

Learn How to Create Like Dunkin'

Dunkin' is a bold, fun, innovative beverage brand known for coffee, espresso, and refreshing drinks that keep guests energized all day long. Now, it's your turn to **think like the Dunkin' culinary and marketing teams** to create a new, crave-worthy drink that fits the Dunkin' vibe, excites guests, and drives sales.

Your challenge is to work as a team to **create and pitch a new Dunkin' beverage** and then decide how to price, market, and promote it. You'll follow the same process real Dunkin' teams use to bring products to life.



CHOOSE YOUR PRODUCT CONCEPT

OPTION 1:

SIGNATURE SEASONAL DRINK

Create a limited-time drink with bold flavors and a social-media-worthy look.

Target Guest: Gen Z and Millennial guests who want something fun and trendy

Flavor Profile: A mix of familiar and surprising

Goal: Drive excitement, create buzz, and boost seasonal sales

Menu Positioning: The “must-try” drink of the season

Food Cost Target: 15 – 25% of menu price

***Focus:** Think about bold colors, unique flavors, and fun names that make people want to share it on TikTok or Instagram.*

OPTION 2:

EVERYDAY HERO DRINK

Design a drink that could stay on the menu year-round and attract new daily customers.

Target Guest: Loyal coffee lovers and younger guests looking for an everyday go-to

Flavor Profile: Smooth, balanced, and craveable

Goal: Build a strong, permanent menu item that appeals to a wide audience

Menu Positioning: “Your new Dunkin’ favorite”

Food Cost Target: 15 – 25% of menu price

***Focus:** Create a product that feels fresh and innovative but still fits Dunkin’s classic style and can easily be made in restaurants.*

FOOD COST CALCULATION

For this challenge, assume Dunkin' 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?
- Why would this drink matter to Gen Z and younger guests?
- How does this idea match Dunkin's fun, social, and high-energy vibe?

PHASE 2: IDENTIFY THE NEED

- What problem or gap does this solve?
- Will it help Dunkin' attract new guests or increase purchases from current guests?
- Could it hurt sales of other items? If yes, is that ok?
- 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 Dunkin' kitchen using mostly current ingredients or equipment?
- Can it be prepped quickly and consistently?
- Does it work for both in-store and drive-thru?

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)?
- 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 Dunkin' 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 Dunkin' 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 Dunkin' can stand out
- Supporting the team with data and ideas to shape the product and marketing

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What are some current beverage trends?
- What do Dunkin' guests already love, and what are they asking for more of?
- What are our competitors doing that's working well?
- Does our idea feel fresh, relevant, and in line with what guests expect from Dunkin'?
- What flavors or formats are showing up across TikTok, food blogs, or Gen Z trends?



SALES & PRICING LEAD

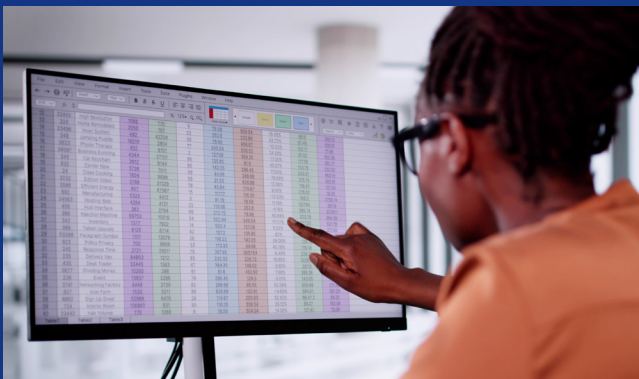
WHAT YOU DO You figure out how much to charge, how it fits into the menu, and how staff can sell it. You make sure it feels like a good value, earns a profit, and supports the overall business goal.

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 Dunkin' 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 Dunkin' 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 ordered for mobile delivery?



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 Dunkin' brand – fun, bold, social, and craveable?
- Does it meet a real business need, such as attracting new guests, driving repeat visits, or encouraging add-ons and trade-ups?
- Is it designed for a clear target guest or specific occasion, like a morning boost, social sharing, or seasonal excitement?

2. PRODUCT CREATIVITY AND APPEAL (20 POINTS)

- Is the drink concept unique, exciting, and on-trend?
- Would it stand out from other Dunkin' menu items or competitor offerings?
- Does it feel craveable, visually appealing, and shareable – is it the kind of product people want to post about on TikTok or Instagram?

3. OPERATIONAL FEASIBILITY (15 POINTS)

- Can this drink realistically be made in a Dunkin' restaurant using available equipment and ingredients?
- Is the recipe consistent and simple enough for busy locations to prepare quickly?
- Will it work well for in-store, drive-thru, mobile orders, and delivery?

4. PRICING AND PROFITABILITY (15 POINTS)

- Is the pricing based on the target food cost range of 15–25%?
- Does the menu price feel competitive and reasonable for the intended audience?
- Is there a clear, logical rationale behind the pricing and cost decisions, and does the drink support Dunkin's business goals?

5. MARKETING AND PROMOTION (15 POINTS)

- Is there a compelling name and message that make the drink feel exciting and “so Dunkin’”?
- Does the marketing plan thoughtfully target the right audience, especially younger consumers?
- Does the promotion strategy feel modern, creative, and relevant, using channels like TikTok, Instagram, loyalty app offers, or in-store displays?

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 Dunkin' menu

Any ideas, food, sauce or drink concepts, marketing materials, etc. created during the activity may be used by Dunkin' and all potential copyrights are hereby assigned to Dunkin'. Your participation in this activity will be considered consent to the terms regarding copyrights.