

Module 13

Catering operations

1. Catering

Catering is one of the most important ingredients for the planning of some common events. Preparing the delicious delicacies that make an event special is the domain of the event caterer. Armed with specialty dishes, culinary delights and dietary alternatives, the many food options the caterer offers can entice, inspire and satisfy event guests, making it a central focus of event activities. Caterers typically offer a signature selection of hors d'oeuvres, salads and entrees, desserts and beverages.

Caterers can be individuals, small businesses, or chefs associated with a hotel or restaurant. Many hotel venues offer in-house catering services, or may suggest a proven and responsible catering service with which they have enjoyed a professional relationship. Caterers typically provide the serving dishes for a buffet, such as chafing dishes, warming trays, serving utensils and beverages, such as tea and coffee. Artistic chefs may also offer hand-carved ice sculptures as the focal point of a special table, and some supply tableware with accompanying flatware to provide the greatest culinary impact.

A banquet serves the purpose of gathering event guests together for the purpose of presenting awards, recognizing achievement, celebrating accomplishments, or introducing new ideas. Banquets may be defined as those relaxed opportunities to introduce guests to like-minded professionals, long-lost friends, or new acquaintances. The banquet can be a simple affair served by a buffet of culinary dishes, or can be rendered in the more formal format of table service, replete with formally-attired waiters and waitresses.

The caterer offers dishes in accordance with the desires of the event sponsors, providing any number of menu options generally priced on a per-person basis. Caterers are also flexible, capable of producing variations of

dishes or offering specialty menus to accommodate the needs of guests limited in their food choices due to diabetes, weight loss programmes, or allergies.

The caterer must have an idea of the number of guests expected to attend the banquet, and details must be defined as to the types of drinks to be served, the selections of hors d'oeuvres prior to the main meal, and the desserts that follow. In addition, the caterer may provide servers for the event, and needful equipment such as chafing dishes, plates, glasses, and tableware. Necessarily, these details must be carefully considered, that the event take place without experiencing the horror of a banquet marred by the lack of personnel, necessary tools to conduct food service, or worse, running out of food.

Determining the number of guests anticipated to attend a banquet is most easily ascertaining by on-line registry, return RSVP to delivered invitations, ticket sales, or sign-up sheets. Allotments should also be made for the occasional important guest whom fails to reserve a seat, as well as for unexpected guests, or last-minute invitations. For this reason, caterers often promise delivery of a reasonable excess to accommodate extra guests who might otherwise be turned away from joining in the festivities.

2. Safety Considerations for Catering Operations

Ensure that the delivery, storage, preparation and sale of food complies with the relevant food safety legislation and where appropriate consideration is given to the advice contained in the relevant industry guides and codes of practice. This will include mobile catering units, catering stalls and marquees, crew catering outlets, hospitality catering, bars and ice cream vendors, etc.

Ensure that food businesses carry out their work in a safe and hygienic way. Examine documentary evidence from each caterer regarding:

- the identification and control of potential food hazards by all catering operations;
- the identification and control of potential health and safety hazards by all catering operations;

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- provision of appropriate fire extinguishers; proper training of all food handlers;
- the suitability of all premises used for the production or sale of food; the suitability of the equipment being used;
- transporting food safely and separate from any potential source of contamination; storing and disposing of food waste (solid and liquid) properly;
- the maintenance of high standards of the personal hygiene of food handlers;
- the proper storing, handling and preparation of food;
- the provision of a drinking water supply ;
- insurance of all food businesses including public, product and employers liabilities;
- the possession of electrical and gas installation compliance certificates by all food businesses;
- the possession of a properly equipped first-aid box by each operating unit.

Environmental health officers or EHOs may wish to carry out an inspection of the catering facilities provided at the event. They may also require you to provide them with a list of caterers who will be attending the event.

Additional requirements may be necessary in certain types of catering operations, eg barbecues and spit roasting. Such operations may present an increased risk of fire, contamination or food poisoning. Carry out a suitable risk assessment, taking into account the particular factors of the operation. Your site plan of the event will need to include a detailed layout of all catering operations.

You will the need to:

- prevent any obstruction that may affect the health and safety of people attending or working at the event;
- prevent, as far as is possible, access to the rear of catering operations by the audience;
- allow entry and exit for emergency vehicles;
- take into account suitable spacing between individual Operations;

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- provide readily accessible and preferably lockable facilities for the storage and disposal of solid and liquid waste;
- allow for the efficient removal of refuse ;
- position catering operations within close proximity to a supply of drinking water, foul drainage and within a safe minimum drainage and within a safe minimum distance from any source of possible contamination, ie fuel, waste or refuse storage; consider manual-handling issues involved in the disposal of water, the delivery of supplies, etc;
- provide separate toilet facilities for the exclusive use of food-handlers, with hot and cold hand-washing facilities;
- provide suitable facilities for parking and access of support vehicles;
- position mobile sleeping accommodation away from the catering operations

3. LPG

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) is the main source of fuel for outside catering operations. It does present a substantial fire/explosion risk, therefore ensure that:

- all operators using LPG can demonstrate a basic understanding of its safe use, its characteristics and emergency procedures;
- storage at each catering operation does not exceed that which is required for a 24-hour period or a maximum of 200 kg, whichever is the least;
- all LPG is handled and stored in accordance with the current regulations and codes of practice;
- all supplies of LPG whether in compounds or within catering operations are secure from interference by the audience.

4. Electrical installations

Electrical power to catering operations should, wherever possible, be provided by the site electrical supply. If portable generators are used, preference should be given to LPG or diesel-fuelled types.

Ensure that:

- they are of a suitable rated power output for the intended use;
- they have been tested and certified by a competent person;
- they are sited in a well-ventilated place away from LPG cylinders and combustible material;
- they are adequately guarded to avoid accidental contact by people or combustible material;
- cables and sockets are appropriate for their intended use;
- the electrical installation is protected by a residual current device (RCD);
- cables do not create a trip hazard;
- fuelling and re-fuelling are carried out in a safe manner;
- fuel is stored in a safe manner in suitable containers.

5. Fire-fighting equipment

Suitable fire-fighting equipment should be provided at the catering operation dependent on the activity type. The equipment must conform to the relevant British Standard. No combustible materials should be allowed to accumulate next to any catering outlets.

6. General area

There must be a supply of drinking water within easy reach of the audience and all catering operations. At outdoor sites (one-day events) a general guideline is one water outlet per 3000 people and one outlet per ten caterers provided they are in the same area.

All water points should:

- have unobstructed access;
- be clearly marked;
- be clearly lit at night if the event continues after dark;
- have self-closing taps.

- The ground surrounding all water points should be well drained or provision made to 'bridge' any flooded areas.

Catering may vary from the provision of automated vending (e.g. hot/cold drinks, hot/cold snacks, confectionery), through drinks and snack counters, cafés, deli bars, canteens and staff restaurants to a full silver-service dining room for directors and clients, and may additionally include hospitality for occasional or regular events and conferences.

7. Catering Considerations When Planning an Event Menu

When planning the food and beverage for any event, it's important for event planners to consider several "not-so-obvious" catering menu planning items to help ensure a successful programme. Consider the following when planning your menu:

7.1 Know Your Guest Profile

What is the profile of the guests being invited to the event? Consider the following:

- The professional level of your guest.
- The frequency your guest attends similar events.
- The location where guests reside.
- The ethnic background of your guests.

7.2 Know Your Guest Preferences

Understanding the profile of your guest, this allows the event planner to begin considering what menu options to offer. The following will help you better plan to meet their needs:

- Older groups of attendees may prefer a milder menu.
- Attendees concerned about health may prefer more seafood and vegetables options.
- Younger or middle-aged attendees may prefer spicier, more adventurous meals.

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- The idea here is to consider what your guests will enjoy the most based on the type of event you are planning.

7.3 Provide Menu Choices

Anyone planning an event should offer several choices so that all guests will be pleased with what's available. Some general guidelines:

- Offer at least two choices of entrée (three is better).
- Offer three or more salad dressing options.
- Serve all condiments on the side.
- Offer two dessert options: one very indulgent, one healthy.

7.4 Incorporate Seasonal and Fresh Items

When selecting the menu, the time of year should play a large factor in determining food and beverage. Take into consideration which items are in season for spring or winter menus. Another important factor is to consider the region or location of the event and popular food items from the area. Incorporate fresh seafood or regionally grown produce.

7.4 Select a Menu that Fits the Event Schedule

Sometimes the clock will be the greatest guide to determining the menu for an event. Some examples:

- Box lunches are best if you have 30 minutes or on the go.
- Plated meals usually requires at least 1.5 hours.
- Buffets may be finished in about 1 hour.
- Cocktail receptions require a minimum of 1 hour before dinner.
- Working breakfasts or lunches should incorporate menu items that can hold up for longer periods of time than others.

7.5 Anticipate Special Needs

Before any event, it is critical for an event planner to find out if any of the guests have a special need so that the catering manager can address those needs prior to the event. Considerations include:

- Food allergies
- Religious requirements
- Dietary restrictions

7.6 Allow for a Comfortable Room Setup

Choose the appropriate room layout that supports your event objectives. If you're serving a meal, the tables will be filled with used dishes and glassware, in addition to binders, notepads and pens. That's why it's important to choose the best room setup, and allow space for people to move. Examples:

- Boardroom setup should be for a maximum of 15 guests.
- U-shape and rectangle table layout to promote discussion.
- Classroom style is great for a presentation.
- Banquet style promotes small group discussions

Regardless of the setup, allow for people to spread out. Tip: Setup for 8 in a 10 person banquet table.

7.7 Create Ethnic or Regional Menus

This allows an event planner and the executive chef to work together to bring region-specific and international foods into the event, and this will definitely please guests. Common ethnic catering includes the following:

- Asian/Chinese/Japanese
- French
- German
- Greek
- Italian
- Mexican
- Middle Eastern

7.8 Menus and choices

Increasingly, caterers are finding that they have to consider a broad range of consumer requirements, such as healthy eating, food intolerances and ethnic variation, within their menus to both serve the more diverse mix of staff now found in the modern workplace, and cater for an increased diversity in taste. However, providing this level of diversity and choice can come at a price and thus requires careful planning. This increase in cost may derive from a variety of different considerations, including: a need for an enhanced subsidy; increased levels of waste being generated; increased labour input (and ultimately labour cost) incurred per cover.

Menus can take various forms, and can include:

- À la carte: being cooked to order these menus are rarely found, except perhaps in the most lavish of client silver-service dining areas.
- Table d'hôte: a limited choice and a set number of courses, which will usually be found in client dining where table service is expected.
- 'Cycle' menu: menus generally rotated on a weekly, fortnightly or four-weekly basis; common in institutional catering establishments such as prisons, hospitals, schools and nursing homes. Menu cycles are often reviewed quarterly to ensure seasonal variation and to take advantage of seasonal procurement benefits.
- Cocktail menu: usual for free-issue finger buffets for general hospitality catering.
- Buffet menu: for a large selection of self-service, all-inclusive meals.
- Café menu: increasingly found for all-day flexible menus for contemporary establishments servicing a more youthful audience. This style of menu works on a part-day basis with key lines retained throughout the service span.

8. Choosing Catering Service Providers

Planning a large event needs good organisational skills and paying attention to the small details. Irrespective of the fact whether it is a corporate or a family event, utilizing the services of a suitable event caterer should be a top priority. An experienced event caterer by your side should be able to save on a great deal of hassles.

8.1 Research Procedure

The very first step in choosing catering services is to make a wide research. Be it through internet or any other source, you will have to check for its authenticity. Once you are satisfied with their services and amenities, you can choose them for your events.

Do not necessarily go for the oldest and the biggest caterer. Rather newer and smaller companies should also be considered. These companies, in a bid to build their reputation might give their extra bit in terms of food and service. It is a fact that smaller caterers generally do not use frozen foods but use freshest of ingredients.

8.2 Catering Budget

As the next step, you have to discuss about your estimated budget to the catering service for better understanding. This will help you in understanding each other's requirements in clearer way. While declaring your budget with your potential caterer, make it a point to understate it. This would provide space for making menu changes as well as covering any extra costs. In case of cancellation of the event, it is better you let the catering company know as early as possible to avoid losing extra bucks. It is advised that you should read carefully the terms and conditions of the event catering company before signing in the dotted line.

8.3 Choice of Cuisines

Understand what type of cuisines they specialise in and let them know your requirements. Always ask for food samples to be assured for the taste and

quality they offer. This will only help you in proceeding further with the catering service.

8.4 Food Hygiene

Best catering service providers do not stop with just cooking tasty food; but, also prepare it in hygienic manner. It is essential for you to inquire and know if they use sophisticated catering equipments, fresh vegetables and other edibles for cooking.

8.5 Decor Style

The decoration style of your dining hall at the party is another primary requirement. Catering people must provide you with uniform chairs, tables, paper rolls, water cups and much more which you could need. Have them clarified right over their desk!

8.6 Serving Etiquette

Being the party host, it is your responsibility to make your guests feel at home. So, the catering service providers must serve your guests with polite manners and patience. This is one of the most important criteria in choosing them. When servers are attired in neat catering uniform, it adds up to their dignity.

8.7 Begin in advance

A reputed event caterer will be in high demand and it makes sense to meet up to discuss the event and book early. Some reputable caterers might even require booking one year in advance to the event.

8.8 Meet up the Caterer

It would be wise to pay a visit to the caterer and taste a sample menu as well as discuss the event particulars rather than only communicating over the phone. Do also make it a point to visit several caterers prior to selecting upon the right one.

9. Planning catering facilities

It is recommended that facilities managers should make themselves familiar with the basic design requirements as a prerequisite to any involvement in the planning of a catering facility. Issues that should be addressed as part of any such proposals include:

Availability of appropriate amenities: water supply, drainage and sewerage, waste disposal, power supply, space heating and/or cooling, ventilation (including the extraction of cooking smells and air-borne grease), all to comply with good practice and local planning, building and fire regulations.

9.1 Protection from insect and vermin infestation

Temperature control and monitoring – required to demonstrate due diligence as required by the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995, appropriate temperature ranges being:

- cold food assembly 5–10 °C;
- larder/pastry meat and fish preparation 16–18 °C; and
- hot cook areas maximum 24 °C.

Sufficient and appropriate space for adequate, safe working space for all personnel and equipment, including maintenance and cleaning thereof, for:

- food deliveries and storage;
- staff amenities;
- food preparation;
- kitchens;
- service areas; and
- eating and dining areas.

9.2 Utilities and water supply/disposal

Special consideration should be given to the specification of utilities and water supplies, as the equipment required to provide a catering facility will create extra demand that will, in turn, result in increased loading on:

- electrical supply;
- gas (mains or bottled), or oil storage;
- mains water supply; and
- waste containment and disposal.

9.3 Deliveries and storage facilities

The type of catering operations to be provided will help define and shape the design regarding the provision for delivery and storage facilities specification. For example, frozen, chilled and perishable consumables have differing storage requirements and monitoring regimes. Food deliveries need careful checking on delivery in terms of specifications, temperatures, volumes, dates and seals.

Broken seals or 'tampered with' items should be rejected or returned as appropriate. Partially defrosted frozen food should under no circumstances, be re-frozen; it should be allowed to fully defrost in a refrigerator and then used immediately, or disposed of in the recommended manner.

Building design and maintenance regimes should also provide for appropriate delivery areas, enabling the catering provider to verify that vehicles used are clean and appropriately specified. Hired vehicles may be a cause of particular concern as they may have been used for the transportation of materials not compatible with foodstuffs. Food should have an auditable historical trace, whether locally purchased perishables or goods delivered and/or stored at a distance. Appropriately sized and equipped on-site administrative facilities should also be provided for use by the catering management personnel to register all such supplies and maintain records, etc.

9.4 Waste

Catering waste (e.g. waste food and cooking oils) should be disposed of in the appropriate location i.e.:

- landfill sites;

- approved composting plants;
- approved biogas plants;
- incineration plants; or
- rendering plants.

It is essential that a facilities manager responsible for a catering contract or in-house operation is able to provide on request documentation proving that catering waste:

- is disposed of appropriately;
- does not contaminate the environment; and
- does not find its way back into the food chain, e.g. by being fed to livestock.

9.5 Staff facilities

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1993 requires separate toilet and changing facilities for catering staff. General workspace staff working in food areas should be treated as food handlers, otherwise separate facilities will need to be provided. The best provision is for separate water closet and hand basins for both sexes, unless there are no more than five workers. Furthermore, all facilities should be clearly marked for use by foodservice personnel only.