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Holy Rolly Charleston



Editorial Team

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In this installment of Meet the Merchant, we speak to LaToya Gardner of Holy Rolly Charleston, in Charleston, South Carolina. Gardner shares how she and her husband decided to leave their corporate jobs to start

a mobile food truck business serving made-from-scratch rolled ice cream, and how they've adapted their business during the coronavirus pandemic.⁹

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Clover: Hello LaToya! Can you tell us the story of how you and your husband started Holy Rolly Charleston?

LaToya Gardner: My husband and I are two self-professed ice cream fanatics and we wanted to start a business that would sell the freshest, most delicious ice cream possible. We sell made-from-scratch rolled ice cream from a food truck—it's something really unique, really fresh, and very flavorful.

Clover: Can you explain how you came upon rolled ice cream and what makes rolled ice cream so unique?

Gardner: We first saw it on vacation, at a store close to the beach. It's truly fascinating to watch your ice cream being freshly made, and we wanted to bring it to Charleston and put it on a food truck.

We are one of the few rolled ice cream businesses that makes our ice cream base from scratch, instead of using a premade soft serve mix. Our base is made with only three ingredients: milk, cream, and sugar. Unlike regular ice cream, which is made by churning air into the base to create volume, rolled ice cream has almost no air incorporated into it. Instead, we roll the ice cream on a stainless-steel plate that is frozen to -20 degrees Fahrenheit, and then we chop and fold in a mix of fresh cobbles, cakes, and pies to create our different flavors. Then we roll it into its signature shape.

Since it's made fresh, we don't use any stabilizers or preservatives. The result is an ice cream with a super rich and creamy taste and texture.

Clover: Did you work in restaurants before? How did you come up with the idea of a rolled ice cream truck?

Gardner: My husband and I had both worked for over 15 years in corporate America—he worked in retail management and I worked in financial services—and after we had our kids, we were both looking for something that allowed us to have more flexibility.

Two years ago, we decided to go all in and we both quit our jobs. We decided to focus all of our energy, time, and attention into building our business, because we truly believed and saw the potential in our idea. In fact, it was a full-time job just getting a custom truck fabricated, developing our branding, and of course, tasting and developing all of our flavors!

Clover: Can you tell us about your flavors and how you choose them?

Gardner: All of our flavors have a “saintly” and a “sinful” version! Sinful is for adults, with alcohol-infused sauces. For example, you can order the “saintly” version of “The Devil’s Playground” and it has red velvet cake mixed into our ice cream base, layered with more red velvet cake, chocolate and vanilla syrup, and a cherry on top. For the “sinful” version, we also infuse the ice cream with our rum crème de cacao sin sauce.

We make everything from scratch. So my husband and I are our own two best taste testers. We mess around with different kinds of baked goods and different variations of ice cream. We will test what we think we would like and then we take that to our closest family and friends. Once we have a winner, it makes the menu.



Clover: Where does the ice cream truck live? Is it parked in one place or does its location change daily?

Gardner: We move around a lot. My husband does all of our bookings, and at first, we tried to do all different types of events. We did festivals, we did business lunches, we did private events—you name it, we tried it. We quickly realized that our market is primarily family and kid events and that we weren't having the same success at festivals that weren't family friendly.

Clover: How has the pandemic changed your business?

Gardner: Food trucks do a lot of festivals and major events. So with Covid, we lost all of our bookings and our calendar was completely cleared out. We had to be creative about where we were going to go.

We decided to focus solely on visiting neighborhoods. This was when all the restaurants were shut down or only available for takeout. During that period, we did very well. We saw our business almost double and we saw a huge spike in sales because so many restaurants were closed.

Now that restaurants have started opening up for sit-down and indoor dining again, we saw our business level back off. We're still going to neighborhoods and doing corporate events, but we're hoping that in 2021, we will see music and other festivals come back, since that has always been the mainstay of our business.

Clover: Why did you decide to use Clover in your business?

Gardner: We've been a Clover customer from the start. We chose the Clover Mini because it has its own built-in cellular service with 4G and we didn't have to use a hot spot to get internet, which is very important for us as a food truck. That was something competitors didn't offer.

Also, our merchant service representative was very hands-on—he actually came over to our truck, set everything up, gave us the walk through of the machine and how to use it.

We mainly use the Mini, though we also have a Clover Go. We also just started using Promos, which helps us give discounts to repeat customers.

Clover: How did you promote your business?

Gardner: Our priority has really been to focus on social media marketing. I don't want to sound conceited, but our desserts are really quite photo-worthy. We get our customers to tag themselves with our desserts and that has really helped us get established locally.

Clover: So what's next for Holy Roll?

Gardener: We're thinking of getting a second food truck so we can serve even more customers!

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How to optimize your restaurant menu to maximize profits



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Operating a restaurant is not for the faint of heart. One of the biggest challenges is the industry's razor-thin profit margins. Much of a restaurant's inventory has a short shelf life, and labor costs are also high. Add in stiff competition, the lack of scalability (since food is prepared by actual people and made to order), and now a foot traffic-crushing pandemic, and you have a recipe for a very challenging business model.

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As we mention in our post on restaurant profit margins, quick-service restaurants tend to have profit margins between 10 and 17%, according to YCchart. Profit margins are even smaller for full-service restaurants (between 3 and 6%, according to Restaurant 365) due to factors like higher labor costs...

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