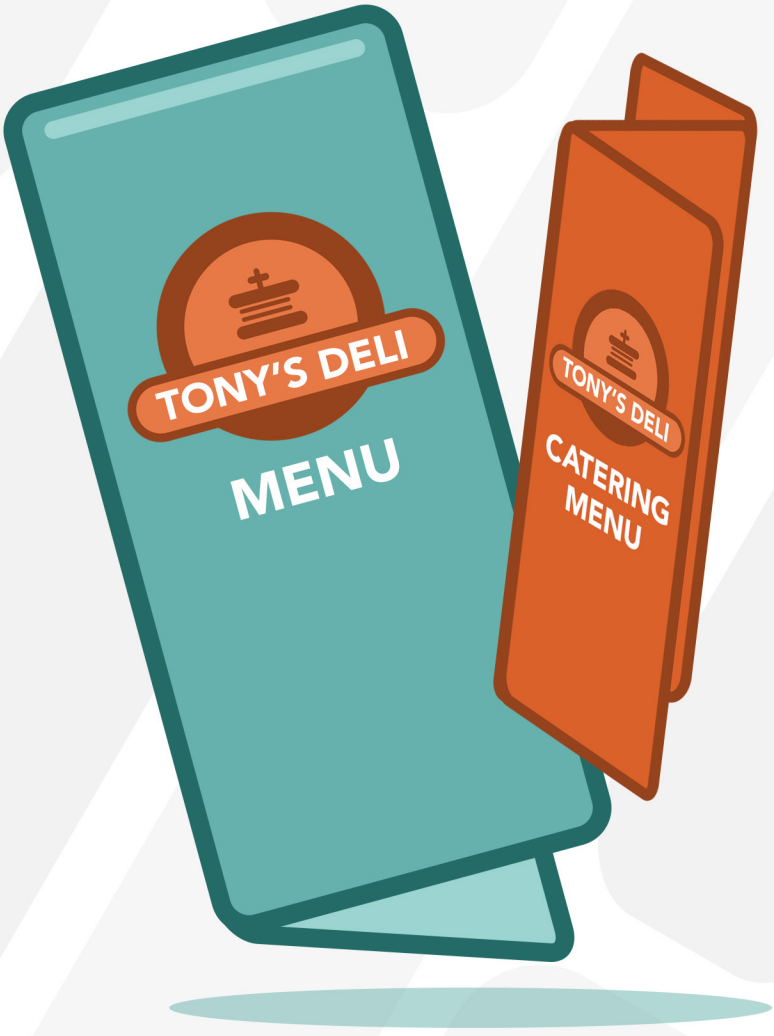
The Catering Institute™

Menu Development in a Multi-Unit Restaurant Catering Operation

A Catering Institute Original Essay by Erle Dardick, *Founder and CEO, The Catering Institute™*



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As restaurateurs, we have done an excellent job at menu development for both our dine-in and takeout revenue channels. We have invested billions of dollars in product design, packaging, training and the proper kitchen equipment to ensure that our customers get the consumption experience that our culinary teams intended. We have mastered the art of driving more restaurant sales with limited-time offers and created craveable items worthy of our customers' return.

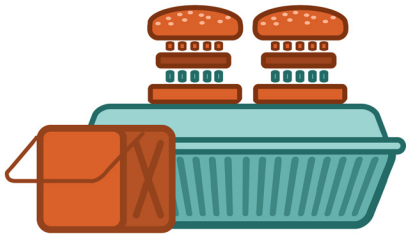
Yet for many restaurant operators, menu development for the catering sales channel remains a daunting task. Operators get stuck in the paradigm that their catering program is an extension of their brand's current retail menu. The assumption that menus are the same between dine-in, takeout and catering can be deadly to our brand and catering customer experience.

> *"As operators, we have to move customers through our restaurants as quickly as possible. Each and every day, we battle meal rushes for breakfast, lunch and dinner."*

Our kitchens are designed for maximum efficiency in our restaurants because speed of service is critical in an industry where turning tables is an important metric. As operators, we have to move customers through our restaurants as quickly as possible. Each and every day, we battle meal rushes for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

These busy times are important for our restaurants because food is an important part of everyone's day. As restaurateurs, we touch people with our products and services. What's even more important to understand, is that our brand has a very personal and intimate relationship with each one of our customers. They eat OUR food and are committed to the impact that our food handling practices and nutritional values have on their bodies.

As a community we have really focused our energy on providing the safest, tastiest and simplest consumption experience that we can create in our establishments. So, when it comes to catering, why have we not been as thoughtful? Why haven't we designed our menus for maximum efficiency and quality?



As we venture further into the off-premise catering channel, we really have to stop and review every single menu item to make sure it is "catering worthy." We must realize that the catering experience begins with menu development, including R&D in production, packaging and distribution methodologies.

I learned this lesson over several years while developing the catering program at Tony's Deli. You see, at Tony's we were loved for our grilled panini sandwiches. As a "paninoteca" we knew that our products had to be on the grill for exactly six minutes at a high temperature. We also understood that our products were at their best if our customers ate them as they came off the grill. The experience was designed that way.

Sure we offered takeout, but we searched high and low for the right foil bag that would keep our panini at the right temperature without "sweating." We knew that if our customers did not consume their panini while it was piping hot, the cheese would congeal, the focaccia would become soggy and the product would lose its structure. It was designed for

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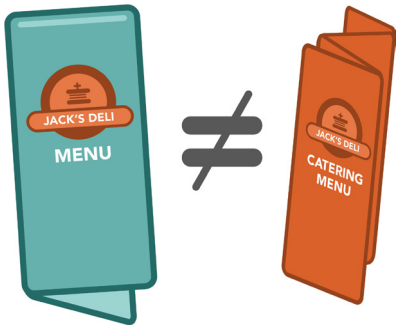
immediate consumption. It's simple chemistry. There was nothing we could do to alter the chemistry of that product.

Tony's was no different than any restaurant operation that wanted to create a proprietary consumption experience. An occurrence so unique and special, that in fact, our loyal customers would drive across Vancouver for that predictable flavor. They knew what they wanted long before they walked through the front door of the deli. In some cases, they craved the experience when they woke up in the morning!

Certainly, as restaurateurs, we are masters at the art of creating menus that have signature items to attract customers, but I have come to understand that our catering menus must be different than our dine-in and takeout menus.



As a matter of fact, to create differentiation in our services, our menus for catering need to be different than our restaurant menus. This means that our customers' catering experiences, from a menu and packaging perspective, should have a clear differentiation from our retail service channels and that as operators we must make the paradigm shift in regard to the menu development process.

I'm not saying the menu needs to step away from our brand identity, but it must be presented in a way that resonates well with the off-premise channel to enhance the brand outside of its four walls. The products and services offered for the catering channel can be a subset of our in-store products or new products all together. There is a strategy to consider here.

> *"Allow for differentiation in pricing, packaging and presentation so you can deliver a unique and thoughtful experience. One by design."*

Imagine rolling out a catering program with branded packaging and the right story attached to the products, with the commitment to provide The Get Catering and Grow Sales!™ System for a memorable off-site consumption experience.

Driving incremental sales is the only reason to launch a catering channel. Often, this sales lift in the catering space can be achieved by developing a simple menu of existing in-store products and then packaging and selling them differently than we currently sell them in-store.

Allow for differentiation in pricing, packaging and presentation so you can deliver a unique and thoughtful experience. One by design.

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

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."

Get Catering and Grow Sales!™

A Strategic Perspective for the Multi-Unit Restaurant Executive

By **Erle Dardick**

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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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