

This Entrepreneur is Rolling in Dough...Pizza Dough, That Is

Gourmet Pizza Truck Targets the Catering and Event Market on Long Island

By [Mitchell York](#), About.com Guide

I recently attended a charity event on eastern Long Island and met Matthew Michel, the founder of [Rolling in Dough Pizza Co.](#),¹ a mobile pizza truck with a wood-fired oven that caters parties on Long Island and in New York City. The pizza was delicious, custom made, and prepared fast. The truck was a work of art -- a restored 1943 International Harvester. Matt was too busy rolling dough to be interviewed on the spot, but we caught up afterward to talk about how rolling dough will turn into rolling in dough.



Matthew Michel, Owner of Rolling in Dough Pizza Co.
Mitchell York

What were you doing before starting up Rolling in Dough Pizza in late 2008, and what led you to start this particular business?

After graduating from Salve Regina University in 2005, I moved back home to Connecticut and worked in the family plumbing business for two years. When I realized that plumbing was far from my dream job, I moved to Long Island to be with a girlfriend at the time, and started bartending in Greenport. During the summer of 2007, my sister decided she would have a pizza truck at her rehearsal dinner. I thought, what a bizarre idea, and then I saw the truck and fell in love. Not only was it an antique truck, with a wood-fired oven on it but it was good pizza and a huge hit with all the guests. On my drive back to Long Island I quickly realized that I would be starting my own truck on Long Island. To me it felt like the perfect demographic for this type of business and it turned out I was right.

What's been the most surprising thing about the business?

I was very surprised at how quickly people started finding out about me. After only a few weeks, I was getting calls from Westchester and New York City, not to mention the [Hamptons](#).² I totally underestimated the power of word of mouth. I knew the truck would generate free press but beyond that it's all word of mouth and people sure can talk.

What's the most challenging part of the business?

Keeping everything in working order on the truck. Everything is constantly being exposed to the elements. If the wind doesn't break the hinge on the refrigerator door, then the electrical re-charging system will attempt to fail. If everything is functioning with the back part of the truck, then most likely something will happen to the truck itself. It never ends and it can be very, very frustrating.

What's the most fun part of the business?

Meeting people. I've always been a people person and this is the perfect job for me. We are always at different locations, homes, and events and the variety of people you meet is incredible. We do get the occasional nightmare customer, but for the most part we end up in the backyards of some pretty fun and interesting folks.

What part of the business do you despise?

I wouldn't say that I despise any part of the business. I will say that the moment I'm able to afford a secretary, she will get a desk and an office, and I will no longer have anything to do with paperwork. That will probably be the happiest day of my life.

How much did the truck cost to buy and refurbish and how did you finance it?

The cost of this project ended up being a little overwhelming. The truck was cheap but the labor, parts, and equipment just kept adding up. What was supposed to be a \$100,000 project ended up being almost double. Fortunately, I had been put in touch with some people that loved that idea and loved my charisma and gave me a private loan no questions asked.

What are your plans for the business? One truck, several, a fleet? Sell it to Domino's for a billion dollars?

My passion has always been restaurants. I know everything one can know about them: how to fix the dishwasher, how to work the line, mix a cocktail, wait on a table. I've always done it, and done it well and the day is coming when I will have my own. As for Rolling In Dough, it is the perfect complement to a good restaurant. With a professional working restaurant kitchen set up, prep work, staffing, bookings become so much easier because I will already have a team in place to do all the work I was doing before by myself. The income from the truck will be a big help when the restaurant is just starting out. Another truck is probably in the future but I'm certainly not going to get too far ahead of myself.

I could not help noticing that you were making the pizzas. As an entrepreneur how do you feel about doing that particular job? Is it necessary that you be the one to do it? Do you plan to continue to do it or replace yourself so you can do other things be?

I will not be making pizza next year but I do love being the one to do it for a number of reasons. It gives me the opportunity to be creative and challenge myself to get quicker and better. Now that I have done it for two summers, I will know what to expect from my pizza makers and know the limits. It's a lot of work when you have 100 people bombarding the truck at one time and it takes practice. Having had the opportunity to learn every aspect of my business -- which many people don't do -- I will be better equipped to train and manage my staff.

How many events ad parties do you do now?

The busiest months are June, July, August, and September and in 2010 I've done about a hundred or more parties in those four months alone. Sales are good and overhead is low. Right now, a good portion of income goes to loan payments but it's getting easier and easier to handle.

Do you have role models or entrepreneur heroes and if so who?

As long as he doesn't find out, I can say that my boss at [The Frisky Oyster in Greenport](#)³ is the person I probably most look up to in business. If I could learn from anyone, it would be him.

What's your favorite Rolling in Dough pizza?

I got a recipe for meatballs from my best friend's Sicilian grandma and now I make the best meatball and black olive pizza you will ever taste. That's not my opinion, it's a fact. We make so many great combinations but if I could have one, that would be it.

Do you ever eat pizza when you go out to dinner?

I do. I think knowing what's out there is important so I do the occasional New York pizza research trip and I always try out new places on Long Island.

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