



# GROWING YOUR BUSINESS:

## Best Practices for Small Catering Events

The holiday season may not be the same for restaurants this year with many facing capacity restrictions and continued concern from consumers about eating out. To stay profitable this holiday season, consider focusing on smaller catering opportunities, like family parties and intimate get-togethers. Your customers will definitely need a break by the holidays, so start your holiday marketing campaign now to remind them that a catered meal will make their holidays less stressful and more enjoyable. Use the suggestions below to improve your catering success and end the year profitably.

### Creating the Menu

- Your catering menu should be consistent with the items on your regular menu to appeal to your current customer base and maintain cost efficiencies. It's also a great opportunity to attract new customers that enjoyed your food. Include additional menus for catered events so guests will know your restaurant for future purchases.
- Updating your menu to include new items will appeal to a broader audience. If you are well known for pizza and wings, adding sandwiches or desserts to the catering menu will satisfy a larger crowd. Use the ingredients in your pantry to create new offerings to avoid buying unique items that may go to waste.
- Don't forget to include menu options that meet the needs of those with dietary restrictions.
- Develop menu items that will feed a certain number of people rather than just your standard sizes. Offering party packs that feed 8, 12 or 20 people will make it easier for your customers to order and may increase check averages as they order more "just in case."
- When pricing your catering menu, you may choose a fixed price per item or a cost per person. Whichever you decide, make sure to consider all of the factors that go into the pricing, including extra packaging, add-ons like napkins, plates and utensils, delivery and additional labor, to maintain your profitability.
- Delivering food ready-to-eat is the best option for catering, so make sure your menu items travel well. If items need to be reheated once they reach the destination, make sure to include clear, step-by-step instructions. The easier it is, the more likely the food will taste as you intended when reheated.

### Offer Promotions

- You will likely be competing with a number of local restaurants offering catering for the first time, and also those who have been doing it for a while. Providing a discount or an incentive, such as an additional side or dessert, may just send consumers to your restaurant for their catering needs.
- Provide free delivery for customers who order catered meals at home during slow times.
- Offer a future discount or rewards valid in the new year to keep them coming back.
- Provide a gift card for every \$100 spent on catering.
- If your restaurant serves alcohol, include a free bottle of wine with a minimum catering purchase.
- Offer customers a discount to take photos of themselves enjoying your catered meal and tag your restaurant on social media.

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### Communicating your Catering Services

- Use social media to promote your catering and encourage customers to order in advance.
- Use your POS system and loyalty program to communicate with regular customers. Focus the message on getting their favorite dishes in larger quantities for entertaining at home.
- Consider sending postcards to your customers or local residents offering a discount for their first catering order. According to the Data & Marketing Association, 42.2% of direct mail recipients either read or scan the mail they receive, and it has a longer life sitting on the counter instead of in an email inbox.
- Download Grande's [customizable box topper](#) to get the word out to customers ordering a pizza for delivery or take out.
- Contact your local media with the menu, high-quality photos of your food and contact information to encourage a free news story.

### Delivering Quality

- Make sure the catering order is accurate and ready for pick up on time or delivered when promised. Many gatherings have been spoiled and customers lost when the food is late or not what was ordered.
- Contact each customer after their catering order is delivered to see how everything went and how they enjoyed it. When you reach out to them, ask them to send you a referral and reward them for any referral that turns into a new catering order.
- If you use a third party delivery service, consider having your catering orders delivered by your own employees instead. It's important that the service is representative of your business for a catering order that can cost your customer up to 10 times their regular order. You also have more people to impress at the event in order to gain their business in the future.
- Offer online ordering for catering. According to a study by Fast Casual, 92% of people who place orders for big groups prefer to do it online. It also improves accuracy, allowing customers to review their order before they click "send."

In addition to providing high quality, delicious food that your restaurant is known for, providing an enjoyable experience and keeping your catering customers and their guests safe during the holidays is one of the most important factors you will face. Achieving this will not only make your holiday season profitable, but also keep your existing customers coming back next year, along with new customers who may have had the chance to try your food for the first time at a catered event.