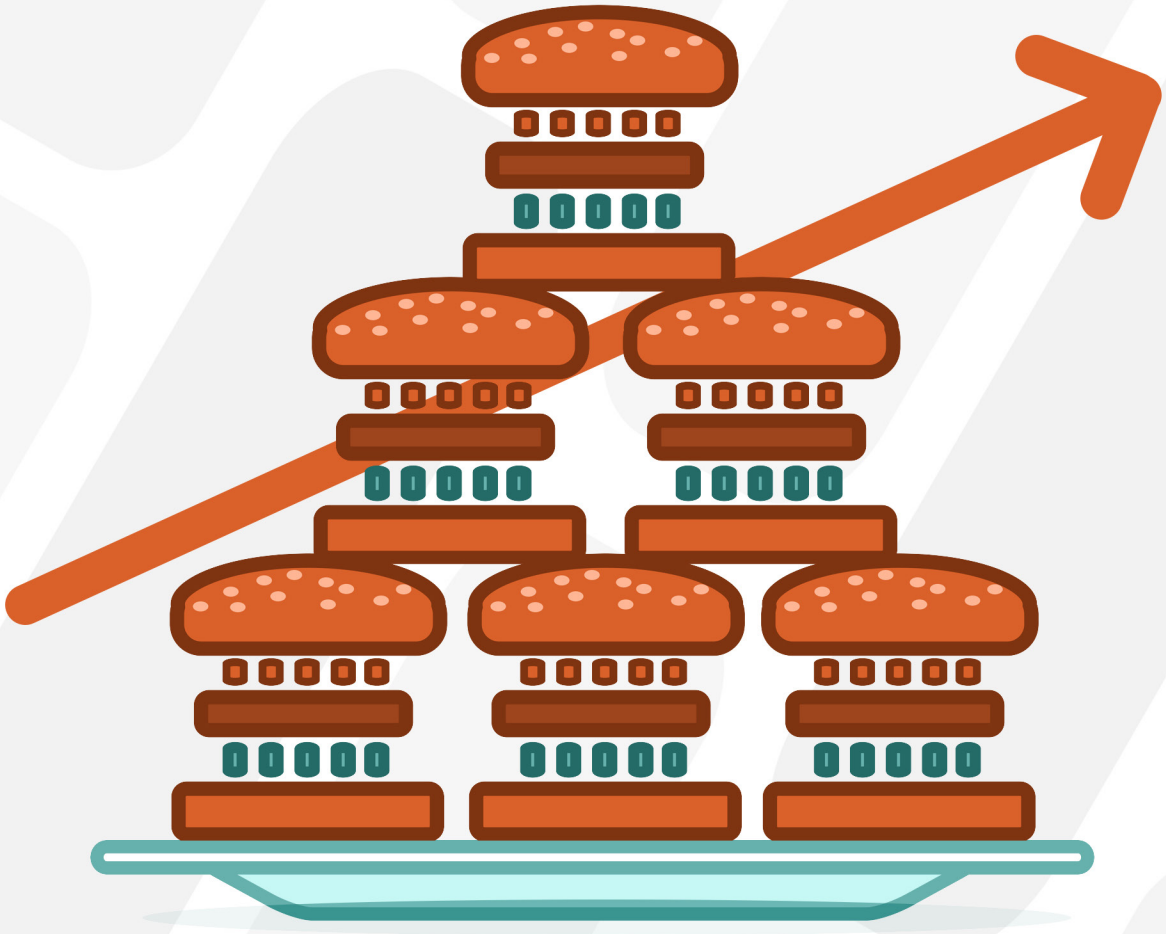
The Catering Institute™

How to Increase Restaurant Catering Ordering Volume & Frequency

A Catering Institute Original Essay by Wayne Alexander, *Senior Faculty Member, The Catering Institute™*
Erle Dardick, *Founder and CEO, The Catering Institute™*



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Driving Relevant Catering Data to Restaurants

One of the most important questions asked about catering sales in restaurants is: "How can our brand effectively drive more catering sales to our restaurants?" In general, there are three ways to grow more restaurant catering sales:

- Acquire new customers
- Get existing customers to visit more frequently
- Sell more to the customers you already have

Certainly, these three principles can be applied individually to growing your restaurant's catering sales; however, a solid catering sales growth strategy should include a focus on all three.

The frequent consumer of catering is very different from the customers that are dining in your restaurants and standing across from your menu boards making order decisions. As such, it only stands to reason that to effectively attract and retain your catering consumers you must first understand what motivates them to order your restaurant's catering products and services. This is in addition to understanding the other nuances of consumer behavior that drive sourcing decisions when catering needs emerge within your communities.

The Professional Catering Client

Predominantly, high-use, frequent consumers of catering products and services are found in offices and business settings of corporations. For example, in the course of performing daily duties as an office manager, administrative assistant, HR training administrator, and educator, people are tasked with arranging food deliveries to the office to feed people where they work and learn. Additionally, there are various sales professionals, who, in the course of selling their products, arrange breakfast, lunch and cocktail gatherings with their clients and serve food as a means of having more time with key decision makers. While these gathering sessions have evolved into key sales tools for professional salespeople, especially in the pharmaceutical and medical field, they

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extend into other product sales categories such as consulting services, insurance, marketing and advertising sales, and accounting and financial services. Law office administrators also are often ordering daily for in-office litigation activity that includes feeding people engaged in deposition and lawsuit settlement activity.

As a cumulative group, these busy catering consumers have a wide variety of needs when it comes to purchasing catering services from your restaurants. From accounting and billing requirements and credit cards on file, to ongoing menu variety and delivery that satisfies the various situations they are presented with in their day-to-day life. There are often special group dietary needs to consider, and individual versus group feeding in their meeting formats enter the picture. Online ordering and instant order confirmation also are important factors influencing the decision of where to order catering services.

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The Service and Sales Tactics You Need to Deliver

From experience at MonkeyMedia Software and the The Catering Institute™, after processing more than $1 billion dollars in restaurant catering trans- actions on behalf of clients, five customer demands dominate all others:

- Food quality
- On-time delivery
- Order accuracy
- Ease of ordering
- Trust and confidence

So when you nail all these factors, then the sales just come, right?

Well, not exactly. These elements are just the key enablers – the minimum requirements you need to fulfill to be in the consideration set of the catering game. There is just no sense in getting more catering orders in the door if you can't execute them every single time!

> *"The most effective restaurant catering sales leaders that we see balance a multi-unit sales force focused on prospecting and client acquisition activity with a well-defined client relationship-management strategy."*

Our cumulative experience in selling these frequent consumers of catering shows us the proven tactic of food sampling and the delivery of your menus to their offices. These effective guerrilla marketing and sales methods can be accomplished by a motivated and driven restaurant team – in particular, delivery drivers that are already out in the field who can canvass for leads and bring in new customers through simple sampling connections made in the course of visiting office buildings.

Many of the restaurant companies we work with on catering are choosing to maintain four walls catering marketing programs while their general managers and restaurant staff are focused on the on-premise service experience. In addition, these restaurant brands are establishing a dedicated catering sales force focused on accomplishing targeted visits to qualified prospective catering leads. Applying proven and developed prospecting and acquisition skills toward the off-premise opportunity is yielding them fantastic success, especially when a skilled catering sales leader is providing structure and discipline to the sales and lead generation program.

The most effective restaurant catering sales leaders that we see balance a multi-unit sales force focused on prospecting and client acquisition activity with a well-defined client relationship-management strategy.

Building a productive and professional sales force requires a sound Customer Relations Management system (CRM) that the catering sales team can leverage to productively and efficiently maintain and track connections. This occurs by combining data-driven contact points such as:

- First-time orders
- Top 10/20 sales client follow-up
- Lapsed user/lost user
- Lead follow-up and order conversion
- Current and prior-year quotes

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Catering Connections

The balance of customer acquisition and connection activity can vary according to the development stage of your restaurant's catering program. Early programs need more energy applied to customer acquisitions and may have sales force activity allocated 80% to acquisitions and 20% to relationship building. More mature restaurant catering programs that are leveraging an online presence with search engine marketing campaigns, may have a 50/50 acquisition to relationship building strategy as a result of search engine optimization (SEO) activity.

The power of reaching catering decision makers at the very moment when catering is top-of-mind – that is, as they are searching on Google for a catering option – is critical to raising brand awareness during an important customer demand moment.

> *"Dropping off cookies, making a call to check in, or occasionally stopping by their office with a "thank you" box lunch or movie tickets are productive sales activities that let key decision makers know your company cares about their business."*

In this particular instance, as your new catering customer is attracted by the ease of online ordering in a 24/7 convenience format, the first time order contact becomes a pivotal point in the relationship building process. Your sales team brings personality, company culture, care and concern to the digital relationship, which bridges the connection to your new customer. Your sales team can further engage your first-time catering customer by asking the right follow-up questions. This will inspire more confidence, trust and referrals between your sales personnel and catering clients.

The right kind of follow-up questions can include:

- Was everything OK with your party yesterday?
- What kind of event was your company engaged with?
- How often do you order for those type events?
- Are there others in your office who order?
- What other needs for catering come up from time to time?
- Who else may I talk to in your office or in your building?
- Can I help you place any additional orders?

Expanding the consumer relationship with this first- time order connection becomes the sales focus because when people have a great catering experience, they want to tell their friends. Securing more referrals from this connection is easy, as satisfied buyers want to share their friends' names when they have been well served. Likewise, if the event had problems with on-time delivery, order accuracy or food quality, the sales team is positioned to personally recover the relationship by taking care of the problem and capturing feedback that can be valuable in improving operational execution.

Another important catering connection is encouraged with the heavy-use catering client. These key clients enjoy being recognized for their business in a personal way. Dropping off cookies, making a call to check in, or occasionally stopping by their office with a "thank you" box lunch or movie tickets are productive sales activities that let key decision makers know your company cares about their business.

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Meanwhile, a well-thought-out CRM system should provide a look at the order history of the sales professionals who have not ordered in 30, 60, or 90 days. Many times, these customers are in the category of "light catering users" and, from experience, we know they are likely to be influenced by an incentive. This group typically has greater sensitivity to price than the heavy user who values consistent service execution. Connecting with lapsed users through email or call contact, and offering a small incentive for a limited time, can bring frequency to a group that may have forgotten about your company's catering program. Also, some of these clients may be heavy users who had an undiscovered bad experience and can be recovered with a call, not to mention the fact that your frequent catering customer might have moved on to another company.

> *Just as we assess and evaluate management capabilities when hiring a new General Manager (GM), we must assess the skills and performance capabilities of the sales professionals we are considering.*

Visibility, Measurement and Focus

While we see many restaurant companies make the decision to invest in a professional catering sales force, few companies actually structure their sales activity into clear expectations or provide sales outreach objectives in a structured, methodical and disciplined way. Many companies we work with focus on the number of orders the sales team has written, forsaking great salesmanship talents such as relationship and connection activity, in favor of the easy-measurement of order completion. The smarter companies we work with are bringing visibility, measurement and focus to their high touch/high impact sales activities, and defer order taking to a well-trained customer service representative or online platform. This allows the higher compensated sales team to sell and you'd be surprised at how a prospect or catering consumer will spend more money with your brand if only a solid sales associate invited them for a cup of coffee!

The important decision to build a catering sales team should be accompanied with a clear plan for what the sales team will be doing and how their time will be allocated and dedicated to high-value sales activities. Just as we assess and evaluate management capabilities when hiring a new General Manager (GM), we must assess the skills and performance capabilities of the sales professionals we are considering.

If we want to grow catering sales through new customer acquisitions and build strong relationships with heavy-use catering consumers, we need to guarantee there are no barriers to initiating contact and no restraints to making connections.

So what does the investment in a professionally skilled sales person amount to? We believe one of the best model sets pay equivalent to the range of a general manager, supplementing that pay with a bonus or commission that adds 25% - 30% in quarterly performance based payouts when sales objectives are accomplished. Payout requisites that center on sales activities applied to the region and leads converted to sales and connections accomplished ties individual sales activity to the sales performance.

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Establishing a productive catering sales team, arming them with the tools and systems to be successful, and providing talented sales leadership are all critical components to growing new customer acquisitions and building frequency through relationship management. Partnered with flawless operational execution, you have created the foundation for the strategic development of a successful restaurant catering program capable of generating double-digit, year-over-year, same-store sales growth.

Let's get catering and grow sales!

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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As Partners in Education, MonkeyMedia Software, PepsiCo Foodservice, and Catering Insights work with the Catering Institute, to help restaurant operators grow sales and increase profits by educating them to become experts at feeding their customers where They Live, Work and Play™.

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