

## THE RESTAURANT START-UP MASTER PLAYBOOK

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### INTRODUCTION: REALITY CHECK

Opening a restaurant isn't just about food — it's about systems, timing, and discipline. Every day before you open, you're spending money. Every delay costs rent. Every oversight costs sanity.

Most owners underestimate this process by a mile.

This guide is intentionally overwhelming. It shows you exactly how much is involved — not to scare you, but to prepare you.

If this feels like too much, that's the point. You'll see why ROI Restaurant Consulting exists.

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### PHASE 1: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

#### The Mission

Your concept is your identity — it decides who your guests are, what your brand feels like, and how profitable you'll be.

#### What Needs to Happen

- Define your restaurant in **one sentence** — clear, repeatable, and emotional.
- Develop your **brand story** — why does this concept deserve to exist?
- Build your **competitive analysis** — not just who sells similar food, but who owns your customer's attention.
- Draft your **menu** early — include estimated food cost %, labor requirements, and prep complexity.
- Create a **brand identity kit** (color palette, tone of voice, logo, fonts).
- Build a **mood board** that defines your atmosphere, uniforms, and service tone.
- Identify **core values** that can scale — consistency, cleanliness, hospitality, or speed.

**Pro Tip:** Don't copy your favorite restaurant — study what *problem* they solve and find your own angle.

### **ROI Note:**

Most clients bring ROI in right here.

Our team validates your concept, tests your menu against target margins, builds your first budget, and creates your brand identity.

We make sure you're not building something beautiful that doesn't make money.

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## **PHASE 2: FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY**

### **The Mission**

You're not opening a hobby — you're building an investment.

The only way to win is to treat this like a business from day one.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Build a **complete startup budget** with line items for:
  - Construction and design
  - Equipment and POS
  - Pre-opening payroll
  - Training, marketing, signage, permits, and working capital
- Create **three-year projections** with realistic assumptions (most new restaurants lose money for 3–6 months).
- Build **sensitivity models** — what happens if food cost rises by 3% or labor by 5%?
- Calculate **daily break-even**: how much do you need to sell just to stay open?
- Secure **funding**: personal equity, SBA, investors, or private lending.
- Plan **cash flow** carefully — payables vs receivables, deposits vs retainers.
- Build your **chart of accounts** and choose an accounting platform (QuickBooks, Restaurant365).

### **Pro Tip:**

Overbudget by 15%. Every single project hits a surprise.

### **ROI Note:**

ROI builds your entire financial model — startup budget, forecast, labor models, and break-even.

We don't guess. We run the numbers, find your blind spots, and give you a real launch budget so you don't blow it halfway through construction.

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## **PHASE 3: SITE SELECTION & LEASE NEGOTIATION**

### **The Mission**

The wrong site kills more restaurants than bad food ever will.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Define your **ideal trade area** — visibility, accessibility, parking, and traffic patterns.
- Tour **5–10 potential locations** and evaluate foot traffic, demographics, and nearby anchors.
- Walk every site with a **contractor and architect** — confirm power, gas, and HVAC capacities.
- Verify **zoning and liquor eligibility** before signing anything.
- Negotiate **tenant improvements (TI)** and **free rent** terms.
- Review **CAM charges, renewal options, exclusivity clauses**, and **personal guarantees**.
- Obtain **as-built drawings** from the landlord.
- Always have your **attorney review** final lease terms.

### **Pro Tip:**

You can't fix bad parking or low visibility. Ever.

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### **ROI Note:**

ROI reviews your potential sites, works with your broker, and negotiates with your landlord. We know how to push back on lease language, what to ask for, and how to avoid signing your way into a financial chokehold.

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## **PHASE 4: DESIGN & PERMITTING**

### **The Mission**

Your restaurant must pass every inspection, meet every code, and still feel like your brand.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Hire a **restaurant architect** — not residential.
- Build **kitchen layout** based on workflow, not looks.
- Submit drawings to **building, fire, health, and planning departments**.
- Track permits weekly — government timelines move slow unless you push.
- Confirm **ADA compliance**, hood system specs, HVAC load, and fire suppression.
- Choose **durable materials** that meet health code but still look great.
- Order **long-lead items** (hood, walk-in, lighting, custom millwork).
- Create a **permitting tracker** with every agency, submission date, and approval deadline.

### **Pro Tip:**

Inspectors aren't your enemy — build relationships early, communicate often.

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### **ROI Note:**

ROI handles this entire process for you — plan submission, contractor coordination, and inspection scheduling.

We stay on every submittal until approval so you don't lose months waiting on paperwork.

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## **PHASE 5: CONSTRUCTION & BUILD-OUT**

### **The Mission**

Keep it on schedule, keep it on budget, and keep your sanity intact.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Get **3 competitive bids** from licensed contractors.
- Hold a **kickoff meeting** before construction starts.
- Set a **milestone schedule** — framing, MEP, inspections, finishes.
- Visit the site **twice weekly** — check punch lists and photo progress.
- Approve **change orders** in writing.
- Schedule **rough-in, hood, plumbing, electrical, and final inspections** early.
- Keep **as-built documentation** for future maintenance.
- Secure **Certificate of Occupancy** before equipment arrives.

### **Pro Tip:**

Never make the final payment until *everything* on the punch list is complete.

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### **ROI Note:**

ROI acts as your project manager — we oversee construction, coordinate inspections, track milestones, and verify payments.

Our oversight keeps you from getting buried in chaos, change orders, or GC excuses.

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## **PHASE 6: PRE-OPENING OPERATIONS**

### **The Mission**

The goal isn't to open — it's to open *ready*.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Register your business, get your EIN, and open your bank accounts.
- Set up **accounting, POS, payroll, and scheduling systems**.
- Establish all **vendor accounts** — food, beverage, linen, pest, waste, chemicals, and uniforms.

- Create **SOPs** for receiving, prep, cooking, cleaning, and cash handling.
- Develop **inventory sheets** and **par levels** by category.
- Program **POS menu** with correct pricing, modifiers, and tax.
- Set up **music, cameras, thermostats, and lighting systems**.
- Train managers on **purchasing, invoice coding, and deposit logs**.
- Create **recipe books** with portion sizes and yield tests.
- Build **opening and closing checklists** for every department.

**Pro Tip:**

The “final two weeks” are 90% logistics and 10% panic. The more you plan now, the smoother it’ll be.

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**ROI Note:**

This is where ROI shines. We build your systems — vendor lists, SOPs, recipes, training binders, and daily operating sheets — so you can step into opening day organized and confident.

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## **PHASE 7: HIRING & TRAINING**

### **The Mission**

Good people make good food possible. Training makes it consistent.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Hire managers **3–4 weeks before opening**.
- Build **job descriptions** with accountability checklists.
- Schedule **orientation** covering brand, culture, and safety.
- Conduct **three weeks of training** — kitchen, service, safety, and leadership.
- Hold **mock service nights** — full volume, simulated guests, full menu.
- Evaluate performance daily and coach on spot.

- Prepare **opening week schedule** with backups in case of turnover.

**Pro Tip:**

Don't hire for skill — hire for work ethic. You can teach skills.

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**ROI Note:**

ROI provides full training programs — FOH, BOH, management, and leadership development.

We train your team the way corporate chains do, so your standards stick.

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## **PHASE 8: MARKETING & BRAND LAUNCH**

### **The Mission**

If nobody knows you're opening, you're already behind.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Finalize **logo, menu design, uniforms, and packaging**.
- Claim and optimize **Google, Yelp, and social media** listings.
- Launch your **website** with strong SEO and a "Coming Soon" page.
- Schedule **press releases** and local media outreach.
- Create a **soft opening event** for friends and influencers.
- Plan **grand opening marketing** — promotions, giveaways, partnerships.
- Launch a **loyalty or email marketing system**.

**Pro Tip:**

Build awareness 30 days before you open, not 3 days after.

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**ROI Note:**

ROI creates your marketing plan, manages your SEO, and coordinates your pre-opening PR push.

We make sure you don't open to an empty dining room.

## **PHASE 9: HEALTH, SAFETY, & COMPLIANCE**

### **The Mission**

If you don't pass inspection, nothing else matters.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Schedule **final health, fire, and building inspections**.
- Verify **all certifications** (ServSafe, alcohol, first aid).
- Post **permits and labor law posters** visibly.
- Conduct **mock inspections** and correct everything before the real one.
- Implement **temperature logs, sanitation logs, and cleaning schedules**.
- Review **insurance policies** for coverage limits.
- Train staff on **accident and emergency protocols**.

### **Pro Tip:**

Keep inspectors happy. Clean, organized operations are your best defense.

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### **ROI Note:**

ROI coordinates all your final inspections, handles compliance documentation, and ensures your restaurant opens clean, legal, and certified.

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## **PHASE 10: OPENING & OPTIMIZATION**

### **The Mission**

Opening isn't success. Sustaining is.

### **What Needs to Happen**

- Hold **friends-and-family nights** for soft openings.
- Collect **guest and staff feedback** forms.
- Track **labor and food cost daily** — not weekly.

- Conduct **post-opening audits** at 30, 60, and 90 days.
- Adjust menu pricing, recipes, or staffing as needed.
- Keep marketing consistent — post regularly, respond to every review.
- Continue leadership meetings weekly for accountability.

**Pro Tip:**

Opening day isn't about profit — it's about process.

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**ROI Note:**

ROI stays with you through the first 90 days — auditing performance, analyzing costs, and optimizing operations until your systems run smoothly and profitably.

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**FINAL WORD**

You can absolutely open a restaurant on your own — if you want to lose sleep, burn money, and age five years in the process.

Or, you can call **ROI Restaurant Consulting**, and we'll bring order, experience, and proven systems to every phase.

Because at ROI, we don't just open restaurants.

We build businesses designed to last.

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**ROI Restaurant Consulting**

**[www.roirestaurantconsulting.com](http://www.roirestaurantconsulting.com)**

*Restaurant Start-Ups • Turnarounds • Project Management • Remodels*