

Your Guide To Planning & Starting A Sushi Business



First of all, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to download and read this starter's guide to planning and starting a sushi business.

We get a lot of questions from people who aren't too familiar with sushi machines, or the sushi industry, but see the opportunity and would like to jump in at the chance to start their own sushi takeaway shop, wholesaling business, or sushi train.

So we've put together this guide to answer the questions we commonly get asked by people looking to start a sushi business.

Though we are not experts in starting, and building sushi businesses, because we have worked with hundreds of successful sushi businesses, right from small individual takeaway shops, all the way up to giant franchises with over 100 stores like Sushi Sushi - we've picked up a few things about planning and starting a sushi machine - and would like to share that knowledge with you.

In this guide, you will learn whether or not starting a sushi business is a wise decision for you, you'll get a basic checklist of the steps you will need to take when starting a business, including a rough estimate of some of the costs (but please be aware that this will vary greatly from location to location around Australia), and we will introduce you to the kinds of equipment you will and

won't need depending on your budget, business type, size, volume and shop space.

So keep reading, and I hope you find the rest of this guide useful in your planning stage!

Should You Start A Sushi Business?

The people who we get enquiries from are usually already sure of starting a sushi business. But because starting a sushi business is a huge investment - both in time and money - it pays to take a step back and really look at whether starting a sushi business is right for you.

Lots of people get pulled in because they love eating sushi, see sushi businesses doing well in their area even with a mediocre product, or look at the high profit margins involved in making sushi.

But the truth is, you must approach starting a sushi business as you would any other investment, or business: with careful evaluation and planning.

There is a lot to be gained by starting a sushi business, with many owners going onto start multiple stores.

But there is also a lot of questions you must answer before you start.

Here are just some:

1. Have you ever run your own business before?

Running your own business requires discipline, initiative, and a willingness to do whatever it takes. Often, 'fires' spring up in your business, and as the owner, it becomes your responsibility to find a way to fix things.

There are a few people who come to us and start a sushi business having never started a business before. But most tend to have some experience running a food business, or at least working in a sushi business. Every bit of experience helps.

2. Have you ever worked in or owned a food business?

It helps if you've worked in a food business, especially the sushi business. There are details and considerations that come through experience including picking a good location, shop layout, seasonal demand fluctuations, sourcing supplies, shop design and fitting, retail selling systems, and labour scheduling. Nothing you can't learn, but it helps if you already know it.

3. Do you have the necessary capital to start? Or have access to adequate financing from a bank or other business lending institution?

Starting any sort of business is expensive - with a sushi business being no exception. Starting a sushi business can cost you well over \$100,000 for a takeaway shop, and much more for a sushi train (due to the larger area involved). You must have adequate money to start a business, or else find a way to finance your business.

4. Is sushi your main product, or a side product?

We get calls from cafes who want to sell sushi along with their coffees, muffins, and sandwiches. Usually, they do not do the volumes that justify the cost of buying dedicated sushi equipment. If that is you, you are probably best off hand rolling sushi as businesses which do sushi as a side item sell low volumes (less than 100 sushi rolls per day) of sushi.

5. Have you identified a suitable location for your business which has significant foot traffic (or access to customers if you are a wholesaler)?

The food business, like the retail business, is all about location, location, location. Your location should be in close proximity to the type of person who will want to eat and buy your sushi. Please note that there are

differences between lunchtime foot traffic and dinner time foot traffic, and you will need to take each into account according to your business type. If you are a takeaway shop, you will focus mainly on lunchtime customers, whereas sushi trains will focus on evening service. If you are a wholesaler, you must identify who your customers are in your area (businesses, schools, etc).

Don't be fooled by locations with cheap rent, or be put off by locations with expensive rent. You must look at the overall return you will get. A more expensive location may yield much better foot traffic, thereby increasing your profit. Whereas a cheaper location may look attractive, but yield much poorer volumes of foot traffic. Always do your homework.

6. Who are the customers who are most likely to eat at your sushi business? Are there enough of them around to sustain your business?

You must identify the types of people you want to attract to your business. This affects your menu selection (you may target younger, office workers concerned about their health, and therefore prepare vegetarian sushi, brown rice sushi, etc), and also affects your location selection - as you want to be in a location close to where they are.

You also want to pick a location where there is sufficient demand for your sushi - otherwise your business will never turn a profit.

7. Have you done an estimate of the costs involved in setting up a sushi business?

One of the first steps is to find out how much it will cost to setup a sushi business, and see whether it fits your allocated budget. Your budget will determine your shop space, equipment, need for additional financing and other factors.

8. Have you done an estimate of the costs involved in running a sushi business?

You also have to consider running costs. In your estimations, it is helpful to work out the volume of sushi you will need to sell in order to break even - to determine whether or not your idea will be profitable or sustainable, before you invest the large amounts of time and money involved in starting and planning a sushi business.

9. Are you personally going to be working in the store? Or will you be hiring others to work in the store?

If you are working in the store, do you know how to make sushi, run a store and manage staff? If not, what resources do you have available to help you?

If you will be hiring others in the store, how will you find skilled people? How will you train them and manage them?

10. Are you able to find suitable staff members to make sushi?

This can be a particular problem if you are in a regional location and can't find people suitably skilled enough to make sushi.

Machines are a good option, otherwise you'll have to make an attractive enough offer to get a sushi chef.

11. Are you adequately skilled or knowledgeable enough about making sushi to train new staff? Or are you able to hire a sushi chef to create a menu and teach your staff?

If you are hiring a sushi chef, then that solves your problem - they have the knowledge and skills necessary. If not, you may have to hire a sushi chef temporarily to design a menu and teach your staff the sushi skills they need.

12. Are you a retailer or wholesaler?

Will you be selling sushi through a sushi train or takeaway store? Or will you be focused on selling larger volumes to schools, other food businesses, supermarkets, and businesses.

13. Will you focus on a sit-down lunch and dinner sushi train, or a lunchtime takeaway shop?

The majority of takeaway shops selling rolls and packs target people on the go who want a quick lunch. 90% of income for these stores comes from their lunch time service.

Whereas for sushi trains, most of their service will come during dinner time, when people sit down for a meal.

14. If you are delivering sushi, how far away will you deliver too? Can you keep the quality of the sushi up?

Wholesaling and delivering to areas can be a successful business area. But you have to make sure you are able to keep your sushi fresh, not just upon delivery, but throughout the time it is displayed.

For example, you may start production at 4am, and finish at 8am. Then do deliveries til 10am. Then the sushi will be on display til about 2-3pm. There are serious quality considerations to ensure a tasty, and safe product.

There are sushi rice shelf life extenders, but you also need to consider the nori freshness, and ingredient freshness.

This is one of the biggest concerns that will limit the geographical distance and area you can reach in your wholesaling business.

15. How big will your shop space be?

Shop space is dictated by the type of sushi business you want to run (sushi trains will require a much larger area than a takeaway shop), and the budget that you have (a larger space will equal higher rent).

The shop space will determine the equipment you have, and how many people you can have working in the shop at one time.

16. Are you willing to sacrifice an enormous amount of time in planning and running the sushi business at the start while things are being established?

Sushi businesses are typically open for business 7 days a week. When starting a sushi business, owners typically work for 7 days a week making sure that the business is running.

17. What type of sushi will you be selling?

Different areas have demand for different types of sushi. It may be half rolls of sushi, nigiri pieces, packs of nigiri, mixed packs of sushi, or even onigiri.

You'll have to research which types of sushi are in demand, as this will affect the type of equipment you need in the shop.

18. Will you expand in the future to other locations?

If you are planning on expanding to multiple shop locations in the future, you will need to think about establishing processes and systems for making sushi, and managing the store so everything is replicable.

A Basic Checklist

Here are some basic checklists to help you whether you are starting a sushi takeaway shop, sushi train or wholesaling business. It is not meant to be comprehensive, but are some of the common issues our customers tend to encounter.

Starting A Sushi Takeaway Shop

✓ **Franchise or Privately Owned**

There are advantages and potential risks for both. With franchises, you get more support and training starting off - and again, this varies greatly depending on the franchise. You will also need to pay franchise royalty fees. And you will not have the option of opening multiple stores, unless you buy another franchise.

If you start a privately owned sushi business (the most common), you will have to do a lot more work on your own to get started, but you will not have to pay any royalties, and you can easily expand to multiple shops.

✓ **Know your budget**

Establish a rough budget of how much you can spend to setup a business. This will dictate the space you look for, and the type of equipment you source. Your budget will be affected by the capital you have available or the amount you can borrow through financing.

✓ **Find a shop location**

One of the first steps will be finding a shop location. You can look at buying an existing sushi business spot (people will be used to buying sushi from that location), or find a new spot. Either way, you must find a shop location before you think about shop design, fitting and equipment, as the location will determine everything else.

✓ **Shop design**

After you've secured a shop location, you can think about shop design. You can hire project managers and designers experienced in food retail businesses to do this.

✓ **Source equipment**

During the shop design process, you will need to think about what equipment you will need (shop designers will need to know what equipment you will be putting where when they draft up their layouts). This is the time to find the rice cookers, and sushi making equipment you need for your business.

✓ **Shop fitting**

After the design process is finished, it's time to get the shopfitter to build your shop!

✓ **Organise financing**

If you need to organise financing to start your business, you will need to talk to a lending institution and they will evaluate your business plan and financial situation.

✓ **Design menu**

You will need to design your sushi menu. You can do it two ways: you can look at what successful sushi shops are selling, then sell that or create your unique twists. Or you can hire a sushi chef to design your menu. Either can work.

✓ **Find labour**

You'll typically need to hire some helping hands in your store, especially as lunch can get very busy. You will need to be confident that they can make sushi, or learn how to use the machines to make sushi.

✓ **Retail Systems**

You will need to buy point-of-sale equipment and figure out how you will handle and deposit cash.

✓ **Sourcing of supplies**

You will need to source suppliers for your ongoing needs - packaging, ingredients, etc.

Starting A Sushi Train

✓ **Know your budget**

Establish a rough budget of how much you can spend to setup a business. This will dictate the space you look for, and the type of equipment you source. Your budget will be affected by the capital you have available or the amount you can borrow through financing.

✓ **Find a shop location**

One of the first steps will be finding a shop location. You can look at buying an existing sushi business spot (people will be used to buying sushi from that location), or find a new spot. Either way, you must find a shop location before you think about shop design, fitting and equipment, as the location will determine everything else.

✓ **Shop & conveyor design**

After you've secured a shop location, you can think about shop design. You can hire project managers and designers experienced in food retail businesses to do this.

During this step, you will want to start sourcing a sushi conveyor, and work out a design, as these typically take 2-3 months to get made.

✓ **Source equipment**

During the shop design process, you will need to think about what equipment you will need (shop designers will need to know what equipment you will be putting where when they draft up their layouts).

This is the time to find the rice cookers, the sushi train and sushi making equipment you need for your business.

✓ **Shop fitting**

After the design process is finished, it's time to get the shopfitter to build your sushi train!

✓ **Organise financing**

If you need to organise financing to start your business, you will need to talk to a lending institution and they will evaluate your business plan and financial situation.

✓ **Design menu**

You will need to design your sushi menu. You can do it two ways: you can look at what successful sushi trains are selling, then sell that or create your unique twists. Or you can hire a sushi chef to design your menu. Either can work.

✓ **Find labour**

If you want a sushi chef running your sushi train, you'll need to find one. In regional areas, this can be quite hard. Otherwise, you'll need to find staff confident enough making sushi for your sushi train.

✓ **Retail Systems**

You will need to buy point-of-sale equipment and figure out how you will handle and deposit cash.

✓ **Sourcing of supplies**

You will need to source suppliers for your ongoing needs - packaging, ingredients, etc.

Starting A Sushi Wholesale Business

✓ **Know your budget**

Establish a rough budget of how much you can spend to setup a business. This will dictate the space you look for, and the type of equipment you source. Your budget will be affected by the capital you have available or the amount you can borrow through financing.

✓ **Find a manufacturing location**

One of the first steps will be finding a manufacturing location. You will need to find a location that has enough room to fit your equipment and arrange it so that it creates an efficient workflow.

Some wholesalers choose to hire out another businesses kitchen - producing in the early hours of the morning when the other business doesn't require the kitchen. This can save you on rental costs.

✓ **Source equipment**

This is the time to find the rice cookers, and sushi making equipment you need for your business. If you are sourcing industrial sized equipment, plan well ahead, as the lead times for these systems can be more than a few months.

✓ **Fit out your manufacturing location**

After the design process is finished, it's time to get the place fitted out.

✓ **Organise financing**

If you need to organise financing to start your business, you will need to talk to a lending institution and they will evaluate your business plan and financial situation.

✓ **Design menu**

You will need to design your sushi menu. You can do it two ways: you can look at what successful sushi businesses are selling, then sell that or create your unique twists. Or you can hire a sushi chef to design your menu. Either can work.

✓ **Find labour**

You will need to find workers for the manufacturing process.

✓ **Sourcing of supplies**

You will need to source suppliers for your ongoing needs - packaging, ingredients, etc.

✓ **Getting customers**

This is the crucial part that will require active pursuit on your part.

Unlike retail stores where you can wait customers to come to you - as a wholesaler, you will typically need to go out, identify, talk to and win business from other companies and organisations.

Do You Even Need A Sushi Machine?

Sushi machines can help you run a sushi business very efficiently, and save greatly on operating costs. The setup costs are high, but they can easily save you 2-3 people on labour, which can lead to savings of tens of thousands of dollars every single year.

But not everyone should get a sushi machine.

If sushi is not your main line, or you don't sell a large volume of sushi (less than 100 - 150 rolls per day), then it may not be economically viable to purchase a sushi machine.

But if you are doing large volumes of sushi and need a way to make sushi faster, and more consistently no matter who is working - then sushi machines are ideal.

Here are the different types of sushi-making equipment available to help your shop:

Rice Mixers

Rice mixers blend cooked sushi rice, with sushi vinegar. These machines take the manual labour out of mixing (which can be time-consuming, and labour-

intensive due to the heavy weight of cooked rice), and is essential for any takeaway shop or restaurant making sushi.

More important than time, sushi mixers create a very even blend, helping the vinegar to be distributed evenly throughout the rice. The enclosure of the sushi rice mixer also helps retain the heat of the sushi rice during mixing, and prevent it from drying out.

Quality rice mixers can blend rice with vinegar in the space of a few minutes, and then automatically discharge it into a rice container.

A good rice mixer should also contain an air blower to maintain optimal temperature throughout mixing.



Suzumo rice mixer models

Rice Sheet Dispensing Machines

Rice sheet dispensing machines do just that. You simply put cooked rice (already blended with sushi vinegar), in the machine, and it dispenses a flat sheet of rice for you. You can then put on the sheet of nori, and hand roll with ingredients.

This kind of machine is ideal for shops who still want to do the final rolling by hand, but want to automate the tricky, and time-consuming rice sheeting step.

Machines can set the thickness, length and density of the rice sheet.



Suzumo SVR-NYA Rice Sheeting Machine



Small Rice Sheet



Medium Rice Sheet



Large Rice Sheet

Rice Sheet Dispensing and rolling machines

For shops who want a machine to do both rice sheet dispensing AND rolling, there are machines which cover both functions in the same machine.

Again, cooked, blended rice is placed in these machines. At the touch of a button, the rice is dispensed onto a sheet of nori. Ingredients are placed by hand on the rice sheet, and at another touch of a button, the machine rolls the sushi for you, leaving you with a finished roll.

After rolling, you'll find that some nori may still be loose. Simply place the sushi roll, so that this loose nori is on the bottom. As the moisture seeps through to the nori, the nori will start to stick to each other - leaving you with a perfect roll with no loose nori.

These machines can usually do both traditional outside-in rolls, as well as California inside-out rolls.



1. Place *Nori* (dried seaweed) by hand on the Forming Plate



2. Press the button to dispense rice automatically onto the *Nori* sheet



3. Place ingredients on the rice sheet by hand



4. Press the button again and the machine will roll the sheet up using the Forming Plate



5. Take the finished roll off the forming plate, and repeat the process to make another roll



Suzumo SVR-NXA Rice Sheet Dispenser and Rolling Machine - Using A Forming Plate



1. Press the button the dispense the rice sheet onto the belt



2. Place *Nori* (dried seaweed) by hand on the top of the rice sheet



3. Place ingredients onto the nori by hand



4. Press the button again to roll the sheet



5. The sheet will be rolled using the belt



6. Take the finished roll off the belt and repeat the process to make another roll



Suzumo SVR-BXA - Rice Sheet Dispensing and Rolling Machine - Using Conveyor Belt

These kinds of machines can typically help you produce 200-600+ half rolls of sushi every hour.

Cutting Sushi Rolls Into Pieces

If you are cutting your sushi roll into smaller pieces, to put into lunch trays, you'll need to invest in a sushi roll cutter (unless you want to cut every one by hand). This prevents the final sushi pieces from being uneven, and crushed when hand-cutting.

Take care when selecting a sushi cutter, as the quality of the blade will vary from brand to brand, and product to product. Make sure you select a model that has a strong cutting blade, otherwise you'll end up having to replace the cutter blades all the time



4 *hosomaki* (small roll) can be set on cutting table : 2,200 rolls / hr



2 medium size rolls : 1,100 rolls / hr



1 large size rice outside roll : 550 rolls / hr



Suzumo SVC-ATC - Sushi Roll Cutter

Making Nigiri

Nigiri is traditionally hand-pressed and hand-moulded. However, machines have now been developed to recreate the hand-made texture of nigiri. These machines are simple to use. Simply load it with cooked, blended rice, and nigiri will be dispensed. Machines that make over 2,000 pieces per hour are readily available, with the size, and density of the nigiri easily adjustable.

The topping ingredients must still be placed by hand, which makes it suitable for use in a takeaway shop, or in a sushi train (a chef can still apply the toppings to preserve a more authentic customer experience).



Suzumo Nigiri Machines

About the Suzumo Sushi-Making Machine Brand



Suzumo has been in the sushi machine business for over two decades. They have invested more in research and development, and had a longer time to refine both the performance, and the quality of their machines - which really shows when you compare their machines to others on the market. They have been in the rice food processing machine business since 1955, and were the first company to make a "Sushi Robot" in 1981. They also hold numerous patents and is a company dedicated to innovation and producing better products for sushi manufacturers.

They set out with the goal of reproducing the hand-made taste and texture of rice made by skilled chefs, and they now have over 60% of the global market. If long-lasting quality, and high performance machines are what you're after, you can't go wrong with Suzumo machines.

Suzumo Japan has over 270 employees, with a head office in Tokyo and a factory in Saitama. Suzumo have numerous branches and distributors around the world serving customers in the US, UK, France, Germany, China, Hong Kong, Thailand, UAE, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Korea, Australia, and Canada. So you can be sure that you can get hold of a machine, and get parts delivered to you and servicing quickly.

The machines and equipments available in Australia are specially designed and built to comply Australian OHS and Safety standard, and operate off the Australian 230V mains voltage. CE - compliant machines are also available for shops who must comply to that standard.



Head Office In Tokyo



Factory in Saitama

Sushi-Making Accessories

There are a whole host of accessories available to help make the sushi-making process faster and easier, while helping to produce better quality sushi.

Here are just some:

Rice box - Rice boxes are heavily insulated, and allow you to store cooked, blended rice and keep it hot. Blended sushi rice can typically be kept in a rice box for up to 8 hours.



Rice keeper sheets are also available. These specially designed sheets help absorb excess moisture as the rice cools. This helps preserve the rice quality when stored inside the rice container.



A castor trolley for rice containers allow rice boxes to be stacked on top of each other and easily transported from the place of cooking, to the rice blending machines, and to the rice sheeting and rolling machines. Rice is heavy, and trolleys help keep your workers safe while helping them to transport rice around the shop quickly.



Rice nets allow you to transport rice quickly and easily from the cooker to the blender. Rice nets are designed to withstand the high heat inside the cooker. Simply place uncooked rice inside the net, put into the rice cooker with rice

and cook. After cooking, all you'll need to do, is to grab the net and you'll be able to quickly transport the rice from the cooker without risk of burning your hands.



Non-stick rice handling gloves help you handle rice, without having it stick all over your hands. Sushi rice is especially sticky, and non-stick gloves allow you to quickly handle other ingredients, handle cash, or handle any other task, without having to spend time washing sticky rice off your hands.



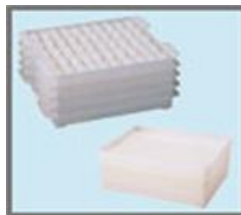
Rice spray oil is necessary to prevent sushi rice from sticking onto machine surfaces. Spray this inside drums, rollers, and machine parts that come in contact with rice.



Cucumber cutters contain an attachment with sharp blades, which help cut a single cucumber into even strips. A cucumber is simply inserted through the top, with cucumber strips coming out the bottom. This can save you enormous time if you prepare a lot of cucumber.



Trays - If you are making nigiri, and need to store them, specially designed trays are available, that fit inside rice container boxes. Simply place finished nigiri on the tray, stack trays on top of each other, then place the trays inside the rice container to keep them fresh.



Which Machines Do You Need?

Needs vary according to each sushi businesses layout, space availability, personal preference, budget, and other factors. The best way to figure out what you need is to give us a call on 02 9748 0868 and tell us about your business, and your idea for your shop. That way we can figure what you do and don't need.

We've supplied over 1500 sushi machines to hundreds of businesses around Australia, some of which are still running after 20 years. So if you are after high quality equipment that lasts, and is reliable, then we can help you. So please give us a call and talk to us today on 02 9748 0868. We know that starting a

sushi business is a big step, and we'd love to provide you with the information you need.

Otherwise, I hope you found this short guide on starting and planning your sushi business helpful, and good luck with your dreams!
