The Catering Institute™

Centralization Strategies

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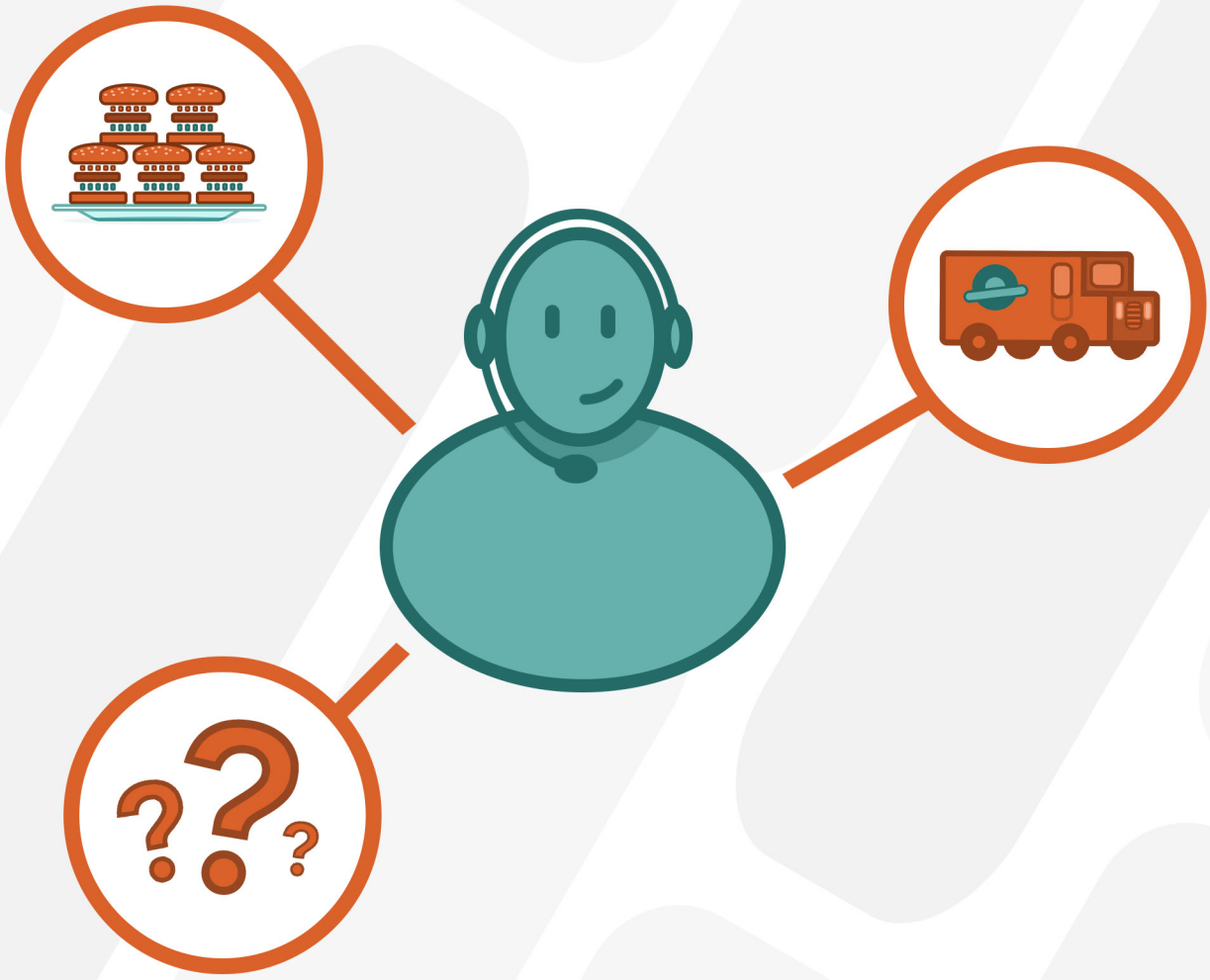

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Driving Relevant Catering Data to Restaurants

When contemplating adding centralized services, a rationale behind making such an investment to a centralized catering model needs to be established.

Picture a cashier in a very busy restaurant with a phone at his or her ear. On the phone is a catering customer looking to place a $300 order. Across the counter from this cashier are valuable customers trying to pay and engage with the restaurant's products and services. Got the picture?

Restaurant operators have worked hard to drive increasing numbers of customers into their restaurant(s). Now that they are there, they are either put on hold while a cashier takes the $300 catering order, or the catering customer is put on hold while the cashier collects and thanks those $7-$8 transacting consumers.

The cashier cannot multi-task their way out of this mess and everyone is now feeling frustrated. The overall message: Nothing good is happening here!

While a majority of restaurants have not adopted a centralized catering model, there are advantages to this type of strategy.

Restaurants that implement a centralized catering model have the ability to provide an uninterrupted on-premise guest experience that exceeds customer expectations while the centralized office is delivering a catering customer experience that is efficient, calm and focused on their needs. Based on those two images, the picture is suddenly transformed into a win-win for all, as shareholders and financial officers start to see growing average sales per catering transaction, increased cash flow and positive same- store sales growth.

> *"Implementing a centralized catering strategy requires an organizational readiness that will leverage and exploit the advantages of the centralized model."*

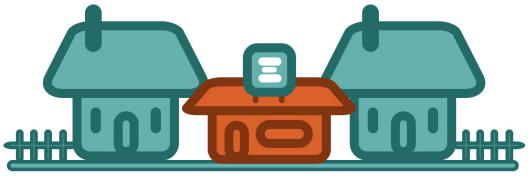
What It Means

Through a centralized model, multi-unit restaurant operators have the ability to leave behind an operational flow as pictured previously. Instead, they see the type of sales lift and revenue growth experienced when in-store and off-premise staff is given the ability to focus on each customer at their chosen point of transaction.

Implementing a centralized catering strategy requires an organizational readiness that will leverage and exploit the advantages of the centralized model.

Firstly, the centralized model will provide greater opportunities for control over the catering business and the customer experience. Brand consistency will increase and a higher rate of dependability will be achieved as a result. Additionally, customers will find the ordering process more convenient because they will have one central phone number to call orders into.

This means that the catering business will grow because a centralized operation is devoted strictly to catering and puts a laser focus on that part of the business. However, while successful centralization strategies can position a company to exploit the long list of advantages, customer perception needs to be addressed.



There are some customers who prefer the level of catering service provided by their local restaurant because they have a relationship there in the neighborhood. Some customers also believe restaurant managers have a better sense of the business, stock levels and capabilities to fulfill the order because, when the manager says they will be there with the order, there is accountability and follow-through within that direct conversation.

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This is where technology comes into great play.

Technology enables the deployment of flawless order execution with a tighter span of control, while containing and minimizing the disadvantages. This is done through the creation of a world class call and online experience that exceeds expectations and builds trust and confidence with every customer along the way.

> *Once these two procedures are streamlined, the consumer comes along with the centralized strategy in a dynamic way, quickly abandoning the local restaurant connection in favor of the efficiency and convenience the centralized model provides.*

Technology enables centralized service support functions that are enhanced with capabilities seldom found at the individual unit level. For instance, the average call center wait time becomes a focus in the centralized environment as operators are given insight into how long each call takes to answer. Additionally, each order process is measured from start to finish.

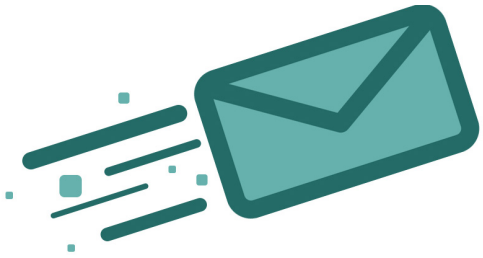
Going back to the restaurant – how many times has a restaurant operator called his/her own restaurants for catering orders, losing count of the number of rings it takes for someone to answer? And then, how long might it take it to find someone to process the order? There is a significant advantage to setting a centralized standard that all calls are answered within six seconds and when this happens, processed within a reasonable amount of time.

Once these two procedures are streamlined, the consumer comes along with the centralized strategy in a dynamic way, quickly abandoning the local restaurant connection in favor of the efficiency and convenience the centralized model provides.

Where It's Leading

When restaurant operators take the big step toward centralizing call and contact center functions, they win. Why? Because they are then able to hone their focus on the fundamentals of keeping hot food hot, cold food cold, and saying please and thank you to every customer that walks through the restaurant door. This all happens while they continue to develop the off-premise channel that is processed and driven by a relatively small group of people who customize every experience with personality, efficiency, and convenience.

The trust and confidence required to build a catering business is then an achievable and realistic outcome associated with every transaction. This is because the randomness of each multi-unit catering experience is brought into control through an effective centralization strategy that combines telephone technology with professional management.



Another big consumer confidence builder is accomplished when technology blends with the centralized service to provide an instant order confirmation email that details the order specifics of time, product, order quantity, and location. This confirmation email is a requisite to building a successful online order experience because it confirms every detail being captured by the catering specialist.

Here is the actual experience of a busy administrative assistance to put these ideas of a centralized order experience into perspective:

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"Good morning! I just happened to fall upon your catering website yesterday after I received a request to provide breakfast for 20 this morning.

Firstly, your website was by far the easiest to navigate even with selection options. I've been to other websites and the time lag between screens and extra pop-up windows is time consuming and can be frustrating.

Second, the fact that I can go back into "my account" to retrieve past orders...in PDF even, is BRILLIANT!

Finally, customer service...from the moment (which was almost instantly) I received confirmation that you had my order, I was put at ease knowing that a store did receive my order. Not only did they deliver on time, they delivered everything in a courteous manner. Even when I forgot to note which building on our campus I was in! Everything was included from cups to napkins.

In summary, I will not hesitate to use your online catering service again! It was the best experience I have ever had.

Thank you, Christine W."

It should be evident through these unsolicited comments that when centralized functions combine with technology and flawless restaurant operational execution, it produces a world class experience.

Let's talk catering.

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About The Catering Institute

The Catering Institute is a leading educator in takeout, delivery and catering, providing training, certification and consulting to restaurant operators and their teams.

The Catering Institute is a private, independent academic institution. Led by founder and CEO Erle Dardick, the faculty at the Catering Institute is passionate about helping brands excel at feeding their customers where they Live, Work & Play™.

Learn more:
www.cateringinstitute.com

Get Catering and Grow Sales!™

A Strategic Perspective for the Multi-Unit Restaurant Executive

By **Erle Dardick**

About Erle Dardick

Erle Dardick is a 17-year catering veteran, business turn-around expert and author, best known for helping multi-unit restaurant executives create successful catering revenue channels. Erle founded both MonkeyMedia Software and The Catering Institute. He is also the Author of "Get Catering and Grow Sales! A Strategic Perspective for The Multi-Unit Restaurant Executive."

About Wayne Alexander

With 16 years of experience and a hands-on style founded in operations and servant leadership, Wayne has established catering as a sustained accelerated growth platform. Through sales force talent development, organizational alignment in the multi-unit franchised environment, centralized call center management, and program development, Wayne reaches catering decision makers at their time of need.

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