

9 Things Caterers Should Focus On

A guide for catering companies
on building their business
and developing lasting client
relationships.



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About the Authors



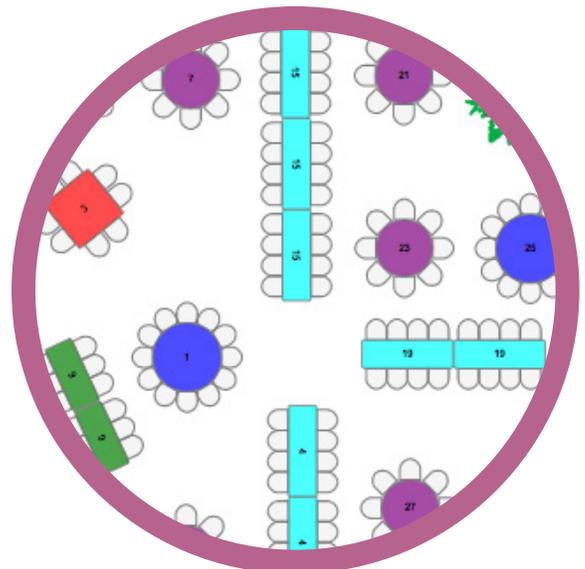
DJ Bruggemann is on our Catering Sales team here at Social Tables. While born in DC, DJ hails from Lexington, KY. After graduating from Miami(OH) University he headed back East with dreams of solving peoples problems with software. He enjoys exploring the various concert venues, restaurants, and sports teams that DC has to offer.



Scott Evans, also on our Catering Sales team, is a DC transplant who answered the call when the startup phone rang. He studied Marketing at Indiana University and began his career in Chicago as an analytic consultant helping clients sell and develop products. On weekends you can find him watching re-runs of Law & Order, playing piano, or cooking brunch for friends.

About Social Tables

Social Tables, a hospitality software company headquartered in Washington, DC, offers the most user-friendly event planning platform available today. The cloud-based product suite has a proven track record of increasing sales and bolstering operational efficiency. Solutions include: 2D room diagram creation, 3D event rendering, attendee management, table assignments, and guest check-in.



INTRODUCTION

Consumer spending and business profit have been on the rise, with corporate profit at an all-time high. As a result, catering industry revenue is expected to climb 2.9% in 2013, marking a fourth-straight year of gains. These gains are great and show progress, but they also mean more competition. In order to stand out and continue gaining business, catering companies, like yours, need to leverage new technology and trends in order to stay on top.

Here are 9 tips to make sure your catering company is headed in the right direction.

1. VALUE

Catering customers now expect higher quality food at a lower rate. It's imperative to share with your customers how you differentiate from your competitors with a better value. Here are a few things you can focus on in order to demonstrate value.

- Food quality per dollar spent. Customers expect to always feel like they got a good deal, but it is imperative that caterers not sacrifice quality for price. Instead the perfect balance of quality and price must be found.
- Little extras such as bundling packages

and including things that you always do can help you stand out amongst your competition. Customers want to be surprised and delighted, and some of the most inexpensive inclusions can make the biggest differences. A great example would be having a Season Specialty Cocktail passed out as guests arrive, when a client upgrades to a full premium bar.

- Flawless execution. An eye for detail and a pursuit for perfection will create an intangible value that cannot be matched by competitors. From a consistent direction of seams/ pattern with linen placement, to the appearance of waitstaff on the floor, no detail is too small.

2. TECHNOLOGY

Leveraging a toolbox of new and inexpensive technologies can help get you a leg up against the competition. In a world where new potential tools are created every day, it is important to stay connected and ahead of industry trends.

Maintaining a fresh web presence is key. For many shoppers, this is their first exposure to your company, so it is important that there is an updated site with pictures of delicious food and beautiful events. If people do not

trust your site, you risk losing them prior to an intro. One of our favorite catering sites is [Occasions Caterers](#), where visuals of the food and gorgeous special events are at the forefront.

Leveraging other cutting edge technologies can help your company look more professional and organized internally and externally. All client deliverables should in some way be influenced by technology. A great looking visual proposal, professional diagrams, and accurate order delivery can all be influenced by well utilized technology. Some technologies that can help you succeed as a business include diagramming software such as [Meeting Matrix](#), [Vivien](#), CAD and [Social Tables](#). Event management software such as [Caterease](#) can also make your event planning process more efficient. These technologies will allow you to create diagrams and proposals more quickly and in some cases, more professionally.



Use 3D diagramming technology to really wow your clients and help them visualize their event!

3. CUSTOMIZATION

Allowing clients to customize as many aspects of their event as possible can be a daunting task. It is easy to limit choices in order to automate, but keep in mind their event is one-of-a-kind. When considering eliminating choices and customers, ask yourself if it is really necessary for the operational success of your company.

Finding the right tools and partners to enable your client to influence the design of the event can create a consultative, memorable experience that is sure to have them spreading the word about your company.

4. COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a great way to create the best customer experience possible. Equipping your team with tools that not only allow effective collaboration internally, but communication with clients over the web can make your team more efficient, and keep your customer out of the dark throughout the process.

Collaboration can also broaden your ability to reach unique and distant potential customers like out-of-towners and the extremely busy.

Working collaboratively with your client may seem to be laborious but in transparency and communication may reduce work in the long run since changes can be easily managed. New technologies, including [Social Tables](#), allow for real-time collaboration. For example, if a client needs to change the food choice of one guest, they can update the meal to gluten-free and your team will immediately see the changes made without email communication back and forth. This gives you more time to work on the finer details of the event.

5. LOCAL/ORGANIC/GLUTEN

Consider sourcing ingredients locally and offering to accommodate all allergens and preferences in order to best serve your customer. Stressing the importance of food quality and customer service is not enough. Successful caterers must show this commitment by individualizing their service to the needs of each guest.



Create a recipe card, incorporating the sustainable, organic ingredients, as a take away for your guests. This will keep your company fresh in their mind.

People inherently want to support their community, therefore the use of local ingredients remains a positive selling point among clients. In addition, knowing the source of an ingredient can tie you back into those local businesses.

Accommodating allergen and special preferences can not only help you create the best experience, but develop a reputation of excellence in certain niche categories. In diagramming products like [Social Tables](#), you can easily keep track of where guests with allergies are seated so there won't be any mix ups.

6. SETTING YOURSELF APART

A great way to make sure that people remember your events and continue coming back is by offering them memories vs. simply food. Providing a unique dish that goes along with the event's theme is a sure-fire way for people to pick up your card on the way out the door.

Going beyond food, a centerpiece on the table that can start a conversation is something that will get your name mentioned as well! Presentation at your buffets can also make a lasting impact. Gone are the days of cupcake towers stealing the show. Consider hanging

desserts or towered glasses for your guests to grab!

Offering interactive elements are a way for guests to remember your event. Giving attendees the opportunity to contribute toward each event's success will leave them smiling and craving an opportunity to do it again.



7. MARKETING

Word of mouth is a phenomenal way to spread the message about your offerings. If you're practicing these suggestions, you're happy and repeat customers will refer people to you. One great way to spread the word is with face to face drop offs with Mini Desserts, savory bites, etc. This will let your

product create some buzz!

Another avenue that cannot be ignored is Social Media. Join groups and be active in discussions that prove your credibility. Clients also love to see a behind the scenes look so post back of house pictures, food preparation and cocktail creation to keep things interesting!



Have an emergency kit with Shout wipes, needle and thread, band-aids, and duct tape so you can save the day!

8. FULL-SERVICE OFFERINGS

If you're not already, going beyond the status quo is a must! Allowing yourself to be a point of contact and reference to other parts of the event planning process will establish more credibility and help you stick out. Let your customer know that they can rely on you to coordinate the rentals and entertainment if you have the contacts.

To go even farther, consider adding departments that cater to these needs. Being able to have an on-site florist, equipment rental, and entertainment makes you the

one-stop shop for everything necessary to make sure an event is remembered. With competition at an all time high, offering more than your competitors will make your business stick out and more attractive to potential customers.

Taking the stress of working with many vendors away from the customer and allowing yourself to be the expert will make sure that they come to you time and time again. That being said, don't over promise and under deliver. Once you start to lose that credibility it can spread quickly and turn customer relations sour.

9. ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Be sure that you and your team aren't cutting corners. It's easy to get in a routine when business gets busy, but for your customers each event is their most important. You should treat it the same way!

Customer satisfaction is best seen when you go beyond the call of duty and are able to wow them beyond what they ever expected. Things like having an emergency kit for day-of accidents can let you save the day.

In this day and age, bad news spreads fast. By paying attention to every last detail and eliminating the possibility of those accidents

you will ensure that your name is spoken highly of.

CONCLUSION

As competition gets greater, it will be more and more important to differentiate yourself from the crowd and build long-lasting client relationships. By utilizing each of these 9 focus points for the specific needs of your business, you will be able to develop the positioning statement for your company. Will you truly stand out on service? Technology? After finding your position, you can develop a successful plan for the future and will truly be a step ahead of the rest.

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to read our white paper. We hope you found it valuable.

If you enjoyed reading it, please take a moment to share it through social media.

If you're interested in learning more about [Social Tables](#), you may contact us at:



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