

How to Set Hours for Your Bar or Restaurant

By Rieva Lesonsky



Deciding what hours of operation your restaurant or bar will be open depends on the overall theme or concept of your business. Are you opening an upscale restaurant or casual, family-style location? If it's a bar, are you also serving food, like a brewpub?

Another consideration is the area where you're opening and what types of businesses and potential customers are nearby. Are there plenty of places serving breakfast, or is the area in need of a restaurant that opens early for

breakfast? Is there enough customer traffic to support that? Perhaps you're opening a bar. Would serving food set you apart from other bars in the area? If you're opening a bar, check with your local city hall for zoning regulations that may limit your hours. If your establishment is near residences, you may come up against strict noise and crowd zoning laws.

It's also crucial to consider what kind of life/work balance you envision yourself having. If your restaurant is open for all three meals, you're going to be working a very long day, and will need to staff up for several shifts. This is why many entrepreneurs prefer to open for breakfast/lunch or lunch/dinner only, at least at first.

In addition to hours, you'll want to consider what days to be open. Most restaurants close one day a week, typically a Monday. However, if most establishments in your area are closed on a given day, perhaps you could capture hungry customers by being the one location that's open. If you're located in a business district, where most of your traffic comes from office workers grabbing breakfast or lunch Monday through Friday, it may not make sense to be open on weekends.

As you test your concept with limited operation hours only, you may eventually find your customers are demanding more. That's a great problem to have, but before expanding to a new daypart, carefully consider the ramifications in terms of operations and hiring. Calculate whether the additional profits you'll make from adding new hours are sufficient when you consider the costs of staying open the additional hours, including extra utility and manpower costs. Figure out your breakeven and adjust your schedule as needed.

It's a good idea to launch a new daypart slowly to see if the traffic supports three meals a day. If not, you can quietly go back to your original schedule. If your new daypart takes off, however, that's the time to put the marketing muscle on full steam and build business even more. Use signage, email marketing, PR and social media to declare that you're "Now open for breakfast!"

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