

How To Start Your Own Cupcake Decorating Business



CUPCAKES

Decorating Business



Cupcake Business

Your Step-by-Step Guide

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Table of Contents

Cupcake Business	5
Getting Started	11
Marketing your Cupcake Business	12
Business Cards & Stationery	15
Spreading the Word	17
Case Study: Promoting on a Shoe-String Budget ...	21
Tools of the Trade	28
Lowering your Business Costs	33
How to Accept Payment	35
Setting up your Office	37
Home Based Business Taxes	38
Organizing your Business for Success	43
Baking Secrets Revealed	47
Insider Tips from a Professional Baker	53
Pricing your Cupcakes	58
Food Safety Tips	61
Wedding Cupcake Consultations	63
Time Management Secrets	70
Cupcake Delivery & Packaging	74
Action Plan: Checklist	77
Conclusion: Final Words	82

Cupcake Business

Welcome to the world of baking cupcakes as a full time business career!

If you love baking and enjoy being creative with your masterpieces, owning a cupcake business will be an enjoyable experience.

There is no feeling like the one you get when you have finished designing the perfect cupcake for a client, especially when it's for a special occasion such as a birthday, anniversary or wedding.

In fact, selling wedding cupcakes may often be the bulk of the orders that come in, and most often are the most successful home based cupcake decorating and baking services in the industry.

The more special attention and customization that you put into your work, the faster your name will be known for quality and reliability, and since these cupcakes will always serve as a focal point of the party, you can quickly create client lists with little effort, as long as your finished product has been created with your client in mind, and not just based on what you believe will be appealing.

However, as with every business there are times when you might be challenged or feel overwhelmed, and that's perfectly normal.

In fact, you should expect to encounter obstacles at times, but as long as you enjoy what you do you will find ongoing success and prosperity.

It's really such a simple yet overlooked aspect to business. Do what you love and the rest will follow.

If you plan on starting a home based cupcake baking and decorating business you will need the support of your family.

Just like with any business you need time to focus on your work and since you want to avoid as many mistakes as you can, having the ongoing support of those in your household will help you jump-start your career a lot easier.

For me, when I began decorating cupcakes from home, my husband was exceptionally supportive.

With three children in the house it wasn't always easy to manage my business with family matters, but with his help I was able to turn a part time service into a full time career.

It has been a marvelous journey and I hope to be of assistance to you during yours.

Thinking of Starting a Cupcake Business?

The cost of starting your own cupcake business from home is a lot less than you might think, especially when compared to more traditional brick and mortar businesses. Since your first step should be to create a service from your home you can save on overhead costs, such as rental space, larger equipment and of course, staff.

To start your business from home you will just need the essentials including basic equipment, baking supplies and of course elbow room! You should also designate an area that you use for your baking supplies.

Extra storage space goes a long way in this business, believe me!

Some people may decide to take some baking classes prior to starting a business. Since I felt I had enough experience I didn't do this, and instead dove right into turning a profit from my home based baking business.

There are so many positive aspects to starting your own business including working for yourself. Being your own boss is an exciting opportunity to be creative and flexible, although working from home does require self-discipline and ongoing motivation.

Here are some other great features and positive aspects:

Set your own schedule

When you first begin working from home you should take things one baby step at a time.

Set up a schedule where you work and try not to go outside of this time frame. The last thing you want is to get burn out early on. You need to balance things well in order to be successful and be able to stay committed.

Low Expenses

As I just mentioned the costs are a lot lower since you do not have to rent a shop, hire employees, renovate the building, deal with inspectors and so much more that goes into running an 'out of house' store. Still once your business takes off you just might wish to upgrade to a larger area, or a walk-in store.

Home with the children

If you have kids being a work at home mom is a success in itself. Your kids will not have to go into daycare and you will be at home when they need you. You can attend school functions and be home for the school holidays.

You set your work hours

You can see potential customers at your home on your schedule. I wouldn't suggest allowing walk-in's since this is your home and not just a place of business but developing a good scheduling system where you

allow clients to come over, look at your samples and discuss what it is that they have in mind.

There are many more advantages to working from home that you will quickly discover. It truly is an incredible experience, and one that you will be proud of.

Minimal Risk

Since it doesn't cost much to get started if you decide that it isn't for you, you lose nothing but time.

There are very few businesses where this is the case.

In the following chapters of my Starting your own Cupcake Business book you will discover exactly how to start and run a successful cupcake baking and decorating service as well as other features including design ideas, how to build a client list, financial considerations and equipment and supplies that you will need.

You do not have to have a lot of experience to learn from this book, but having the basic knowledge of cupcake creation will help you get started faster and easier.

From whatever background you are coming from, my book can help you make your next move.

It's a great starting place for those who are seriously considering developing a cupcake baking business but aren't sure where to begin.

Getting Started

How should you begin?

My first step was decorating birthday cupcakes for my family and friends. I then placed a few ads in the local classified and put up some bulletins on the shopping mall entrance boards.

Within a few days I had calls from potential clients, and within a week I had over 11 orders. I catered to baby and bridal showers as well.

These cupcakes will be the main source of your income at first, however as you grow and take on the wedding industry you will see your business really soar!

Personally I focused on birthday cupcakes at first, until I honed and improved my skills.

While every cupcake is very important wedding cupcakes tend to be the center point of the event, since it is a very large part of the reception process.

For this reason I treaded carefully and only focused on wedding events after I had been in business for a couple of months.

As a cupcake baker and decorator you must realize your responsibilities are enormous.

If you are confident in your craft, I encourage you to accept wedding clients right from the start, however if you aren't, do as I did and start by catering to smaller events because once word gets out that people enjoy your cupcakes, you will be stunned at how many orders you will receive!

Please don't be intimidated by the importance of wedding cupcakes. Every single baker in our situation is nervous as heck at first. I can't tell you how many cupcakes I destroyed attempting to get it perfect the first few times. No too mention how many sleepless nights I had worried that everyone would be happy with their order!

Skill comes with time and if you believe in yourself and your abilities, you will develop a style that is unique and just as good as some of the most world renowned in the industry.

In addition if practice makes perfect, you will have lots of that soon enough! =)

Marketing Your Cupcake Business

Without a doubt there is a huge market for beautifully decorated cupcakes however in the early phase of your career you will be required to do a great deal of self-advertising.

This can be time consuming and in some cases, you might get bored of the repetitive aspect of it all but once this footwork has been done, it will be so much easier to continually market yourself.

Developing your own brand (and reputation) is the first step in introducing your new service to your community.

A good promotional strategy will help you focus on your current market, get the most out of your advertising efforts and ensure that a consistent, high quality image is maintained.

You want to get the word out quickly and as affordably as possible while ensuring you are still effectively targeting your potential customers properly, right?

Perhaps you have heard that marketing your product is the key to success in any business, cupcakes or otherwise.

So, to create the best advertising campaigns that you can you have to put yourself in the shoes of the customer you are targeting. This is the very fundamental of marketing regardless of what industry you are in.

You must ask yourself a few important questions such as:

Why would a customer come to me and not a competitor?

What am I offering that is unique?

What discounts, coupons, special incentives can I offer my potential customers to jump start my business by having them give me a chance, rather than continuing to go to the local bakery?

How can I stand out? What can I do differently that a customer would appreciate? (faster turn around times perhaps, free birthday card package if it's a birthday cupcake you are decorating, etc).

Your promotional package should highlight the benefits of using your service, and showcase why you are different. You have to stand out in order to gain as many new customers as possible.

Simple things can make a huge impact on how your customers view you. As suggested above, if you are baking for a birthday party, throwing in a free package of candles or a bag of balloons is low cost but different.

Put your own personal touch on your packages and you will see incredible results.

Taking It A Step Further

Creating custom packages or incentives that will highlight what you are offering by putting simple twists on your business is only the starting point of advertising yourself.

In addition to this you must build a complete promotional package that can be customized and changed easily.

You can also advertise through your local radio, trade shows, fairs, or by placing classifieds in your

local paper.

However you decide to begin your advertising campaigns you should take great measures to stay organized and to document every marketing tactic you try. That way you can see what is working and what isn't.

When you are advertising your new business, be sure to focus on building consumer confidence, and always represent yourself in a professional, yet friendly way.

Business Cards & Stationery

Business cards and stationery are simple but important methods in establishing your business.

You can effectively market yourself if you have a business card handy whenever you run into a situation where you are dealing with a potential client.

Imagine someone striking up a conversation with you that ends up being about your business. As they leave they ask you for a business card. What if you don't have one? How unprofessional will that look?

Not only will you look like you aren't all that serious about your business but you will lose out on potential clients who want a copy of your business information for future reference.

Creating business cards is a no brainer method of promotion and it's easily affordable. Once you

have your business cards printed off, use EVERY opportunity that you can to pass them out. Remember, every single person that you meet is a potential client. Everyone has birthdays =)

People you could give business cards to include neighbors, your local youth group centers, people at your church if you attend, you could leave flyers with your business card attached at local shops, your child's school, sports clubs, you name it!

If you take five minutes right now to write down a list of places you can leave business cards or flyers you would be surprised at just how easy it will be to spread the word!

When I started since I didn't attend a lot of community events, and I didn't regularly go to church, I decided to print off flyers and stick them on bulletin boards at grocery stores. I attached business cards to the flyers.

This is a five minute promotional tactic that is easy (not to mention free) and I had orders the same week. Obviously I wanted to expand my marketing beyond that, but it was a simple way to start out.

Just use the resources that are available to you and have faith in yourself. Start off slow if you are nervous, and go from there. Just take action! That's the most important thing you can do. The rest will follow.

Spreading The Word

Since I do recommend leaving flyers everywhere that you can, another step could be in sending a letter to local businesses by postal mail (or dropping it off if you wish).

Think about the places that hire cupcake services throughout the year like offices that have staff parties, or other businesses that have events all year long.

All you have to do to advertising yourself in a simple but effective way is to create a customized letter to each business and mail it off. It's a "no-sales" approach for those who don't like selling themselves or are afraid of being too pushy.

(That was one of the biggest obstacles for me! I always was fearful that I was advertising TOO much every time I had a discussion with a neighbor or potential customer.

Don't be afraid to talk about your business whenever you can. It is something you will be passionate about and it will be a major part of your life, so talk about it!)

To make things easier for those non-writers out there, here is a sample of the letter I sent out to businesses in my community.

You can edit this however you wish, but whatever you do be SURE to customize each and every letter that you send out. If you fail to address the business, it will look very much like it would if you did that online.

And everyone hates spam.

You don't have to use the name of an actual person since many times you might not know who is in charge of what department, and in those situations just address it to the business itself.

SAMPLE LETTER

High Tech Sky Services
Box A45 May Walter Avenue
Lexington, KY 40515

To: High Tech Sky Services

My name is (insert name) and I am the owner of a local cupcake baking and decorating service.

Since I began I have been catering to local businesses like High Tech Sky Services and the comments I have been receiving have been exceptionally flattering.

I am writing this letter today to extend my services to your company as well, in the event you need a custom cupcake.

All of my cupcakes use only the freshest of ingredients and are made absolutely from scratch.

I can create some for your company with only a days notice and can have them delivered or available for pick up at a specific time.

If you are interested in my services I have attached a business card to this letter for your convenience. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to set up an order.

I am also able to take advance orders so whenever your next special occasion or event approaches, please give me a call. You can also visit my website at:

<http://www.yourdomain.com>.

As a small business owner I just want to thank you for your time and support. I hope to hear from you in the future.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)

Of course you will have to customize this to suit the business that you are mailing. Do your homework and find out as much about the company as you can. The more customized, the better results.

This is a time consuming process but it's free advertising and very effective. It is also a more personal approach and will make you stand out to them,

since local grocery store bakeries will not attempt to connect with businesses in the same way.

Quick Tip: Keep receipts of all the supplies you buy when designing cards and stationery (even envelopes, postage, EVERYTHING). This will help you when it's tax time!

Promoting On A Shoe String Budget

I took the "grass route" method when marketing my business because I didn't have a huge advertising budget to work with.

I had to be innovative and figure out how to reach as many people as possible the most affordable way that I could. It would have been far easier if I had the ability to broadcast on the radio, or set up ads on our local community channel but in my case, that wasn't possible when I first started.

Since I had such a restricted budget I paid particular attention to every single method I used to ensure that I didn't waste resources on the things that weren't really yielding any new sales.

Here are some of the ways that I advertised my cupcake baking business.

Local Newspaper Advertisements

It cost me \$40 to run an ad for two months in my local newspaper. I then branched out to cover newspapers in other communities because my ad was so effective that I was then generating revenue from my decorating business to cover the cost of additional ads.

The first step is to create a list of every newspaper in your area (and surrounding areas if you are in a smaller city or town).

Find out if they have a website if possible because if so, it makes the process even easier and faster.

Once you have your list, find out what their ad prices are. Target the ones that are more affordable at first, because even though they may have a smaller readership, you can see how effective your ads are (and if they need tweaking) without spending a lot of money.

When you advertise choose the longest available campaign that you can to make sure it runs (and it seen) by as many people as possible.

One ad, one time will not yield nearly as much as if people see your ad multiple times, a proven strategy that Internet marketing gurus have tested throughout the years. In fact, they say it takes the average person four times viewing an ad before they remember it.

My Ads Went Zoom Zoom

I know it might sound tacky but because I was on a shoestring budget I decided to try out the car magnet idea. It worked like a charm and didn't cost me that much at all.

Just make sure that you have a website before you try this technique because people will NOT remember your phone number. They are far more likely to remember your website address instead.

Refrigerator Magnets

Turn your business card into a refrigerator magnet. The magnets can be given to each customer when they pick up their cupcakes (along with other "plain" business cards to give to the guests at their party).

Bridal Gown and Tux Shops

Visit bridal gown and tuxedo shops in your area and request permission to display your business cards on their counter top or bulletin board. Purchase inexpensive, clear cardholders in which to display your cards.

Ask the shop owner for permission to display some beautifully decorated dummy wedding cupcakes in their store.

Other Wedding Vendors

Speak to the owners of other shops in your area that cater to the wedding and special events industry.

Ask about placing your business cards in a prominent location in their shops and possibly creating a display similar to the one described above, using their items along with bridal cupcakes. Also ask about collaborative advertising in the newspaper.

Other businesses to consider include hair salons, nail salons, day spas, jewelry stores, etc.

Other Places for Cards and Displays

Below are other businesses and groups that you might consider asking for permission to display business cards:

Children's party places and hosted events

Sports Events

Craft Stores

Daycare Providers

Beauty Salons (I got a lot of business from these)

Baby stores (baby showers always have cupcakes!)

Lingerie Shops (or anywhere else that brides-to-be go)

Just remember there is no shop that has customers that won't need your services.

I have said it before and I will say it again, everyone has a birthday, everyone attends weddings, everyone knows someone who is getting married, everyone knows someone who is having a baby shower, and the list goes on.

Quick Tip:

I used the Internet for promoting my business just by participating on discussion forums and placing articles on ezine sites about topics that people looking for custom cupcakes would find interesting.

Of course every article I wrote had a link back to my site. I can say to you with a lot of confidence that a website is **REQUIRED** in order to get the most out of the advertising possibilities that are around you.

"Higher End" Methods of Marketing

These are typically more expensive ways to market your new cupcake decorating business if you have the budget to accommodate these techniques.

Food Editors

Food editors in newspapers or websites may be interested in writing an article about easy cupcake tips, things a bride should know when ordering her wedding cupcakes, or perhaps an article on a home-based business owned by a stay-at-home mom.

After sending the press kit to an editor, follow up seven to ten days later with a telephone call to confirm her receipt of your press kit.

Ask the editor if she sees the possibility in the future of a story about cupcakes. Keep your conversation brief and to the point.

Thank her for her time and tell her that you would appreciate her keeping your information on file. You

may hear from her a week later or a year later. If you do not hear from her right away, you may send her a short letter every six months just to keep yourself in the forefront of her mind.

Bridal Shows

Bridal shows are held in many cities throughout the year, but especially January through March after all those Christmas engagements.

Consider having a booth or a display at an upcoming bridal show in your area. Bridal shows often include a bridal attire fashion show with lots of door prizes, followed by time for attendees to stroll and check out the booths of businesses catering to the wedding industry.

Consider making cupcakes and serving them to visitors to your booth. (Ask event organizers how many people attended last years show to estimate your cupcake quantities.)

Display some dummy wedding cupcakes.

Make sure each booth visitor receives your business card and any other sales materials you have brought. You should consider giving these items to everyone, not just potential wedding cupcake customers.

Don't Be Intimated

First of all let me tell you that it does not matter where you live. You can be in the smallest of towns or

the biggest of cities you really can be successful with this business.

If you use creative marketing ideas to promote yourself you will be able to create a rather lengthy and active customer list quickly. Even if you find the competition stiff, if you introduce your services in an appealing and different way you will stand out.

Do not allow yourself to be intimidated by large bakeries, catering services and the like. If you are professional and consistent word of mouth will spread like wild-fire (and it's the best form of marketing at that).

Simply develop a marketing strategy that is affordable, easy to execute and effective. You need to cover as much ground as possible.

For me, it took a lot of discipline but I knew that if I did not work on marketing constantly (every single week) I would never expand into the areas that I wanted to cover. Every bit of effort will pay off.

I think one of the most important aspects of advertising is the ability to pay close attention to every route you take.

What I mean is, find out what is working and what isn't. Whenever someone calls to place an order, try to find out how they heard about you.

Knowing whether it was the flyer at the grocery store

or the more expensive radio ad will help you determine where to spend your advertising dollars more wisely, and eliminate the advertising that isn't producing results.

Tools Of The Trade

You can take online workshops, you can watch the cooking channel, you can read about how to create the perfect cupcake, you can do all of this and more but NOTHING will help you improve your skills than taking a hands on approach and actually doing it!

So, what tools will you need?

If you bake regularly you probably already have most of these baking tools in your kitchen, however if you don't, rest assured that most of the baking supplies are relatively inexpensive, and some of them can be purchased at a later date whenever you receive a custom order that requires them since otherwise they aren't used that often.

Here are the tools that I made sure I had when I started my cupcake decorating business.

1) The Obvious One, An Oven!

Myth: You do not need some specialty-baking oven to create the perfect cupcake. A regular oven will work just fine, provided that you are able to regulate the temperature correctly. If your oven is under-cooking in one corner and burning in another, it is probably time

to head out to your local appliance store and consider a new one.

2) A Hands-Free Electric Mixer

My grandmother, a popular cupcake decorator in the city burned up three stand mixers before she had ever learned about the Kitchen Aid mixers.

She then bought a second hand Kitchen Aid 5 Qt. mixer over 20 years ago. That mixer is still in use to this day. Mixing icing really does put some stress on the mixers.

My point?

A heavy-duty mixer is a must. This will quickly become your new best friend. It's an essential piece of equipment for the cupcake decorator and something you cannot avoid buying.

The Kitchen Aid 5 quart Artisan stand mixer is perfect for the job. They are not cheap however they will save you a lot of time, so it's well worth the investment. If you shop around you can usually find them on sale, so be sure to hunt down a bargain for this item before you buy one.

3) Cupcake Turntable

Sturdy turntables are a necessity. There are several styles and designs available for the sugar artist.

From the basic small plastic version, to a reversible one side rectangular and the other side round with an elevation of about 6 inches, to the motorized elevated turntable. There are many sizes, designs and prices to choose from.

A better quality turntable is best since that way when you get into heavier tiered cupcakes you will not have to purchase a new turntable.

4) Cupcake Trays

Good quality cupcake trays.

As you are acquiring your equipment buy the best quality trays you can afford.

Buying good pans does make a difference. Don't buy the bargain versions if you plan on using them for a long time. Multiple sets of different sized pans will allow you to bake in a shorter amount of time. Only one tray means you must cool the tray after baking before you can wash it, refill it and bake again.

Your time is valuable. Two or more sets will allow you to use your time to a better advantage.

As your business grows you will probably want to even add more sets.

Larger commercial size trays are available but you must make sure that your oven will accommodate those sizes.

Measure the inside of your oven before buying the larger size pans.

It is advisable to always shop at professional bakery equipment supply stores, craft stores, or online cupcake decorating sites rather than a department store.

Talk to professional bakers about the pans they use and check out online forums for bakers. If you plan on using your pans for a long time, investing in a quality product makes all the difference in the world and will save you money in the long run since you will not have to replace these items as often.

Cooling racks

Large heavy duty cooling racks are a necessity.

Angled spatula - For applying and smoothing icing.

Piping (or pastry) bags -

For creating borders and other decorations.

Couviere - For changing tips easily.

Tips - Basic tips include those used for lettering and creating flower petals, leaves, and borders. Purchase others as needed.

Digital Camera

A really good camera. Learn to take really good close up pictures of your cupcakes. When you are trying to establish yourself in your community, these pictures will show your customers just what you can do.

Other Items to remember:

Icing scraper or comb

Icing ruler or comb

Serrated knife

Decoration for top of cupcake

When you are really ready to make a go of cupcake decorating as a business, you need to determine exactly what you can afford to invest and stay within your budget.

Typically the biggest investment you will need to make is in an electric mixer.

Once you complete your research and purchase a mixer, you will probably also realize that there are a host of other wonderful items that could be used in your decorating business.

If you are one of those people who LOVES to shop, be wary of going too far too fast, to purchase much more than you really need.

You see, despite all of the wonderful products that are out there, most of your work will be done with a few essential tools. Be steadfast about buying only the tools required for the designs you are offering.

That means planning ahead and making some design decisions early on. (you can always change your mind.) Unless a special request comes in from a customer for a custom design, you really won't need anything other than the basics listed above.

Lowering Your Business Costs

Here are a few tips at keeping start up costs as low as possible.

Tip #1) Buy Only What You Need

This is tricky because it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of all the fancy decorating tools available to bakers. Try to avoid the temptation to "over buy" and choose items that really will help your business grow.

Tip #2) Use The Internet

Obviously you have access to the Internet if you are reading my guide. The possibilities with what you can do online with your own website (featuring your service

of course) is endless. Free advertising at its finest.

Not to mention the unlimited resources available to you to help you improve your skills, get new ideas and network with others in the business.

Tip #3) Use Your Home Number or Cell Phone

Keep costs low by utilizing the resources that are already available. When you start your cupcake business you can use your home phone as a way to communicate with clients. Once your business grows you can invest in a separate phone line but it is not required when you first begin.

Tip #4) Create Your Own Business Cards

With the easy to use templates available at Avery.com and similar sites there is no reason you cannot create and print your own stationery and business cards. This will save you a lot of money.

Tip #5) Use Your Home Office

You do not need to rent office space, that's silly. Just set up your office and computer to be your central point where you can store customer lists, build your website and stay organized. If you don't have a computer this can be a costly investment but a worthwhile one.

Tip #6) Take your own photographs

Each time you design a cupcake you should take a photo so that eventually you can build up a portfolio and use these pictures as a catalog for potential customers.

Taking your own digital photos is easy, and will save you a lot of money in the long run since you can even print the photos off yourself with just a standard printer and photo paper (I suggest Canon printers for photo printing).

Essentially the more things you do yourself the more money you will save and be able to use in other areas that will grow your business even more such as advertising.

How To Accept Payment

Credit Cards:

This is an essential step. You must be able to accept credit cards, as most customers will expect that they will be able to use them to purchase their cupcakes.

There are many different providers available, so do your homework before selecting the merchant account and processing agent that you intend to use.

If you have a website, which you should, you can accept payment via Paypal, the easiest way to accept all credit cards without having to have your own merchant account.

That way you can direct your customer to an order form on your site where they can pay instantly and receive an automated email receipt from Paypal. <http://paypal.com>

Checks:

I wouldn't recommend accepting checks due to the fact that they often take a while to clear but if you decide to go that route all you need to do is set up a checking account at your local bank.

If possible, I would suggest registering a business name in your community and opening the bank account up in that particular name. That way, your customers can write checks out to the business rather than your personal name. Once again, you need to always remember to represent yourself in a professional manner.

Cash:

This was the most common method that I was paid when I first began. If you are accept cash be sure to have a receipt book available so that you can write out receipts for all of your customers.

Also, be sure to keep solid records for taxation purposes and regardless of how you are paid, always claim everything you earn.

Setting Up Your Office

When starting your cupcake business, there are so many things to remember and so many documents to keep track of. Be sure to set aside space in your house in addition to your kitchen, specifically for the business.

The tax advantages may be significant when operating a home Office. A cupcake business really isn't the kind of business that requires a storefront, at least in the early stages. As you grow, you may want to consider that route.

A home office does not have to be glamorous, but it does need to be exclusively used for business and it does need to be comfortable.

The IRS typically looks at home office deductions very carefully and you may want to consult with a tax advisor regarding such deductions.

Home Based Business Taxes

It is very important to the IRS that your business is not a hobby. Even if you have another job, your cupcake business is likely entitled to tax breaks if you are running it as a business.

The IRS considers a hobby an activity "carried on for personal pleasure or recreation."

The considerations for being identified as a business include: the activity being carried on in a "business-like" manner; enough time invested into your efforts to demonstrate that you intend to make a profit; you depend on the income for your living; your losses are beyond your control (start-up losses are normal); you make changes to make the business profitable; you or your advisors know what they're doing to make the business successful; you've made a profit in similar activities in the past; you start making a profit eventually; you can expect to make a future profit from the appreciation of the assets used in the activity.

All of these qualifications do not need to be met to qualify as a business. If you are making a profit, another important consideration is the self-employment tax you will owe in addition to your regular income tax.

The self-employment taxes pay for Social Security

coverage. If you have a salaried job covered by Social Security, the self-employment tax only applies to the amount of your home-business income that, when applied to your salary reaches the current ceiling.

State taxes and potentially sales taxes apply as well. Again, talk to a pro.

The website www.irs.gov has a wealth of information regarding home-based businesses.

Are You Legal?

Most cities have legal zoning laws that prohibit home businesses unless you apply and are approved for a variance. You will need the support of your neighbors if this becomes necessary for you.

Take your neighbors a cupcake once in a while. Let them know what you do and why. Be considerate of your neighbors. If people picking up their cupcakes, causes too much traffic in your neighborhood, you may need to deliver those items.

Arranging for all pick-ups during hours that your neighbors are at work or school might alleviate this problem.

If you are only doing a couple of cupcake orders a week - the expenses of having a legal baking facility will not be practical for you.

But if your business has grown enough for you to know that you must approach this as a real business (instead of a money making hobby) these are the things you should do. Check with your local Health Department for the requirements to have a legal health inspected food facility in your town. Each state and town has different requirements.

Some states are very lenient with small home baking businesses and only require you to get legal when you surpass their limits.

Other states or cities just play like you aren't really there. If you happen to be in a city with a very strict health department - you must get legal or risk being fined or shut down.

When we converted our two car garage into my work kitchen we made sure that we followed all of those requirements. I found it was difficult to get the information I wanted from the proper sources. They kept sending me to other departments and giving me conflicting information.

We home cupcake decorators don't really fit into their normal criteria for a bakery and they don't quite know what to do with us.

I was operating with a business name with a tax number and had done everything listed below.

A bakery in town turned me in for the zoning violation and that forced the issue. My neighbors went to bat for me and the health department inspection was a breeze.

Now that bakery has a legal competitor. There is room for all of us. What my customers want is a good eating cupcake and someone who will let them get creative in designing their own special cupcake. Most of us do sugar art and the bakeries don't want or have the time to do those types of techniques.

"Possible" Legal Requirements:

The following is a list of things that may be required of you to become a legal business.

City - State License

Fed ID No for Tax record purposes and buying from the wholesale florist, restaurant supply and institutional food warehouses.

Health Dept. Fee - City and State

Physical House Requirements MAY include:

3 compartment sink with a grease trap installed Hand sink
and mop sink (2 separate sinks)

Lights covered (They make clear plastic tubes that cover the fluorescent bulbs)

Washable surfaces - walls, floors, cabinets, counter tops

Ceiling must be of non-absorbent material

Separate refrigerator, freezer, oven (with thermometers)

Separate Entrance

Storage for Equipment - pans, spatulas, bowls, etc.

No pets in work area Approved Water source

All Ingredient containers must have covers and be labelled with contents and dated in refrigerators, freezers and cabinets

Heating and Air Conditioning may need to be separate from the house system.

If your cupcake decorating area is to be a separate building from your house you will probably be required to have a small rest room installed.

Check your zoning laws to see if signs are allowed for your business in a residential area.

Organizing Your Business For Success

In today's computer age, many people store most of their documents electronically.

This is increasingly easier, more convenient and efficient for small businesses. There is specialized software for bookkeeping, recipe and ingredient tracking and project management.

Email is a great way to keep in touch with clients; contracts can be drafted and quickly altered in Word, and financial analysis is simple with spreadsheets.

Most small businesses use computers in some aspect of their business. However relying solely on one technology to keep track of everything is not the best way for everyone, particularly the "technologically challenged".

Having a hard copy of important paperwork is advisable for every business and the following list identifies the most important paperwork you should keep in easily accessible files or notebooks.

Too Much Paperwork!

It may seem a bit overwhelming to have so much

paperwork involved with a business like this but there are two main reasons to always keep accurate records:

Taxes and Legal Protection The Tax Man Comes A'Calling

Your company will be established as a home-operated, part or full-time, sole proprietorship (unless you plan to have partners). You can usually file your business taxes under your personal 1040 using your Social Security number as the business tax ID.

There are many potential tax benefits to running your business from your home. Ultimately, you should contact a professional tax advisor.

A percentage of your home expenses is deductible when you use a percentage of your home exclusively for the business.

In the situation where you are using your kitchen both for your business and for your personal use, you will break down this percentage even further.

Your tax advisor will help you calculate this figure. Your deductions may also include all ingredients, equipment, and utilities such as electricity, water, gas as well as any renovation costs for your workspace.

Don't forget about services such as garbage removal, maintenance and repairs.

Travel and auto expenses are deductible when the travel is specifically business related. Internet expenses, office supplies, advertising, business meals, cooking books, equipment repair, and many other items are deductions you may be able to take. If you rent, the same deductions apply.

So, be sure to keep:

Receipts for all cupcake related expenses (Ingredients, classes, supplies, products, etc.)

Mileage on Car - running to the store for eggs, delivering cupcakes, developing cupcake pictures, and all things related to turning out those cupcakes.

Utilities records - gas and electricity that your use in baking and decorating should be deductible on your taxes.

Legal Protection

And as for legal protection, the last thing you want is a problem where a wedding party claims that you made a mistake that destroyed their day. Ensure that you have a copy of their exact order details for if you should ever need it.

The most important thing is to keep excellent records and receipts of ALL your spending.

If you try to remember expenses months after the fact, you will spend far more time tracking down receipts and probably will make errors. You can simply keep all receipts in a box even if you can't get to the bookkeeping right away.

Protect yourself and keep those records for a sufficient period of time. It is best to consult your tax advisor for the time for which you should hold onto records.

An efficient way to do this is to scan your records and save to CD. They also work great as a reference when a new bride wants cupcakes just like her best friend had. You may not remember what the other bride ordered, but you can pull her order and you can find the flavor, design and have all of the specifics in hand.

For weddings especially I would also suggest taking a few extra photographs of the cupcakes BEFORE they pick them up or they are delivered.

This will be proof that the cupcakes were perfect when they left your house.

Baking Secrets Revealed

Now we move on to the fun stuff, selecting recipes!

One of the most important decisions you will make in your cupcake decorating business is the selection of your cupcake recipes. As you first begin cupcake decorating, a good place to practice is on your family and friends.

As part of your preparatory stages, conduct a taste test. It does not need to be an expensive one: call your friends and give samples to your neighbors.

Try to get as many people to sample your product. Have a list of questions ready.

The results can help you evaluate the best aspects of your cupcakes and designs.

This kind of survey can also help you determine what kind of products everyday people are looking for and if there's sufficient demand for the kind of product you bake.

Cupcake Ingredients

When choosing a recipe, keep in mind some practical matters. Consider the list of ingredients:

Consider the method and time required to prepare the batter.

How complex is the recipe?

Does the recipe require folding, stirring, or other time-consuming hand-mixing methods? The dump and mix method is the most cost effective as it consists of only one step: Combine all ingredients in the mixing bowl and mix.

Many bakers make good quality recipes by using this procedure.

The ingredients in the recipe are such that they can be mixed this way without drying its texture when baked. It's important to mix the batter for EXACTLY the length of time the recipes calls for. You can set a kitchen timer while you beat to help you keep track.

Keep it simple and cost efficient.

When choosing recipes you may be tempted to start out with extravagant ones. Be advised that most brides prefer either chocolate, white cupcakes or spice/carrot cupcakes.

Build your business around two simple recipes, as they will account for a huge percentage of your orders. Add other recipes when and if the demand exists.

The three basic recipes you should consider using should include very simple ingredients and be quick and easy to prepare.

Icing Recipes

You will also want to test icing recipes. Butter cream, royal, and rolled fondants are three basic types of icing that you will want to include in your repertoire.

Butter cream can be used to coat and decorate cupcakes. Royal icing is used mainly for decorations and rolled fondant is used to coat cupcakes that are already coated with a glaze or buttercream.

Rolled fondant may also be used to create borders, flowers, and other decorations,

Buttercream:

When testing buttercream recipes, use unsalted butter, not margarine. If the recipe calls for shortening, use the best quality shortening available and try substituting butter for at least a portion of the shortening. Try a variety of flavorings in your buttercream: pure vanilla, almond, and lemon.

Royal Icing:

Royal Icing is a pure white icing that dries to a smooth, hard, matte finish.

Besides its lovely finish it also colors beautifully which makes it a favorite of professionals who use it not only for frosting cupcakes and cookies, but also for intricate piping of decorations (flowers, borders, and lettering).

It is simply a mixture of powdered (icing or confectioners) sugar, lemon juice, and raw egg whites but due to the risk of salmonella when using raw egg whites, I have also included a recipe using meringue powder.

Meringue powder is a fine, white powder used to replace fresh egg whites and is made from dried egg whites, sugar, salt, vanillin and gum.

When beaten with water and confectioners sugar it has the same consistency as icing made with fresh egg whites.

However, I do find that royal icing made with meringue powder does not taste as good as icing made with egg whites, so I suggest adding about 1/2 teaspoon of extract (vanilla, almond or lemon) when making the icing.

It is important when working with royal icing to keep it covered as much as possible as it dries out very quickly.

Fondant:

What is "Fondant"?

Fondant is a thick, creamy white sugar mass used in different forms for decorating cupcakes and cookies with; it can be rolled and draped over a cupcake, poured as a glaze or sculpted with.

Fondant is also the basis of many candies -- it is the center of a piece of a chocolate buttercream candy or

pecan logs.

It can also be used as a thick creamy, sugary filling that gushes out of a chocolate-covered cherry when bitten into. Fondant originates from the word "fondre" which means to melt named so because it melts in your mouth when eaten.

There are three types of Fondant:

Rolled, Poured or Sculpted, each one being versatile.

Rolled Fondant has a play dough-like consistency that can be rolled and draped in one piece over a recipe and pressed into place, such as with a wedding cupcake.

It "dries" with a semi-hard, perfectly smooth and satiny smooth surface that holds up well.

Poured Fondant is the smooth, white-as-snow glaze. It is the traditional topping for petits fours but can be used to glaze cupcakes, cookies, doughnuts, cookies, brownies, and éclairs.

Candy centers can also be dipped, as well. When dry, it gives a shiny, alabaster finish.

Rolled Fondant is versatile. It can be tinted, flavored, modeled, formed, twisted, imprinted, and cut out to form eyelet lace or other shapes to be placed on a Fondant-covered cupcake. It can also be topped with an additional layer royal icing or very white butter cream frosting.

Note: Some people object to the taste of fondant, but others think it tastes great! Fondant tastes a bit like marshmallow, but it is not as soft.

DOWN TO BAKING BUSINESS

The recipes most bakeries use most frequently cannot be duplicated using any commercial mix or combination of mix and "from scratch."

Find recipes that are almost as quick and simple to prepare as a mix. Any extra time or effort, however, will be well worth it to your clients. When baking "from scratch," follow these tips:

MIXING:

Have all tools, equipment, and pre-measured ingredients needed on the counter.

Keep ingredients at room temperature for best results

Scoop shortening from can to the measuring cup with a rubber scraper or spatula. Press it into the cup and level it off with the same spatula.

Spray baking pans with non-stick product.

Sift flour, baking soda, baking powder, and spices to avoid lumps

Mixing chopped nuts, dried fruit, or other additions with a little of the flour called for in the recipe will keep them from sinking to the bottom as they bake.

If you're out of baking powder, mix 1/2 baking soda and 1/2 cream of tartar.

If you've had baking powder or soda for a time, you can check to see if it still has leavening power by adding a small amount to a bit of very hot water.

If it bubbles and fizzes, then it's still good. When measuring flour, heap desired amount into measuring cup and scrape off the excess do not pound or settle it.

Double check to make sure you did not leave out an ingredient.

Insider Tips From A Professional Baker

BAKING

Before mixing batter, preheat the oven, prepare cupcake pans, and move oven rack to center position.

Try Crisco No-Stick Spray and follow with a light dusting of flour for greasing cupcake pans.

Place cupcake pans at least 1 inch apart from each other and from the oven walls. This allows air to circulate.

FROSTING

To seal in crumbs, spread a thin layer of frosting on the cupcake, and then refrigerate it. When the base coat of frosting is hard, spread on a final, heavier layer.

For a smooth-frosted surface, use a straight-edged metal spatula to spread icing.

DECORATING

Many excellent books are full of beautiful color photographs of intricately decorated cupcakes-many with complete decorating instructions.

Inevitably you will enjoy filling your shelves with cupcake design books and magazines particularly those that include step-by-step instructions.

They will serve as inspiration and as tutorials. (And they're tax deductible!)

YOUR CUPCAKE DECORATING PORTFOLIO

This is one of the most important things that you can create, a decorating portfolio.

This portfolio will be used to promote your business in

many ways, as the photographs represent your style, your skill and your abilities.

Here is what your portfolio should include: Photos of Cupcakes (of course) Why do we need pictures?

Pictures of your cupcakes are worth more than a thousand words. You should take a picture of all cupcakes that you are proud to have done. (Once in a while we do a cupcake that we hope no one knows we did) Your future customers may not know what you can do, how creative you can be and what your skill level is. When you have an album of pictures of actual cupcakes that you have done they have a realistic knowledge of your capabilities.

When creating cupcakes for weddings be sure to ask for a photo from the bride as it's an opportunity to get a copy of your cupcake design taken by a professional photographer. Be sure however to also take your own photos!

Be sure to use a digital camera (as I mentioned in a previous chapter).

It will cost you less in developing and since it's film-free, you can instantly transfer the photos to your computer. Better yet, using a digital camera enables you to view the photos as you take them, ensuring that you get a good shot.

Taking A Great Photo Of Your Cupcake

Lighting is one of the most important items when taking cupcake pictures.

Where you photograph your cupcakes is VERY important. If you have the room in your work area to set up a photographing space with controlled lighting that is the absolute best way to control your picture result.

For the most pleasing picture watch for the following items:

- Cupcakes are framed, centered, etc. in the picture.
- Move in close but not too close. Watch the backgrounds and try to keep them simple.
- * Take note from what angle the picture was taken
- Reflection from glass. Put an angle between the camera and glass so the reflecting light does not come straight back at the camera. Try using existing light.
- Bracket pictures to ensure good exposure for the cupcakes
- * Try using the flash with it off the camera

- Props can help a picture Your Website

A website showcases your talent and gives your client designs from which to choose in the comfort of their own home any time of day or night.

If you don't have the expertise to set up a website, consider hiring a small local hosting company to set one up for you. Explain your business and tell them you want to set up a "gallery" of your cupcake photographs.

This does not need to be a fully functional e-commerce site, where you would interact with the client, or process orders. (At least not in the beginning!) Your site should be an electronic version of your portfolio.

Feedback & Testimonials

If people have complimented you on the work you have done for them, ask them if they would be willing to submit a testimonial via email. That way you can collect this feedback and include it on your website and place a copy in your portfolio.

PRICING YOUR CUPCAKES

Appropriate and fair Pricing charts are the most sought after information for new cupcake decorators.

Unfortunately, there is no easy answer and it is probably the most common area for mistakes, especially for home-based cupcake decorators who are new to the market.

The number one reason why most cupcake decorators price their cupcakes too low is because of lack of confidence in their abilities.

My advice to you?

Do not EVER undercut the local bakeries!

Remember the reason why customers are coming to you rather than the local bakery is because they simply want a product that is better tasting, or perhaps they like your style or you will create something that the local bakery won't.

Whatever the reasons, they came to you, you need to set your prices so that they aren't only fair to your customers, and they are fair to you.

Be generous with your servings. Give your customers the very best tasting cupcake you can offer.

Always do your best on every project or cupcake you take on. Even if you realize you under priced a cupcake - still give your best and adjust that price the next time you are asked to do that same design.

So how do you determine a fair price range?

Call local bakeries and get their pricing list. Ask for prices on a variety of items, such as: A birthday cupcake, and whatever you are quoted, be sure to get the exact size of the cupcake in inches.

Take notes, especially since you should be asking for many different prices from everything including wedding cupcakes with white icing roses and swags, or basket weave or perhaps whether they do rolled fondant icing.

The more you can find out about your competition the better prepared you will be to set fair pricing on your own products.

Then when you have all of the information from various bakeries set your prices to be competitive but SIMILAR.

Remember to take into account the ingredients used for each particular type of cupcake, the time it takes you to prepare and decorate, the cost of cardboard rounds, glue, ribbon, etc.

Note: I suggest calling multiple bakers to collectively obtain the information you need instead of calling one and asking them a multitude of questions.

A general rule of thumb used by many cupcake decorators and caterers is to figure all costs of ingredients and supplies, then multiply by three to determine a minimum cost.

Food Safety Tips

To be successful in any food related business, one must produce items that are safe and wholesome. The production of safe foods is your responsibility.

Time and temperature abuse of foods contaminated with food-borne pathogens will certainly lead to a foodborne outbreak that would likely destroy your reputation and business.

If anyone gets sick after eating your cupcake you may also find doctors bills or worse, a lawsuit on your hands.

These problems can be avoided if you follow safe food handling practices.

Purchase high-quality foods from a reliable vendor. The food should be in good condition with the packaging intact, fresh (not beyond expiration date), and at the proper temperature.

Store potentially hazardous foods, such as eggs and milk, immediately in the refrigerator (33 to 40°F). Dry staples should be stored at 50 to 70°F. Practice First-in-First-Out (FIFO) to insure safety and quality of your items.

Ideally, frozen foods should be thawed in the refrigerator 18 to 24 hours prior to preparation. However, thawing under cold running water (<70°F), in the microwave, or extending the cooking time are all acceptable methods for thawing food.

Practice good personal hygiene when preparing and handling food. Wash hands before food preparation, after handling raw foods, after using the restroom or at any time the hands become soiled.

Gloves may be worn when handling and preparing food.

Take measures to prevent cross-contamination of food if you cook your family's meals in the same space where you bake and decorate cupcakes.

Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces such as counter tops, cutting boards, equipment and utensils. One tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water is an effective sanitizing agent.

Wash fresh fruit thoroughly under cold running water. In refrigerator storage, make sure fresh fruits are wrapped or stored in containers separately from raw meats.

Wear clean clothes and aprons when preparing food.

Do not use the same towel to wipe food contact surfaces that you use for wiping hands.

Clean storage and kitchen areas regularly.

Practice good housekeeping and implement a pest control program for eliminating the spread of disease.

Wedding Cupcake Consultations

The Wedding Industry is a huge industry, and when I say huge, I mean a 30+ Billion dollar a year business.

Whether you intend to focus just on this market or expanding to include other special events like anniversaries, birthdays, catering or restaurants, there is a lot of potential and an enormous opportunity for you to make an ongoing, steady profit just by baking and decorating these cupcakes.

Wedding cupcake consultations are sometimes conducted totally by phone and sometimes face-to-face in your home.

Sometimes the bride or her mother has visited your website and will request more information (prices) via email or phone. If your designs and prices seem to fit the bill, your potential clients will want to meet with you in person to discuss their cupcake order.

When setting the appointment for a consultation, ask the bride to bring any photographs or magazine clippings, sketches, whatever is needed to communicate what her wedding is in her mind.

You will be reviewing all the details, decorations, and colors. Ask her to also bring any fabric swatches (or even paint chips) if she wants color in her cupcake design. If she already bought ornaments for her cupcakes, she should bring them as well.

A cupcake tasting is usually the first step toward making sure the finished cupcakes are exactly what the bride wants. The bride will sample the different cupcake flavors that you offer; and you will work together to figure out the costs. Use your best china and silver or flatware. When serving cupcakes, serve hot coffee or tea and water.

One way you can set yourself apart from other bakeries is to discuss openly and honestly her budget. If you are genuinely concerned about accommodating her budget, your sincerity will come through.

Being up-front with your clients regarding pricing is the best way to avoid misunderstandings later.

During your cupcake consultation, there are several key areas that should be discussed:

Cupcake Design & Style:

Have her bring photos, if possible, of cupcakes that she likes.

Size of Cupcake order:

Typically estimated by the number of guests.

Frosting Choices:

Buttercream, fondant, royal icing, etc

Cupcake Fillings

Accents

Fresh flowers, edible beading ,etc

Cupcake topper styles

Traditional, fresh floral, sugared fruit

Pricing and delivery fees and terms. Due Date of Cupcake order

Conduct the consultation assuming that the order will be closed and deposit received at this meeting. Begin filling in the blanks on the agreement and discuss the cost of everything as you go along.

Remember to be especially tactful and sensitive when discussing your cancellation policy.

Brides usually do not come to a wedding cupcake consultation with thoughts of canceling on their minds!

Make sure you mention it, but don't dwell on it.

A very important part of your agreement is the list of telephone numbers of various people that you may need to contact before the wedding and possibly on the day of the wedding.

If all of those names and numbers are not yet known, be sure to follow up later.

The discussion of the artistic design of the cupcakes can be very quick and easy if a bride comes with pictures and firm ideas.

However, this can become a long, drawn-out discussion if you are not prepared to step in as the professional and help the bride reach a decision.

You should not open your design idea books unless it becomes necessary. And do not have all of your design idea books on the table.

Once you have an inkling of the cupcake design likes and dislikes of the bride, narrow the search and the discussion.

When design discussions begin, refer to the decorated dummy cupcakes and hope the bride likes one of the designs displayed.

Obviously, the dummies and the cupcakes in the portfolio will be easy and comfortable for you to do because you've done them before.

If you need to look further, go to your portfolio.

If the bride finds a design that she loves, encourage her to finalize her decision because continuing to pour through a library of design idea books can become very time consuming and even confusing.

Once the design decision is made, be very careful to put every minute detail on the agreement, using separate pages if necessary.

Include your sketches, magazine clippings, photographs, and any color samples brought by the bride.

It is very important to note the size and shape of each cupcake, as well as all design details. Write down these details.

If the couple desires a groom's cupcake, the same attention to detail is necessary as you complete the section of the agreement for this second cupcake design.

Once the agreement is completely filled in, ask the bride if she would like to go ahead and reserve her wedding date on your calendar today by signing the agreement and paying a deposit.

As your business grows you will be able to mention that "dates are filling up fast." This isn't a "hard sell" per se, just the truth.

When the agreement has been signed, make a copy for the bride if you have a copier at home.

If you do not have a copier (or fax or printer that makes copies), assure the bride that you will mail her a copy of the contract within a few days. Often contracts can be completed in Microsoft Word and can therefore be emailed.

Occasionally, a bride will have already set up a consultation with another cupcake decorator and will prefer to wait before signing the agreement. This is all part of being in a service business particularly the wedding service business.

Brides will occasionally want to check out at least one other shop before making a firm decision. (Don't take it personally.

It's not about you or your cupcakes.) It often depends on how prepared the bride is. If they are organized and have plenty of time to shop for services, they'll shop around. If time is of the essence, they may be ready to sign the contract and leave a deposit.

Whether or not the bride leaves you with a signed agreement and check, remind her that you are available if she has any questions and, again, offer your best wishes.

If the agreement has been signed, send the bride a letter thanking her for the honor of creating her Wedding cupcakes and list any details that she needs to provide for you-such as a final decision on her cupcake designs.

If she does not yet have a copy of the agreement, mail a copy as an enclosure with this letter.

If the bride left the consultation without having made her final decision, send a letter immediately thanking her for her time in coming to discuss her wedding cupcakes.

If she left with any unanswered questions, provide the information she needed. Remind her that you are available by telephone and e-mail to answer any questions she may have and wish her well as she plans her special day.

Time Management Secrets

As you gain experience in your cupcake business, you will develop your own strategies to work faster and more efficiently-thereby increasing your profit.

The following tips are offered to assist you in reaching a level of time management in your cupcake decorating business that others obtain only through trial and error-and lots of time.

Don't Procrastinate

As soon as an order is taken, begin a list of the steps you can do ahead of time. The goal is to keep your actual decorating time to a minimum during the final days and hours before delivery or pick-up. In many cases, the final stages of design can boil down to icing the cupcake, piping the borders, and applying pre-made or purchased decorations.

Royal Icing

When planning a cupcake design, always consider which elements of design can be created ahead of time. Many children's and other novelty cupcakes are lovely with royal icing decorations.

Flowers, ribbon, bows, lettering, clowns, and color-

flow work can be prepared weeks in advance, allowed to dry, and simply placed on the iced cupcake before delivery.

Gumpaste

Gumpaste flowers and decorations can also be made in advance. Always offer gumpaste as an option to your clients. Flowers made with gumpaste can be very realistic, and gumpaste is a more profitable medium in which to work.

Boxes and Boards

Once the cupcake design is planned and all possible decorations have been made in advance, still more work can be completed before the final days. Assemble the cupcake box and affix at least three of your business cards to the top of the box.

Refrigerating and Freezing

Several days before baking and decorating, mix butter cream icing and refrigerate. The day before decorating, divide icing into smaller bowls and color with paste food coloring.

Store, tightly covered, in fridge. Bring to room temperature on decorating day.

Whenever possible avoid baking ahead of time and

freezing. However, just about everybody freezes their cupcakes when their business picks up!

When volume of business increases and wedding cupcake orders start coming in, freezing can become avoidable in many cases.

When freezing cupcakes, cool completely and wrap tightly in plastic wrap.

Wrap completely in freezer foil and seal tightly. When thawing, remove from freezer and set on a flat surface. Do not remove any of the wrapping until completely thawed.

Cupcake Storage

Cupcakes can be stored at a cool room temperature or frozen depending on the cupcake and whether or not there are decorations. Try to avoid refrigerating a cupcake because it dries them out, unless it has perishable frostings and fillings.

When you store cupcakes without perishable items, you want to maintain freshness and moisture.

Unfrosted plain cupcakes, such as angel food, unfrosted butter cupcakes, tortes, sponge and chiffon, do not require refrigeration and can be stored at room temperature. Make sure you wrap them with plastic wrap and/or foil.

If you want to keep your unfrosted cupcakes for longer, freeze them. First wrap them in plastic wrap and then in foil, even if storing overnight (freezing for even a short stay, tightens the cupcake's crumb). Place inside of a resealable plastic bag.

Place frosted cupcakes in the freezer to harden the frosting before covering.

Place layer cupcakes in a cupcake container to prevent crushing. Angel and chiffon cupcakes are best left in the pan or placed in rigid containers to avoid crushing.

The icing and filling that covers your cupcake determines how you store your cupcake. Perishable frostings and fillings containing, for example, eggs, cooked custards, whipped cream and fresh fruit and berries and dairy MUST be refrigerated.

Cupcake Delivery & Packaging

Moving a cupcakes from one location to another does not have to be difficult. In actuality, it can be quite easy!

Following some simple guidelines ensures that your cupcakes will arrive safely—whether you are traveling hundreds of miles or just a few.

Be sure to have with you the equipment and icings you will need to finish any decorating needed at the reception.

Boxing the cupcakes makes transportation easier. Not only does it protect them from damage, but it keeps them clean and free from dirt, dust and bugs.

Place the boxes on carpet foam or a non-skid mat on a level surface in the vehicle to prevent shifting. Keep the boxes flat; never place on a car seat.

Boxed cupcakes can also be transported in the trunk of the car, except in hot weather, because air conditioning will not reach the trunk area.

At the destination, request a cart on wheels to move the cupcakes into the reception area. This is easier and safer than carrying by hand.

Remove the cupcakes from the boxes on the reception table by cutting the sides of the boxes and sliding the cupcakes out. Bring **along** a repair kit – extra icing, prepared decorating bags and tips, flowers, spatulas—just in case it is necessary to make any repairs.

Other Tips

Turn on air conditioning in your vehicle before loading and load everything else before finally loading the cupcakes. These simple steps will help prevent icing from melting.

As mentioned before, fondant has the tendency to weep if exposed to quickly changing hot and cool environments so try to move from cool space to cool space quickly. If possible keep the cupcakes away from or cover the windows, and use insulated boxes if available.

A large insulated box or cover can be made by duct taping or gluing together sheets of foil-backed insulation foam from the hardware store.

Hiring Delivery Help

When your business grows and your Saturday delivery schedule becomes overwhelming, you may consider hiring someone to deliver your cupcakes or ask a family member to help.

If and when you foresee the need for delivery assistance, first hire the person you are considering for the job to simply assist you in several deliveries before allowing them to deliver alone.

They must be totally confident in their ability to deliver safely and on time, as well as their ability to arrange fresh flowers, and do minor touch-ups.

Whoever you hire (even a family member) must be as professional in every way as you are in your dealings with clients, members of the wedding party, and your colleagues in the wedding industry. When you reach the point of needing delivery assistance, you have already developed a stellar reputation.

Protect your reputation by hiring only the best.

Charging Delivery Fees

Don't be afraid to charge a delivery fee for your orders. However, before determining what your delivery fee will be, find out what other cupcake decorators and related businesses charge for delivery in your area. (Same idea as when you were determining your cupcake prices earlier by calling bakeries). Also call delivery services and ask if they will deliver your cupcakes and how much they would charge.

Action Plan: Checklist

I have created the following sheets that will help you stay organized from start to finish. I hope that they help make things easier to manage for each and every order so that it is a success.

Remember taking the time to list everything that must be done to fulfill each order will help you stay on track and minimize problems.

For weddings and large catering orders, you will need a document with the following information:

- 1 - Names of everyone associated with the particular order including full contact details (phone number, addresses, etc)
- 2 - Directions to the reception hall. Always confirm exact details of the location and write it down.
- 3 - Any and all color samples, magazine clippings and other design pieces to help you create the perfect cupcakes based on the brides' style.
- 4 - Detailed contact information used for the day of the event (cell phone numbers etc), just in case you need to reach someone in the wedding party.

CheckList: 30 Days Before Wedding/Event

Purchase non-perishable items including fabric and ribbon (if needed), cupcake toppers, etc.

Be sure to have all of the required supplies including pastry bags, food color, gumpaste, fondant, plastic wrap, etc.

Write a list of grocery items that need to be purchased during the week before delivery.

Make as many cupcake decorations as possible (i.e., gumpaste or royal icing flowers and decorations, etc.).

Check records to make sure balance of payment has been received.

Prepare "delivery kit" - a basket of items that may come in handy at delivery. This is something you will use quite often and it should always be stocked.

Things that may be included in the delivery kit would be a map to the reception site, phone numbers, bride's top ornament, angled spatula, piping bags filled with icing (one bag for each color, secure end with twist-tie and wrap in plastic wrap).

Container of icing, decorating bags, etc.

I also include the tips I used to decorate along with a spatula, couplers, picture of the cupcake.

Also, do not forget to carry a package of your business cards! =)

One Week Before Wedding

Example: Monday for a Saturday Delivery

Contact florist if agreement includes flowers on the cupcakes. Confirm arrival time at reception and the time you will have the cupcakes set up and ready for the flower arrangement.

Contact photographer to request photographs of the cupcakes for your portfolio.

Contact reception site manager and confirm your arrival time.

Purchase all cupcake and icing ingredients that you will need to create the cupcakes.

Tuesday:

Make your buttercream icing and store in refrigerator.

Double-check all pre-made decorations (extras should have been made just in case of breakage)

Wednesday:

Get out all necessary pans, cupcake liners and/or cupcake wrappers and cooking racks in preparation for tomorrow (Thursday).

Check over your list and set up time on Thursday where your family is aware that you are going to be baking.

Thursday:

Bake the cupcakes, cool. Wrap all cupcakes.

Friday:

Remove buttercream from refrigerator and allow it to defrost to room temperature.

Ice and decorate the cupcakes!

Add icing and tips to your delivery kit.

Saturday:

Complete any unfinished decorating (should be minimal)

Photograph the cupcakes for your portfolio

Load delivery vehicle

Deliver the cupcakes on time!

Follow Up:

I suggest doing the following if possible.

Mail personalized thank you notes to the bride and groom and perhaps other party members who you had a business relationship with (if any) during this process.

Whenever you receive photos back from the photographer include them in your portfolio and if you have a website, be sure to upload them!

Relax for the day with your family. You just fulfilled an important order and made someone's day extra special.

You deserve it!

Conclusion: Final Words

As you start your new home-based business you will quickly discover how exciting this industry can be. You are bound to be a little nervous when you first start out but remember that you started this business because you have a passion for baking and being able to express yourself creatively.

The most important step you can take is to remain focused and disciplined.

Begin by solidifying your reputation and getting the word out to your community. Advertise yourself every single week, until you build up a solid customer base.

Always remember that your skills will improve the more you practice so if you are unsatisfied with a certain style you are attempting, keep trying.

You will be amazed at how your speed will increase and your abilities with time.

I would also recommend trying new styles almost on a weekly basis, especially when you first start out. Sure your family will get sick of cupcakes, but there is always a friend or family member to pass it on to! =)

Remember to create and mail those personalized letters out to local businesses as soon as you have purchased

the supplies and organized your business so it's ready for launch.

Do not be intimidated by those already established, there is room for you as well.

And last but not least do not give up. Sure you will encounter obstacles and moments where you wonder what you got yourself into, but that comes with the territory of being self-employed and believe me, it is something everyone experiences at one time or another in every business industry out there.

The bottom line is if you love what you do, you can't help but be successful at it.

I wish you all of the best with your new endeavor.

If there is anything I can do to help you, please do not hesitate to let me know.

To your success!