

Learn How to Create Like Buffalo Wild Wings®

Buffalo Wild Wings (BWW) is a bold, social, sports-focused restaurant brand known for flavorful wings and fun, high-energy experiences. Now, they're challenging you to **think like a restaurant pro** and help take their menu to the next level with some fresh, new products.

Your challenge is to work as a team to **create and pitch a new BWW menu item** – either an appetizer slider or a signature wing sauce – that is exciting, profitable, and a good fit for the brand. You will follow the same process real culinary and marketing teams at BWW use to bring a product to life.

CHOOSE YOUR PRODUCT CONCEPT

OPTION 1: APPETIZER SLIDER

Create a shareable slider appetizer that satisfies sandwich cravings and encourages guests to still order a full-price entrée.

Target Guest: People who do not usually order appetizers

Portion: Small, craveable, easy to share

Goal: Boost appetizer sales without replacing entrées

Menu Positioning: Big flavor in a small bite; a craveable shareable that starts the meal strong

Food Cost Target: 25 – 35% percent of the menu price

Focus: Think about how to make something bold, fun, and shareable that hits a sandwich craving without replacing the main meal.

OPTION 2: SIGNATURE SAUCE

Invent a bold, one-of-a-kind wing sauce that blends popular flavors in a surprising way. It must work on both traditional and boneless wings.

Target Guest: Core BWW fans who love flavor and adventure

Flavor Profile: Familiar meets unexpected

Marketing Angle: Easy to describe, sparks curiosity, and leaves a lasting impression

Food Cost Target: \$0.16 – \$0.25 per oz.

Focus: Think about trendy flavor combinations, shock value, or mass appeal. Does it deliver a wow factor?

FOOD COST CALCULATION

For this challenge, assume BWW buys ingredients at about 30% less than grocery store prices. Use supermarket prices to estimate costs, then calculate your menu price based on a 15–25% food cost target.



YOUR PROCESS:

SIX PHASES TO GUIDE YOUR TEAM

This challenge is not just about the final idea. **It is about learning how to think like a real culinary or marketing team.** Follow each phase in order. You will be judged on the process you followed.

PHASE 1: KNOW THE BRAND AND GUEST

- Who are we making this for?
- What occasion is this for (game night, sharing with friends, weekend fun)?
- How does this idea match the BWW brand?

PHASE 2: IDENTIFY THE NEED

- What problem or gap does this solve?
- Will it help BWW attract new guests or increase purchases from current guests?
- Could it hurt sales of other items? If yes, is that acceptable?
- Why should this be on the menu right now?

PHASE 3: CREATE THE PRODUCT

- Does this fit the brand personality?
- Can this be made in a real BWW kitchen using mostly current ingredients or equipment?
- Can it be prepped quickly and consistently?
- Does it work for both dine-in and takeout?

PHASE 4: PRICE THE PRODUCT

- What is the estimated food cost?
- Does this price feel fair to the customer?
- How does it compare to competitors?
- Will it meet our profit margin goals?

PHASE 5: MARKET AND PROMOTE

- What makes this item exciting and worth trying?
- Who are we trying to reach?
- Where will we promote it (TikTok, in-store signage, social media)?
- Does it work for both dine-in and takeout?
- How can we create buzz or curiosity?

PHASE 6: EVALUATE YOUR IDEA

- Why does this belong on the menu?
- Who will love it, and why?
- Will it help the business grow sales or bring in new guests?
- Would you personally order it?



TEAM ROLES: WORK LIKE A REAL PRODUCT TEAM

Each student should take on a role. Teams should have at least the first three roles.

The last two are optional; if you don't have these roles, divide up the tasks between the first three roles.

PRODUCT DEVELOPER (CULINARY/INNOVATION LEAD)

WHAT YOU DO You design the new menu item. You choose what it is, what's in it, and make sure it feels bold, fun, and on-brand for BWW and that it has a reason to exist.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR

- Coming up with a creative idea
- Making sure it's realistic to make in a kitchen
- Making it exciting and unique, but still something customers want to order
- Understanding what gap or need it fills on the menu

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What guest need does this product meet? (new guest, add-on, trade-up, seasonal?)
- Is this attracting a new type of customer?
- Is this encouraging customers to spend more – either by adding something to their meal or upgrading what they already order?
- How is this different from what we already sell?
- Could it replace or hurt sales of another item? (that's called cannibalization)
- Why does this product belong on our menu right now?



MARKETING & PROMOTIONS LEAD

WHAT YOU DO You create the story that makes customers want to try the product. You choose how to promote it, explain why it's exciting, and connect it to what the customer wants.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR

- Naming the product & writing its "story"
- Choosing how to advertise it (social media, influencers, in-store, etc.)
- Making it feel like a must-have for the right audience
- Explaining why this item makes sense for customers today

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Who is this item for? (new guests, loyal customers, people celebrating?)
- What occasion does this fit? (watching a game? quick lunch? date night?)
- Why should customers pick this over something else on the menu?
- Does this product get people to try BWW for the first time, spend more on their visit, or come back more often?
- What message will help customers understand why it's exciting and worth it?



TEAM ROLES: WORK LIKE A REAL PRODUCT TEAM

CUSTOMER INSIGHTS & RESEARCH ANALYST (OPTIONAL)

WHAT YOU DO You help the team make smart decisions by researching food trends, customer behavior, and competitor strategies. Your job is to make sure the product idea is backed by real-world insights, not just guesses.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR

- Understanding what today's restaurant guests want
- Identifying trends in food, flavor, and restaurant behavior
- Looking at what competitors are offering and how BWW can stand out
- Supporting the team with data and ideas to shape the product and marketing

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What are some current food trends (sliders, sauces, global flavors, comfort foods, etc.)?
- What do BWW guests already love, and what are they asking for more of?
- What are other casual dining or wing-focused restaurants doing that's working well?
- Does our idea feel fresh, relevant, and in line with what guests expect from BWW?
- What flavors or formats are showing up across TikTok, food blogs, or Gen Z trends?



SALES & PRICING LEAD

WHAT YOU DO You figure out how much to charge, how it fits into the menu, and how staff can sell it. You make sure it feels like a good value, earns a profit, and supports the overall business goal.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR

- Setting a price that makes sense
- Comparing to competitors and what customers are willing to pay
- Thinking of ways to get customers and staff excited to sell it
- Considering how it affects other menu items (good or bad)

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Is this item supposed to attract a new guest, or sell more to someone already here?
- Are we asking customers to trade up to a more expensive choice?
- Does this item encourage them to add it on top of their usual order?
- Will this product hurt sales of more profitable menu items?
- If it does, is the trade-off worth it because it keeps people coming back or attracts new guests?
- How does this price feel compared to what customers expect and what competitors charge?
- Why is this a smart business move right now?



TEAM ROLES: WORK LIKE A REAL PRODUCT TEAM

OPERATIONS & FEASIBILITY MANAGER (OPTIONAL)

WHAT YOU DO You make sure the item your team creates can actually be prepared and served in a busy BWW restaurant. You think about speed, consistency, kitchen limitations, and packaging for dine-in or takeout.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR

- Making sure the item is realistic to execute in a real kitchen
- Keeping the prep process simple and fast
- Ensuring consistency so every guest has a great experience
- Considering how the item performs for takeout and delivery

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Can this be made quickly and easily in a high-volume kitchen?
- Does it use ingredients and equipment that are already in most BWW restaurants?
- Are there too many steps or fragile components that could slow things down?
- Will this item still taste and look good if it's delivered or carried out?
- Is this something a kitchen team can make consistently on a busy Friday night?



JUDGING CRITERIA

This is how your team's project will be evaluated across key categories, focusing on strategy, creativity, feasibility, and presentation.

1. STRATEGIC FIT (20 POINTS)

- Does the product align with the BWW brand (bold, social, fun, craveable)?
- Does it meet a real business need (attracting new guests, driving add-ons, trade-ups, etc.)?
- Is it designed for a clear guest or occasion?

2. PRODUCT CREATIVITY AND APPEAL (20 POINTS)

- Is the slider or sauce idea unique and exciting?
- Would it stand out from other menu items or competitors?
- Does it feel craveable, shareable, or curiosity-sparking?

3. OPERATIONAL FEASIBILITY (15 POINTS)

- Can the item realistically be made in a BWW kitchen?
- Are the ingredients practical and the prep simple?
- Will it work well for both dine-in and takeout?

4. PRICING AND PROFITABILITY (15 POINTS)

- Is the pricing within target food cost range (25-25% for sliders, \$0.16-\$0.25/oz for sauces)?
- Does the menu price feel appropriate and competitive?
- Is there a clear rationale behind the cost and price?

5. MARKETING AND PROMOTION (15 POINTS)

- Is there a compelling name and message?
- Is the marketing plan well thought out for the target audience?
- Does the promotion strategy feel modern and appropriate (social, in-store, etc.)?

6. CLARITY AND PRESENTATION (15 POINTS)

- Was the idea clearly explained and easy to understand?
- Was the pitch organized, confident, and persuasive?
- Were visuals (if used) helpful and relevant?

For more information on ProStart, please email prostart@nraef.org



FINAL DELIVERABLES

EACH TEAM WILL SUBMIT

- Product name and description
- Ingredients or flavor profile
- Pricing and food cost estimate
- Marketing plan or promotional sample
- 3 to 5 sentence pitch on why this item belongs on the BWW menu