit you apply for in week 4 that should have gone in during week 1 will hold the whole project. Work the blocks in order, and treat the dates as commitments you make to a lender, a landlord and a construction crew who all have their own calendars.

Three rules that govern the whole plan:

1. **Nothing is booked until it is booked in writing.** A contractor who says "we can start in three weeks" has not committed to anything. A signed change order with a date has.
2. **Permits and inspections are the critical path.** Almost every delayed opening traces back to a permit application submitted late, an inspection scheduled after the equipment was already installed, or a drawing that did not match what was built. Everything else can be compressed. This cannot.
3. **Your opening date is a range until final inspection passes.** Announce a week, not a day, to the public. Announce a day only after the occupancy permit is in your hand.

> **COMMON MISTAKE**
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> Signing the lease and starting rent before the landlord's work is defined and priced. If the lease commencement date is tied to possession rather than to permit issuance or substantial completion of landlord work, you can pay four months of rent on a dark room while you wait for a building permit. Tie your rent-free fit-out period to the **issuance of the building permit**, not to handover of keys.

Master timeline at a glance

Block	Theme	The one thing that must be true at the end
Day 90-75	Concept, money, lease	Lease signed or walked away from; financing confirmed in writing; concept and price point locked.
Day 75-60	Legal, permits, insurance	Every permit application is submitted and tracked; corporation, bank account and merchant account exist.
Day 60-45	Build, equipment, systems	Kitchen layout approved, long-lead equipment ordered, POS vendor selected and contracted, suppliers set up.
Day 45-30	People	Org chart, wage bands and hiring plan done; management hired; hourly interviews underway.
Day 30-15	Menu costing and system build	Menu costed and priced; POS fully configured; online ordering live in test mode; listings claimed.
Day 15-7	Training and rehearsal	Staff trained, at least two full service simulations run, opening inventory counted.
Day 7-0	Soft open and final inspections	Occupancy and health sign-off in hand; friends-and-family and soft-open services complete.
Day 1-30 after	Stabilise	Prime cost measured weekly; ticket times trending down; every review answered.

Day 90-75 | Concept, money and the lease

This block is where the economics of the business are decided. Almost nothing you do after day 60 can fix a bad lease or an under-capitalised opening.

Lock the concept before you price anything

Write a one-page concept statement and refuse to move until it survives being read out loud to someone who will be honest with you. It must answer:

- Who is the guest, and what are they doing in the ninety minutes before they walk in? (Finishing a shift, leaving a movie, feeding kids at 5:30 pm.)
- What is the target average cheque per person, before tax and tip, at lunch and at dinner? Every downstream decision - menu, staffing, china, seat count - hangs off this number.
- How many covers per day do you need at that cheque to break even? If you cannot answer this in one line of arithmetic, you are not ready to sign a lease.
- What is the service model? Full service, counter service, hybrid order-at-table? This determines labour model, floor plan, and POS hardware count.
- What are the three dishes people will describe to a friend? If you cannot name them, the menu is not finished.

Build the model, then stress it

- Build a monthly P and L for year one with seasonality, not a flat average. Most markets have a slow stretch; opening into it is survivable only if you budgeted for it.
- Model **prime cost** (cost of goods plus total labour including payroll taxes and benefits) as a percentage of sales. For most full-service independents a sustainable target is roughly 60-65 percent; quick service often runs lower on labour and higher on packaging. Above the high 60s, rent and utilities will leave nothing.
- Model occupancy cost (base rent, additional rent, property tax, insurance) as a percentage of forecast sales. Typical comfort is high single digits to low teens. Above the mid-teens the site has to carry volume you may not get.
- Stress-test at 70 percent of your forecast sales for the first four months. If that scenario runs out of cash, raise more before you sign, not after.
- Budget a working-capital reserve on top of build cost - enough to fund payroll, rent and food purchases through a slow first quarter without new revenue assumptions. Three months of fixed costs is a common floor.

Financing

- [ ] Decide the mix: owner equity, bank or credit-union term loan, government-backed small business loan program, equipment financing or lease, family and friends, landlord fit-out allowance.
- [ ] Get the lender's conditions **in writing** before lease signature. "Verbally approved" is not approved.
- [ ] Understand what the lender will want as security and whether a personal guarantee is required. Assume it is.
- [ ] Separate equipment financing from working capital. Do not spend your operating cushion on a combi oven.
- [ ] Confirm the landlord's fit-out allowance amount, the milestones that release it, and the documentation required (lien waivers, paid invoices, occupancy permit).

DO THIS BEFORE YOU SIGN THE LEASE

Take the draft lease to a commercial real-estate lawyer who has done restaurant deals in your city. Budget for it. The clauses below are the ones that quietly decide whether the business works; get each of them answered in writing and reflected in the document, not in an email from the leasing agent.

Clause	What to ask for	The trap if you do not
Permitted use	Language broad enough to cover your full concept: restaurant, take-out, delivery, catering, retail sales, and licensed alcohol service.	A narrow use clause can block delivery, a bottle shop or a patio later, and gives the landlord leverage on renewal.
Exclusivity	A covenant that the landlord will not lease to another tenant in the property whose primary business is your cuisine or format.	A second coffee shop or a competing pizza operator opens forty feet away and your traffic assumptions collapse.
HVAC and grease trap	Written allocation of who supplies, installs, maintains and replaces rooftop units, make-up air, exhaust, and the grease interceptor; and the age and condition of existing units.	A rooftop unit replacement is a five-figure surprise. Grease interceptor undersizing can fail plumbing inspection weeks before opening.
Fixturing / rent-free period	A fit-out period that begins on **issuance of the building permit**, with an extension if permits are delayed for reasons outside your control.	Rent starts on possession while you wait months for a permit, and you burn working capital on an empty room.
Landlord work letter	A schedule listing exactly what the landlord delivers (electrical service capacity in amps, gas line size, water and sanitary stub locations, HVAC tonnage, demised walls, sprinkler coverage) and by what date.	You discover the panel cannot carry your kitchen and the upgrade is on you.
Assignment and change of control	The right to assign to a purchaser of the business with landlord consent "not to be unreasonably withheld, conditioned or delayed", and a right to transfer to an affiliate without consent.	You cannot sell the business - which is most of your exit value - or the landlord extracts a fee to allow it.
Percentage rent	If percentage rent exists, a clearly defined natural breakpoint, a definition of gross sales that excludes taxes, tips, gift-card sales at issuance, employee meals, comps, refunds and third-party delivery commissions.	You pay percentage rent on money you never kept - most painfully on the gross value of marketplace delivery orders.
Additional rent / CAM	A cap on the annual increase in controllable operating costs, the right to audit the reconciliation, and exclusion of capital replacements.	Additional rent drifts up every year with no explanation and no recourse.
Renewal options	At least one renewal term, with rent set by a defined formula or market arbitration rather than "as agreed".	Year five arrives, you have built the goodwill, and the landlord reprices you out of your own restaurant.
Hours, signage, patio, venting	Written approval for your operating hours, sign locations and sizes, patio footprint, and exhaust routing.	The sign you budgeted for is refused, or the patio you counted on for summer revenue never gets approved.

Clause	What to ask for	The trap if you do not
Demolition / relocation clause	Delete it if possible, or negotiate long notice plus compensation for unamortised leasehold improvements.	The landlord can end your lease to redevelop, and your build-out value evaporates.

Day 75-60 | Entity, permits, insurance, banking

Permits are the critical path. Applications go in during this block even if construction has not started, because approval clocks run in parallel with your build and almost never move faster than the authority's queue.

Corporate and financial set-up

- [ ] Incorporate or register the business entity; register the operating name if it differs from the legal name.
- [ ] Register for sales tax collection and payroll remittance accounts with the relevant tax authorities before your first hire and first sale.
- [ ] Open the business bank account. Bring incorporation documents, directors' identification, and the lease.
- [ ] Open a separate account for sales tax and payroll withholdings, and sweep into it weekly. Money you owe the government is not working capital.
- [ ] Apply for the merchant account and payment processing. Underwriting for a new restaurant with no processing history commonly takes one to three weeks and may require a personal guarantee, so start here rather than in the final fortnight.
- [ ] Engage a bookkeeper and set the chart of accounts now, so that your POS categories and your accounting categories match from day one.
- [ ] Set up payroll: pay periods, statutory deductions, and how tips are recorded and distributed. Decide the tip pool policy in writing before you hire anyone.

Insurance

Quote at least two brokers who write hospitality. Bind coverage before any contractor sets foot on site, and give the landlord a certificate naming them as additional insured if the lease requires it.

- Commercial general liability, with the limit your lease and lender require.
- Liquor liability if you serve alcohol - usually a separate endorsement and usually mandatory for a licence.
- Property and contents, including tenant improvements you paid for.
- Business interruption, including extended period of indemnity - this is the one operators skip and regret.
- Equipment breakdown and spoilage. A walk-in failure over a long weekend is a textbook claim.
- Workers' compensation coverage as required in your jurisdiction.
- Employment practices liability if you will have a sizeable team.
- Cyber liability if you hold guest data or process online orders.
- Builder's risk during construction, and confirmation that every contractor carries their own liability and workers' compensation - collect the certificates.

> **OPERATOR TIP**
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> Assign one person - by name, not by role - to own the permit tracker, and have them phone the authority weekly. Applications sit in queues. A polite weekly call that asks "is anything outstanding from us?" routinely surfaces a missing drawing or an unpaid fee that would otherwise have cost you three weeks.

Licences and permits tracker

Authority names vary by country, province or state, and municipality; the column below gives the typical body. Print this page, fill in your local authority names, and update it weekly. Nothing on this list should be blank in the "Applied" column after day 60.

Item	Typical authority	Applied	Approved	Expiry	Notes
Business licence / municipal business registration	City or municipality				
Food premises / food service establishment permit	Regional or county public health				
Food handler certification (owner plus supervisors)	Public health or accredited trainer				
Building permit (interior alterations)	Municipal building department				
Plumbing permit and backflow prevention	Municipal building / water utility				
Electrical permit and final electrical inspection	Electrical safety authority				
Gas / fuels permit for cooking appliances	Technical standards or fuels authority				
Commercial kitchen hood and fire suppression approval	Fire department / building				
Fire inspection and occupant load certificate	Fire department				
Occupancy permit / final building sign-off	Municipal building department				
Liquor / alcohol sales licence	Provincial or state alcohol regulator				
Liquor server certification for all servers and managers	Regulator-approved training provider				
Patio / sidewalk cafe endorsement and encroachment permit	Municipality plus alcohol regulator				
Sign permit (fascia, projecting, window coverage)	Municipal planning / zoning				
Music licences (performing rights plus recorded music)	Performing-rights and neighbouring-rights societies				
Grease interceptor approval / sewer discharge	Municipal water and wastewater				
Waste and organics collection contract	Municipality or private hauler				
Weights and measures (if selling by weight)	National measurement authority				
Tobacco or lottery endorsements (if applicable)	Provincial or state regulator				
Extended hours / noise exemption (if applicable)	Municipal bylaw office				
Elevator or lift inspection (if applicable)	Technical standards authority				

COMMON MISTAKE

Booking the health inspection and the fire inspection for the same week as your planned opening. Both can fail on first attempt for trivial reasons - a missing thermometer, an unlabelled sanitiser bucket, an exit sign not on emergency power. Schedule both with at least ten days of slack, and ask each inspector during the rough-in stage what they will be looking for at final.

Day 60-45 | Kitchen, equipment and systems

Layout and equipment

- ☐ Finalise the kitchen layout against the menu, not against a generic template. Walk the path of your three highest-volume dishes from walk-in to pass and count the steps. If a cook crosses the line twice to build one plate, redraw it.
- ☐ Confirm electrical load and gas capacity against the equipment schedule before ordering. Compare the total connected load with what the landlord's work letter actually delivers.
- ☐ Order long-lead equipment now: hood and make-up air, walk-in cooler or freezer panels, combi ovens, custom stainless, refrigerated line inserts, dish machine. Lead times of eight to sixteen weeks are normal and they will not compress.
- ☐ Book the hood installer and the fire suppression contractor together, and confirm who pulls the permit for the suppression system.
- ☐ Confirm the make-up air balance. Under-supplied kitchens pull doors shut, kill dining-room comfort, and fail air-balance testing.
- ☐ Specify the dish area properly: soiled landing, pre-rinse, machine, clean landing, and a rack shelf. Undersized dish pits produce more service failures than any single cooking station.
- ☐ Order smallwares against a written par list built from the menu: pans, inserts, tongs, thermometers, scales, deli containers, labels. Budget more than feels reasonable; you will use all of it.
- ☐ Plan and order china, glassware and cutlery against seat count with a replacement multiple - roughly two to three times the seat count for high-turn items.
- ☐ Confirm walk-in and reach-in placement relative to the receiving door. Every delivery, every day, forever, walks this route.

Point of sale and hardware

Select the POS in this block, not later. The vendor needs lead time to build your menu, ship hardware and schedule training, and you need the system configured before staff training starts at day 15.

- ☐ Count the terminals, handhelds, kitchen printers or screens, cash drawers, receipt printers and payment terminals you actually need, then map each to a physical position and a power and network drop.
- ☐ Have the electrician and low-voltage installer place hardwired network drops at every terminal and every KDS position. Do not run a restaurant on wireless alone.
- ☐ Specify a business-grade router with a separate staff and guest network, and a cellular or second-line failover.
- ☐ Put every POS device, network switch, router and kitchen printer on an uninterruptible power supply. A four-second brownout in the middle of Friday service should not restart your kitchen.
- ☐ Confirm how the system behaves when the internet drops: can you still take orders, print to the kitchen, and accept cards offline? Ask for a demonstration, not a promise.

- [ ] Agree the go-live support arrangement in writing: who is on site or on call for the soft open and the first weekend, and at what cost.

What to actually ask a POS vendor

Ask all twelve. Write down the answers. The difference between vendors is almost never the demo screen; it is these answers.

#	Question	Why it matters / what a good answer sounds like
1	What is my total monthly cost in month one, month thirteen and month twenty-five, itemised?	Headline software price often excludes per-terminal fees, online ordering, loyalty, reporting tiers and payment hardware. Ask for an itemised quote and the contracted price escalation.
2	What is my effective payment processing rate on my actual card mix?	Give them a realistic mix of debit, consumer credit and premium credit and ask for the blended effective rate including assessments, and every fixed monthly fee. A rate quoted without the fee schedule is not a quote.
3	Am I locked to your payment processing, and what happens if I want to change processors?	Some platforms will not function without their processing. Understand whether you are buying software, payments, or a bundle you cannot unbundle.
4	What is the contract term, the auto-renewal notice period, and the early termination fee?	You want a clear notice window, no evergreen renewal that requires 90 days' written notice you will forget, and a stated buyout number.
5	Do I own my data, and can I export menu, sales history, guest records and loyalty balances myself, at any time, without asking you?	A good answer is self-serve CSV or API export of all of it. "Contact support and we'll see what we can do" is a lock-in answer.
6	What happens to card payments and kitchen tickets when the internet goes down?	Ask for a live demonstration with the network cable pulled. Find out the offline transaction limit, how long it can stay offline, and who bears the risk of a declined card captured offline.
7	Who owns the hardware, what does replacement cost, and what is the turnaround on a failed terminal?	You want a named next-business-day path and a spare on the shelf for anything single-point-of-failure, especially the payment terminal.
8	How are software updates deployed, and can I defer them?	You do not want a forced update on a Friday at 6 pm. Ask about release windows and rollback.
9	Can you show me the exact reports I will run every Monday morning?	Ask specifically for: sales by category, labour by day-part against sales, voids and comps by employee, discounts by reason, product mix with contribution margin, and payment reconciliation against bank deposits.
10	How does the system handle modifiers, combos, price levels and happy hour?	Have them build one of your genuinely awkward menu items live in the demo - the one with a required choice, two optional add-ons, an upcharge and a size variant. This is the single most revealing test.
11	What does implementation include, who builds my menu, and what does training cost?	Get named deliverables and hours. "We'll get you set up" is not a deliverable. Confirm whether menu build is done for you or by you.
12	What are your support hours, what is the target response time, and how do I reach a human at 8 pm on a Saturday?	Ask for the phone number and call it during the evaluation. The result of that call is your real answer.

Menu engineering, first pass

- ☐ Write the full menu, then cut it by a third. New kitchens with long menus produce slow tickets, high waste and inconsistent food.
- ☐ Count cross-utilisation: every ingredient should appear in at least two dishes. Circle any ingredient used once and justify it or remove it.
- ☐ Check station balance. Lay the menu out by station and count how many items land on each. If eight of twelve mains come off the grill, Friday will fail.
- ☐ Estimate cook times per dish and identify anything over your target ticket time. Decide now whether to par-cook, change the technique, or drop the dish.
- ☐ Confirm every ingredient is actually available from a supplier who delivers to you, at a price you have in writing, in a pack size you can use before it spoils.
- ☐ Draft allergen and dietary notes for each dish. This becomes staff training material and POS modifier logic later.

Suppliers and credit terms

- ☐ Open accounts with a broadline distributor plus at least one backup, produce, protein, dairy, bakery, beverage, coffee, and non-food and chemical suppliers.
- ☐ Ask each for delivery days and cut-off times, and build your prep and ordering calendar around them rather than the other way round.
- ☐ Negotiate terms. New accounts often start prepaid or on cash on delivery; ask what it takes to move to net 15 or net 30 and how many on-time payments that requires.
- ☐ Get price lists in writing and ask which items are market-priced and how often they change.
- ☐ Confirm minimum order values and what a missed minimum costs in delivery fees.
- ☐ Set up a receiving standard now: who receives, who checks temperature and weight, who signs, and where invoices go the same day.
- ☐ Order opening product only for the first ten days. Over-ordering opening inventory is one of the most common and most expensive first-week mistakes.

Day 45-30 | Hiring and the team

Hire management first and let them help hire the line. A general manager or head chef who arrives after the team is assembled inherits a culture they did not choose and will spend three months undoing it.

Headcount guidance

Use the table as a starting frame for a roughly 60-90 seat full-service restaurant open six or seven days, then adjust for your service model, hours and menu complexity. Counter-service and quick-service concepts run leaner front of house and heavier on a single cross-trained hourly pool.

Role	Typical opening headcount	Hire by	Notes
General manager	1	Day 60	Hire first. Involve in POS selection, hiring and menu pricing.
Head chef / kitchen manager	1	Day 60	Owns menu execution, recipe cards, prep lists and food cost.
Assistant manager / supervisor	1-2	Day 40	You need someone to close so the GM is not working 70 hours a week by week three.
Sous chef / lead line cook	1-2	Day 40	Hire the strongest cook you can afford; they set the pace of the line.
Line cooks	3-6	Day 30	Staff to your busiest projected service, not your average.
Prep cook	1-2	Day 25	Under-hiring prep pushes prep onto line cooks and blows up ticket times.
Dishwasher / porter	2-3	Day 25	The most under-hired role in the industry. Two on weekends.
Servers	6-10	Day 25	Plan for a mix of full and part time and expect 10-20 percent not to show for training.
Bartender	1-3	Day 30	Also owns bar par levels, pour standards and opening liquor inventory.
Host / expeditor	2-3	Day 25	A dedicated expo for the first month is worth the labour cost.
Busser / server assistant	2-4	Day 20	Protects table turn time during the opening weeks.

> **OPERATOR TIP**
> Over-hire hourly staff by roughly 15-20 percent for opening. A share of new hires will not finish training, and a share will discover the job is not what they expected once real service starts. It is far easier to reduce hours in week three than to hire and train a line cook in week two while you are also running a restaurant.

Wage banding

- Set a band - minimum, target and ceiling - for every role before you post a single job. Without bands you will pay whatever the last candidate asked for and create pay compression you cannot unwind.
- Anchor the bands to what comparable restaurants in your immediate area are actually advertising this month, not to national figures.

- Decide and document the tip policy before hiring: tip pool or individual, whether kitchen shares, how it is calculated, and how it appears on a pay statement. Check your jurisdiction's rules on tip pooling and on employer participation.
- Model total labour cost, not wage rate: employer payroll taxes, statutory holiday pay, vacation accrual, workers' compensation premiums and any benefits typically add a meaningful percentage on top of the hourly rate.
- Decide your salaried-versus-hourly line for managers and confirm it against the overtime rules in your jurisdiction.

Job posts and interviews

- [ ] Write posts that state the wage range, the schedule, and the start date. Posts without a range get fewer and worse applicants.
- [ ] Post to the channels your candidates actually use, and put a sign in the window - for hourly roles, local walk-in traffic is still one of the best sources.
- [ ] Run a structured interview: same questions, same order, scored immediately.
- [ ] For kitchen roles, run a paid working interview - two to three hours on the line or on prep. You will learn more than in five conversations.
- [ ] Check two references for every manager and every kitchen lead. Ask one question: "would you rehire them, and why?"
- [ ] Send written offers with role, wage, schedule expectation, start date and training dates. Verbal offers produce no-shows.
- [ ] Collect payroll paperwork, work eligibility documentation and required certifications before the first shift, not after.

Interview scorecard

Score each dimension 1-5 immediately after the interview, before discussing the candidate with anyone else. Set a hire threshold in advance - for example, a minimum total and no score below 2 on reliability.

Dimension	What you are listening for	1-2	3	4-5
Reliability	Concrete examples of showing up, tenure in previous roles, how they handled a conflict with a schedule.			
Pace under pressure	A specific busy service described in detail, including what went wrong and what they did.			
Guest orientation	Whether they describe guests as people or as obstacles. Ask about a complaint they handled.			
Teamwork	Do they say "we" about previous kitchens or "they"? Ask who they learned the most from.			
Coachability	Ask for feedback they received and disagreed with, and what they did about it.			
Relevant skill	Verified through a working interview or a practical question, not a claim on a resume.			
Availability fit	Actual availability against your actual schedule needs, including weekends and closes.			

Training calendar

- Block training dates before you make offers, and put them in every offer letter.
- Plan roughly 12-20 hours of paid training for hourly front-of-house staff and more for kitchen, spread over the final two weeks. Budget it as a real line item.
- Build the training content now: menu book with descriptions, allergens and pronunciation; steps of service; POS how-to; opening and closing checklists by station; safety and food-handling; alcohol service rules; and your complaint recovery procedure.
- Name a trainer for each area and give them the material a week early so they can learn it themselves first.

Day 30-15 | Costing, pricing and system build

Menu costing and pricing

- ☐ Build a recipe card for every menu item: exact yields, portion weights, and as-purchased versus edible-portion cost. Estimating portion cost from a case price without a yield test understates food cost, usually badly.
- ☐ Run yield tests on your top proteins and any produce with heavy trim loss. Record the yield percentage and use it in the recipe card.
- ☐ Calculate plate cost including garnish, sauce, oil, and anything that goes in the bread basket. Small unpriced extras are where food cost quietly leaks.
- ☐ Price for **contribution margin in currency**, not just food cost percentage. A dish at 34 percent cost that contributes $19 usually beats one at 24 percent that contributes $7.
- ☐ Sanity-check every price against what your guest will accept and against nearby comparable restaurants. Adjust the dish, the portion or the plate cost - not the target margin.
- ☐ Set your target weighted food cost across the projected menu mix, then check the menu delivers it at your forecast mix, not at an equal-weight average.
- ☐ Decide beverage pricing separately by category: liquor, beer and wine each carry different cost structures and different sensible pour-cost targets.
- ☐ Design the physical menu to guide the eye toward high-contribution items. Avoid aligned price columns, which invite price shopping down the column.

POS build

Set a build freeze one week before training. Staff cannot learn a system that is still changing under them.

Menu, modifiers and taxes

- ☐ Build the category tree so it matches how you want to read reports later: your reporting categories are set here and are painful to restructure after you have sales history.
- ☐ Build modifier groups with explicit required-versus-optional flags and minimum and maximum selections. Test every combination on a live terminal.
- ☐ Set price-carrying modifiers and upcharges, and confirm they flow into the correct reporting category rather than disappearing into a generic bucket.
- ☐ Configure taxes precisely: which items are taxable, which are exempt, whether take-out and dine-in are taxed differently, and how alcohol is treated. Verify with your accountant and run a test ticket for each case.
- ☐ Configure gratuity handling: suggested tip percentages and whether they are calculated before or after tax, automatic gratuity thresholds for large parties, and how tips are reported for payroll.
- ☐ Build happy hour and any time-based price levels, then test by changing the terminal clock or scheduling a test window.
- ☐ Enter open-item and miscellaneous buttons deliberately and restrict who can use them. Unrestricted open items are a control weakness.

Floor plan, routing and permissions

- ☐ Draw the floor plan in the POS to match the physical room, including patio and bar, and number tables the way staff will actually refer to them.

- ☐ Build the printer and kitchen-screen routing matrix: for each menu category, which station receives it, and what happens if that device fails.
- ☐ Configure a backup route for every station so a failed printer redirects rather than silently dropping tickets.
- ☐ Set up staff records, PINs and permission levels. Decide who can void, comp, discount, reopen a closed cheque, adjust a tip, and run a report - and make those different permission levels.
- ☐ Require a reason code on every void, comp and discount. This single setting is the foundation of your loss-prevention reporting.
- ☐ Configure cash management: drawer assignment, blind close or not, float amount, paid-outs and who can perform them.
- ☐ Print a test ticket from every device and walk it to the station it belongs to. Do this with the kitchen team present.

Digital presence

- ☐ Set up online ordering with the same menu data as the POS so prices and modifiers cannot drift apart, and set realistic quote times for opening week - then extend them.
- ☐ Claim and complete your Google Business Profile: exact category, hours, service options, menu link, ordering link, and at least fifteen good photographs.
- ☐ Claim your listing on the major review and map platforms and any local guides.
- ☐ Secure matching social handles and the domain, and point the domain at a simple site with hours, address, menu, phone number and an order link. Nothing else matters on day one.
- ☐ Book a photographer for a half day: hero dishes, the room empty and full, the bar, the team. Shoot the menu items you most want to sell, not the ones that photograph most easily.
- ☐ Set up the reservations or waitlist tool and test the confirmation messages a real guest will receive.
- ☐ Write and schedule the opening-week posts now, while you still have time.

> **COMMON MISTAKE**
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> Launching third-party delivery in week one. Marketplace commissions, packaging costs and a kitchen that has not found its rhythm combine into orders that lose money and generate one-star reviews you will carry for years. Open dine-in, stabilise the line, then switch delivery on - typically somewhere between week three and week six.

Day 15-7 | Training and rehearsal

Staff training

- ☐ Day 15-13: orientation, policies, payroll paperwork, food safety, alcohol service rules, and a full menu tasting. Staff must taste everything they will sell.
- ☐ Day 13-11: station training. Every person walks their own opening checklist, mid checklist and closing checklist with the trainer, on the real equipment.
- ☐ Day 12-10: POS training on live terminals with a training mode or a test day-part. Every server rings twenty realistic tickets including modifiers, splits, voids, a comp, a partial payment and a card refund.
- ☐ Day 11-9: kitchen production run. Cook the full menu at volume, plate every dish, photograph each plate and post the photographs on the line as the plating standard.
- ☐ Day 10-8: service simulation one. Staff and family act as guests. Run a deliberately imperfect service - send a wrong dish, run out of an item, split a cheque six ways - and debrief for thirty minutes afterwards.
- ☐ Day 9-7: service simulation two, at higher volume, with the full team and real ticket times measured.
- ☐ Friends and family service: charge nothing or charge a nominal amount, but run every ticket through the POS at full price and then comp it, so the system, the kitchen printers and the reporting all get exercised.

Line checks and standards

- Write the line check sheet and run it at every simulation: every product tasted, every temperature logged, every container labelled and dated, every station stocked to par.
- Post par levels at each station. Ambiguity about par is the source of most eighty-sixes in the first month.
- Photograph every finished dish and post the images at the pass. The plating standard should be visible, not remembered.
- Log cook times per dish during the simulations and identify the two dishes that will hold the pass on a busy Friday. Fix them now.

Opening inventory and cash controls

- ☐ Count opening inventory the night before you open, at cost, by category, with two people counting and one recording. This count is the baseline for every food cost number you will ever calculate.
- ☐ Enter opening counts into your inventory system or spreadsheet the same night and reconcile against invoices.
- ☐ Count liquor by weight or by tenths and record it separately from food. Bar inventory drifts fastest.
- ☐ Set the cash float amount per drawer and count it in with two signatures.
- ☐ Write the cash handling procedure: who counts, when, blind or open, where the safe drop happens, who has safe access, and how variances are reported. One page, signed by everyone who touches cash.
- ☐ Set the daily deposit routine and confirm with the bank how and when deposits post.
- ☐ Order and test gift cards if you will sell them, and confirm how the liability is recorded in the POS and in your books.

Incident and complaint process

- Write the recovery ladder: what a server can do without asking (remake a dish, remove an item), what needs a supervisor (comp a course, comp a cheque), and what needs the owner. Give the front line real authority; hesitation is what turns a problem into a review.

- Define the allergen protocol end to end: how the order is taken, how it is flagged in the POS, how the kitchen segregates it, and how it is delivered to the table and identified by name.
- Write the injury, illness and food-safety incident procedure, including who to call and what to document. Post it.
- Decide who responds to online reviews, in what tone, and within what time. Twenty four hours is a reasonable standard.

Day 7-0 | Soft open and go live

The soft-open sequence

1. **Day 7-6 - final inspections.** Health, fire and occupancy. Do not schedule anything else these two days; keep them free to fix whatever is found.
2. **Day 5 - friends and family, invite only, limited menu.** Half capacity. Objective: prove the system, not the food. Collect written feedback.
3. **Day 4 - debrief and fix.** Full team meeting. Fix ticket times, station layout, POS button placement and anything that caused a delay.
4. **Day 3-2 - soft open to the public, reduced hours and reduced menu.** Say publicly that you are in soft open; guests are remarkably forgiving when told. Cap covers deliberately.
5. **Day 1 - rest and reset.** Deep clean, restock to par, count inventory, fix the last items on the punch list. Do not serve.
6. **Day 0 - open.** Full menu, full hours, full team, owner on the floor.

Marketing push

- ☐ Announce the opening week - not a single date - two weeks out, and confirm the exact day only once occupancy is granted.
- ☐ Invite local food writers, neighbourhood groups and nearby business owners to the soft open. Local matters more than reach.
- ☐ Post the menu with prices publicly before you open. Guests decide whether to come based on it.
- ☐ Brief every staff member on what to say when guests ask when you are opening, so the answer is consistent.
- ☐ Have a plan for the first-week photograph flood: encourage it, provide good light at the entrance and a well-lit signature dish.
- ☐ Do not run a heavy discount promotion in week one. You will attract volume you cannot yet execute against and train guests to wait for discounts.

Day-one checklist

- ☐ Float counted into every drawer, two signatures.
- ☐ Payment terminals tested with a real card, and a refund tested and confirmed.
- ☐ Every kitchen printer and screen tested with a live ticket.
- ☐ Network and failover confirmed; UPS units on and charged.
- ☐ Line check completed and signed; all temperatures logged.
- ☐ Par levels stocked at every station, front and back.
- ☐ Eighty-six board and communication channel live.
- ☐ Reservations and waitlist confirmed; door staff briefed.
- ☐ Online ordering set to the correct quote time or switched off for day one.
- ☐ Pre-shift meeting held: menu run-through, eighty-sixes, section assignments, target ticket times, and one specific service focus for the night.
- ☐ Owner and manager both on the floor, neither of them behind the line.
- ☐ Someone assigned to photograph the room and the plates during service.

Opening week daily rhythm

Time	Who	What happens	Output
8:00	Manager	Read yesterday's sales, labour, voids and comps in the POS. Note the three worst numbers.	Three numbers on the pre-shift sheet.
8:30	Chef	Review yesterday's ticket times by dish. Identify the slowest two.	One fix per slow dish.
9:00	Chef / manager	Receive deliveries, check temperature and weight against the invoice, put away immediately.	Signed invoices to bookkeeping same day.
9:30	Kitchen	Prep against the par sheet, not against memory.	Prep list signed off.
11:00	Manager	Count float, test one card transaction and one kitchen ticket.	Systems confirmed before doors.
11:30	Full team	Pre-shift: eighty-sixes, specials, sections, one service focus.	Everyone hears the same thing.
Service	Expo / manager	Watch the pass, not the office. Log every eighty-six, every remake and every long ticket.	Service log.
Mid-shift	Manager	Cut labour if sales are below forecast; call in if above. Decide by 3:00 pm.	Adjusted schedule.
Close	Manager	Cash count, deposit, close cheques, run the void and comp report and read it.	Reconciled day.
Close	Chef	Line clean, label and date everything, walk-in organised, order placed against par.	Order sent before cut-off.
Close +30	Manager / chef	Ten-minute debrief: what broke, what to change tomorrow. Write it down.	Tomorrow's fix list.

Day 1-30 after opening | Stabilise

The first month is not about growth. It is about making the operation repeatable and finding out where money leaks before the leaks become habits.

What to watch, and how often

Metric	Cadence	What good looks like early	What to do if it moves the wrong way
Prime cost	Weekly, not monthly	Trending toward your plan by week four; opening weeks will be worse.	Split it: is it food, beverage or labour? Fix the larger half first. Do not cut both at once or you cannot tell what worked.
Food cost variance (theoretical versus actual)	Weekly once counts are reliable	Gap narrowing week over week.	Look at portioning, waste, over-ordering and receiving accuracy before you suspect theft.
Voids and comps	Daily, by employee and reason	Falling steadily as training takes hold; reasons recorded on every one.	Retrain on the specific reason codes that dominate. A void with no reason is a process failure, not a staff failure.
Ticket times by dish and day-part	Daily	Converging on your target; the tail shrinking, not just the average.	Fix the slowest two dishes: change the prep, the technique or the station. Watch the average and the worst ticket separately.
Labour as a percentage of sales, and sales per labour hour	Daily and weekly	Sales per labour hour improving as the team gets faster.	Adjust the schedule shape, not just the headcount. Most opening labour waste is in the wrong hours, not the wrong number of people.
Reviews	Daily	Every review answered within 24 hours, in your own voice.	Look for the same word appearing three times. That word is your actual problem, whatever you believe it is.
Cash over and short	Daily	Within a small tolerance, with variances explained.	Tighten drawer assignment and blind close before you suspect anyone.
Waste log	Daily	Logged at all - most restaurants never start.	Adjust par levels and prep quantities from the log, weekly.
Repeat guests	Weekly from week three	Recognisable faces returning within the first month.	If nobody returns, the issue is rarely price. Ask ten guests directly.

Week-by-week focus

- **Week 1:** execution only. Do not add menu items, do not add hours, do not add channels. Fix the pass and the door.
- **Week 2:** labour shape. Rebuild the schedule from actual hourly sales, not from your forecast. Cut the shifts that produced no sales.
- **Week 3:** cost control. First real inventory count against theoretical usage. Expect an unpleasant number; it is information, not a verdict.
- **Week 4:** menu. Pull the product mix report and rank items by units sold and contribution margin. The bottom of that list is your first menu cut. Add nothing before you remove something.
- **Week 4:** switch on delivery or extended hours only if ticket times and review sentiment are both stable.

OPERATOR TIP

Book a standing 90-minute meeting with yourself every Monday morning for the first year: sales, prime cost, labour, voids and comps, product mix, and reviews. Same six reports, same order, every week. Operators who do this catch problems in week two. Operators who wait for the monthly statement catch them in week nine, after ten thousand dollars has already walked out the door.

A short note on what actually goes wrong

In the projects that slip, the cause is almost never the thing the owner was worrying about. It is usually one of five things: a permit application that went in three weeks late; a long-lead equipment item ordered after the layout changed; a lease clause that was never negotiated; a menu that was too long for the kitchen that was built; or a management hire made in the last fortnight out of desperation. Every one of those is decided before day 45. Spend your energy there.