

3. WHAT SERVICES CAN YOU OFFER?



Extract

OVERVIEW

In this module, we look at the kinds of services you can offer. This helps put catering in perspective, and may help you narrow down your choices.

We cover the following services:

- Parties for adults
- Parties for children
- Boardroom lunches
- Sandwich delivery
- Weddings
- Funerals
- Barbecues
- Ancillary services
- Conference catering
- Other opportunities - TV and radio

WHAT KIND OF CATERING DO YOU LIKE DOING?

The kind of services you can offer depends on several factors:

1. **YOUR PERSONAL TASTE.** Are you the kind of person who loves cooking for intimate dinner parties? Or do you see yourself as a wedding caterer, with airy marquees and champagne flowing?
2. **THE PART OF THE COUNTRY YOU LIVE IN.** In cosmopolitan cities, there is more of a demand for sushi and Mexican food. In the country, you might have to do pig roasts (for big outdoor events).

But it mainly depends on the needs of your clients, and you have to respond creatively and efficiently to their enquiries.

WHAT KIND OF CATERING DO YOU WANT TO DO?

You'll only succeed if you do the kind of catering you enjoy and feel passionate about.

During the course, we look at many different types of catering activities. We don't suggest that you do them all.

On the contrary, you should decide which is your niche. You'll have to work out what you're best at. And concentrate on that.

PARTIES FOR ADULTS

An adult party may take the form of a cocktail party, a surprise birthday party, or a party for a special occasion. This can include birthday parties (especially for the big birthdays, 30, 40, 50, 60 etc.).

Bigger parties tend to be buffet-style, with people collecting their own food and eating standing up.

Smaller parties (of up to 12 people) are often sit-down affairs. At large houses and upmarket parties, you may be asked to serve the food. But mostly, the hostess will get the credit for the food, and will serve it herself.

You would need to collect the dishes after the party, but for an evening party this would usually be done the following day.

Rank how interested you are in this item, from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested).

TIP

Sandwiches may sound an easy option, but beware: they quickly dry out, and look unappetising. Keep them covered until the last possible moment. Don't put too many out at once. Keep some in reserve. Keep an eye on the party, and when the sandwiches run low, replenish them with more from your covered supplies.

SURPRISE PARTIES

Surprise parties often benefit from using a caterer, because it means there will be no trace of party preparation anywhere in the house.

It also means you have to bring the food straight into the house or hall, and serve it rapidly. There will be little time for setting it up.

Rank how interested you are in this item, from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested).

OFFICE PARTIES

Office parties include 'leaving do's', retirements, and Christmas parties.

The company is likely to have space to serve the food, but the kind of firm that will buy off you won't have its own kitchen (other than a small place for making tea and coffee). This applies to just about every small to medium sized office in the world.

Rank how interested you are in this item, from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested).

EXERCISE 3.1

In your workbook, prepare a sample menu for a stand-up buffet for 40 people. This is for a company's sales conference at its head office.

PARTIES FOR CHILDREN

Some caterers can successful do children's parties, while others find it hard to succeed.

Most children just want basic party food, such as burgers, hot dogs, and chicken nuggets.

Anyone can cook this, and supermarkets have an abundance of such food. So it's rare for a parent to ask you do this.

The only reason someone might ask you to cater for children in this way is if they're too busy to cook themselves. For example, this might be where both parents work long hours.

However, some people find that there is a move away from having a party at the local swimming pool or activity centre, where they serve chips and burgers. Some children (and parents) want the luxury of a traditional children's party at home.

OFFER THE PARENTS SOME THEMES

If you want to do children's parties, you should have a list of exciting themes. For example, Wild West or Fancy dress.

Each theme should be appropriate to a particular age range.

If you do this, you'll need to be able to buy accessories for each party. There are many mail order suppliers of children's party themes. You will need many weeks notice to be able to do this. Don't agree to do any more than the basic catering unless you have eight weeks or more to plan it.

JUST THE BASIC CATERING

It's easier to offer just the catering, rather than getting involved in the event planning. And frequently, the parents will know what kind of party they want, and simply need a caterer.

The way to make the catering work is to offer the kids food that is nutritious but which also looks exciting. For example, you can cut sandwiches with star shaped cutters.

Or you can imprint a Tellytubby figure on to a slice of bread, and toast it. This gives the bread a special logo on it.

So in marketing your service to a parent, make them realise that the food will look exciting and attractive.

Rank how interested you are in this item, from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested).

SANDWICH DELIVERY

Sandwich delivery can be to either industrial estates or to offices.

DELIVERING SANDWICHES ON INDUSTRIAL ESTATES

Sandwich delivery usually involves your driving around industrial estates, honking the horn to alert workers that they can buy lunch from you.

This type of catering requires the use of a small van.

The work force won't walk more than 25 metres/yards from their premises, so you need lots of short stops on each estate. Honk your horn when

you get to each stop, and open the hatch back. The workforce will come and look at what is on display.

1. Establish that no one else is running a sandwich delivery service. Do this by ringing small companies on estates, and ask if anyone is currently providing a sandwich delivery service.
2. You will need a van. Spread the cost of the van by buying it on credit. Don't buy the van new. Visit a specialist commercial van dealer, and see what vans are for sale. Or look in the pages of your free ads magazine or local newspaper or regional weekly car sales magazine (The Trader). You can find the value of vans by buying a car price guide at a newsagent.
3. Don't buy the van until you have established that you can make enough profit from this kind of work.
4. Consider having the van sign painted, to advertise your catering services. Write something like this:

Fran's Mobile Catering

Catering for parties and
special occasions

Tel: 01934 713 563

5. Ensure that your food is clearly displayed. You may need racks to slide trays in and out.
6. Make sure the food is clearly priced. It will also need to be well wrapped, to protect it against exhaust fumes.
7. You are not restricted to lunch time. This would severely curtail your market. You can turn up any time between 10.00am and 1.00pm. By then the work force will have taken steps to buy their food elsewhere.
8. In the afternoon, you can prepare the food for the following day, or undertake other catering assignments.

DELIVERING SANDWICHES TO OFFICES

This calls for someone with a basket, carrying the sandwiches into the office. The telephonist will often let people know that the sandwich person has arrived.

Since there's a limit to the number of sandwiches that anyone can carry, the deliverer may have to keep a back-up stock in a van in a car park.

We also discuss sandwiches in the next module.

Rank how interested you are in this item, from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested).

CASE STUDY: THE CATERER WHO DIDN'T TURN UP

The company where my friend works is on an industrial estate. They got a leaflet saying that a mobile sandwich delivery van was going to be in the area every morning from a certain date.

Everyone on the site had these letter. She said she'd be there between 11.00am to 11.30am. She'd obviously worked out the distance between the different plots on the estate. But she never turned up.

People were waiting for her. They'd have bought if she'd been there. But she never turned up. So she never got the business. If people knew that she was going to be there at a certain time, they'd have bought from her.

WEDDINGS

A typical wedding for which you would be asked to cater would be held in a church hall. The bride's family would ask you to supply the food in the hall.

Weddings can involve large numbers of guests, which means you have to ration your time. You can't afford to spend all the time in the kitchen. You'll have to be out managing your staff.

It is likely that the family will have sorted out the wine. However, we refer to this in a later module.

The planning of the event is crucial, and we cover this in Module 6. From a caterer's perspective, a typical wedding might have the following timing on the day of the event:

10.00am Start packing cold food and utensils and crockery into the car.

10.30am Leave for the venue.

- 11.00am Arrive at the venue with cold food. Set out drinks table. Lay out food in the kitchen or ante room.
- 11.45am At home, hot food is put into the van.
- 12.00pm Guests leave church or registry office. Driver leaves home with the hot food in the van.
- 12.15pm Guests begin to arrive at the function room. Serve drinks from a serving table. Food arrives by car.
- 12.30pm Bride's father invites everyone to eat. Guests get seated. Serve first course, followed by second course and then pudding. Serve coffee.
- 1.15pm Serve champagne. Bride's father makes speech, followed by best man and groom. Guests drink toasts.
- 1.45pm Guests begin to depart.
- 2.00pm Begin clearing up.

As you can see from the timetable, an event of this type requires one or more people to be at the venue, while leaving someone else to bring the hot food just in time to be served.

Sometimes, there may be bain maries (electrically powered hot food serving dishes) at the venue, but this is the exception.

Rank how interested you are in this item, from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested).

CHRISTENINGS

Christenings are similar to weddings, in that people come from a church service to a function room where they eat food. So the planning process is similar. But there are fewer formal christening lunches these days.

Rank how interested you are in this item, from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested).

REMINDER

Have you completed the following exercises?

- Exercise 3.1
- Exercise 3.2
- Exercise 3.3
- Exercise 3.4

Tick each box when you have completed the exercises. When you have done them, you should do the assignment that follows.

SUMMARY

1. You have considered what types of catering you would like to do.
2. You understand the requirements of the various services you could offer.
3. You realise that the coordination of ancillary services offers an increased income.
4. You are aware of how to handle your first party.

ASSIGNMENT 3

Mrs. Pilkington has contacted you about a reception being held after the marriage of her daughter Denise (who works at a call centre) to Martin, who works in the design office of an engineering firm.

They are going to hold the reception in a local church hall, and they'll be inviting 100 guests. It will be a stand-up buffet, and the family will be organising its own alcohol.

Please prepare a sample menu for the buffet.

If you can, try to work out what the event (food and staff) might cost you. You'll need two assistants for six hours, so add £50 to your costs for staffing.

When you have completed this assignment, please send or email it to your tutor for marking. Remember to staple it to a cover sheet.

Well, that's the end of the extract. If you want to know more, you'll have to register!

We look forward to welcoming you on to the course, and helping you become a home-based caterer.