

POOJA DHINGRA

STARTING A PATISSERIE

101

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Pooja Dhingra is an Indian pastry chef and a businesswoman. She is the owner of the first lip-smacking macaroon bakery chain 'Le 15 Patisserie' in Mumbai, India. Having graduated from Le Cordon Bleu, Pooja wanted to offer Mumbai a taste of a classic French patisserie. Le 15 Patisserie is now Bollywood's official and most preferred bakery. Pooja has appeared on 'The Forbes, India's: Prestigious 30', in 2014. In 2016, Dhingra expanded her enterprise, opening a new location called Le15 Café in South Mumbai.

With signature desserts named after French women, the cafe's menu includes simple, savoury main course dishes. Penguin Books, India, published her first best-selling cookbook called 'The Big Book of Treats'. Pooja has been featured in many national newspapers and international fashion and lifestyle magazines. Having made a prominent mark in this industry, Pooja aspires to open over 20-pastry establishments in India.

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01

What is a patisserie?

Learn about the unique concept of a patisserie and what sets it apart from a bakery through this lesson.



Overview of Patisserie

A patisserie is similar to a pastry shop. It is largely inspired by the way cakes are baked in France. The French have clearly categorized everything; patisserie, boulangerie, viennoiserie. They are all categorized differently. If anything involves fermentation or yeast, then, it belongs to the boulangerie. Baguettes and croissants come under boulangerie. Everything that is sweet and has sugar, flour and eggs come under a patisserie. Le 15 Patisserie focuses on macaroons but also focuses on cakes, tarts and choux pastry and sable.

Patisserie Vs Bakery

A patisserie has everything to do with French Baking. You will not have the products that you would traditionally find in an Indian restaurant such as puffs and those type of cakes. The variety of things that you will find in an American bakery will be different from the one found in a French patisserie or an Indian bakery. In France, if you wish to be a pastry chef, then, you need to train under a Chef for several years. You can go to a Culinary School and gain some experience as well.



02

How to conceptualize a patisserie?

Learn about USP, developing a menu, importance of location and the ability to define a target audience.



What is your Unique Selling Point (USP)?

When Pooja Dhingra tried a macaroon for the very first time, she knew that it was not widely available in Mumbai. It felt different to her. She came back to India and started Le 15 Patisserie with macarons as a unique product. Identify what differentiates you from every other patisserie in the neighbourhood or locality.

Define Your Target Audience

You need to ask yourself these questions:

“Who are you catering?”

“Who are the customers?”

“What are your customers’ likes and dislikes?”

“What is your ‘unique’ Solution?”

The answer of the above-mentioned questions will help you define and understand your audience.

Location

Pooja Dhingra learnt that the location is the most important factor while starting a restaurant. She set up a centralized kitchen to cut down on the restaurant costs. Le 15 Patisserie opened its stores in the most prime locations of Mumbai. Since the rent was high, hence, the store size was small. Your target audience, location and USP has to tie in together. When Pooja started her patisserie in Colaba, she knew that she was targeting a certain kind of customers. Colaba was an upscale market with a lot of tourist footfalls. The menu was priced accordingly. Once you find your USP, then try to find the right location that houses all your customers. Do not open an up-market Patisserie in a student area because they will not be able to afford it.



Developing Your Menu

Dedicate most of your time to developing a menu for your patisserie. People are going to visit your store for the food. Pick a limited number of things and try to make it perfect. Taste is subjective. Try to have a mix of all things. The things that you love may not be admired by others. For instance, Pooja is a big fan of chocolate. A few customers complained that there were not enough fruit-based products on the menu. She keeps working hard to ensure that she can cater to the needs of her customers. Have a range of different prices for your products. Plan your menu description based on whether they are going to sit and read it or take it away. The first Le 15 Patisserie menu comprised of things that Pooja personally loved. They started out with macaroons and kept on adding items to the list. Once they perfected one aspect of it, they kept adding more items to the menu. This made things exciting for her customers, and none of them got bored. You should include your personal story and journey in your food.



03

Finances and Licensing

In this lesson, you will get an estimate of the initial capital investment and the licenses required to start a patisserie.



Capital Investment

It depends on the size of the project. When Pooja started 8 years ago, then, the capital investment was around Rs 20,00,000. To plan it out perfectly, you need to be clear about your expenses. Your expense will cover your rent, deposit, machinery, assets, salary and food cost. Today, the amount of investment required to start a small sized patisserie will be around 20 to 40 lacs. If you choose a high street location, then, the prices will considerably increase. Now that you know the amount of money required, you can begin to think where you can find this money.

How to fund yourself?

Pooja started her patisserie with a seed fund from her parents. There are different ways you can do that. You can take monetary help from your 'friends and family'. You can also make a business plan and take it to a bank. You can go to an Angel Investor or a Venture Capitalist to get the capital investment. As the business grew, the revenues that she made went back into the business.

Licenses

You need a Health license for the place that you are baking your goods at. You need to get a fire NOC, building NOC, and the basic Shops and License Establishment clearance from the municipal corporation. If you are serving food using weighing machines, then, you will need weights and measurement clearance from the municipality.



You will need a Food and Business License i.e. FSSAI to be able to serve the food. Moreover, you will need to get registered for GST. You can go to different licensing agents to get all the required licenses.

Be involved in all aspects of licensing. This is to ensure that you are aware of the rules and regulations. The Chartered Account (CA) is an important part of the company and Pooja learned it the hard way. Ensure that you have someone who is taking great care of your money.



04

Assembling a team

In this lesson, you will learn about the art of building a team and retaining the employees.



Building a Team

Your team is the backbone of your success. Pooja started her Le 15 Patisserie with two other people. Today, the size of her team stands at 85. It takes a lot of work to build and maintain an entire team. You need to define your goals to figure out the number of people you need in the kitchen. A small or medium sized patisserie will require 3-4 chefs (1 main Patisserie Chef and other Sous Chefs) and someone for washing dishes. When Pooja started her Patisserie, there was only one person managing the front-of-the-house.

He was responsible for taking orders, answering calls and overseeing the working of the kitchen. You probably don't need delivery boys anymore due to the sudden rise of food-delivery apps. You will need someone in the accountant team to help you with the finances. The most important of all are the ones who work in the kitchen. They are responsible for creating your product. It is crucial to build a great relationship with your Chefs and be involved on a day-to-day basis. The head patisserie is the chief of the Chefs. Pooja is a Pastry Chef herself, and therefore she did not have to find anyone. If you are not a Chef, then, you have to find one. Ensure that your vision and interests are aligned with that of your Chef. This is important because working in the kitchen is a tedious job. People have started to take culinary arts seriously. There are a lot of pastry Chefs graduating every year. It makes it easier for you to find a Chef.



Retaining Employees

Pooja thinks that the biggest problem in the hospitality business is to retain the employees. The employees at Le 15 are like a family. The way Pooja leads her team is different from other organisations. You need to make it more important than money. Pooja discusses her goals with her employees. It makes them feel like they are helping her achieve a goal. It makes them feel important. Once your team is ready, you need to establish a smooth and seamless workflow. Everyone should be assigned their responsibilities. It is important to keep everyone in check to measure their performance. Pooja uses different apps to track the performance of her employees. She hands out projects to everyone in her team and they report to her on a daily and weekly basis.



05

How to start your patisserie?

You will learn more about the supplies and equipment required to start a patisserie. Find out the importance of business hours, billing software, waste and hygiene management.



Gather the Best Equipment

In order to start your patisserie, you need to focus on your kitchen. You need to understand your product line to be able to understand the equipment you need. When Pooja started with Le 15, she had few basic equipments such as ovens, stand mixers and stainless steel tables. Buy high quality kitchenware such as bowls, knives, spatulas etc. This is to ensure that you do not need to replace them frequently.

Find Good Suppliers

Find good suppliers and build a strong relationship with them. You need to understand your product before seeking out for suppliers. Go to different suppliers and find the one who delivers the best supplies at the best price. Sign a yearly contract to ensure that the prices of the ingredients remain fixed. Pooja did not sign a yearly contract and, therefore, the rates kept fluctuating. You need to have a weighing machine in the receiving area of your kitchen to measure your supplies. It will also help ensure that you are getting the right value for your money.

Set up a Storage Area

You need to build a proper layout for your kitchen. The back-of-the-house is as important as the front-of-the-house. Think about the future. Will you have enough space at your store after a span of 6 months? You may start small but think about it from a future perspective.



Plan your store after thinking of all possible scenarios. You need to focus on your product line because everything is dependent on it. Plan out the storage, presentation and delivery of products. For instance, if you are making something delicate in your kitchen, then, you need to ensure that your product reaches your store safely. Initially, at Le15, many of the macaroons were destroyed in the process of transport. Therefore, Pooja got special boxes designed that have enough space to fit the macaroons. As a result, the delivery of her products became smooth.

Delighting the Customer

You need to plan not only the product but also how it is going to be delivered to your customer. You need to figure out as to how you are going to interact with your customer. When you are running a patisserie, think of the customer experience from the start-to-end; from the time they enter the store, to feast and leave.

Packaging of Product

The packaging is superbly important for Pooja at Le 15. They keep on changing their packaging boxes every 6 months. It gives the customer something new to look at every time. Pooja uses bright colours for her products. She uses food-safe and edible paper. You need to check with suppliers and understand how printers work with edible paper. You should understand the whole process before the final packaging of the box.



Set up your business Hours

You need to setup your business hours depending on your customers. For instance, if your store is in a business zone, then, it need not be open until midnight. However, if you are in a residential area, then, you can open and close your store in the late hours.

Waste Management

You need to consider wastage while dealing with perishable food items. Le 15 has finally reached a stage where the percentage of waste is less than 2%. You need to do a lot of trials to figure out ways to reduce wastage. Pooja does not keep supplies in her patisserie for more than a day. She has tied up with NGOs where the excess food is delivered.

Billing Software

You also need to have a billing software that has a great material management system. It will keep records of your stock and recipes. It will ease the process of management as the business grows.

Hygiene Management

Hygiene is important. Ensure that everyone is wearing a hair cap. You need to maintain cleanliness in your kitchen. Make sure that the refrigerators are closed when they are not in use. You need to ensure that the things that are put into the fridge first are also the ones to be used first.



06

Design and Brand story

Learn the importance of identifying your brand and the story behind it.





It is important to identify your brand. Pooja wanted to bring the food of Paris to the city of Mumbai. She was clear about the experience that she wanted to give to her customers from the time they walked into the store. It is important to break it down into different aspects.

Name

Think before you finalize on the name of your patisserie. What kind of emotions will it evoke in a customer? Pooja wanted to remind people of Paris through the Le 15 Patisserie.

Logo

Pooja took the help of a friend to design the logo of Le 15 Patisserie. The logo has two “thought bubbles” and the design of an Eiffel tower. Pooja was clear about the colour and design of the logo. Find a great designer who is aligned to your vision and preferences. It is important to know your brand story to be able to understand the design and logo. You have to see, how it translates to everything that the customer experiences. Pooja wanted to stick to the colours that can be seen in a French patisserie.



Other Factors

Your staff uniform will depend on your brand story and colours. You can have a casual uniform or give a formal outlook to your patisserie. Packaging is crucial at Le 15 Patisserie. The food package is enticing and appetizing. They picked the right size and it could be given away easily as a gift. Colour, texture and shape are important parts of any packaging. It is important to plan patisserie products as well. Your patisserie counter is as important as all other aspects. Nothing gives Pooja more joy than the sight of kids leaning against the counter.

Functionality

Figure out the type of counter you want your store to have. It may be an open or a square counter. Ensure that the temperature in the store is optimum. It is important to keep the counter clean at all times. Fix a time to clean your counter. For most patisserie units, you can have a readymade counter or design one for your store. The design is important for you to portray your creation.



07

Marketing your patisserie

In this lesson, you will learn about the significance of offline marketing tactics, social media and a brand ambassador.



Word of Mouth

Pooja started her patisserie when she was 23 years old. The first thing she did was to make people taste her product. She believes that the word-of-mouth is the best form of marketing. She distributed desserts between her friends and family. She made sure that she was participating in every possible exhibition. She gave away free samples while cross-selling her products. Once people taste your product, they will definitely come back for more.

Flyers and Business Cards

Pooja printed out flyers and business cards and circulated it in the neighbourhood of the patisserie. Pooja created eye-catching flyers and circulated it in local shops and newspapers.

Collaborate with Other Brands

It is important to see how your brand finds synergy with other brands. Pooja contacted a local flower shop and established a tie-up. She would sell cakes, every time the flower shop received an order. It is crucial to find other business establishments in your locality and collaborate to grow your own business.

Social Media

Social media is easily available to everyone. Pooja started a Facebook page for her patisserie. She would upload pictures of baked cakes and arranged them in various albums. People started placing orders on call after seeing her posts. Pooja began documenting her work through Facebook and Instagram.



She uses Instagram to highlight behind-the-scenes of her kitchen and her upcoming collaborations and desserts. Instagram is one of the biggest marketing tools of Le 15 patisserie. Create appetizing videos and exciting content that people will look forward to.

People appreciate her Instagram page because it's honest and true. On her personal account, Pooja honestly describes her day. The Instagram account of Le 15 has appetizing pictures of cakes and other delicacies. She started a hashtag called #PhoneToFork. She also started a page for the Café menu. The customers can check the Instagram account and know their menu, prices and constituents and reviews of products. There are many different ways you can use Instagram to your advantage.

Photography

Photography is an essential part of marketing your patisserie. Use natural light for photography. You can shoot pictures yourself or hire a photographer. Le 15 has an in-house professional photographer who takes stunning pictures of their products. Invest in a good camera or a photographer. Make sure that you have a lot of natural light.



Need for a Brand Ambassador

Every brand needs a brand ambassador, and Pooja somehow became the ambassador of Le 15. She was able to represent Le 15 in the food industry. Eventually, people started identifying Le 15 with Pooja. She was covered by Forbes and other International magazines. It helped Le 15 being identified on a national level. Don't be afraid to put yourself out in the world. It helps your brand to be recognized by people. Pooja has a huge following on Instagram, and she uses it to promote her business all the time.



08

Is it a viable career option?

Find out more about the scope of starting a patisserie as a viable career option through this lesson.





When Pooja started her patisserie 8 years ago, only a handful of people would take it as a serious career option. It makes Pooja happy when she finds people going to culinary school and expressing their willingness to work with her. Being a Pastry Chef is tough. It is not going to be an easy ride. It is not like baking a cake at home, giving it to all your friends and being happy about it. It is about making the same cake 100 times everyday and ensuring that it has the same taste and flavour. Be prepared to work for long hours and have no holidays.

When Pooja tells people that she is a Pastry Chef, it automatically brings a smile on their face. This is because they are reminded of their last birthday or a cake they've recently had. There are many opportunities available in the market. You can get a job at any 5-star hotel, bakery or patisserie. The initial years are going to be hard, and you need to prove yourself. Eventually, if you decide to do it, then, you have all the tools to start a patisserie. It is indeed a viable career option.



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