

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Thinking about a move into food to go?  
Aidan Fortune has some expert advice



## Is it for me?

First off, it's important to look at whether your store could cope with a food-to-go installation and if it would benefit your business. Country Choice marketing controller Stephen Clifford says that it's important to conduct a proper business appraisal before jumping in. Country Choice, owner of the Bake & Bite brand, does this for all new customers, but as a rough rule of thumb if you are near a station, town centre, school/university, factory, bus stop or office then there's a good chance food to go will work for you.

Max Jenvey of food-to-go specialists Oxygen Marketing Partnership adds: "If your store can spare 1.5 metres of counter, you're in the right location and have strong enough footfall to merit it, then there is an excellent case for an installation," he says.

Around 25% of a typical c-store customer base will buy foodservice items if they are available, he adds.



## How much will it cost me?

There are several ways to get into food to go:

**Supplier funded:** Sometimes known as a 'free on loan' agreement, here the supplier provides everything, from the counter-top unit, pos material, oven and freezer to training. There is no initial charge except for the cost of stock and items such as bags, napkins, cups and so on. Therein lies the sting in the tail, though, as the cost of the hardware is wrapped up in the supply of the product.

**Part supplier funded and part operator funded:** a similar set-up to before, but the cost of product is lower, depending on how much of an investment you can make. An operator could invest as little as £350.

**Operator funded:** The retailer buys all the equipment, and gets a much better cost price on bakery products as a result. This method means you can also shop around as you would not be tied to a single supplier; your sausage rolls could come from Country Choice but your croissants may be from Cuisine de France.

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### What do I stock?

According to Jenvey, food to go customers can be broken into several categories: white van man; morning commuters; top-up shoppers; long-distance drivers; those on the school run; and upmarket customers looking for good-quality products.

These are all cash-rich and time-poor individuals who are key targets for a food-to-go offering, he says. "Some 44% of food-to-go customers will purchase a product for either their breakfast, lunch or dinner, so these are all demographics that should be focused on."

Clifford believes that once you have chosen your demographic you should select the products that best suit that market and target specific meal occasions. "For example, breakfast baps and savouries are popular with men, but if you have a significant female customer base then provide Viennoiserie products and Danish pastries," he says.

"At lunchtime a filled baguette or sandwich offer should include something for everyone, so offer a couple of varieties of bread carrier and a varied selection of meat fillings, as well as vegetarian option."

Clifford says late afternoon is the after-school 'energy boost' period and advises offering confectionery items such as donuts, muffins and cookies. Change it again in the early evening to incorporate pizzas, rotisserie chicken and potato combos. These may also work at lunchtimes depending on the demographics.

Retailers should review their range at least every six months with a view to including seasonal offers and promotions, adds Jenvey.



### How about training?

Anyone who works on a food-to-go station needs training in food and hygiene safety, says Jenvey. "This covers health & safety laws; temperature checks; traceability; shelf life; stock rotation; personal hygiene; food preparation; and storage of food. Hygiene is a key factor in training and areas that should be covered include bacterial control; hand and uniform cleanliness; cross-contamination; food poisoning and pest control."

The time it takes to train staff depends on the product range and the number of people who need to be trained. For a small site it will probably take only a day, whereas at a larger site it might take up to a week.

Training can be provided by a local council or specialist consultancy such as Technical Foodservices. Country Choice also offers on-site training to all of its customers, with refresher courses available if needed.



### Useful numbers

**Oxygen Marketing Partnership**  
tel: 020 8572 3780  
**Country Choice**  
tel: 0800 521 366  
**Cuisine De France**  
tel: 020 8917 9734

### Where to put it

Now that you've decided to stock food to go and have chosen the range to best suit your store, where to put it is the next big decision to make. Clifford points out a common mistake made by retailers: "From an operational point of view you might think that the back of the store near the freezers is the best place to site it, or even a convenient alcove somewhere. However, in reality, the best place is where it is most visible to your customers. There is an element of impulse to food-to-go purchases and so your offer needs to be in clear view."

If the best location already has something important filling it, then it may be time to decide which has the potential to offer more to your business. "Food-to-go profit margins can be up to 60% and the category can contribute as much as 15% to the total turnover of some stores," says Clifford. "So a retailer needs to compare this with the return they are getting from whatever already occupies the space."

Clifford also advises retailers to keep food to go in one place to avoid confusion, but says that dump bins for prepacked impulse items such as muffins, cookies and donuts could be multi-sited.

### Waste control

This is a tricky area as offering too much choice in one go can lead to wastage and cost you money, whereas too little on display looks poor and may mean disappointed customers.

"Minimum credible displays are essential," says Jenvey. "For low-volume stores, a thaw & serve offer or prepacked range could be the best way to create a good presentation without too much wastage."

"Ginsters is the nation's favourite when it comes to prepacked bakery goods, and if you can store and display thaw & serve ranges then Cuisine de France or Country Choice will certainly help you with product choice, display and promotional materials."

He adds that for fully baked offers there are some golden rules to follow. "Bake little and often to ensure best quality products," he says.

"Only produce in line with customer demand and frequency - typically the six till nine morning period is one of the busiest times for hot beverages and pastry sales. The aroma alone will sell the offer for you."

### retailer view

## Elle Farrington



"When we first set out our food-to-go offering, it took a while for everyone to find their feet. We had to make sure that we all knew the procedures to be followed. Planning and communication are essential and it's important that all staff understand their role."

"We have seven metres of food to go, including a hot food counter. Our range includes subs, wraps, pizzas, cakes and salads. Our supplier, Country Choice, has promotions on a regular basis and we also try to mix up our range to keep customers interested."

"I would advise anyone considering moving into food to speak to other retailers involved in it. Most suppliers will also answer any questions."

Elle Farrington, FTG manager, Tates Spar, Sleaford, Lincolnshire

### retailer view

## Harry Goraya



"We first introduced food to go in the store as a trial to see if it would be successful. It has definitely justified the space we've allocated it and we are now making enquiries about increasing the range of goods we sell. We're hoping to expand our hot beverage and donut offering."

"It's important that a store has the right range for its area and monitors what is selling. If you can keep track of what is popular and what isn't then there is more chance of your food to go service being successful. If it's not watched then wastage will start building up and you will start losing money."

"There's almost always a market for food to go in an area and once the offering is presented well with high standards then there is no reason why it won't justify its position in your store."

Harry Goraya, Nisa-Local, Gravesend, Kent

### Spread the word

Tips on how to draw customers' attention to your food-to-go area:

- Display menu boards with clear pricing around the store
- Use pos material to promote meal deals
- Ask your suppliers for eye-catching visuals
- Consider investing in branded packaging and napkins