



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

A commercial kitchen operation opens the door for many great opportunities to get the businesses name out and known by the public – an excellent chance to make its catering services known to a large group of individuals. Each day, hundreds of opportunities occur that have a need for a catered meal. A wedding reception, a dinner party celebrating 50 years of marriage, an engagement party, a sweet sixteen birthday party or a corporate meeting: all are common, regular events that could use a catering service.

A commercial kitchen business is poised to offer catering services as an additional revenue stream. Operating a catering business provides a much-needed service in the community and can be very lucrative as most consumers are more inclined to splurge on a one-time event - especially if the nature of the occasion is a celebration. However, these high margin events can be weeks in between which creates a sort of financial roller coaster ride? The money made at a catered event can be outstanding but with high peaks, inevitably there are low valleys. This is why Personal Chef Services is a natural complement to catering operations? The steady, consistent income from a Personal Chef Service helps even out the roller coaster effect of the catering operations.

Catering jobs can run the gamut. Is it a cocktail party affair with canapés and hors d'oeuvres, or is it a sit down dinner event with a set number of courses, all served by a wait staff? Maybe it's a birthday celebration with light sandwiches and salads topped by the cutting of the cake with ice cream. No matter what the event or how it is to be presented, it's critical to know what the client wants, the budget, the date, and some idea of the menu. This information will cover the operation of a commercial kitchen-based catering operation - from menus, to pricing, to the execution of the event.

### Organizing The Catering Operation

There are three keys to an organized catering operation:

- ❖ Pre-designed menus
- ❖ Reliable recipe collection
- ❖ Multi-purpose client agreement

#### Pre-designed Menus

Having a variety of menus showing different styles and cuisines gives the potential client insight to the versatility of the business. Pre-designed menus provide a starting point when talking with clients who are unsure of exactly what they want for an event and will also help keep the client focused on the type of event offered. Menus might take several days or more to set up, but they are the cornerstones to operating efficiently. When a client chooses a pre-designed menu, the business already has a good idea what the groceries will cost, the time involved in preparation and how much potential profit will be made.

#### Reliable Recipe Collection

Collecting recipes takes time and effort. It is important to organize the recipes systematically so they can be found when a request is made for a dish. It doesn't matter whether it's a manual filing system or a computer program. The important thing is that the recipes can be found when needed. Having a large pool of good, reliable recipes to select from can simplify the task of designing creative menus or customizing an event for a special request.

#### Multi-Purpose Client Agreement

Almost everyone has listened to a friend relate an experience with a business - a story of woe that has a typical unfavorable ending regarding services rendered not matching what was originally promised. And the response after hearing the story is also quite typical; "too bad you didn't get it in writing". Putting agreements in writing, regardless of how small or minor, has become a necessity in our society and as a business owner this needs to be a top priority.



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The client agreement contains every detail of the event from the date, occasion, etc., to a copy of the menu and a copy of the invoice. Have these pre-printed so that when a prospective client calls, all pertinent questions are answered. It will become a working document that will be used until the event is over.

### Equipment Lists

Considering the amount of information to coordinate, trying to put everything to memory is a bad habit to have. We can take a lesson from Christmas folklore in the classic carol where Santa Claus is described as "making a list and checking it twice." The use of lists as part of a routine will help ensure that the event goes off without a hitch. Yes, most of the food preparation will happen at the commercial kitchen but the event will still need to have tools and equipment to put on the final touches. Print out a copy of the mobile equipment list and attach it to the copy of the client contract. Then, when getting ready for the event, check to be sure everything needed to take to the event is present.

### Working Smart

For event catering, planning and preparation are what will help stay one step ahead of the game. An understanding of baking and cooking coupled with a knowledge of food components can establish a smooth routine simply by working smart. When designing a menu, it is important to include recipes that can be prepared in the commercial kitchen. A catered event can easily fall apart in organization because too much has to be done just prior to serving. Timing is everything. Let's take a look at the following sample menu to see how much of the meal can be prepared in advance.

Shrimp Cocktail – This is a chilled dish that can be prepared early in the day, stored in a refrigerator and served in chilled martini glasses on a bed of lettuce with the minimum of fuss.

Individual Beef Wellingtons – The preparation for this dish can be done earlier in the day and chilled in the refrigerator. When ready, it is easily baked and served hot.

Parsley Potatoes – These can be completely made ahead, including tossing with butter and parsley, then refrigerated. At the appropriate time the dish can be set to bake in the oven.

Julienne Seasonal Vegetables – The vegetables can be prepared early in the day then steamed and chilled, or left raw and microwaved in a small amount of water, wine or orange juice at serving time.

White Chocolate Mousse with Liqueur – Make this early in the day, chill and then pour on the liqueur just before serving. Garnish with a wafer. So as you can see, this whole menu can be made earlier in the day and chilled in the refrigerator. When the event is ramping up, it's simply, heat and plate and at serving time. there will be a minimum of fuss

### Recipe Pre-preparation

The following are more examples of how to take recipes and coordinate the pre-preparation that will make the catered event go smoothly.

Salad Greens – Salad greens can be torn, washed, spun and tossed in the morning and stored in bowls or bags, ready for plating.



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Salad Vegetables and Toppings – The vegetables for the salads such as tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, mushrooms, etc. can be cleaned and prepared while working with other vegetables. Then place the salad vegetables in the refrigerator together, ready to top the plated salad greens.

Salad Dressings – Make these early in the day. Store them in a bottle ready to top the salads or place them in containers, ready to go on the plates or dinner table.

Breads and Rolls – These can be baked or prepped ahead then stored wrapped in foil, ready to warm in the oven before dinner.

Butter Patties and Spreads – If serving butter or spreads with the bread or rolls, make plates of decorative patties and store them in the refrigerator. Spreads can be placed in small cups or bowls to be placed on the table. Be sure to remove butters and spreads from the refrigerator and allow them to come to the correct temperature for the dinner service.

Garnishes – Most garnishes can be prepared and stored ahead of time. Some more complicated garnishes can be assembled and stored on plates or in containers so they are ready to go directly on the plates. Crowns can be cut and held together until service. Green onion flowers and vegetable curls can be stored in ice water. Herbs and vegetables can be chopped and stored in cups to be used as toppings later.

Cold Appetizers – Appetizers like Stuffed Tomatoes, Shrimp Cocktails and Cheese and Cracker plates are a great way to get ahead. They are “set and forget” items. When it is time to serve this course, all that’s required is to pull them out of the refrigerator and serve. This allows for concentration on the next course while the guests indulge on this one.

Hot Appetizers – Appetizers like Oysters Rockefeller and Stuffed Mushrooms are examples of items that can be preprepared completely except for the cooking. When it is time to serve them, all that’s required is to pop them under a broiler, brown and plate. This is another great way to get some time between courses.

Cold Sauces – Sauces that are served cold are a great item that can be made ahead and even stored in the ramekin, dish or bowl that will be placed on the plate or table. Having these done ahead avoids scrambling for the little things when it comes time to set the table and serve.

Dinner Vegetables – Many of the dinner vegetables can be prepared ahead of time - ready to be cooked. When it comes time for the main course the vegetables are ready to be prepared hot and fresh. Prepping them in advance provides the time necessary to make them look great using an assortment of decorative cuts and techniques.

Entrées – Many entrees can be prepared and assembled a long time before serving. Items in puff pastry such as the Beef Wellington or Salmon En Croute can be prepared and refrigerated until it is time to bake them. Items that are “en papillote” or “in the bag” are easy to make earlier in the day and are ready to go when dinnertime arrives.

Desserts – There are many desserts that can be prepared ahead of time. Pies, cakes, tarts and cheesecakes are good examples. In some cases, they can even be plated ahead of time. Any dessert that can be put in a cup makes a great item to have ready to go. Filled items like chocolate cups and cream puffs can save time on the dessert course.



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### Portion Sizing

One of the most frequently asked questions, apart from the "How much should I charge" question, is "How much food do I buy?" There are some fairly simple rules to follow here. • If serving finger food as an appetizer at the start of an event, plan on serving around five bites of finger food per person.

- ❖ If serving finger food and people haven't already eaten, plan on
- ❖ 10 to 15 bites per person.
- ❖ Serve 6 to 10 ounces of meat as a main course depending upon cut.
- ❖ (6 ounces for beef tenderloin (no waste – no bone) and 10 ounces for a New York strip steak)
- ❖ Serve 5 to 8 ounces of fish, as a main course depending upon preparation, cost and type.
- ❖ The average pie serves about 8 people.
- ❖ If serving potatoes or rice, plan on about 4 to 5 ounces per person.
- ❖ For vegetables, about one cup per person.
- ❖ When serving bread, 1 to 3 pieces per person depending upon appetite. (1 roll per person is quite typical)

After calculating the total amount of food needed, plan on adding extra portions in case there are unexpected guests, or one guest has a really hearty appetite. Generally, 5% to 10% is a good rule of thumb with a group size of at least 40 people. If the event is for a smaller group, plan on 2 or 3 extra plates.

### Menu Planning

A professional commercial kitchen operation will have menus, prepared in advance, available for review by a client. This will give them an idea of what they can expect for the expenditure of a specific dollar amount.

### Menu Fundamentals

Before choosing recipes for the menu-planning repertoire, it is useful to know how to construct a menu. It is recommended that a number of set menu choices be presented to a client. Even though much of what is done can be customized to the client's preferences, giving the client a variety of menu choices helps give them ideas, demonstrates versatility and speaks to the professionalism of the business.

Each menu choice should consist of three courses as a minimum, typically:

- ❖ Appetizer
- ❖ Main course
- ❖ Dessert

In general, a three-course meal might consist of the following:

- ❖ Soup or salad as an appetizer
- ❖ Main course – Protein with a starch and vegetables
- ❖ Hot or cold dessert

Adding further courses can make it a five- to seven-course meal. A typical five-course meal might consist of:

- ❖ Salad
- ❖ Soup
- ❖ Fish or Seafood
- ❖ Main course – Protein with a starch and vegetables
- ❖ Dessert



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Or as a seven-course meal:

- ❖ Salad
- ❖ Soup
- ❖ Fish course
- ❖ Sorbet (to cleanse the palate)
- ❖ Meat, Poultry or Vegetarian course
- ❖ Cheese and crackers, or nuts and fresh fruit
- ❖ Dessert

Be ready to add further course suggestions should the client want them rather than the standard three-course meal. Be sure to adjust portion sizes accordingly when adding or removing extra courses.

### The Recipe Repertoire

Recipes may originate from many sources: cookbooks, magazines, the Internet, television programs, newspapers and the like. However, it doesn't matter where they're obtained, the important thing is to identify the great ones and incorporate them into the organization so they are usable in the future. There are few things worse than not being able to share the food from a great recipe simply because the recipe can't be found.

A commercial kitchen catering business owner will likely read recipes a little differently. The skill and talent of reading and analyzing a recipe simply comes by experience. To help develop and/or refine this skill, consider the following questions when reading each recipe. Make two piles of recipes - if a recipe passes each test question, put it in the "A" list pile. If not put it in the "B" list pile. The "A" pile recipes are ones that will be used for prime catering events and the "B" pile recipes are ones to possibly use at a later date.

It is helpful to keep recipes in a file system. This allows for a quick review of what's involved in the preparation of the dish, the ingredients needed, how many servings the recipe makes and whether a recipe can be doubled, tripled, or if no changes are allowed because of the type of cooking required.

Recipes in a filing system designed specifically for catered events can be double and triple checked to save time in the future when planning an event. When the business has "down time," relax and do the math; and then check it to make sure the numbers are good. If a recipe cannot be increased, mark it in a special color so when viewing the card valuable time isn't wasted thinking about increasing its volume.

### Key Questions:

- ❖ Is this recipe special enough to be served at a catered event? If it's only suitable as an everyday meal, sometimes small changes can be made to a recipe to make it special enough for an event. Take a look at how to change a recipe with the addition of different ingredients before discarding it as ordinary. For instance, change ordinary Beef Stew into extraordinary Beef Bourguignon with the addition of a few simple ingredients.
- ❖ Is the recipe fairly simple to prepare?  
A favorite recipe that is simply a knockout but its preparation takes hours to put together or assemble isn't a preferred recipe. So before deciding to add a particular recipe to the repertoire, look at the method of preparation. If the directions seem long and complicated, reconsider this recipe as a party dish. However, a full page of good instruction is beneficial for understanding the preparation verses poor, short and vague instructions.



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- ❖ Are the ingredients for this recipe readily available?  
There is no reason to panic because a certain ingredient that is key to the recipe cannot be located. Try to make sure that dishes are designed using ingredients available through a favorite vendor. If choosing to use interesting and exotic ingredients, make sure they can be found and are available.
- ❖ With my current capabilities as a chef, can I make this dish really well?  
Take a good look at your skills. You may have certain areas that are your specialty and some others that are literally foreign to you because you don't have enough knowledge of that particular cuisine. The best advice (especially as you are starting out) is to stick with dishes that you have already made successfully in the past. You can then make time in the research and development part of your business to learn new skills and put into practice new dishes that can be added to your repertoire at a later date.
- ❖ Does this recipe require a lot of last-minute attention or can most of it be made ahead?  
Analyze the recipe. Can the sauce be made ahead earlier in the day? Cheese needs to be grated ahead? Can the food be pre-cooked a little earlier and then kept hot right up to serving time? If not, then put this recipe on your "B" list pile.
- ❖ If the event is running late, does this dish have good hold time or must it be served immediately?  
A soufflé would be a good example of a dish with no hold time. A beef stew on the other hand can be delayed almost indefinitely. Hopefully most of the recipes will fall somewhere in the middle. Sometimes things don't always go according to plan. Plan ahead for this eventuality.
- ❖ How good is this dish going to look on a plate? Sometimes the appearance of a recipe can be improved merely by the way it is presented. Would the food look better made into individual portions to be served separately to each guest in a ramekin? Or perhaps the food can be "stacked" on the plate by using a cookie cutter as a way to hold the food together to make a stunning presentation.

### Pricing The Service

A business owner is required to make many decisions which affect the livelihood of the business. None is more important than setting the proper value on time, skills and rendered service. Setting proper value will assure that the business is fairly compensated and the client is not overcharged in the process.

In a catering operation there is not only the cost of the food to consider but also delivery as an expense, a wait staff (if applicable) or staff members responsible for food replenishment, decorations, serving pieces, table linens, decorations, plus the commercial kitchen overhead to name just a few. Remember, you are a professional offering a service that is specialized to their event and are providing food products that are made from only the freshest ingredients available. These specialized services will set the business apart from the restaurant caterer or a caterer that is not detail oriented.

What will the market bear? Any catered event requires a price that is fair to the customer and fair to the business. One way to determine pricing is to survey what the market will bear in the area in which you plan to operate. Don't shortchange expertise and definitely don't over price the events.

The pricing of the catered service is critical. The business needs to select a pricing strategy based upon the target market. Will the catering services offered be geared toward larger clients and events or be more focused on the smaller events that the larger caterers ignore? The answer will determine the appropriate pricing strategy, whether it's a low volume/ higher-price per meal strategy, a higher-volume lower-price per meal strategy, or a combination of the two. Choosing a higher price range is only profitable if there are enough people who will find value in your catered events at that higher rate. The pricing strategy established needs to ensure the business is fairly compensated yet profitable enough to stay in the game for the long haul.



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### **Costing A Menu**

Just like any good restaurant, the calculation of an exact cost for each menu item is mandatory. It is a lengthy exercise but once done, it can be updated from time to time. Remember, the true accuracy of the cost depends upon the data you are working with and the amount of effort spent on calculations.

### Ingredients

To make menu costing easier, compiling a list of common ingredients and their price can save time and frustration. Using a computer spreadsheet program can save time as it allows multiple ways to sort and organize the list of common ingredients. Sorting alphabetically is many times the first logical way to organize such a list. Another is to divide the items into groups or categories that correspond with the grocery order lists (i.e. dairy, meat, canned goods, etc.)

### Recipes

Once a list of common ingredients has been compiled, the process of efficiently costing out each recipe can begin. With hundreds of recipes in the repertoire, the idea of costing out each one seems daunting. Take it one step at a time and cost out recipes as they're used for clients. Keep in mind the price fluctuations of seasonal or uncommon ingredients. A 10¢ change in a price per ounce for a cut of meat can quickly eat up the profits. It is a good rule of thumb to double check prices of meats and vegetables periodically, especially when it is a cut or type that hasn't been used in a while.

### Menus

Pricing menus is quite easy once a quantity of recipes is available for selection. Simply add up the cost per portion for each recipe contained in the menu and multiply by the number of guests attending the event and that will give a total cost for that menu.

### How To Price An Event

The estimated price should cover:

- ❖ The cost of ingredients (less than 1/3 of the final price plus 25% additional for disposables\*)
- ❖ \*Nominal items that are used but not easily calculated as part of the cost of ingredients (i.e. paper towels, spices, etc.)
- ❖ The cost of overhead (less than 1/3 of the final price)
- ❖ The cost for the business (at least 1/3 of the final price)

There are two main ways to come up with a realistic price that will also include profit for the business:

1. Cost of food multiplied
2. Flat hourly rate plus the cost of food



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### Cost Of Food Multiplied

Perhaps the most common way of giving an accurate ballpark price is taking the cost of ingredients, multiplied by 3.75 and adding an hourly rate for time spent at the event. The idea behind multiplying the cost of ingredients is that this formula gives you a total price that is usually very accurate. For most average catering events, it covers the time spent consulting, menu planning, shopping and preparing the recipes. Then add to that total an hourly rate for the time spent engaged on-site at the event.

- ❖ Help the client decide on a menu. Once they have done this. Let them know you will get back to them within 24 hours with an approximate price.
- ❖ Make a list of every ingredient, not forgetting to include: garnishes, toppings, nuts, grated cheeses, breads etc. Calculate the approximate quantity of food needed based upon the number of people attending the event and the type of event.
- ❖ Take a trip to the supermarket and jot down the cost of every ingredient.
- ❖ Total the cost of ingredients and then multiply the total by 3.25 to come up with the final food price. Remember, this price does not cover the cost of table service on the night.
- ❖ Take the final cost and divide it by the total number of people expected to attend. Give this final figure to the client as a price per head. (Much more pleasant than the much scarier total price) Let them know that there will be extra charges added for additional services.

#### Example 1:

There are 10 people for a small, catered event. The menu is gourmet and the calculated food cost is \$225. The service rate is \$30 per hour and 7 hours are allotted at the event serving guests and cleaning up.

Ingredients Multiplied:  $\$225 \times 3.75 = \$843.75$

Service Time:  $\$30 \times 7 \text{ hours} = \$210.00$

Total: \$1,053.75

**Approximately \$105 per person**

#### Example 2:

There are 40 people for a catered event. The menu is fairly simple and the calculated food cost is \$565. The service rate is \$30 per hour and 5 hours are allotted at the event serving guests and cleaning up. There is also a wait staff of 2 each working for \$15 per hour but receiving their minimum guarantee of \$50 each because they will only work 2 hours.

Ingredients Multiplied:  $\$565 \times 3.75 = \$2,118.75$

Service Time:  $\$30 \times 5 \text{ hours} = \$150.00$

Wait Staff:  $\$50 \times 2 \text{ hours} = \$100$

Total: \$2,368.75

**Approximately \$59 per person**



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### Example 3:

There are 45 people for a catered event. The menu is buffet style and the calculated food cost is \$427. The service rate is \$30 per hour for the chef and \$20 per hour for one helper and 6 hours are allotted at the event serving guests and cleaning up.

Ingredients Multiplied:  $\$427 \times 3.75 = \$1,601.25$

Service Time:  $\$30 \times 6 \text{ hours} = \$180.00$

Added Helper Time:  $\$20 \times 6 \text{ hours} = \$120.00$

Total: \$1,901.25

Approximately \$42.25 per person

### Example 4:

There are 26 people for a formal catered event. The menu is seven courses and the calculated food cost is \$635. The service rate is \$30 per hour for the chef and \$20 per hour each for two helpers and 6 hours are allotted at the event serving guests and cleaning up. The location is an indoor meeting space at the city Rose Garden and the business needs to provide the entire place setting, linens and centerpieces

Ingredients Multiplied:  $\$635 \times 3.75 = \$2,381.25$

Price for rented items:  $\$285 \times 1.10 = \$313.50$

Service Time:  $\$30 \times 6 \text{ hours} = \$180.00$

Added Helper Time:  $\$20 \times 12 \text{ hours} = \$240.00$

Total: \$3,114.75

Approximately \$119.79 per person

### Exception to the rule

The previous pricing method works well with most small-catered events. When pricing for an event that is smaller, some adjustments to the pricing method need to be considered. For example, with smaller gatherings or an intimate dinner for two (if accommodating such a request), there needs to be fair compensation for time spent. For smaller gatherings a minimum charge of \$300 can apply to cover the time and effort spent on the event.

Using this method would eliminate most miscalculations that could result in a pricing mistake. However, if one occurs, then learn from that mistake for the next time. Analyze what went wrong and change things accordingly. Also, if the client makes changes to the agreed catered event service (especially when something is added or increased), don't be afraid to provide a prompt price adjustment that reflects their addition. Understanding also that it's best not to "nickel and dime" the client over trivial things, however there is a line that divides good business and being taken advantage of. Each business has to decide where that line is.

If the clients are more affluent, and their gatherings are more upscale, they are possibly and very likely expecting and willing to pay a premium for a catered event. Charge what the market will bear. This is an entrepreneurial skill that takes market research and a bit of trial and error. To make more profit, look at providing excellent service and charging a premium for it. The Cadillac automobile didn't get where it is today by being the lowest price.



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### Providing Discounts

When young children are to be among the guests for the catered event, it's ok to charge half or two thirds the normal price for children under ten. Children over ten years should be treated as adults. This pricing discount should not take place after the event when the host/hostess sees amounts of food un-eaten by young guests. This is something that should be revealed early in the consulting and planning for it obviously has direct impact on the menu plan and portion sizes.

Another occasion that may warrant a discount would be when a client gives a referral of another person who wishes to have a catered event. If the client does this, reward them with a \$30 (or whatever is appropriate) coupon off their next event. Print up discount coupons on a computer and give them to the client at the same time you bill them for their event.

### Gift Certificates

Gift certificates make great Christmas and birthday presents. People are always looking for new ideas on these occasions; so don't forget to advertise that fact. Prices can start at around \$50 and go up to any amount desired.

### What To Charge For Hired Help

There will be many occasions when an event requires extra help. It won't take long to realize that an individual can only comfortably handle a certain number of people sitting down at the same table. The client may also prefer to have the chef overseeing the event details and a food server to wait table.

Pay a food server by the hour plus a share of any tips received. They can either show up early and help with the event preparations or turn up an hour before the event start time. In either case pay them \$10 to \$15 per hour plus tips, but charge the client about \$15 to 20 per hour. This way the extra \$5 per hour can go toward the extra time they spend helping during pre-event hours.

### Charging For Extra Services

In addition to the food, there may be extras that should or must be added to the client's bill. These items include:

- ❖ Transportation charges. Charge a nominal amount, \$8 to \$20 depending upon distance, to help defray the costs if several trips need to be made to the client's event site.
- ❖ Staff Services. Charge for the service time at \$25 to \$35 per hour plus wait staff/bartenders at \$10 to \$15 per hour. There should be a minimum \$50 per staff person charge.
- ❖ Rental Equipment. Charge the client for any rental equipment, including a delivery cost (usually anything from \$25 to \$40 for delivery and pick up) plus an up charge of 10% for organizing this for them.
- ❖ Table Set Up. Charge at least one hour of service time for table set up.
- ❖ Disposable items. When ordering any floral arrangements, charge their actual cost plus 10% service charge for organizing this for them. Delivery is usually included in the price.
- ❖ Decorations. If the client wants the event decorations handled by the caterer, for example, a Mexican Fiesta Theme, the charge to the client would be the cost of the decorations, plus the time to purchase and coordinate the distribution throughout the event, plus a 10% up charge.



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### Bartending And Handling Alcohol

One of the questions to ask the client when organizing their event is, "Who will be serving the drinks?" "What kind of drinks will be served?" Is it going to be just wine and water with the meal, or do they expect cocktails to be served before dinner?

If they do and they want the business to provide this service, here are a couple of questions to ask:

- ❖ Who will be buying the liquor? If the business is expected to supply wine or any other alcohol, then it may need a liquor license in order to pass the cost on to the client. It's best to let the client purchase these beverages. Double-check this with the local authorities. Hire bartenders and servers who are trained or certified in alcohol serving.
- ❖ What happens if one of the guests who was served alcohol at the event has an accident during their drive home? Will the business be liable? Some people believe that the person who buys the liquor is the one held liable. Is this true? There are instances where the injured parties will even try to prosecute the server. To answer those questions and clarify the scope of responsibility and possible liabilities, will require consulting with an attorney who is familiar with local and state laws. If the business is worried about this issue, it can always purchase a Liquor Liability Insurance Policy.
- ❖ Does the client want the chef to serve cocktails? Does the chef have the necessary skills to make them? If feeling concerned about any of the above, an option is to hire a professional bartending service. Look under: "Bartending Services" in the phone book or Internet search. They may not only provide the liquor but also a bartender, and liability insurance.

### Renting Equipment

If clients do not have enough equipment, (plates, cups, cutlery, etc.) for their own event, the business generally, will take the responsibility to rent it. Again, just like menu planning it is better to be ready for this scenario before it ever happens.

Look under "Party or Event Rental Equipment" or "Rental Equipment" in the phone book or Internet. Call around and speak to several companies. Get them to send a price list. Ask each if they give a discount for caterers. They may give up to a 10% discount. Ask them what they charge for delivery and pick up. Rental companies generally charge between \$20 to \$40 for this service.

Once the best company has been chosen, make sure to add 10% to the normal rental price and pass this on to the customer for providing this service.



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### Ordering Centerpieces

When ordering floral centerpieces and providing candles for the client:

- ❖ First check to see what the color scheme is in the dining room and ask the host if they have any preferences or problems (i.e. allergies).
- ❖ Order something that complements both the color scheme and the occasion. Black is not good as it is seen as too dramatic. Red and white flowers are sometimes seen as unlucky.
- ❖ Don't order Arum lilies, these are usually reserved for funerals
- ❖ Make sure that the flowers are not too tall. In other words, the guests must be able to see each other clearly over the top when seated without having to move the flowers out of the way.
- ❖ Order flowers that are unscented because their fragrance might clash with the food, but don't use silk flowers or dried flowers unless requested by the client.
- ❖ Find a good local florist. Ask them if they have a catalogue to show to the customer.
- ❖ Use elegant candles, usually in white. Thin tapers are always good. Also, use candles that are unscented.
- ❖ Don't use a large candelabrum that guests have to peer around to see each other.
- ❖ After picking up the flowers, store them in the refrigerator if needed to keep them fresh.
- ❖ Set them out on the table only about 1 hour before the party.
- ❖ Charge your customer 10 to 20% on the top of the retail price for providing this service.

### Theme Parties

Instead of just a plain event, the client may be interested in holding a themed event. Theme events range from those based around the kind of food being served to the kind of non-food services being provided. Conducting a theme event will require a lot of homework and preparation before being able to advertise it in the repertoire. With these theme events, the business is not only providing the food to suit the occasion but also decorating the table and the whole room, with the possibility of recommending the music and or live entertainment.

### Marketing Literature

The literature does not need to be expensive, but it must represent the business well. The following are some additional tips to consider for any catering operation.

### Printed Menus

Having menus available for review is a reflection of the businesses professionalism and demonstrates to potential customers what a commercial kitchen catering operation can provide. Each menu should contain the following:

- ❖ Menu name (i.e. Hawaiian Nights, Tex-Mex Celebration, Spanish Delights, Pacific Rim Party, etc.).
- ❖ Describe the menu - a one or two sentence concise statement that communicates the overall theme and style.
- ❖ List of recipes used with a brief, mouth-watering description of each dish.
- ❖ Contact information - make sure that the business name and phone number are shown somewhere on each page.

Try to keep each menu to just one page. Menus can be printed on letterhead or used in a special format or template in the word processor on a computer. Organize the menus together by putting similar ones together. One way is to organize by type (i.e. Ethnic, Traditional, Elegant Seafood, Poultry, Meats, Vegetarian, Upscale, Traditional Party Fare, and Special Diet)



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

### Presentation Packet

An important part of meeting and consulting personally with clients is having a professional looking and organized presentation packet to leave with them.

The presentation packet should include the following:

- ❖ Letter of introduction printed on the business's letterhead.
- ❖ A brief description of the business - tout the specialties.
- ❖ Specific printed menu pages that match and correspond with the type of event being considered.
- ❖ Full list of menu titles available.
- ❖ Letters of testimony from satisfied clients (if you don't have any right now, begin asking clients for them). In the meantime, type up a sheet of comments and kudos that people have verbally shared with you.
- ❖ Other marketing material - include a copy of a brochure or flyer and especially a couple of business cards.
- ❖ All presentation material should have business name and contact information.  
There are many ways to organize and gather presentation materials. However, they are packaged, do it with class and make a lasting impression. The three most common ways are:
- ❖ Pocket Folder - There are a myriad of color and styles readily available from most office supply stores. In the left pocket put a letter of introduction followed by business description page and list of menus available. In the right pocket put the menus selected for review. Pocket folders usually have special slots for holding a business card - use them. Put any other materials where it seems appropriate.
- ❖ Booklets - Using a plastic report cover with a sliding bar, available from most office supply stores, is an easy method of organizing the pages into one packet.
- ❖ Bound Document - Print shops and copy centers offer various binding services. This can often give the presentation packet a touch of pizzazz because it is something that is over and above the normal pocket folder.

### Setting The Ground Rules

Those catered events that come off without any apparent glitches are those where the caterer took control of what is and is not provided and supplied definite deadlines for the client to meet. Setting the following ground rules makes the client aware they have a responsibility to the caterer to ensure a successful event.

- ❖ Set a minimum guest count to offer pricing estimates.
- ❖ Set a deadline date for final guest count notification.
- ❖ Establish the start and stop time for the event.
- ❖ Set a date or number of days after final count and after final menu selection when a firm per person price will be quoted.
- ❖ A description of all services provided including labor (staffing with staff schedule included), disposables, any additional costs that are not included with a standard service fee, i.e., bartender.
- ❖ Agree upon deposit requirements and ending payment.
- ❖ Set the cancellation and deposit refund policy.

Once the ground rules are set, they can be written into the agreement.



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

### Drafting The Agreement

As a professional, a legally binding agreement for the services at a catering event is vital to maintaining control of the expenses and the event itself. The multi-purpose client agreement serves many purposes. It is the document that will hold the event together because it contains every detail of the party from start to finish. It will provide the following information:

- ❖ Client's name and address.
- ❖ Their contact information: Telephone numbers, mobile phone, fax and email address.
- ❖ Date contacted by client.
- ❖ The event details such as: The event date; the occasion (birthday, anniversary, etc); the party location; directions to the property; the number of attendees; their general age group and sex (gives you an idea of how much food to prepare); the chef's arrival time; what time the guests will arrive; what time the event will begin; and what time it will end.
- ❖ The menu shown in complete detail. Shows every course described in detail. This shows the client exactly what they will be getting.
- ❖ A list of table service equipment the business will be providing.
- ❖ A list of rental equipment in detail that the business will rent on the customers behalf and how much each costs. Don't forget to add in any delivery/pickup charges.
- ❖ A list of disposable items should there be any, including but not limited to: table centerpieces, candles, place name tags and the cost of each.
- ❖ What duties the client will have such as: setting up the bar area, buying the alcohol.
- ❖ Any extra equipment the business is providing.
- ❖ Any special instructions for the chef.
- ❖ An estimate of the service costs per head in line-by-line detail.
- ❖ A copy of the cancellation policy.
- ❖ The client's approval (their signature) on the agreement.

Start using the multi-purpose agreement when a prospective client is on the telephone. It will prompt the asking of all the relevant questions. Make sure the business has the client's date available and arrange for the first meeting where the balance of the event details can be discussed. Once the event is booked, fill out the remainder of the contract, and mail a typed copy to the client for their records. Highlight any areas of importance such as the items THEY have responsibility to complete.

Congratulations! The business' first catering event has been booked. Now what to do? Don't panic, this is where the fun begins. It begins by meeting with the customer to get the details of the event, then collecting the deposit, doing the event planning, and ends by completing the job. Sounds easy? Well, it really is with the inside scoop. Let's get started.

### Fill Out The Rest Of The Agreement

Go through the rest of the half-filled-out client contract. Double-check everything on the contract with the client. Now is the time to go through the rest of the menu and double-check that everything is to their liking. Be prepared to make alternative suggestions if they have changed their mind. Once the menu is confirmed, it's time to fill out the rest of the contract.



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

### Who Is Providing What?

It is really important to get every detail of the event in writing. Especially such items as who is providing what. In most cases, a caterer supplies everything, but it is best to check who will be supplying items like ice, coffee, cream, ice buckets, breadbaskets and the small often forgotten items. But sometimes there are hosts who want to use some of their own equipment. There is really nothing worse than not being sure about such things and each person thinking that the other has covered these items. The key to this is to think the event out in fine detail. Write a grocery list with all of the ingredients. Don't forget to plan everything down to the last garnish.

### Who Is Doing What?

Make sure both parties are crystal clear, and it is in writing, who will be performing every task. The business has agreed to do the menu planning, securing of fresh ingredients, cooking and clean up, but who is going to order the table centerpiece? If any rental equipment is needed, who will be ordering it, and arranging for delivery and pickup?

### Special Requests

Always check for any special requests. If it is someone's birthday, do they want the chef to cut and serve the cake as well as light the candles? Do they want to halt the event part way through so that someone can make a speech? Do they wish to serve a certain person first?

### Collect A Deposit

Make sure to collect at least a one-third deposit (a one-half deposit would be ideal) from the customer before leaving. Since the deposit is non-refundable, it is a good practice to deposit this check immediately. Just like the bill in a restaurant, the balance will be payable at the end of the evening.

### The Cancellation Policy

Make sure a realistic cancellation policy is in place to protect the business from the client canceling the party or postponing the event. This is a decision for each business; however, a good guide would be 25% for cancellation or change within 14 days of the party and the full 100% if the party were cancelled within 7 days. This is important. Without a cancellation policy in effect the business will be taken advantage of at some stage. The client can and will cancel at the last minute particularly if there is no price to pay. Make sure each client has read and understands the cancellation policy by signing it.

### Check Out The Site

The number-one rule for any event is to visit the site before the event. There needs to be enough time to assess any problems that may arise, such as workspace, sufficient amenities and any necessary permits that may be required (some public venues or city managed facilities may require a permit). If a permit is required, be sure to make clear in the contract who is responsible for obtaining and paying for the permit. A site visit requires a familiarization with the event location and a look at the room where the meal will be served, including its proximity to the kitchen, the most likely area for staging and serving the event. Any issues need to be addressed. If a stove or oven is required to complete a dish or a refrigerator is needed to store the dessert, the availability of that equipment is crucial to the success of the event.



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

### Planning The Event

After meeting the client and leaving with a signed client's contract and a check to deposit, it's time to start planning the event.

- ❖ Go through every detail on the agreement.
- ❖ Put the firm date on the calendar.
- ❖ Type up the handwritten copy of the client agreement.
- ❖ Mail a copy of the entire contract to the client for their information. Highlight any items that are their responsibility.
- ❖ Hire any staff needed.
- ❖ If the table setting is part of the event, make a list of all the equipment needed and decide where that equipment will be coming from: the business or a rental establishment. Think this through carefully.
- ❖ Order all rental equipment. Make sure the company knows that this is a catering business (in case of any discounts). If the business will be collecting the equipment, arrange for pickup ahead of time (a day early or the morning of) to eliminate possible problems. Otherwise arrange for delivery.
- ❖ Order any disposables such as floral centerpieces. Buy all candles. Make or buy any name tags. Collect any other table props.
- ❖ Print copies of all the recipes to be used. Attach them to the copy of the client agreement.
- ❖ Make sure that the proper clothing is ready to wear on the event day.

### The Shopping List

Writing a shopping list for an event should be a very simple task. Having said that, the last thing needed is to have to visit a store for a forgotten item. So go ahead and calculate the amount of food needed in total and then write your first draft. Make a list for the orders that will be delivered to the kitchen and another list for the items needing to be picked up. Then go back and double-check every single item on every single recipe. Take into account the bread and butter on the table. After that, think about garnishes and what will be used to make them. Think about who is providing the coffee and creamer? The ice? Once you have triple checked every item. Mentally go through the cooking process. Will any cooking oil be needed? Is there sufficient plastic wrap, foil and zipper bags?

### The Preparation List

Write your prep list well in advance of the event. First, read through all the recipes for the event. Go through each recipe and plan which items can be prepared ahead. Make the prep list on an hour-by-hour basis in the order in which everything will be prepared. Think about which items will hold best in the refrigerator. Make those items first.

### Reliable Staff

Depending on the event, staff may need to be hired for either bartending or serving the food and clearing the tables. Remember it is always better to hire help and charge more than risk not being able to manage the event. Where to find staff and how should they dress? Naturally the first source for this is spouses, family and friends. (Before hiring them, make sure that they have the necessary training to complete the task.) After exhausting those avenues, it is time to start looking elsewhere. Here are some other sources of help (not in any particular order):

- ❖ When visiting a bar or restaurant ask the wait staff if they would be interested in some extra work on the side. Gradually compile a list.
- ❖ Cooking schools may have willing and able workers.
- ❖ College students always want to earn extra cash.
- ❖ Staffing services – trained temps



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

Wait staff are usually happy with about \$10-15 per hour plus a share of any tips collected. (Share all tips equally with all the staff.) This is much more than most restaurants pay so they should be happy to oblige. Charge your customer \$20 per hour for service staff and then apply the extra dollars to the hours that helpers are used before the event. Collect a long list of names and telephone numbers so it's easy to find servers and bartenders who will be available that evening. The staff should dress in "black and whites" as they are known in catering circles. This means: Black trousers or skirt, black shoes, with a white dress shirt and bow tie. If trousers are to be worn, a cummerbund can be worn depending upon how formal the event is – the staff should provide their own clothing.

### Staff And Taxes

The hiring of staff on an occasional basis means staff pay can usually be classified as "casual labor" without deducting any taxes. If they are hired for several events and their salary totals more than \$600 per year, the business will have to issue an IRS form 1099. The staff will still be responsible for paying their own taxes. Deciding to hire a regular employee means compliance with another set of rules and regulations.

### What To Wear At The Event

This is a time to shine. The staff will be on show for the client and their guests. The object of this is to look professional so the client looks good to their guests. As the business' representative, the chef should wear a chef hat, chef jacket and chef pants, and always have a clean apron available.

### Event Countdown:

#### Gathering The Ingredients

When the food order is received take the time (or make the time) to review all of the items delivered and reconcile them against the prepared lists. It is important to make sure everything ordered is received so that the cooking production won't be interrupted or halted due to poor quality, wrong amounts or missing ingredients. The items picked up from the store also should be reconciled against the lists. There is much going on and a lot to think about and the reality of overlooking an item is very real.

#### Packing Supplies And Equipment

The day before the party is the right time to prepare all equipment for loading. Get out the lists and pack all serving utensils, serving equipment, breadbaskets, foil, plastic wrap and any china or cutlery. Pack a folder with two copies of the client contract. The business' copy should also have the shopping list, prep list and recipes attached. The customers should be kept clean in an envelope. Make sure to remember to load a cell phone, checkbook, credit cards and cash.

### Picking Up Rental Equipment

Assuming the rental equipment isn't being delivered, most companies are quite happy for it to be picked up the day before the event and returned the day after the event. Before leaving the counter, check that everything is present. Count all tablecloths, plates, glasses etc. There is no need to unpack them but double check as best as possible. Check that everything matches and is the correct color. It's standard to pay for everything in advance and also to leave a security deposit.

### Checking Staff

Call any helpers one last time and double check that they remember what time they have to arrive at the event. Make sure they have clear directions. Make sure they bring their cell phone for communication of any last-minute items for pick up. And make certain they have your number in case of a delay that keeps them from being where they are supposed to be.



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

As a safeguard to one of the staff not appearing at the event, make arrangements for a "spare" staff member to standby the day of the event. Pay them \$20 for the one-hour they are asked to standby. It's a stopgap measure that can pay dividends by looking very organized to the client when a regularly scheduled staff member does not appear.

### Contingency Equipment

In catering, the food is generally prepared at a commercial kitchen and delivered to the event location. It's crucial to plan ahead for those last-minute fixes such as forgotten pieces to garnish a fish tray. It might be a missing knife, lost serving spoons or a mandolin for some last-minute slicing. Whatever the scenario, plan on the worst in order to look the best.

### A Chronological Checklist For The Cooking Day

Working in a commercial kitchen operation necessitates the use of a checklist as a reminder to make sure everything is completed.

- ❖ The morning of the event, pull the client contract with the menu for the event, the prep list arranged in preparation sequence and the vehicle-packing list.
- ❖ All prep work needs to be completed in the order indicated on the prep list. Cooking can start on all foods for the event.
- ❖ As the items on the menu are completed to the stage noted on the prep list, check them off and store for transportation to the event site.
- ❖ Once all items are cooked and prepared for transportation to the event site, load into vehicle making sure everything is checked off EACH list when loaded.
- ❖ Drive to the event site and unload vehicle. Refrigerated items are first to be stored safely in refrigerator and double check EVERYTHING on the lists as items are off loaded.
- ❖ Collect the check from the customer - final payment.

### Several hours ahead (a.m.)

- ❖ Do a final check on the client's China and utensils. Make sure everything is present down to the last fork and napkin.
- ❖ If in charge of the bartending, check glasses, mixers, wines, ice, etc.
- ❖ Start making any dressings, soups, cold desserts, wash/drain salad ingredients and place in plastic bags, etc. Grate cheeses, chop nuts and store in bags.
- ❖ Bake breads or rolls and make compound butters.
- ❖ Make the main entrée (or as much as possible) and place in the refrigerator ready for baking & roasting.
- ❖ Prepare any vegetables to be served. They can be blanched/cooked ahead and then chilled. That means at party time just dip them in boiling water and they'll be ready.
- ❖ Make any hot desserts (such as pies) and place them covered and unbaked in the refrigerator.
- ❖ If responsible for setting the customer's table, complete that task. (If there are any fresh flowers, keep them in the refrigerator until ready.)

### About 2 hours ahead

- ❖ Chill the wine. Get the coffee pot ready for brewing. The cream should already be chilling, place it in a small pitcher and cover.



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

### In the last hour

- ❖ Plate any salads, cover, and put the plates back in refrigerator. (Put any nuts or toppings on at the last minute.)
- ❖ When guests arrive, serve them a round of drinks. Check to see what time they will be seated. Be discrete when talking to the hosts.
- ❖ Fill up the water pitcher and place on the table.
- ❖ Slice the bread and place in the breadbasket. Cover. Remove butter from refrigerator to allow it to reach room temperature.
- ❖ Place the floral arrangements on the table.

### Serving time

- ❖ Slowly heat any soups and hot appetizers.
- ❖ Put the butter on the table.
- ❖ Place a napkin in the breadbasket, add the sliced bread or rolls; cover the whole thing with foil and place in the oven for a few minutes.
- ❖ Start cooking the main entrée. Time it so that it will come out of the oven at the right moment.
- ❖ When everyone is seated, serve the first glass of wine and the warmed bread in a breadbasket. Fill up the water glasses.
- ❖ Serve the appetizers.
- ❖ Warm the entrée plates in the oven.
- ❖ Remove the salad/soup plates when everyone is finished.
- ❖ Keep filling up the water glasses and wine.
- ❖ Re-heat the vegetables pre-cooked earlier. Plate them and the rest of the main course.
- ❖ Serve the main course. While the guests are eating, wash up the salad plates, they may be needed for dessert. Keep filling up the wine.
- ❖ Bake any hot desserts now (or earlier if needed). Whip any cream. This can also be accomplished ahead of time and held in refrigerator.
- ❖ Brew the coffee and get the coffee cups, spoons and creamer ready if not already completed.
- ❖ Plate and decorate the dessert (if cold).
- ❖ Go out and check that everyone is happy and doesn't need anything. Ask how they are enjoying the food.
- ❖ Unless serving dessert wines, remove all the dinner plates when everyone has finished eating. Also remove empty wine glasses, bread plates, salt and pepper shakers from the table before serving dessert.
- ❖ Serve dessert. Ask who would like coffee/tea. Serve the coffee with the dessert if desired.
- ❖ Remove dessert plates and wine glasses, as guests are finished with them. Don't hover or crowd the guests.
- ❖ Start loading the dishwasher and packing up equipment. Don't forget to pack the check or present the bill discreetly to the hosts.
- ❖ Clean the kitchen.
- ❖ Take one last look at the guests to see if they need anything. Politely and discreetly let the hostess know that you will be leaving and check to see if they need anything else before departing.
- ❖ Load up equipment and leave. Don't forget to leave a couple of business cards in the kitchen for guests.



## Other Revenue Sources - Catering

### Finishing the Event

Once the serving is finished or the buffet has closed, it's time to clean up as quickly and efficiently as possible so the staff can leave.

Any excess food should be disposed of as a safety issue. Do not leave any behind and always plan on feeding the staff working the event

Equipment returned to the commercial kitchen can be washed at the site or upon return to the kitchen.

Any rental equipment should be washed for return except for linens that can be returned as is, unless otherwise specified in the rental agreement.