

Need-finding Report

Abstract. This report includes the need-finding results using interviews and focus group, naturalistic observation, user interviews, and hacks and workarounds. The need-finding activities explored the pain points of Meet Fresh customers and owners on app usage, ordering, customer experience and business operations. The clear need for improving revenue streams and attracting new customers was identified. The below sessions give a high-level summary of the need-finding exercise and the results.

Introduction to Meet Fresh Business Model:

Meet Fresh is a Taiwanese dessert chain specializing in traditional handcrafted desserts like grass jelly, taro balls, and shaved ice. Its business model is centered around authenticity, cultural nostalgia, and expansion through franchising. The franchise model of Meet Fresh offers both limitations and benefits for stakeholders. While franchisees have limited autonomy over menu changes, pricing, and marketing, they benefit from the established brand recognition, operational support, and centralized supply chain provided by headquarters. By leveraging the support and resources available through the franchise network, while also finding ways to localize their approach, franchisees can successfully navigate the challenges and maximize the opportunities of the franchise model. This balance allows them to meet both customer needs and business goals, ensuring the long-term success of their Meet Fresh locations.

Key Revenue Streams:

- Retail Sales: In-store and online orders of desserts and drinks.
- Franchising Fees: Expansion through global franchise partnerships.
- Delivery & Partnerships: Collaborations with platforms like Doordash, UberEats for wider reach.
- Loyalty & Promotions: Reward programs encouraging repeat customers.

Value Proposition:

- Authentic Taiwanese desserts are made fresh daily.
- High-quality ingredients with traditional craftsmanship.
- Modern digital presence (mobile app, online ordering).

Challenges:

- Cultural appeal gap for non-Asian customers.
- High franchise costs for new partners.
- Limited order flexibility in customization.

Here we'll present to you our findings.

1. Stakeholder need findings 1 (Xiaohan), interviews and focus group

I. Current Business Status & Staples

- The store has operated for 7 years, facing brand aging risks.
- The menu items are intrinsically non-ideal for takeouts.
- Limited autonomy from HQ (recipes, packaging, pricing, and portion sizes).

II. Business Owner's Core Needs

- Customer awareness, acquisition, and feedback
 - Expand beyond the current predominantly Asian customer base.
 - Conduct better market campaigns to attract more customers, especially on off-peak weekdays, and customers living outside the 10-mile radius.
 - Collect and process the dine-in customers' feedback systematically.
- Shop Operations
 - Reduce daily food waste.
 - Optimizing inventory management.
 - Increase turnover rate when seat capacity is close to saturation.
 - Automating the bookkeeping process, and data integration from multiple sources.
 - Keeping a tight and stable well-trained team without sacrificing service quality.

III. Follow up (post-event protocol)

- Create a 2-D needs priority matrix on urgency and impact.
- Acquire the historical and observational data mentioned in IV.
- Provide feasible low-fidelity prototypes or practically guided alternative suggestions to stakeholder

IV. Data Gaps

- Customer Behavior Data
 - Overall/personalized menu items/ingredients sales
 - Dine-in customer dwell time/APP customer order time
 - Tracking motivations for non-Asian customers' first-time purchases
- Operational Data
 - Daily inventory record and unsold ingredient waste
 - Per-item preparation time and error rates(accuracy > speed)
 - Hourly/weather-based sales fluctuation patterns
- Competitor Benchmarking Data
 - Pricing strategies of competitors, e.g., Mango Mango
 - Baseline metrics for community event participation/conversion rates

2. Need finding exercise 2 Naturalistic observation (Sara)

	<u>Long Island City, New York</u>	<u>Houston, Texas</u>
Customer Demographics	A diverse clientele, including Asian, Mexican, and Black customers. Both dine-in, takeout orders, and delivery pickups were common.	Predominantly Asian and Mexican, reflecting the store's location in Chinatown. Only a few customers observed, possibly due to weather conditions.
	💡 Potential need: Both locations serve multicultural communities but lack white customer presence, highlighting the importance of offering a variety of flavors, ingredients, or customization options to meet different needs.	
Ordering System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both stores relied on staff to take orders, with no self-service kiosks available. Orders were communicated in English, even both stores located in a predominantly Asian community. Both did not use product numbers for ordering, which could be less user-friendly for the Asian community compared to competitors like Hui Liu Shan. No Chinese menu provided. 	
	💡 Potential need: Introducing self-service kiosks or a more streamlined/culturally familiar menu could improve customer experience, especially in locations with a high percentage of non-English-speaking customers.	
Customer Behavior	Decision-making time varied, with some taking longer to decide (e.g., foreign customers) and others making quick choices (e.g., Asian customers). Dine-in customers tended to be groups, while solo visitors preferred takeout.	Customers spent more time deciding on their orders, and the store had fewer visitors, possibly due to the weather or location.
	💡 Potential need: Some customers, particularly foreign or first-time visitors, spent a long time deciding on their orders. Providing clearer menu descriptions, or staff recommendations could help facilitate ordering decision-making.	
Preparation Time	Dine-in orders took approximately 5-7 minutes to prepare, while takeout orders were often ready before delivery drivers arrived, indicating efficient handling of delivery demand.	
Portion Size and Taste	Portion sizes were large, and some customers found the desserts overly sweet, especially toward the end of the meal.	
	💡 Potential need: Some customers found the desserts overly sweet, and portion sizes were too large for individual consumption. Offering more customization options for sweetness levels and smaller portion sizes could enhance customer satisfaction.	
Delivery Demand	Both stores had a steady flow of delivery orders, with multiple drivers picking up orders during the observation periods. This indicates a strong demand for delivery services.	
Staffing	Three staff members were present initially, but one left, leaving two employees to manage both front-of-house and kitchen duties.	Only two staff members were observed, with one primarily working in the kitchen.

3. Need finding exercise 3: Hacks and Workarounds (Amelie)

App Engagement

Visual Aesthetics: The app features high-resolution images of desserts, a bright and fresh color palette, and a clean, simple layout that aligns with its warm, authentic and traditional Taiwanese brand identity.

Intuitive Navigation: The app uses clear, big icons and organized navigation (Home, Order, Rewards, More). Home screen shows the latest promotional activities such as cooperation with Honor Kings and exclusive items. The menu under Order is logically organized into categories. Rewards page provides a tier-based loyalty system encouraging repeat purchases. More displays account settings, payment method and transaction history.

Location-based Ordering: The app integrates Google Maps to help users find nearby Meet Fresh locations quickly. The ability to select favorite locations and “heart” a product allows customers to navigate to the same product quickly next time.

App Usability Issues

Short Cache Time: The Meet Fresh app has a short cache time for cart items, meaning that the products added to “My Bags” are cleared quickly if the user navigates away, such as to retrieve payment information. This can be frustrating for customers, as they may need to reselect items, leading to inconvenience and a potential drop in completed orders. Improving session persistence or adding a “Save Bag” feature could enhance the user experience.

Reward System Restrictions: While the loyalty system is a great feature, some restrictions (max 150 points per transaction, only one reward redemption at a time) limit flexibility.

Weak Emotional Connection with non-Asian Customers: Taiwanese customers visit Meet Fresh for nostalgia—a reminder of home and traditional flavors. However, US customers don’t have this cultural connection, making them less loyal. While Meet Fresh maintains its traditional Asian customer base, efforts should be made to attract more diverse communities as a localization strategy. Recommend creating relatable comparisons to Western desserts as the first step such as, Grass Jelly = Herbal-infused Jell-O or Taro balls = Chewy, mochi-like dessert. Also include popular ingredients in products such as vanilla, coffee, chocolate.

Order Flexibility and Customization: I ended up using Doordash to place an order and the entire size of the order became too big for the paper bowl with additional toppings. Also sugar level was incorrect by the time the order was received. Quality control and customization of portion size can be improved.

4. Need finding exercise 4: user interviews (Yucheng)

I. Customer Demographics & Preferences

- **Age & Background:** 20-42 years old, White, Asian, Hispanic, Romanian.
- **Dietary Preferences:** Low sugar, dairy-free, gluten-free, or taste-focused.
- **Consumption Habits:** Occasional to daily; favorites include ice cream, cakes, taro desserts, grass jelly, bubble tea.
- **Customization Needs:** Sweetness, toppings, portion control valued.
- **Taiwanese Dessert Experience:** Some enjoy traditional flavors, others find U.S. versions too sweet.

II. Customer Expectations & Pain Points

- **Ordering Experience:** Needs clearer menu descriptions, images; varying preferences (counter, app, kiosk, delivery); long wait times.
- **Customer Service:** Friendly, knowledgeable staff; complaints about incorrect orders, unclear menus.
- **Ambiance & Accessibility:** Cozy, inviting spaces; some stores feel too small; delivery expansion needed.

III. Store Improvement Opportunities

- **Customization & Menu:**
 - More options for sweetness, portions.
 - **Tech:** AI-powered recommendations (past orders, diet, trends).
- **Ordering System:**
 - Better menu clarity with images.
 - **Tech:** Chatbot/virtual assistant for menu guidance.
- **Engagement & Retention:**
 - Loyalty programs, seasonal items, group deals.
- **Store Layout & Delivery:**
 - Optimize seating, improve packaging, streamline takeout.

IV. Marketing & Competitive Edge

- **Discoverability:** Social media, online reviews, influencer marketing (TikTok, Instagram).
- **Differentiation:** Emphasize authenticity, highlight unique ingredients (taro, grass jelly, osmanthus). AI-driven content for engagement.
- **Tech: Promotions:** Targeted push notifications, limited-time seasonal flavors.

Conclusion:

Meet Fresh has a strong foundation but can improve **customization, menu clarity, service, ambiance, and tech-driven solutions** like AI recommendations and loyalty programs. Addressing these needs will enhance the customer experience, broaden the audience, and strengthen its market position.

5. Combined Analysis: Stakeholder and Customer Needs (Ning Ni)

To address both **stakeholder (business owner)** and **customer needs**, we need to identify overlapping areas and prioritize solutions that benefit both parties. Below is a combined analysis and conclusion on how to meet the needs of both stakeholders and customers:

Customer Acquisition and Retention:

- **Stakeholder Need:** The business needs to attract new customers, especially non-Asian demographics, and retain existing ones. Previous marketing efforts (e.g., social media campaigns) have had low conversion rates.
- **Customer Need:** Customers discover new dessert places through **social media**, **online reviews**, and **word of mouth**. They value **authenticity**, **unique flavors**, and **customization options**.
- **Solution:**
 - **Enlarged Marketing:** Use **social media influencers** (e.g., TikTok, Instagram) to reach younger, diverse audiences. Highlight **local flavors** and **customization options**.
 - **Loyalty Programs:** Implement a **rewards system** or **subscription service** to encourage repeat visits. Offer **personalized discounts** based on customer preferences (e.g., low sugar, dairy-free).

Seasonal and Limited-Edition Offerings:

- **Stakeholder Need:** The business wants to increase **dine-in traffic** and **weekday promotions**.
- **Customer Need:** Customers are interested in **seasonal or limited-edition menu items**, especially traditional flavors like **sesame** or **osmanthus**.
- **Solution:**
 - **Seasonal Promotions:** Introduce **seasonal menus** and **limited-time offers** to attract customers during slower periods. Promote these through social media and in-store signage.
 - **Weekday Specials:** Offer **weekday discounts** or **bundle deals** to drive traffic on slower days.

AI and Personalization:

- **Smart Recommendation System:** Implement an **AI-powered recommendation system** that suggests items based on past orders, dietary preferences, and seasonal flavors.
- **Customer Feedback System:** Use **digital surveys** or **in-app feedback** to collect and analyze customer preferences in real-time.