

# Restaurant Launch Checklist

From Concept to Opening Day

## Introduction

Launching a restaurant is exciting — but without a clear roadmap, it's easy to overlook critical tasks, hit delays, or incur avoidable costs. This checklist is designed to guide you through every major milestone, from **concept** through **first 90 days of operations**. Use it as:

- A print-out to track progress
- A digital tool your team shares
- A strategic plan to keep your project on time and on budget

Each task includes space for **Owner/Responsible**, **Target Date**, and a ✓ Done checkbox — so you stay accountable and on-schedule.

## Step 1: Nail Down Your Concept (and Build the Brand Around It)

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Define target guest profile and core audience (persona, habits, needs)			
Choose concept and theme that reflect story and positioning (e.g., street food, farm-to-table, fusion)			
Develop brand story and visual identity — name, logo, colors, voice & moodboard			
Identify unique selling proposition (USP) and brand values that guide guest experience			
Define menu direction (high-level — type of food, service style, vibe) to match concept			
Create brand assets (checklist for logo files, fonts, brand guide, social handles secured)			
Align brand story with physical design and guest journey (signage, menu, music, tone)			

### Key Insights:

Your restaurant's concept is more than cuisine — it's the story you're telling. It defines the mood, audience, and experience you deliver. A cohesive concept + brand identity becomes your north star for every future decision — from menu design and interior style to hiring and marketing tone.

## Step 2: Design a Smart, Profitable Menu

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Draft initial menu aligned with concept and kitchen capacity			
Analyze ingredient costs and target food cost percentage			
Identify high-margin and signature items			
Design menu layout emphasizing profitability and clarity			
Test menu pricing strategy against competition and customer perception			
Create portion control and recipe cards for cost consistency			

### Key Insights:

A great menu balances creativity and profit. Keep it focused, cost-controlled, and visually strategic. Every item should have a purpose — either margin or marketing value.

### Step 3: Build a Real Business Plan

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Write mission and vision statements			
Define concept summary and market analysis			
Develop operations plan (staffing, hours, systems)			
Outline startup costs and 3-year financial projections			
Identify competition and differentiation strategy			
Include marketing and growth plan for investors			

#### Key Insights:

Your business plan is your roadmap. It's not just for investors — it keeps you accountable and strategic. Refine it as you progress.

#### Step 4: Figure Out the Money (and Where It's Coming From)

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Estimate startup and pre-opening costs			
Define monthly operating budget and break-even point			
Decide funding strategy (self-funded, investors, loans, crowdfunding)			
Prepare investor pitch or loan package			
Open business bank account and			
accounting system setup			

#### Key Insights:

Funding defines your runway. Know your numbers cold — costs, margins, payback plan. Transparency builds trust with lenders and investors.

## Step 5: Choose a Location That Matches Your Vision

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Conduct location scouting and demographic analysis			
Assess foot traffic, parking, competition, and local demand			
Negotiate lease terms and understand landlord obligations			
Check zoning and licensing requirements for food service			
Evaluate build-out potential and renovation costs			

### Key Insights:

A great location supports your concept and budget. Don't fall in love too fast — test the market realities before signing.

## Step 6: Map Out a Functional, Inviting Layout

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Design floor plan balancing guest experience and operational flow			
Plan efficient kitchen workflow (prep, cook, service, dish)			
Coordinate with architect, designer, or contractor for compliance			
Plan seating capacity and traffic flow			
Incorporate storage, staff zones, and accessibility compliance			

### Key Insights:

Design is workflow. A well-planned space reduces stress, speeds service, and makes guests feel comfortable without wasting square footage.

## Step 7: Handle Your Licenses, Permits & Compliance Early

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Register legal entity and obtain EIN			
Apply for health, food service, and occupancy permits			
Secure liquor license (if applicable)			
Schedule fire, safety, and ADA inspections			
File local business and signage permits			

### Key Insights:

Start early — permits can take months. Missing one can delay opening or cause costly fines.



## Step 8: Outfit Your Kitchen Without Overspending

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
List essential kitchen equipment by station			
Compare new, used, and leased options for best ROI			
Confirm delivery timelines and warranty coverage			
Install and test equipment before staff training			
Ensure safety, ventilation, and health code compliance			

### Key Insights:

Buy for function, not flash. A reliable, efficient kitchen setup saves time and money from day one.

## Step 9: Build a Rockstar Team

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Hire core leadership: GM, Chef, FOH Manager			
Develop hiring plan for cooks, servers, and dishwashers			
Create employee handbook and onboarding checklist			
Set training schedule and SOPs for all roles			
Establish team culture: communication, respect, accountability			

### Key Insights:

Culture drives performance. Hire for attitude and train for excellence. A motivated team becomes your brand's backbone.

## Step 10: Promote Early, Loud, and Often

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Create pre-launch marketing calendar and budget			
Launch website, Google Business, and social profiles			
Post behind-the-scenes updates and teasers			
Partner with local influencers or press			
Start email or SMS list for early supporters			
Plan launch campaign and media coverage			

### Key Insights:

Marketing starts months before opening. Build curiosity, not just awareness — show your journey and brand personality.

## Step 11: Host a Soft Opening First — Then Go Big

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Plan and invite guests for soft opening (friends, partners, local press)			
Run limited menu and collect guest feedback			
Adjust systems, service, and menu based on insights			
Plan grand opening event: PR, promotions, giveaways			
Capture photo/video for post-launch marketing			

### Key Insights:

Soft openings are rehearsal. Learn fast, fix issues, and then make your grand opening unforgettable.

## Step 12: Play the Long Game

Task	Owner	Target Date	Done
Set weekly and monthly KPIs: sales, margins, covers, reviews			
Refine menu and marketing based on data			
Launch loyalty and retention program			
Host events or seasonal specials to maintain buzz			
Plan long-term growth: new units, catering, partnerships			

### Key Insights:

Sustainability > speed. Measure, adapt, and evolve. The best restaurants stay consistent while always improving.

## **Ready to Launch With Confidence?**

Use this checklist as your blueprint. Track every task. Refine your brand. Hit your opening strong—and position your restaurant for growth from day one.

For expert help or a tailored launch-strategy session, reach out to Restaurant Launch Lab LLC. Website: [www.restaurantlaunchlab.com](http://www.restaurantlaunchlab.com) | Email: [info@restaurantlaunchlab.com](mailto:info@restaurantlaunchlab.com)