

EXCLUSIVE: Make Your Events Accessible (p. 30)

SPECIAL EVENTS

FALL 2024

START YOUR AI
JOURNEY
P. 12

ALL ABOUT
GRAZING
TABLES
P. 20

*Wedding
Casis*

FALL 2024 THIS ISSUE

VOLUME 42
NO. 3



FEATURES

30 THANKS FOR THINKING OF ME

Make your events accessible



ON THE COVER:

The couple from a Gala award-nominated desert oasis wedding stands under a lush floral-draped chuppah. Hi Rise Events transformed the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival grounds to create a gorgeous wedding scape. Photo courtesy John and Joseph Photography

COLUMNS

04 Editor's Page

Changing seasons

54 The Last Word

The role of memory makers

DEPARTMENTS

06 Conference News

CS+TSE registration is now open!

08 Business of Events

Prep your PR for off-season

10 Marketing & Media

Boost ROI with focused analytics

12 On Trend

Start your AI journey

18 Tech Talk

Transform your tech stack

20 Food for Fetes

Feast your eyes on these grazing tables

40 Confetti

Inside a 2024 Gala nominated desert wedding

48 Steal This

Make an entrance with these show-stopping ideas

Where caterers
meet event planners

under one roof!

catersource® + **THE SPECIAL EVENT®**

FEBRUARY 24-27, 2025

**BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA**

Catersource + The Special Event is the only annual event of its kind. A show of unrivaled influence and inspiration, it's a spirited gathering of all the people, ideas, and trending innovations shaping the catering and events industry.

SECURE YOUR SPOT!

CATERSOURCE-TSE.COM



EDITOR'S PAGE

Heralding Changes as the Season Turns to Fall

In the **Summer issue of *Special Events* magazine**, I noted that we were saying farewell to our longtime graphic artist, Sharon Carlson, and that changes were afoot for our Fall issue. One could think that a new designer (Sarah Kolcheck), adjusted internal processes for handoff and proofing, and a fresh type of digital product might encounter some growing pains (as it were), but my “tiny but mighty” team are pros! The process of converting from a flipbook style magazine to a digizine has been surprisingly smooth.

You probably noticed the change from the cover turn to the first page of this issue, but as you continue to the Conference News spread on [pages 6-7](#), you will be able to click on three different embedded videos! As we continue to rev up and create vibrant video shorts and other fun, digestible content you will hopefully find the interactive nature of this new digizine a splendid upgrade. It's not ink and paper, but it certainly is fun and definitely easier to get to websites of all ilk!

One other note before I leave you: our Conference News section also heralds the opening of registration for our annual conference in 2025. Embedded links will take you to our conference website: [Catersource + The Special Event](#). Mark your calendars for February 24–27 in beautiful Fort Lauderdale, FL and be sure to take advantage of our Super Early Bird rates, available until November 22nd. And please: if you have an event you are especially proud of, be sure to enter it into our [Gala awards](#) competition. The final deadline is October 31st and our ceremony will be, as always, uplifting and celebratory of this tremendous industry.

Kathleen Stoehr
Director of Community & Content Strategy

SPECIAL EVENTS

Director of Community & Content Strategy Kathleen Stoehr, kathleen.stoehr@informa.com
Content Editor Amanda Nicklaus, amanda.nicklaus@informa.com
Senior Content Producer Amber Kispert, amber.kispert@informa.com
Art Director Sarah Kolcheck, sarah@nxtgennetwork.com
Sales Director Michael Lindahl, michael.lindahl@informa.com
Sales Account Executive Kevin Hacke, kevin.hacke@informa.com
Managing Director Melissa Fromento, melissa.fromento@informa.com
Ad Operations Specialist Denise Walde, denise.walde@informa.com

WEBSITES

specialevents.com
catersource.com
informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/

CONTRIBUTORS

Meghan Ely, Christie Osborne, Ian Ramirez, Nora Sheils

Foodservice Group

Special Events magazine is published quarterly by Informa Connect Foodservice Group, 650 Third Ave, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10158. Subscriptions: Go to specialevents.com and sign up to receive *Special Events*' quarterly issues and/or monthly e-newsletter products. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission prohibited. ©2024 Informa Connect Foodservice Group. All rights reserved.

The premier awards recognizing the finest work in catering & special events worldwide



catersource® + THE SPECIAL EVENT™

ACE Gala AWARDS

Start working on
your entries today!
DEADLINE EXTENDED:
OCTOBER 31, 2024



The ACE and Gala Awards
will be presented during
Catersource + The Special Event,
February 24-27 in Fort Lauderdale.

Find all the details at
ace-gala.awardsplatform.com

catersource®

**SPECIAL
EVENTS**



Photo courtesy Broward County Convention Center

catersource® + **THE SPECIAL EVENT®**

FEBRUARY 24-27, 2025

**BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA**

Conference news

Get ready to meet in Fort Lauderdale, land of beaches, world-class restaurants and bars, and the famed Florida Everglades!

Registration for Catersource + The Special Event is Now Open!

Catersource + The Special Event is the only annual event of its kind, and in 2025 it heads to Fort Lauderdale, FL from February 24–27. A show of unrivaled influence and inspiration, it's a spirited gathering of all the people, ideas, and trending innovations shaping the catering and events industry.

The time is now to [register](#) at the best rates available to experience three days of conference sessions coupled with two full days of tradeshow exhibitions, opening and closing general sessions, an awards ceremony, a happy hour, and three evening events to keep you busy! All the major industry associations will be in attendance, conference sessions will allow attendees to keep their accreditations current, and

“surprise and delight” installations are in the works to keep your social posts snappy.

Session sneak peek

We are excited to announce our keynote speakers for 2025! Restaurateur and author of *Unreasonable Hospitality: The Remarkable Power of Giving People More than They Expect*, Will Guidara is this year's Opening Keynote speaker on Wednesday, February 26th, and acclaimed documentary filmmaker Brett Culp will deliver the Closing Keynote on Thursday, February 27th.

You can also get a sneak peek at what to expect from this year's education sessions by previewing some of this year's speakers in the accompanying videos.

We can hardly wait to see you in Fort Lauderdale this coming February! ●

Sneak preview!

Get a glimpse of Catersource + The Special Event 2025 as 2024 Opening Keynote speaker Laura Schwartz sits down with some of this year's speakers.



(Above) Laura speaks with Kawania Wooten; (Right) Laura and David Merrell; (Lower right) Take a look at our Sizzle reel of CS+TSE2024!



Photo courtesy Visit Florida





Prep Your PR for Off-Season



By Meghan Ely

As we pass the midpoint of the busy season, it's a good time for event professionals to start planning for the off-season. How will you take advantage of the slower months to elevate your business for 2025's peak season? For some, the off-season provides a chance to update their internal systems. Others might aim to design a new offering or refresh their branding.

However, there's one thing everyone should prioritize once business quiets down: PR.

Dedicating time to public relations during the off-season sets you up for a lucrative booking season when a crush of newly engaged couples starts planning after the holidays. As the busy season winds down, there's plenty you can do to lay the groundwork for a productive winter and a profitable year ahead.

DEFINE NEXT YEAR'S PR GOALS

What you work on during the off-season will drive your PR strategy in 2025, so you must first determine where you'll invest your time and resources. Will it be the year you finally place a real wedding with your dream publication? Or do you hope to make your name known through features on some of the top industry podcasts?

Clarifying your outreach approach will help you develop an action plan for the off-season, whether it entails curating wedding galleries, researching

speaking opportunities, applying for awards, or pitching to podcasts.

REVIEW THIS YEAR'S WINS AND LOSSES

While the busy season isn't over yet, you likely have an idea of what has worked this year and what hasn't. Consider what you can learn from your setbacks and how to implement proactive solutions to improve in 2025.

For example, if you missed the deadline for a [national conference](#), maybe you could set calendar reminders to check for the call for speakers announcement. If writing the application was an obstacle, you might consider hiring a copywriter ahead of time.

Editor's Note: *The Catersource + The Special Event Call for Speakers 2026 will open in February 2025, so mark your calendars and keep your eyes open in the next few months for a chance to speak at this widely-attended conference!*

TAKE A HARD LOOK AT YOUR CALENDAR

If you want to achieve PR success in 2025, you need a schedule that supports your goals. Take stock of all your booked events and any professional obligations and personal commitments throughout the year. A big-picture view of the year will help you plan your PR projects wisely.

For instance, if the [Special Events Gala Awards](#) submission deadline typically falls in your busiest month, you can begin collecting resources and preparing your application in advance.

A well-defined process can make all the difference in your PR success, as it saves you from recreating the wheel.



Likewise, if your best weddings stack up in a matter of weeks, you might reconsider scheduling your family vacation immediately after so you can focus on submissions.

2025 might seem far away, but the new year will creep up as it always does once the wedding season slows down. By looking ahead now, you'll enter the off-season with a plan to maximize your time—whether that means creating a press page for anticipated real wedding features or crafting speaking topics for future submissions.

EMBRACE AUTOMATION TO STAY ON TRACK

A well-defined process can make all the difference in your PR success, as it saves you from recreating the wheel. Real wedding submissions are a prime example. If you know what you need up front—a curated gallery of photos, a write-up of the couple's

background and design elements, and a detailed vendor list—you can build a standard operating procedure (SOP) for collecting those items in a timely manner.

When pitching to editors and podcast hosts, developing a template makes it quick and straightforward to send out feelers. (Just make sure to update all those placeholders!)

Better yet, find ways to automate steps of your SOPs. Perhaps you can auto-send an email to the photographer several weeks before an event to schedule a meeting to discuss media placement. For photographers, it may be a matter of using (or upgrading) a digital asset management platform.

If you're on the hunt for awards and speaking opportunities, you could set up an alert to notify you when a call for submissions goes live.

Creating streamlined systems and processes during the off-season

will let you enter the new year with an efficient PR strategy that doesn't require as much time. For now, start thinking about how to build or improve existing systems that support your PR efforts. Then, as business slows down, you'll already have your work cut out for you!

As you gear up for the off-season, remember that thoughtful preparation can be your ticket to a standout year in 2025. Take the time now to strategize your PR approach so you can hit the ground running once the off-season arrives and avoid last-minute scrambling when an exciting opportunity arises. ●

Meghan Ely is the owner of wedding PR and wedding marketing firm **OFD Consulting**. Ely is a sought-after speaker, adjunct professor in the field of public relations, and a self-professed royal wedding enthusiast.

Small Data, Big Impact: Boosting Marketing ROI with Focused Analytics



It's not about having all the data—it's about having the right data and knowing how to use it.

By Christie Osborne

Let me guess: You're a seasoned event pro juggling multiple clients and deadlines, all while managing a team. Your Google Analytics 4 (GA4) that you rushed to set up before Universal Analytics went away hasn't been touched since. Or maybe you never bothered to set up a new analytics account.

After all, you don't need numbers to tell you what you already know— inquiries and sales have been down all year. In fact, 2024 might be shaping up to be your worst year since before the pandemic.

In an industry driven by personal touches and magical moments, diving into data can feel like the last thing you want to do.

But what if I told you that the key to turning things around isn't in more data, but in smarter data?

The power of small data for event professionals

"Small data" in marketing isn't about ignoring analytics; it's about focusing on a handful of meaningful metrics that directly impact your bottom line. It's quality over quantity, depth over breadth.

For event professionals, small data might include:

- Number of inquiry forms submitted through your website
- Percentage of inquiries that turn into consultation bookings
- Rate at which consultations convert to signed contracts
- Average value of each contract

By concentrating on these key metrics, you gain a clear picture of your business's health without getting lost in a maze of marketing metrics. This approach is particularly powerful for service-based businesses, where personal touch is at the heart of every sale.

From small data to big impact: A simple framework

Ready to harness the power of small data? Here's a straightforward framework to get you started:

- **Identify your key metrics:**
Start at the bottom, where the money is, and work your way up. What are the crucial steps a potential client takes from seeing your marketing to signing a contract? Those are your key metrics.
- **Set up focused data collection:**
If you haven't set up Google Analytics 4 (GA4) yet, now's the time. Don't worry about tracking everything— focus on the metrics you identified in step one. But don't stop there; look at your CRM numbers or email

“By concentrating on these key metrics, you gain a clear picture of your business’s health without getting lost in a maze of marketing metrics.”

marketing metrics for additional insights and context.

- **Analyze with context:** Look at your data regularly, but don’t just skim the surface. Ask yourself what the numbers mean in the context of your business and your goals.
- **Make informed decisions:** Use your insights to guide your strategy. Should you focus on getting more inquiries, or on converting more consultations to contracts?
- **Monitor and adjust:** Keep an eye on your key metrics and be ready to adjust your approach based on what you see.

This framework allows you to make data-driven decisions without getting bogged down in analysis paralysis. It’s about being smart and focused, not overwhelmed and scattered.

Case study: Small data success in event planning

Let me share a quick story illustrating the power of this approach. A client of mine, an owner of an established wedding business, was convinced she needed to ramp up her Google Ads and Instagram advertising to get more leads and sales.

Her instinct was to throw money at marketing and hope the problem would be fixed—a common reaction when revenue is down.

But when we looked at her small data set—specifically her lead-to-consultation rate and her close rate—we discovered something interesting.

She was getting plenty of leads, but only a small percentage were booking consultations. Of those who did book consultations, however, a high percentage went on to sign contracts.

The insight was clear: she didn’t need more advertising; she needed better lead nurturing.

By focusing on improving her follow-up process with leads, we raised her inquiry-to-consult rate from 5% to 10%. She was able to book more consultations and, ultimately, more weddings—all without spending an extra dime on advertising.

See how a few well-chosen metrics, thoughtfully considered, can save significant time and money while driving real business growth.

Overcoming common data challenges

Now, some of you might be thinking: “But aren’t there certain metrics every business should track?” or “Don’t I need to look at all my data to get the full picture?”

You’re not alone. These are common data and analytics misconceptions, especially among businesses who rely on in-person consultations for bookings.

The truth is that the most important metrics are the ones that help you solve your specific business problems. If you’re struggling with sales, for instance, looking at website traffic data isn’t going to give you the insights you need.

The key is to start with your business problem, then determine which metrics will give you insight into that problem.

Don’t let anyone tell you that you must track certain KPIs just because “that’s what businesses do.”

Your business is unique, and your approach to data should be too.

Remember this

As an event pro, you’re in the business of creating moments that matter. It’s time to apply that same philosophy to your data strategy by identifying and using metrics that matter.

Embrace the power of small data by identifying the three to five metrics that truly drive your business. Set up simple systems to track these metrics consistently, and make it a habit to review and reflect on this data regularly.

Remember, in the data world, sometimes less is more. It’s not about having all the data—it’s about having the right data and knowing how to use it. That’s how you create a big impact with small data. ●

Christie Osborne is the owner of [Mountainside Media](#), a company that helps event industry professionals and brands develop scalable marketing strategies that bring in more inquiries and leads. Christie is a national educator with recent speaking engagements at NACE Experience, WIPA, ABC Conference, and [Catersource + The Special Event](#). Christie regularly shares industry insight in her Special Events column, as well as other industry publications and blogs.



ON TREND

Starting Your AI Journey

An overview of how to
incorporate AI into your
event business

By Amanda Nicklaus

There's no escaping it: AI is here. Even if you haven't taken the leap and experimented with it yet, you've likely found yourself amid several conversations on the subject.

With so much information out there, it can be confusing to know where to start. But not to worry—we're here to help! Welcome to the *Special Events* crash course in using AI in the events industry.

With the sheer volume of information available, this will not be a comprehensive guide. There will always be new pieces of the conversation (register for [Catersource + The Special Event 2025](#) in Fort Lauderdale, FL from February 24-27 to hear the latest on the subject). Instead, this overview will acquaint you with what is available and how to get started.

Let's begin!

AI: What is it?

Artificial Intelligence (AI), in the simplest terms, is technology that allows computers to process information similarly to the human brain. There are several main types of AI which falls into one of two categories: traditional verses generative AI. Examples of traditional AI include predictive text, voice assistants, and recommendation engines, whereas generative AI includes chatbots, language translation, and content creation.

Pros & cons

There are several pros to using AI in events and event companies. According to [Eventscase](#), these include enhanced personalization, optimization of logistics, improved attendee experience, and predictive analytics. [6Connex](#) adds to that list with improved efficiency, dynamic content creation and delivery, enhanced sponsorship and partnership opportunities, better accessibility and inclusivity, and post-event analysis and feedback.

"AI can go through data to look for trends much faster than a human," says Doug Baird, President of event software company RainFocus. "This allows for real-time analysis during hybrid events to immediately enact changes that boost engagement."

Having faster processing, Baird points out, ultimately saves event pros loads of time. "AI is going to save event marketers an incredible amount of time as they begin to implement it into more and more processes. For example, precious time spent crunching data, pulling trends, writing personalized messages, answering questions, etc. will be minimized. This time can instead be put into tasks that require more strategic thinking and in-person action."

Of course, nothing is perfect, and there are valid reasons some pros feel a sense of hesitation around incorporating this technology. Beside the vague sense of dystopian doom, there are concerns around data privacy, misinformation, even fake or misleading events—who can forget the [Wonka Experience](#) disaster back in March? Then of course there are copyright concerns, worries about unrealistic expectations from clients, lack of originality, and even apprehension around the possibility of AI reinforcing social biases with algorithm-generated sessions, speaker suggestions, and other event factors.

Not to worry, however.

"Events are one of the lowest risk industries because they are about bringing people together and facilitating human interactions," explained Panos Moutafis, CEO of Zenus, in an article for [DAHLIA+Agency](#). "The nature of the applications in general are less disposed to ethical issues." Moutafis also noted that the events industry "tends to adopt technology reservedly and with a lot of supervision, which also reduces the potential for things to go wrong."

The options are endless

When it comes to incorporating AI into events and events businesses, the options truly seem endless. There are countless ways to implement the ever-increasing number of AI tools, which—while exciting—can be overwhelming, especially for an event pro with a lot on their plate.

Of course, the first step to any change is being aware, so it can be helpful to know just what AI is capable of in the event realm.

From beginning to end, there are opportunities to implement AI into the life of an event.

Registration and ticketing processes can be automated, for starters, and real-time support in the form of chatboxes can improve the attendee experience. AI can help craft speaker bios and intros, form panel questions, create event



ON TREND

“AI is not going to kill the job of an event manager, but event managers using AI will be the ones being successful in the future.” —Colja Dams

agendas, and recommend sessions for attendees using data from registration.

Event names and imagery can be inspired by AI, and the design and decor can be influenced by AI-generated photos. Venue layouts can be simulated ahead of an event; Prismm (formerly AllSeated), for example, [optimizes seating](#) using data about guest relationships. AI can even craft sponsorship letters and scripts for event teasers.

Regarding virtual events, AI can smooth over small streaming glitches, like [intelligent framing](#) on a webcast, making speakers appear still when they may be moving around; likewise, AI can work big magic, transcribing videos and providing real-time translations on screen. Trent Waterhouse, CMO of GlobalMeet, says that, along with offering those AI features, the company is close to producing AI technology that can translate languages spoken in real-time, so that an attendee listening to an English speaker could hear the audio in French, for instance.

Post-event, AI can help gather event feedback and even create reports.

On the office side of things, AI is already becoming popular for the use of marketing and generating sales leads, and it can craft email templates and create promotional social posts.

Waterhouse told *Special Events* that GlobalMeet is also working on AI that can search through transcriptions of videos, so that, instead of searching only documents and spreadsheets for information, event pros will soon be able to search through video content as well. “If we’ve transcribed the video, and

as you build up your library of recorded events overtime...business intelligence now takes your video library as a feed...the video becomes another kind of content.”

Currently, the available AI tools can automate, optimize, and streamline event management and office work, giving event pros more time to work on the creative and relational parts of events.

Making it a reality

With all these tools and functions available, where should you begin? An article from [MeetingsNet](#) details seven tips for getting started:

1. Start small by identifying pain points and finding an AI tool to help with that specific problem
2. Go with what you know and explore your existing tech stack for built-in AI tools
3. Find a workhorse—a system that you can use alongside your everyday work (think ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Jasper.ai)
4. Always add the human touch by reviewing and editing generated results
5. Use AI to find other AI
6. Fact check AI by having your chosen AI tool fact check itself
7. Get better prompts by telling it what you want so it can tell you what to ask

In an article for [Catersource](#), Footers Catering (Denver, CO) owner Anthony Lambatos recommends asking yourself three questions: Does it improve the guest experience? Does it improve the



This year's annual VOK DAMS TrendLab focused on how AI

employee experience? What resources are necessary? The answers can help you decide what is necessary and how to focus on real solutions when taking the first steps with AI.

What are you waiting for?

AI is already taking hold of the events industry, so it's time to begin working it into your event business. Take this advice from [Forbes](#): “With people returning to conferences and summits en masse, it's no longer a wise business decision to opt out. At the same time, it's more important to choose events wisely. AI-equipped technology makes it easy to make smarter decisions backed by data.”



AI is becoming a game-changer in the event sector. Photo courtesy VOK DAMS



AI is already at play in catering spaces: Miso Robotics offers a software product that delivers AI-powered cooking with its Flippy robot. The CookRight platform uses cameras mounted above a grill along with a tablet computer. The cameras look down at the food being prepared and use a combination of computer vision, thermal detection, and AI to identify a cut of meat, its thickness, and cooking progress. Photo courtesy Miso Robotics

Want to learn more about AI?

Here are some more articles to continue your journey:

- [A Chef's Dive into AI: Maximizing ChatGPT- Shortcuts and Tips](#)
- [A.I.'s Latest Skill: Creating Promotional Videos from Live-Event Content](#)
- [Here's What AI Thinks a Barbiecore Wedding Looks Like](#)
- [It's Not Science Fiction... It's Sales](#)
- [State of the Industry: Innovations in Tech](#)
- [The Future of AI in the Wedding Industry](#)
- [The Robot Uprising](#)
- [Unlocking the Power of AI in Event Tech](#)
- [We Asked ChatGPT What It Can Do for Meetings, So You Don't Have To](#)
- [How to Win Against AI](#)



ON TREND

A **report** from consulting company McKinsey & Company verifies the technology's place in the world: "Organizations are already seeing material benefits from generative AI use, reporting both cost decreases and revenue jumps in the business units deploying the technology.... The biggest increase from 2023 is found in marketing and sales, where reported adoption has more than doubled."

Baird does encourage event pros to use caution when getting started. "Planners need to be incredibly cautious when it comes to using AI for hybrid events. Consumers are smart and can tell when content is not human-generated. While there are benefits and it is a time-saving tool, it is vital that event planners don't just take the easy way out. Rather, they should spend time checking AI's work and applying human strategy and thought to it."

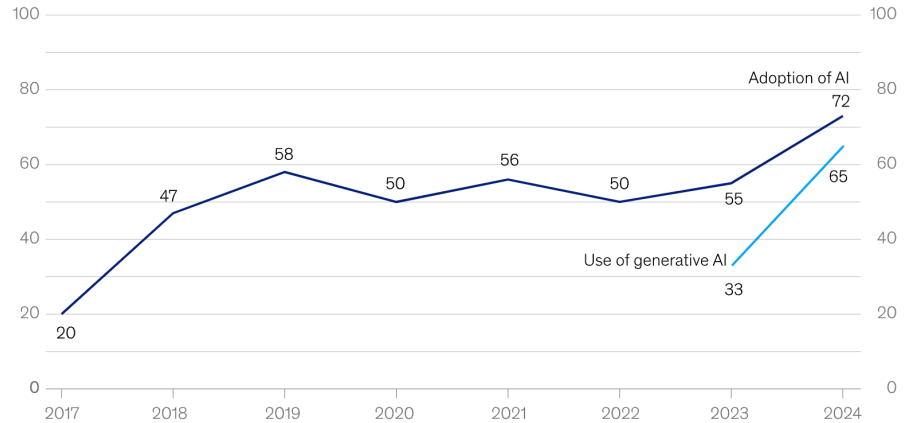
It is this human relation with AI that will allow event pros to optimize their efforts. In other words: let AI help with the logistics, not the creativity or relational sides of events.

As Colja Dams, CEO of VOK DAMS (Frankfurt, Germany), said in his session *How Will AI Transform Events?* at Catersource + The Special Event 2024: "AI is not going to kill the job of an event manager, but event managers using AI will be the ones being successful in the future."

Don't let overwhelm or hesitation keep you behind your competitors. Now that you know a little bit more about this new technology, choose a tool you're comfortable with and start experimenting. AI is here and it's all around us—heck, I used ChatGPT to help create this article title (but my human editor changed it slightly)! ●

AI adoption worldwide has increased dramatically in the past year, after years of little meaningful change.

Organizations that have adopted AI in at least 1 business function,¹ % of respondents



¹In 2017, the definition for AI adoption was using AI in a core part of the organization's business or at scale. In 2018 and 2019, the definition was embedding at least 1 AI capability in business processes or products. Since 2020, the definition has been that the organization has adopted AI in at least 1 function. Source: McKinsey Global Survey on AI, 1,363 participants at all levels of the organization, Feb 22–Mar 5, 2024

McKinsey & Company

A graph from a report by global consulting company McKinsey & Company shows the increase in AI adoption throughout organizations across the world. Photo courtesy McKinsey & Company



Attendees at Catersource + The Special Event 2024 experienced AI with SpotMyPhotos, an AI-powered photo delivery platform that allows attendees to receive photos of themselves directly to their phones as photographers make the rounds throughout the event. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions



Leading Caterers of America (LCA) is comprised of the top caterers and event venues in the United States and Canada. When you need a caterer to make your next event exceptional, perfect and delicious, choose a LCA caterer.

Planning something special?

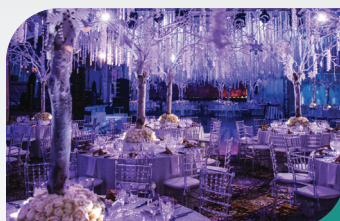
Let the best of the best in all things events be your guide.



Corporate

LCA specializes in corporate events of all types - marketing, celebratory, client related, employee morale, and others. Whether held in the host's facility, or in an off-premise location, LCA members are able to deliver a high value corporate event experience.

Photo Credit: Catering Creations



Weddings

At its collective portfolio of some of the most desirable wedding venues in the United States and Canada, the LCA caters many thousands of weddings annually.

Most LCA members have dedicated wedding specialists on staff to ensure this most important day is executed flawlessly, no matter the level of complexity.

Photo Credit: Bonura Hospitality Group



Social

Bar and bat mitzvahs, First Communions, quinceañeras, retirements and graduations, and even funerals are all important life cycle events. Superb food and service are crucial to making these events special and memorable, and the LCA is a perfect resource for those products.

Photo Credit: Catering by Michael's



Nonprofits

Galas and fundraisers are key to the success of most charitable ventures - including both financial and membership. The LCA is highly attuned to the needs of most charities, and is a great resource for all the necessary components to make these gala events successful.

Photo Credit: G Catering

Elite talent. Unbeatable service. Right where you need it.

Find a LCA caterer in your region!



MIDWEST

Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, Wisconsin

Photo Credit: Zilli Hospitality Group



SOUTH

Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas

Photo Credit: Bill Hansen Catering



WEST

Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington

Photo Credit: DSquared Hospitality Company



EAST

Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia

Photo Credit: The Classic Catering People

Learn more at [LeadingCaterers.com](https://www.leadingcaterers.com)

Five Tech Tools to Transform Your Tech Stack



Automating your business can make all the difference, and with new tools jumping on the scene every day, it's easier than ever to find solutions that truly work for you.

By Nora Sheils

We have all heard it before:

running a business involves juggling multiple tasks, but still so many pros are not using the right tech to make it all easier. Take it from us—automating your business can make all the difference, and with new tools jumping on the scene every day, it's easier than ever to find solutions that truly work for you.

Here are five tried-and-true tech tools that can streamline your operations and boost efficiency.

1. COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Email threads are nice, but sometimes you just need to have a good chat with your team. Tools like Slack or Microsoft Teams are a perfect opportunity to collaborate and have conversations about specific projects or clients that everyone can reference again later; it's a tool that you can use on the go on your phone, and one that can upload files, pictures, and videos.

Pro tip: You can always upgrade your Slack account if you need to, or if you want to connect it to the other apps and programs you use (the ultimate automation tech stack!), but the free version is perfect for most small business owners and their teams!

2. INTUITIVE TIME MANAGEMENT APPS

It's amazing how much time you don't know a task takes you or your team to complete— which means you might not even be billing correctly for it. Use an app like Toggl or Clockify to track

time spent on clients, projects, office time, and more so that you know exactly how much you need to be charging or paying your team.

Pro Tip: This is also a great solution for tracking tasks that should be automated. For example: If it takes you 25 office hours to send invoices, manually reconcile invoices, or send contracts, you need to begin automating!

3. PAYMENT PLATFORMS

It's 2024—you must allow your current and future clients to pay online; opt for a payment platform that is easy for you to use, is affordable, and won't significantly cut your profits. When looking for the right platform, you'll want to find a tool that integrates invoicing, contracts, and proposals. Steer clear of platforms that have several extra features that you won't use anytime soon—when that introductory promo fades away, you will be left with hefty bills on a platform that you aren't actually using.

Pro tip: Check out Rock Paper Coin, which is made to be simple, affordable, and exactly what you need to book clients and get paid. That's it!

4. ROBUST PASSWORD MANAGERS

If it feels like every week someone is reporting on another data leak, it's because they are. Trust us, we know changing your password often or remembering a 30-digit passcode is incredibly frustrating, but it's for your own good. We see far too many times how many small business owners get their emails—or worse,



“Staying updated with the latest tech tools will keep your business competitive and efficient, but it will also keep new clients coming through your door and current clients happy because everything is so easy and fast.”

their social media accounts—hacked. Secure your business with password managers such as 1Pass or Dashlane. They protect sensitive information, remember all of your passwords in one easy place, and if you ever have a breach or even lose your wallet you can update everything right from their site, making password management effortless.

Pro tip: Add all of your passwords (business and personal) into the app so you are sure to use it. The worst app to have is the one you don't use!

5. BACKUP YOUR WORK

While we're on the topic of security, invest in cybersecurity tools that offer cloud backups. Many small business owners enjoy Dropbox because it's

easily accessible from their phone or desktop. This ensures your business is protected from potential threats and data breaches across all your devices.

EMBRACE THE FUTURE

Tech can feel overwhelming simply because it's always changing and updating. If you are behind and know you must get your business up to speed, hire a virtual assistant who can set up all the tools for you. You can also take advantage of your platform's customer service—they are there to help! Staying updated with the latest tech tools will keep your business competitive and efficient, but it will also keep new clients coming through your door and current clients happy because everything is so easy and fast.

If you are tech-savvy, here is your reminder to evaluate your current tech stack to stay ahead. ●

Nora Sheils is the founder of award-winning planning firm [Bridal Bliss](#) and co-founder of [Rock Paper Coin](#), a client management platform that offers a streamlined approach to contract, invoicing, and payment processing for the wedding and event industry. Nora is a well-known and sought-after speaker on national stages. Recognized as one of the Top 500 Event Professionals by BizBash, Nora has also been heralded as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the Event Industry by Eventex.



FOOD FOR FÊTES

Feast Your

The rise of grazing tables
plus how to do them well

By Amanda Nicklaus

Eyes on This



A lush, elegant grazing table (or feasting table, as Chef Richard Vanderplas calls them), by Edenopolis. Photo courtesy Edenopolis

For the past few years, it seems that charcuterie boards of all types have had a grip on the events world, mostly for the better. What started as an elaborate snacking trend has taken several turns—cheese and crackers have been swapped for bread and butter, brunch boards have evolved into specialty waffle boards—until the grazing board reached its most recent development: the grazing table, an opulent display of maximalism that can be adapted to match any celebratory setting.

This trend doesn't seem to be fading anytime soon, so it's time to make sure you're set up for success. "Regardless of how you may approach grazing tables, it's an enduring trend that caterers must get on board with sooner rather than later," stated an article from [Catersource](#). Whether your client wants a simple cured meat and cheese board or a luxurious table overflowing with a variety of seafood items, there's more to this trend than picking a theme. Here are a few things you need to know.

Grazing habits

There are many reasons why grazing boards and tables have become an event go-to. For starters, in recent years, event design has tended toward maximalism, providing a stimulating vision for both in-person attendees and those viewing photos and videos of the event on social media. Elaborate grazing tables with unique ingredients and interactive displays bode well for both in-person experiences and online scrolling—and in both cases, this creative array of food is a great reflection of your expertise as an event pro.

Grazing boards and tables offer flexibility and room for personalization, a [prevailing trend](#) in 2024 (and the predictable future). Clients want every aspect to be an expression of their unique personalities, and grazing tables allow for a curation of food that both fits the client's tastes and leaves room for a variety of guest preferences.

"Grazing boards are definitely a huge trend right now because they're a lot easier to customize than plated dinners," Danielle Minninger, the Marketing Director of Le Meridien St Louis Clayton, told *Special Events*. "Couples don't have to worry about selecting one entrée to make everyone happy."

Grazing boards and tables also encourage conversation among guests, creating a casual, social atmosphere. This conversation is elevated even more when interactive chef stations and service are provided.

In an [article for BizBash](#), Kabrel Geller, owner of This Messy Table LA, said that grazing tables are more than a vehicle for serving food—they also act as an art installation and interactive food experience, which increases attendee engagement. "I've found that when This Messy Table is the mainstage food at parties, those parties usually last an hour or two longer than they normally would," Geller said. "More people tend to be more comfortable in taking how much they want [with a grazing table], whereas when you're doing passed hors d'oeuvres, they can feel stuffy and old school. People might not like to eat as much, even if they want to."

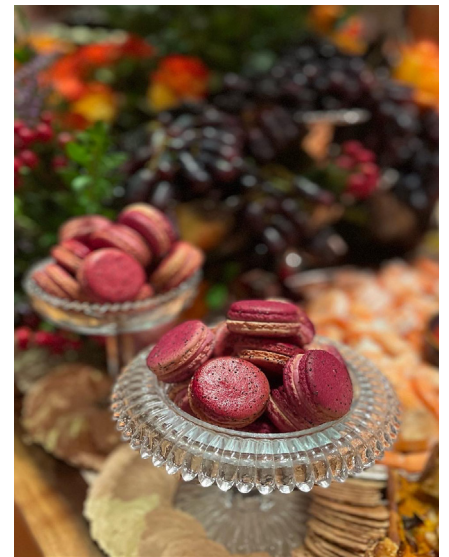
Bountiful offerings

Besides the typical charcuterie spread—with preserved meats, a variety of cheeses, and some assortment of bread, crackers, fruit, pickles, spreads, and nuts—there's been a surge of creative board alternatives with untraditional ingredients. *Catersource* + The Special Event 2022 turned attention to French fry boards, dessert boards, brunch boards, veggie boards, and even a dessert board.

Opposite page, top row from left: Grazing tables are a great way to incorporate a client's brand throughout the feasting experience. Table by and photo courtesy Edenopolis; Grazing tables don't have to be charcuterie-based—this breakfast table by Edenopolis features bagels and toppings, doughnuts, muffins, croissants, yogurt parfaits, fresh fruit, and granola. Photo courtesy Edenopolis; A grazing table created by placing charcuterie boards together across a table, with an attendant to oversee guests. Table by and photo courtesy Le Meridien St. Louis Clayton

Middle row: Grazing tables can feature different food stations, best overseen by individual chefs, like this carving station by Edenopolis. Photo courtesy Edenopolis; Food and decor displayed at varying heights creates a more stimulating image for the eye. Table by and photo courtesy Edenopolis; Treats of all kinds can end up on a grazing table, like these macarons on a table from Edenopolis. Photo courtesy Edenopolis

Bottom row: Ornate glassware can elevate a grazing table. Photo courtesy Rebecca via Unsplash; Any surface or type of table can become a grazing surface, like these smaller tables pushed together. Table by and photo courtesy Edenopolis; This spread is a great example of how food becomes art on a grazing table. Photo courtesy Derick McKinney



SPECIAL EVENTS FALL 2024





FOOD FOR FÊTES

Burrata boards, hummus or polenta boards, and seafood displays are trending. A new take on this trend is popping up in the form of caviar displays. All types of bread and brunch boards are popular as well.

Other spreads we've seen pop up:

- Candy table
- Pickle board
- Antipasti board
- BBQ table
- Holiday themes
- Tropical theme
- Cultural/regional spreads (Mediterranean, South Asian, etc.)
- Hot cocoa boards
- Taco table
- Mezze table
- Seafood/coastal table

Le Meridien St. Louis Clayton has added European-inspired spreads to their offerings, including a Mediterranean Grazing Table topped with marinated artichoke hearts, fresh mozzarella, feta, grilled halloumi, and more, as well as a French Bistro Table topped with warmed brie, fruit and nut chutney, and prosciutto.

"When it comes to selecting a grazing board, one of the biggest trends I've been seeing is couples wanting custom offerings with a super personalized touch," continues Minninger. "For example, if a groom is from Chicago and a bride is from St. Louis, we could create a board inspired by dishes from each city, like mini Chicago hot dogs and toasted ravioli (which is a St. Louis thing!). We can also create a board that incorporates a family recipe like 'Grandma's macaroni' for a custom mac 'n cheese board that comes with different types of pasta and toppings. We love giving couples the opportunity to add something extra meaningful to the meal on their big day!"

These spreads will sometimes make up an entire meal. "Grazing boards are no longer limited to hors d'oeuvres," says Minninger. "They can be used to serve dessert or even a full meal! Over-the-top presentation and displays are key when it comes to serving dinner on a board, which is much different from the sleek individual portions that used to be popular."

Chef Richard Vanderplas, owner of Edenopolis, offers what he calls "feasting tables" and says that when it comes to being creative, nothing is off the table (pun fully intended). When asked what food can be displayed, he told *Special Events*, "Everything. There are no limits. You can have metal platters with chilled items on ice, electric warmers or Sterno® heating beautiful silver platters, chefs carving whole roasts of meat, and anything else you can imagine."

The grazing table is a place for creativity to thrive. "The only rule here is that it is one huge table, filled to the brim



Of course, a classic charcuterie board will always stay classy, like this board served with champagne. Photo courtesy Eleven Six PR



Chef Robin Selden of Marcia Selden Catering & Events sets up a Grazing Room for guests to enjoy other sweets, as well as "to go" boxes for guests to fill up with their favorites before



d at a picnic by InterContinental New York Barclay, paired with Veuve Clicquot



re-event: a small office turned into a wonderland filled with candy, cookies, and
re departing the event. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events

with food, that makes your guests feel like little kids with joy when they walk up to it,” says Vanderplas.

Getting started

There is no shortage of logistics to consider when incorporating a grazing board or table into your event. Here are some things to keep in mind.

Keep it fresh

You don’t want a photo snapped halfway through the event with part of the grazing table eaten away. It’s important to keep the table staffed with attendants who can replenish the food and keep the area tidy. Make sure you know who is responsible for this and how often they need to refresh the spread.

“You should always have someone physically there cleaning up the table as guests eat [from] it, explaining things, making plates, and picking food up off the floor,” says Vanderplas. (More on that in a bit.)

The right environment

When having food displayed out in the open, it’s always important to know and abide by federal and state food safety laws. You’ll also want to pay attention to the weather and environmental conditions of the event space and adjust the menu accordingly.

“Being aware of the temperature and the placement of each grazing table, especially if it’s outdoors, is also important,” says Minninger. “Certain foods may spoil quickly, and others could attract insects.”

Vanderplas agrees. “Make sure you select the correct foods that do well in hot outdoor conditions. Do not use cut fruits, but instead use grapes; do not use brie, but instead Parmesan; do not use chocolate, but instead mini brownies,” he recommends.

“Make sure to be good at saying ‘no’ to your client; remember, they are not experts on food safety! If you educate them on why you can’t have seafood sitting on an outdoor table in July, they will understand. Also, a non-negotiable, regardless of the weather, time of year, or type of food: always protect your food from the sun with an umbrella or tent. I also always have ‘fly helicopters’ on the table over dips and sweets.”

Handling different diets

The beauty of grazing boards and tables is that guests can choose what they like, making it easier to cater to individual preferences—and to dietary restrictions. Per usual, it’s important to have guests notify you of any allergies and restrictions before the event, so the caterer can separate food or leave it off the table.



FOOD FOR FÊTES



Attendants are necessary to keep the table tidy and answer questions, all while providing excellent service. Photo courtesy Edenopolis



This clever use of eggplants as signage allows guests to know what they are eating without disrupting the table's aesthetic. Photo courtesy Edenopolis

“The only rule here is that it is one huge table, filled to the brim with food, that makes your guests feel like little kids with joy when they walk up to it.” —Richard Vanderplas

“If there are allergies that are not so serious, make sure your staff are aware of what is what, and can answer questions for the guests,” says Vanderplas. “It is important that your staff are properly trained to answer these questions.”

Signage can take on various forms, though Vanderplas prefers to ditch the signage in favor of educated attendants.

“I am not a fan of signage; I think it's ugly. In general, it takes away from the art of your table. In the event that you have a grazing table that is completely unattended by staff, and no one is there to explain, then signage can be helpful.”

Geller is of the same mindset. “If an event is more than 50 people, it really behooves the host and the guests to have an attendant there,” she says. “Because people have questions, and they want to know, ‘How did this happen? And how did you do it? And what's that? And that?’ So, I have found that [an attendant] can be really important to the success of how the event goes.”

Vanderplas advises having one staff member per 20 guests. This means one head chef per food type/service, one to four assistants per station, and can depend on the amount of food per menu, not just the guest count.

One option for signage is to put the printed (or digital) menu near the table to avoid clutter.

If you don't have attendants, Minninger recommends all garnishes and enhancements be edible to ensure guest safety.

Design

When it comes to the table, you could use ornately carved handiwork, but you can also use a few plastic tables pushed together with tablecloths and butcher paper over the top. You can even use parts of the venue, like cutouts and thick windowsills, for extra inventive uses of space.

A physical or video walkthrough of the venue is a good start for creating the table design. “This is important as you can get an idea of what you are walking into. Every venue has its unique challenges,” suggests Vanderplas. “Make sure you know if the building has a service entrance/loading dock and how it works, and [that] you have all the appropriate

insurance and COIs (Certificate of Insurance) with the building handled ahead of time.”

You may have a design in mind for decorating the table, but if the caterer has a preferred layout, give them the reins to bring their vision to life in a way that works with food service. That being said, there are several ways to display and decorate food tables that can make them feel like an art installation at your event.

“I love making a huge floral foam installation of flowers right in the center of the table,” says Vanderplas, “and tapering it down to the edges of the table with various risers. I like wood, because it is natural looking, hides grease, and is tough and light for transport. It's good to put brown wax paper down on the display pieces to keep them clean.”

The best grazing table designs have no negative space, filling the entirety of the tabletop and even overflowing off the edges. Various heights with risers and decor will be interesting to the eye and incorporating [seasonal ingredients](#) and dried herbs into the display will give it that extra zhuzh.

In the article for *BizBash*, Hailey Keane of Graze & Co. said that she always tries “to make it feel like a Renaissance painting, still life kind of setup, so it doesn't feel like it's just thrown together.”

Remember, this is the place to embrace maximalism and let art take the forefront!

Sustainability

One thing to get ahead of with grazing tables is food waste. It's imperative to work with a caterer who values sustainability, so that you can avoid serving excess food and have a plan for using the leftovers.

“This all starts with a talk with the client,” says Vanderplas. “Some clients want to keep all the food for a party the next day, some want it to be donated. We have connections to homeless shelters, firehouses (with lots of hungry firefighters), and lots of hungry staff! We always bring Ziplock bags and aluminum trays to pack up leftovers. We hate throwing food away!”



FOOD FOR FÊTES



If you decide signage is a must, it can end up being part of the artistic design, like these typewriter display signs at an event catered by D'Amico Catering (Minneapolis, MN). Photo courtesy Anna Grinets Photography

The key to avoiding waste is to communicate thoroughly with both the client and the caterer ahead of time.

Vanderplas recommends aiming for only 10% more food than can be consumed. He sticks with two to four ounces of charcuterie per person and one ounce of fruits and veggies per person.

By communicating well and sticking with a precise plan, you should be able to have an opulent display that doesn't end up in the trash after the event.

Working with a caterer

Of course, the real key to successful grazing boards and tables is close collaboration with the caterer. Make sure the caterer is willing to work with you in a way that aligns with the rest of the event.

"Collaboration with the host or the event planner is really important to me," says Geller, "because we add these floral elements, and [the planner] probably has a florist that they're

working with.... For me, that collaboration is super important to the success and look of the table."

Vanderplas also insists on respectful collaboration with the caterer. "Get everything in writing," he suggests. "Planners should be in charge of all logistical details, ordering of rentals, staffing, and design. Once that has been communicated in writing, and confirmed by the caterer, please let us do our job and trust us to do it well."

By clearly communicating and putting in writing who is responsible for what, you can ensure a healthy relationship with your caterer and a smooth event that lets each of you excel at what you do best.

Grazing tables are a chance to get creative, elevating your event theme and wowing guests with photo ops and interactive chef stations. Use this trend to enhance the guest experience and show off your expertise.

As chef Thomas Keller once said, "Food should be fun." This trend will be around for awhile, so have fun with it! ●

Where caterers
meet event planners

under one roof!

catersource® + **THE
SPECIAL
EVENT®**

FEBRUARY 24-27, 2025

**BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA**

Catersource + The Special Event is the only annual event of its kind. A show of unrivaled influence and inspiration, it's a spirited gathering of all the people, ideas, and trending innovations shaping the catering and events industry.

SECURE YOUR SPOT!

CATERSOURCE-TSE.COM



Thanks

FOR THINKING OF ME!

How to make events
that are accessible
for all

By Amanda Nicklaus



American Sign Language interpreter Justina Miles went viral for her performance alongside Rihanna during Super Bowl 2023, providing an expressive and passionate interpretation. Shown here: Miles performs “Lift Every Voice and Sing” prior to that year’s Super Bowl. Photo courtesy Rob Carr/Getty Images

The events world has been on a DEI journey—that is, a journey to make the industry more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Multifaceted as this framework is, there have been several places event pros have sized up the industry and made changes in recent years, including racial and LGBTQIA+ equity and inclusion. Recently, there has been another sector gaining awareness: that of accessibility.

In the events world, this means ensuring that events are easy to access and engage with for individuals of varying abilities. As the topic of event accessibility grows, it’s time to take inventory of your practices and make sure that you’re providing event services that are indeed accessible to all of your potential clients and guests.

The need for easy access

There are plenty of reasons to make your events accessible, the least of which is legality (more on that in a bit). According to the World Health Organization, 16% of people worldwide have a disability. Across the EU, the [average is higher](#) at 24%; in the UK, it’s almost 22% of the population (or 14.1 million people). The [CDC](#) reports that 28.7% (more than one in four) Americans have a disability. This means that statistically, at the very least, 16% of your event attendees have some type of disability. “If your events aren’t welcoming and accessible for everyone, you’re likely missing out on the opportunity to reach a much wider audience,” states an article from [Cvent](#). Besides increasing engagement, creating accessible events is the right thing to do—it makes the world more enjoyable for all.

Accessibility is also required by law. The [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#) protects people with disabilities from discrimination. And in the UK, “disability is one of nine ‘protected characteristics’ defined by the [2010 Equality Act](#)—making it illegal for any business to discriminate against persons with disabilities,” says the Cvent article.

So, are your events accessible to all? Here’s how to check.

Types of accessibility

To begin, it's helpful to be aware of the different types of accessibility. According to the [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#), there are three main types: physical, sensory, and cognitive accessibility.

Physical

A physically accessible event is held in a space that accommodates various physical abilities and body types. This means it has no problems for wheelchair/mobility scooter users and people with vision disabilities, and all spaces work for all ambulatory needs. These people should be able to move safely and comfortably and may require ramps, lifts, wider aisles, and allocated parking spaces. This can also include providing accommodations for nursing women.

Sensory

People with sensory needs require an event space that is safe and accommodates allergies as well as vision and hearing impairment. People with different sensory processing abilities, like Highly Sensitive Persons (HSPs), may require accommodation as well.

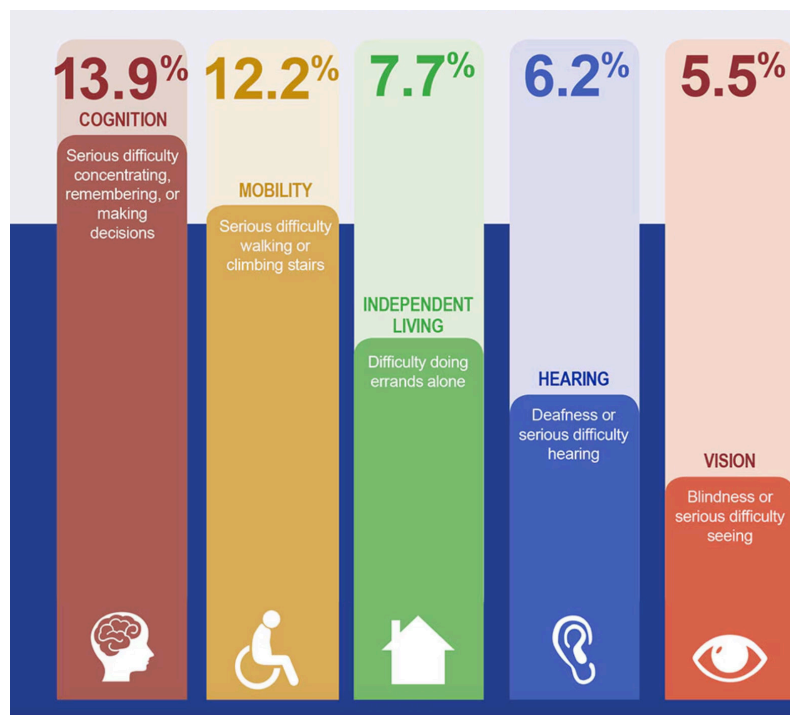
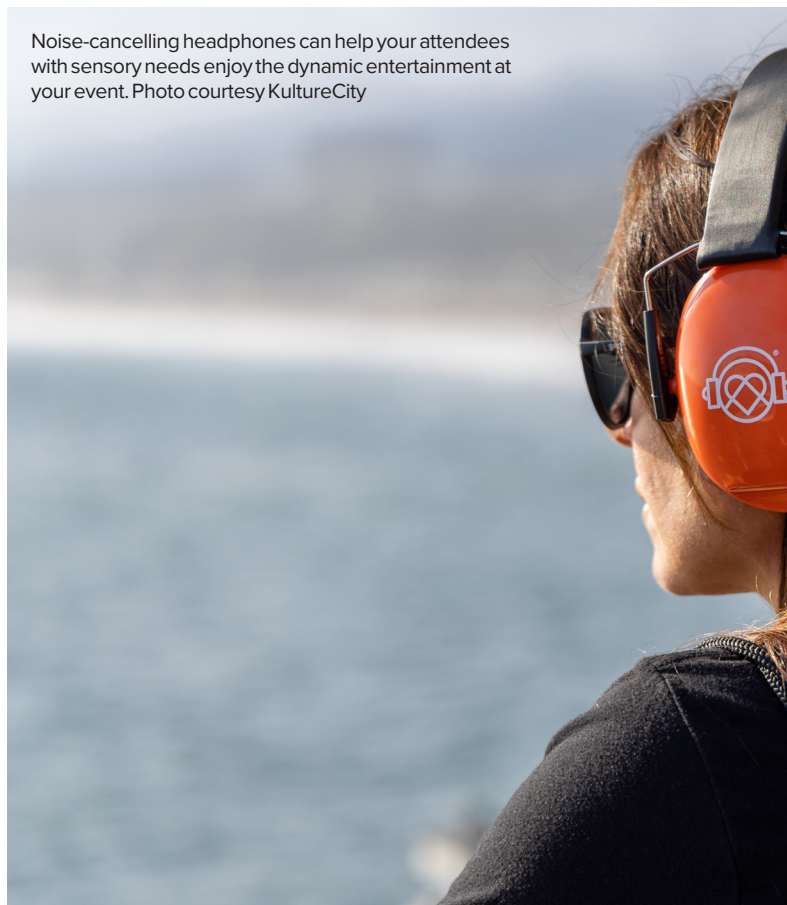
Cognitive

Cognitive accessibility accounts for different types of neural information processing. This can look like providing clear information and communication, language translation, and various accommodations for neurodivergent conditions and mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD.

In his session *David Merrell & Susie Perelman Present: Current Trends in the Event Industry* at [Catersource + The Special Event 2024](#), Creative Director of AOO Events David Merrell noted that accessibility in the form of neuroinclusivity is gaining traction.

“Basically, it’s the idea that everybody interacts and experiences the world around them in a different way, and there’s really no one right way or wrong way. So, a neurodivergent person would be someone who has ADHD, or OCD, or autism, or dyslexia—I would venture to say in this room, there are people that have certain variations or certain degrees of that,” said Merrell. He emphasized that it’s time “to now start thinking about the fact that corporations are actually starting to pay attention to neurodiversity, and make sure that their content and what they do for everybody ... is available for everyone to sensory process in their own way.”

Noise-cancelling headphones can help your attendees with sensory needs enjoy the dynamic entertainment at your event. Photo courtesy KultureCity





[Cornell University](#) also sorts accessibility into two broader categories: visible and non-obvious, meaning conditions you can observe, like mobility, and those you cannot, like chronic health.

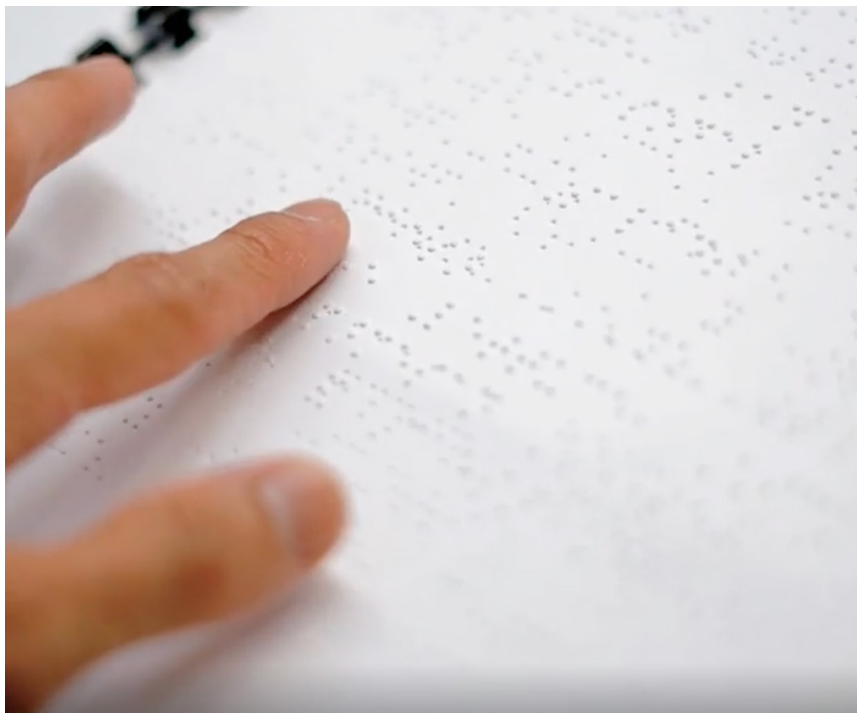
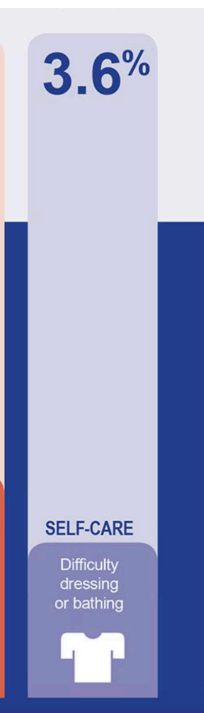
Once you are aware of these main types of accessibility, you can begin designing your event services with these accommodations in mind.

Universal design

The goal of accessibility is to design an event that everyone can participate in. This does not mean, however, designing your event around a specific community.

A *Special Events (SE)* [interview](#) with venue sensory inclusivity nonprofit [KultureCity](#) revealed that “designing for one community will inherently alienate another.” Uma Srivastava, the COO of KultureCity, told SE, “It’s providing some other elements to the table for those with sensory needs.... design for those that are typical because we want to make sure everybody gets to enjoy it, but as you’re designing, think about your environment.”

In her session *Creating Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Events: More than Words* at Catersource + The Special Event 2023, WSU Event Manager and CMP Angela Senter advised event pros to follow not the Golden Rule (“do unto others as you’d want



(Far left) There are a variety of needs for which your attendees may need accommodations. Photo courtesy Center for Disease Control and Prevention; (Left) At the National Federation of the Blind's annual convention, Sodexo Live! (at the Orange County Convention Center) created custom braille menus. Photo courtesy Sodexo Live!

Thanks for Thinking of Me!

others to do unto you”) but the Platinum Rule (“do unto others as others want done unto them”). As you design your events, think about the ways that your attendees will want to engage and the different ways they might experience the various aspects of your event.

Accessible from the start

Cornell University recommends asking event attendees about their needs from the get-go. “When you send out

the invitation or notice, include a welcome message to let invitees know they can contact the planner regarding accommodations.” The article provides an example message:

“We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to engage fully. To be respectful of those with allergies and environmental sensitivities, we ask that you please refrain from wearing strong fragrances. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please contact (name, email, phone).”

Cornell also recommends sending out a reminder to attendees a couple days before the event asking them to refrain from wearing strong fragrances.



It's important to provide enough flexible seating options for attendees with mobility needs. Shown here: attendees at a NASCAR event at the LA Memorial Coliseum have been accommodated for wheelchair seating. Photo courtesy KultureCity

An alternative to including this message in the invitation is to provide a checklist in the RSVP or registration that allows guests to communicate any accommodation needs, such as a sign language interpreter, large print options, or wheelchair access.

That being said, “no person is required to show proof of their disability, nor should they be asked for proof,” points out an article from [Social Tables](#). “This includes people who request accommodations, purchase tickets for accessible seating, attend with a service dog, or have an invisible disability.”

Safe spaces

Speaking of venues, the very crux of event accessibility is using a venue that offers accessibility features and solutions. There are several things to look for, including (but certainly not limited to):

- **Mobility accommodations:** do they have a wheelchair ramp? Elevator? Are the doorways, aisles, spaces between tables, and seating wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs/scooters (at least 32 inches of clear width)? Do doors have functioning ADA-compliant openers? Is there accessible parking near the venue (handicap spots that are van accessible with space between spots, and have an ADA compliant number of accessible parking spots)? Perhaps valet parking? Proximity to a bus stop (five minutes of walking or less)? Are the bathrooms accessible? Are all pathways barrier-free? Are classrooms and dining halls close to hotels?
- **Visibility:** Is there clear signage identifying location and directions? Braille signage? Are meeting spaces and adjacent areas well-lit? Are projection screens visible from all seating areas? Is there comfortable space for service animals to rest, as well as accessible toileting and watering facilities nearby?
- **Hearing and language:** The [University of Kansas](#) recommends contacting the venue’s IT/AV team and asking if the venue has the technology required to provide Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) and/or other assistive listening devices. Also ask: is there a PA system? Roving microphone? Seating available near the presenter for lip reading? Is there well-lit space for an interpreter if needed?
- **Technological:** Are there electrical outlets in accessible seating areas to accommodate adaptive devices?
- **Wellness:** Are there spaces that can act as quiet/sensory rooms, wellness spaces, or lactation rooms? Are there gender-neutral restrooms?

ACCESSIBILITY *Checklist*

When sending out invitations, it can be helpful to provide a checklist for attendees to notify you of their accessibility needs, like the one below.

I will need the following accommodations to participate:

- ☐ Assistive listening device
- ☐ Captioning
- ☐ Reserved front row seat
- ☐ Large print
- ☐ Advance copy of slides to be projected
- ☐ Wheelchair access
- ☐ Wheelchair access to working tables throughout room
- ☐ Scent-free room
- ☐ Lactation room
- ☐ Gender neutral bathroom
- ☐ Diet Restrictions. List: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Information courtesy Cornell University

“Being inclusive, and radically inclusive, is the future.” –Megan Henshall (Google)

- **Outdoor spaces:** Are there accessible portable toilets (ADA requires 5% to be accessible)? Wheelchair-friendly pathways both within the event and from the parking lot? Is there seating for people to rest, especially in the shade? Will the venue waive a no-bag policy for certain individuals? Are there outlets outdoors?

As you can see, there are a plethora of things to look for in finding an accessible venue. This is why requesting information about accommodations with the RSVP is important, because it will limit the amount of features you'll need to look for (or might miss).

One thing to note: be cautious when relying on labels. “A venue space can be ADA compliant and still not accessible,” says Senter. If the building was built before a specific year, for instance, it is exempt from ADA standards. Or, if a non-accessible feature of the venue is too expensive to repair or is marked for historical value, it legally doesn't have to be fixed. “So, you might have two little steps down into the ballroom that are Parisian antique tile; those don't need to be replaced and still [is] an ADA-certified venue.”

Also, be sure to verify that recommended hotels or other lodging have accessible rooms and features as well.

Take it online

If you are planning a virtual event, choose a platform that offers accessibility services, like Zoom or GlobalMeet.

In an [article](#) for *Special Events*, content marketer Jenna Bunnell discussed accessibility in virtual events. “[An] important deliberation is to offer inclusive services like closed captioning, translations, and/or sign language.... moreover, some people might not have the best internet connection, so consider providing a downloadable version of the event.

“Adding a virtual option to your events can make it accessible to everyone who cannot travel to your venue. Take advantage of the growing hybrid integration platform market and bring all the recordings of your old events on the cloud for those who could not be included before.” This also allows individuals to play back events at a slower speed.

Work with your presenters to meet specific color contrast ratios in their presentations, so that people with visual impairments, including color blindness, can easily view the slides. Have the presenter also explain what is on the slides for those who cannot easily see.

If you do have a sign language interpreter, make sure that they are always visible on screen and sized large enough to be legible.

Together is better

Your team is an important part of making an event accessible. Training them to shift their mindset and look for ways to consider various capabilities will not only improve the event experience for all in attendance, but it will also empower your team to feel confident in assisting your attendees and will give them the tools they need to problem solve.

There are plenty of options for training your staff, such as the [PCMA Event Accessibility Certificate](#) or the [KultureCity Sensory Inclusive™ Certification](#).

In the interview with KultureCity, Srivistata urged planners to “teach staff cues to look for in guests that might be uncomfortable—for example, someone getting up and leaving in the middle of a performance isn't necessarily rude but might be dealing with a sensory issue. Someone bouncing up and down in their seat might seem rude to the person next to them, but they might be regulating their sensory sensitivity.”

Make sure your staff are prepared to treat each guest with respect, to not fuss over service animals, and to be on the lookout for ways that your event might need improved accessibility.

It may be helpful to assign one of your team members to lead all accessibility-related factors, making them the touchpoint for guests as well handling accessibility in the case of [venue evacuation](#).

“At larger events or events with scheduled accommodations, designate someone to be responsible for accommodations as well as help with seating, ensuring captioning and other technology is working, maintaining clear pathways, or other needs,” encourages Cornell.

Have them contact guests who note in their RSVP that they need accommodations and talk through these needs so that your team understands what to provide. You can also have them act as an usher to greet guests with needs at the start of the event, as well as check in with these guests throughout the event.



Catersource + The Special Event 2023 debuted a wellness room, where attendees could pause for a quiet break at any time throughout the conference. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Accessibility means all attendees can be comfortable as they experience an event. Photo courtesy Harvard University

Learning to see needs can be overwhelming, but don't worry—there are plenty of resources available to get you started!

- The Americans with Disabilities Act
- A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities
- A Roadmap for Successful and Inclusive Meetings & Events in 2024
- The Autistic Self Advocacy Network's Holding Inclusive Events: A Guide to Accessible Event Planning
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Cornell University's Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist
- Cvent's Event Planning for Accessibility: Tips and Best Practices
- Designing for Belonging
- Harvard University's Planning Accessible Meetings and Events
- Inclusion and Diversity: How to Ensure Your Event Has Both
- KultureCity
- Meeting Professionals International's The Definitive ADA Mobility Guide for Meeting and Event Planners
- Sensory-Inclusive Meetings: Attendees with Invisible Challenges
- Social Table's Event Planning Accessibility Guidelines
- The University of Chicago's Accessible Event Resource Guide
- The University of Kansas's Best Practice Guidelines for Planning an Accessible Event
- The University of Minnesota Duluth's Accessible & Inclusive Event Planning



D'Amico Catering (Minneapolis) displayed common food allergens and dietary information on a polaroid. Photo courtesy Anna Grinets Photography 2024



KultureCity partner Photo courtesy KultureCity

Smarter partners

As with all sustainability and DEI measures, finding vendors that prioritize accessibility will make your event flow smoother and create less work for you. Check to see if they, too, hold certifications in accessibility, and have conversations ahead of time to ensure they can meet you in creating an accessible event. For example, a caterer who understands the legalities of accounting for food allergies and sensitivities and who provides alternatives, clear signage, and safety measures will relieve you of doing the work to determine how to make sure everyone is safe.

Materials with accessible messaging

Having accessible event materials may not be something you think about right away, but this, too, is an important part of inclusivity. Besides having signage or pamphlets that provide accessibility information and a directory of resources, your websites, digital flyers, and social media should fit certain criteria, including large enough print, color contrasting, alt



ed with the Gadsden Special Olympics 2024 by providing sensory bags for attendees.
KultureCity

text for photos, and Camel Case (capitalizing the first letter of each word) in hashtags.

It's showtime

On the day of the event, there will be no shortage of things to consider.

You'll want to be aware if any attendees have a Personal Care Assistant (PCA). If so, Cvent recommends ensuring the PCA's free entrance, the ability to always sit next to the person they're caring for, and that you've factored them into your catering numbers and room capabilities.

Make sure registration tables are an appropriate height for anyone using a wheelchair or scooter or who is short-statured (The University of Kansas recommends no more than 34 inches and no less than 28 inches above the floor). The same goes for seating at tables; make sure there is knee space at least 27 inches from the floor to the lower edge of the tabletop, and if there's seated catering, decide ahead of time if you will include preset spots for wheelchairs or if attendants will clear a place in real time.

Ahead of the event, let presenters know that a microphone is not optional, because using one ensures that everyone

can hear. Likewise, when doing Q&A, presenters should repeat audience-asked questions into the microphone before answering. Have them activate captions for any videos they include in their presentation and send their presentations in advance to individuals who have let you know that they cannot view screens well. It's also considerate to have reserved seating near the front of session rooms for participants who may have vision or hearing impairments.

You don't have to sacrifice any strobe lights or loud music but do give a warning to attendees so that they can be prepared to leave if they need to—ideally heading to a quiet room you've provided on site. It can also be helpful to provide sufficient breaks in between event happenings to allow people to regulate.

An excellent tool that KultureCity provides to venues is a collection of sensory bags. These are kits that contain noise-cancelling headphones, different types of fidgets, strobe reduction glasses, VIP lanyards, visual cue cards, and weighted laptop pads. You can work with a program like KultureCity or create your own sensory bags for the event.

Ready for action

As with any growth, don't expect to get everything right on the first try. There's a lot to consider, and there's no shame in missing something when you start your accessible events journey. So long as you're willing to practice patience and empathy, and treat this as a learning process, you'll get better at recognizing and accommodating needs. After your event, you can send out a survey to see what you missed, what you succeeded at, and how you can improve your next event.

"Use your resources," says Senter. "You do not have to be an expert in this space." She recommends inviting people of various abilities along on venue tours—bring someone in a wheelchair with you to see if the venue is accessible for them. Have someone who is vision impaired walk through the space with you so that you can learn how they would experience your event.

In an article for [MeetingsNet](#), Megan Henshall, CMP, DES, and global events strategic solutions lead at Google, said, "I believe those who gather others for a living have a really important role to play for solving the lack of belonging in the world."

Get to know ADA and other legal accessibility requirements, educate yourself, and practice a lot of transparency and clear communication.

"We have a tool, and we are the best ones to wield it," says Henshall. "As an industry we must get behind it and figure it out. If we do, we will see a lot of positive side effects. Being inclusive, and radically inclusive, is the future. Younger generations are going to demand it." ●

CONFETTI

Wedding @





How one wedding brought the Coachella festival site to life with vibrant garden glam

By Amanda Nicklaus

All photos courtesy John and Joseph Photography unless noted otherwise

Every year, over half a million people step onto the Empire Polo Club Grounds to attend the sensational Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. Wait a moment—now imagine stepping onto the same grounds to attend not a two-weekend-long artsy, brand-driven music frenzy, but a glamorous and extravagant wedding.

For a couple based in Chicago, the mountains of Indio, California were an ideal destination, so Hi Rise Events created a dreamy mountain-and-palm-tree gardenscape that absolutely dripped with romance—and planned four other wedding activations over the course of four days. The result did not disappoint, and even gained them a 2024 *Special Events* Gala Award **nomination** for the category of Best Wedding.

The festivities began with 200 guests arriving in California for a “Welcome to Palm Springs” Party. Then came a Ketubah Signing & Luncheon, followed by a Fiesta Rehearsal Dinner. The main event, of course, was the wedding ceremony, sandwiched by a cocktail party and reception, immediately followed by a carnival afterparty. To wrap up the weekend, guests were invited to a Sunday brunch. Transportation was provided for guests to each event.

An elaborate archway lit with lanterns and overflowing with lush florals of roses, jasmine, and Amaranthus framed the orangery entry, where a band played on a tiered stage and welcomed guests inside.

CONFETTI

Lush florals cascaded over the chuppah, framing the couple in a romantic vignette.





On the day of the wedding, guests were immediately surrounded by romantic views as they entered the location, walking down a path lined with a huge floral display of brightly colored roses that led to the seating and ceremony area, which then lifted off the ground to wrap around a chuppah. Upon entering the wedding area, guests were welcomed with a cocktail reception, featuring a custom walk-around bar, seating lounges, a musical combo, a sushi bar, and appetizers.

The orangery glass tent was the perfect backdrop to the pre-ceremony cocktail party. The cocktail reception featured a custom walk-around bar, seating lounges, a musical combo, a sushi bar, and appetizers. Escort cards were positioned on wooden panels adorned with garden roses and dripping Amaranthus.

Imagine stepping onto the same grounds to attend not a two-weekend-long artsy, brand-driven music frenzy, but a glamorous and extravagant wedding.

Amidst the desert mountains and palm trees, abundant florals lined a meandering wooden aisle for the wedding ceremony.



CONFETTI

The ceremony took place at sunset, capturing all the vibrant colors of the desert. Then, everyone headed to the reception, which was held in an enormous orangery glass tent, dubbed the “Glam Greenhouse.” This structure featured a glass cathedral ceiling and glass wall panels, creating an oasis for the night’s festivities. An elaborate archway lit with lanterns and overflowing with lush florals of roses, jasmine, and Amaranthus framed the entry, where a band played on a tiered stage and welcomed guests inside.

Inside, the corners of the Glam Greenhouse held “garden lounge vignettes,” where guests enjoyed whiskey, martini, tequila, and cocktail bars. A gourmet four-course dinner was formally served, and a five-tiered wedding cake took the spotlight. This show-stopping pastry was designed by world-renowned custom cake artisans and featured a replica of the couple’s dogs, which were hand-crafted from fondant icing and set atop the cake.



World-renowned custom cake artisans designed a five-tiered wedding cake, each layer in different flavors. The pastry-chef hand-sculpted two of the couple’s puppies and placed them on the tiers of the cake that rested upon a tufted riser surrounded by a lush garden of flowers.



Inside the Glam Greenhouse, guests dined in an enchanted desert oasis.

(Right) Long dining tables were beautifully highlighted with a garden-forward design, brought to life by candles and designer china; (Below) Uplit palm trees surrounded the elegant orangery Glam Greenhouse, lit inside by glowing candlelight.



Garden chandeliers and pendant lights hung suspended over the marble-style dance floor. The stage backdrop featured reflective mirrors and wall sconces.

CONFETTI

Guests thought that dancing would be the end of the romantic night, but they were in for a delightful surprise: when they stepped back out of the Glam Greenhouse, they found themselves entering a carnival afterparty. The polo field was completely transformed, surrounded by 25 10-foot-tall inflatable neon columns. Guests could stop by a merch tent to receive comfortable hoodies with the carnival's logo as a cozy memento from the event. From there, they spent the night playing carnival games, winning prizes, and feasting from food booths and a booze bar. There were even dancers grooving on a black and white dance floor while a DJ kept the vibes going. To complete the carnival experience, guests slid down a 125-foot electric slide, bringing a childlike delight to the joyous occasion.

This electric wedding weekend ended with brunch the next morning to bring everyone together one last time before heading home. It is hardly surprising that a wedding held on the grounds of a dreamy, whimsical music festival would share the same romantic, lively energy. Of course, the same care, attention to detail, creativity, and meticulous planning is required to create such an iconic event, and thanks to every single vendor, staff personnel, and team member, this couple had a wedding as memorable as Coachella. ●

(Right) A black and white dance floor was framed by a large truss structure supporting moving neon lights.
(Below) No carnival is complete without a giant slide!



The carnival afterparty lit up the night for a fun surprise.



A Grand Marquee framed the carnival entranceway, flanked by 10-foot-tall neon columns and swagged light bulb ropes.

Deadline Extended!

Submissions now being accepted for 2025 ACE and Gala Awards

Submissions are now being accepted for the *Special Events* 2025 Gala Awards! We invite you to submit your best work from the past year. Join in the excitement and the spirit of our industry as we celebrate the hard work and exceptional accomplishments of our peers.

Get your submission in now before the portal closes on October 31st!

To submit an entry to this year's Gala awards, please visit our [awards portal](#).



Star-projected red carpet for HBO movie premier *All the Way* | Design and production by Billy Butchkavitz | Photo courtesy Gabor Ekes



A colorful installation at the base of a stairway leading to the rooftop bar | Photo courtesy 24 Carrots Catering & Events

Flower hallway installation with greeters for “Legends of Wonderland” incentive trip by Destination Concepts, inc. | Photo courtesy Shewanders Photography



o an event by 24 Carrots Catering &

Immersive Entrances

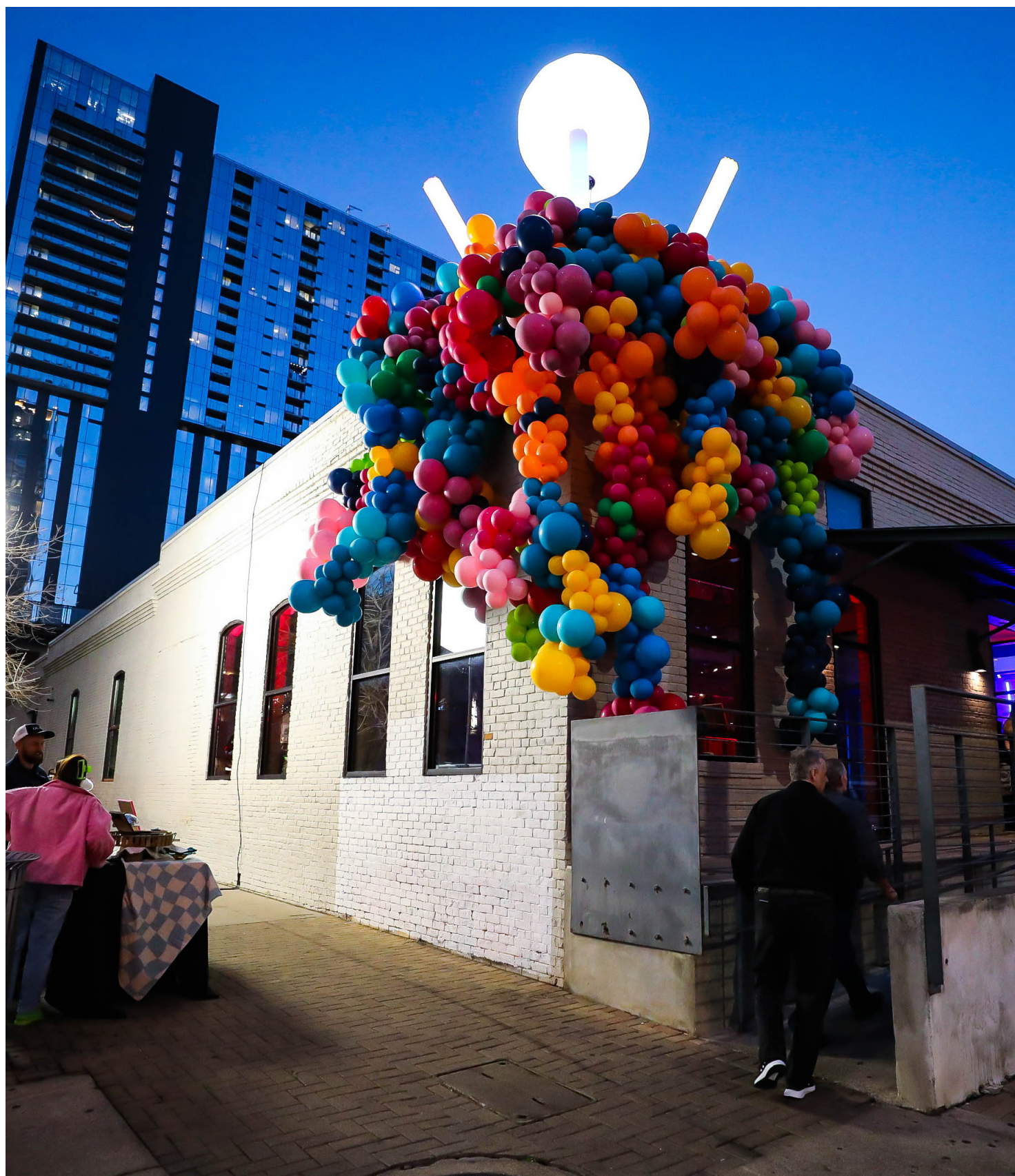
From the moment guests catch sight of the doors to your event, they should feel the magic, becoming part of the event by the time they set foot inside. “We want to be able to bring our guests in from the very beginning, have some sort of experience—some communal experience,” said Terrica (Cocktails & Details®/Terrica Inc.) in her session *How to Design for the Senses* during Catersource + The Special Event 2024. From the lighting, decor, and greeters to the sights, scents, and sounds, be sure to welcome guests with pizzazz. ● —Amanda Nicklaus



Custom circus clown mouth entrance for “Night Circus” event by Studio F Designs | Photo courtesy Harley Bonham Photography



STEAL THIS



Balloon cascade at the entrance of Catersource + The Special Event's 2024 Opening Night Party | Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Production



Vivid floral arch over doorway | Event by and photo courtesy AOO Events



Faux snow-covered yard with uplit Christmas trees for Kardashian Holiday Event 2024 | Event by Mindy Weiss
| Design by Ray Thompson/Images | Photo courtesy John and Joseph Photography



STEAL THIS



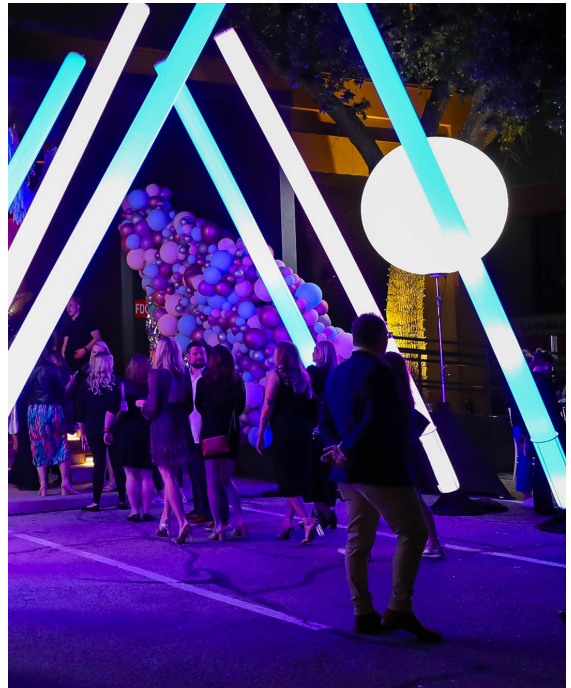
(Above) 150-foot twinkle light tunnel at the “Gilded Glamour” event for Herbalife Honors by Destination Concepts, inc. | Photo courtesy Destination Concepts inc./David Martin Jr Photography; (Right) Giant storybook entrance with cutout door for wedding | Event by and photo courtesy Miradore Weddings



Handmade keyhole entrance way from “Alice, Curiouser and Curiouser” | Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy Photography



(Left) Tropical doorway into surprise 70th birthday party by Kristin Banta Events | Photo courtesy Clark Studio; (Below) “Prismatic Spectacle” themed [Closing Night Celebration](#) at Catersource + The Special Event 2024 | Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos



“Curiouser” Gala by Peace Arch Hospital Foundation



Crinkled metallic decor pairs with baby's breath adorning a doorway | Photo courtesy Kelly Hornberger Photography



At events, we give people a break from their lives, their daily grind. And for a moment in time, they forget about their worries and fears.

Memory Makers

By Ian Ramirez

“A picture is worth a thousand words,” but sometimes, it means even more.

It was around my birthday when we posted a photo of a father-daughter dance on Facebook, not expecting the profound impact about to happen on my life and someone else's. That same day, the bride in the photo reached out to us and expressed that seeing the photo had brought a bittersweet smile to her face during one of the hardest times in her life—the passing of her father not the day before. I could tell her message was filled with both gratitude and emotion, and she shared how her family took it as sign that he was still with them, watching over them in that moment of pure joy and beautiful sorrow.

That's when it hit me. We're not just event planners and professionals; we're memory makers. At events, we give people a break from their lives, their daily grind. And for a moment in time, they forget about their worries and fears. They laugh. They cry. Maybe drink a little, too. But most importantly, we help them craft the stories of their lives.

My path into the event industry may differ than most, but it started in a similarly impactful world: opera. With opera, I learned the power of touching lives through performance and music. Whether it was Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* or Puccini's *La Boheme*, music could move an audience to tears, tickle them with laughter, or even make them yell *scheußlich* at the end of the opera. (Yes, the Germans never hold back how something really makes them feel!) As a young opera singer, I filled my schedule between gigs by helping around my family's wedding venue, Madera Estates. This is where I found a similar kind

of magic. Both worlds aimed to create unforgettable experiences that left a lasting mark on people's hearts.

Events give those that attend them a break from the mundane, a chance to connect, or even a way to experience something new. It could be the laughter at an unrehearsed Best Man's speech at a wedding, the awe of a captivating story of a keynote speaker, or the excitement of live entertainment at a holiday party. At its core, our industry is all about crafting these moments that later become the foundation to lifelong stories—our *memories*.

But the memories we help create go beyond the event itself. They become cherished stories that people carry with them, embellished around new friends, retold countless times at family gatherings, and passed on to our children and grandchildren. These stories become our greatest gift, a small token of our experiences that define us.

As we head into the busiest of seasons, the story of the father-daughter dance photo serves as an important reminder that what we do is more important than we think. Our purpose is not just about executing a perfect event; it's about crafting moments that touch people's lives in ways we may never know. It is humbling to know that a picture could bring such comfort to a grieving bride, a true privilege to play a small part in what is perhaps the greatest memory of her life.

In the end, if we can touch even one person's life, we've done our job. And just like my days on the opera stage, the true measure of our success lies in the smiles, tears, and memories we help create. ●

The premier awards recognizing the finest work in catering & special events worldwide



catersource® + THE SPECIAL EVENT™

ACE Gala AWARDS

Start working on
your entries today!
DEADLINE EXTENDED:
OCTOBER 31, 2024



The ACE and Gala Awards
will be presented during
Catersource + The Special Event,
February 24-27 in Fort Lauderdale.

Find all the details at
ace-gala.awardsplatform.com

catersource®

**SPECIAL
EVENTS**

FALL 2024

catersource®

A *Feast* FOR THE *Eyes*



Planning the Perfect Pop-Up {12}

Components of Sustainable Catering, Part 3 {26}

Game Day Grub {28}

EDUCATION, NEWS, PRODUCTS & IDEAS FOR PROFESSIONAL CATERERS

contents

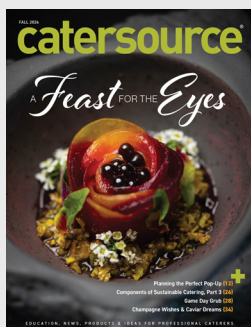
FALL 2024
VOLUME 22, NUMBER 3



features

12....**PLANNING THE PERFECT POP-UP**

Caterers are increasingly tapping into the popularity of pop-up events, experiences, and dinners



Behind the Cover

The Earthen Rosebud is an imaginative interpretation of a Greek salad featuring a rose fashioned from yellow and red beetroot and baked in a crust of salt and juniper berries. Greek yogurt labneh and a rose petal paste combine with Concord grape gel, and is further elevated by ice vinegar. Completing the course is a brittle of Sicilian pistachio and rare white Jaguar cocoa seeds. Aged balsamic pearls and white alyssum flowers provide the finishing touch. The dish was served as part of Chef de Cuisine Dennis Efthymiou's Cornucopia Eight-Course Degustation Menu at Luce, a signature restaurant at the InterContinental San Francisco Hotel. Turn to page 44 for more inspiration on how to turn food into art. Photo courtesy InterContinental San Francisco Hotel

departments

04....**FOREWORD**

Changes complete

06....**CONFERENCE NEWS**

Registration for Catersource + The Special Event 2025 is now open!

08....**ICA'S THE DISH**

Challenging catering norms with this year's Best Action Station or Buffet CATIE Awards finalists

10....**THE C-SUITE**

Supercharge professional development with these four questions

22....**EVENT SOLUTIONS**

Proof of the Pudding takes home an ACE award with its event, War Eagle!

26....**FROM THE CONSULTANTS**

Components of sustainable catering, part 3

28....**ON THE MENU**

Caterers can score big business with elevated takes on game day favorites

32....**SUCCESSFUL SELLING**

The psychology of selling: understanding customer behavior and decision-making

34....**IN THE GLASS**

All about ombre: Visually stunning layered cocktails are grabbing the attention of guests

38....**CATERING TO DIVERSITY**

Essential tips for a flawless quinceañera

44....**STEAL THIS**

A feast for the eyes

THERE'S ONLY 1 STERNO®

THE TOP CHOICE OF FOODSERVICE PROFESSIONALS
FOR OVER 100 YEARS





Changes Complete

In the Summer issue of *Catersource* magazine, I noted that we were saying farewell to our longtime graphic artist, Sharon Carlson, and that changes were afoot for our Fall issue. One could think that a new designer, adjusted internal processes for handoff and proofing, and a fresh type of digital product might encounter some growing pains (as it were), but my “tiny but mighty” team are pros! The process of converting from a flipbook style magazine to a digizine has been surprisingly smooth.

You probably noticed the change from the turning of the glorious cover to the first page of this issue, but as you continue to the Conference News spread on pages 6–7, you will be able to click on three different embedded videos! You’ll find another from an experiential eating event our senior content producer, Amber Kispert, attended last fall (go to page 17 to read and watch).

While I’m a diehard “old school” ink and paper gal, when it comes to publishing there’s nothing like a fun video short to bring it home. A 60-second sizzle reel offers a unique impact over words alone. *Le sigh*. Industry marches on!

One other note before I leave you: our Conference News section also heralds the opening of registration for our annual conferences in 2025. Embedded links will take you to our conference websites: [Catersource + The Special Event](#) and [Art of Catering Food](#). Mark your calendars for February 23–24 (AOCF) and February 24–27 (CS+TSE) in beautiful Fort Lauderdale, FL. Cheers!

Kathleen

Kathleen Stoehr, Director of Community & Content Strategy

What do you think of this issue? Like it? Love it? Have something to contribute to our website? We’d love to hear from you. Write us at editor@catersource.com.

catersource®
MAGAZINE, CONFERENCE & TRADESHOW

Director of Community & Content Strategy Kathleen Stoehr, kathleen.stoehr@informa.com
Senior Content Producer Amber Kispert, amber.kispert@informa.com
Content Editor Amanda Nicklaus, amanda.nicklaus@informa.com
Art Director Sarah Kolcheck, sarah@nxtgennetwork.com
Sales Director Michael Lindahl, michael.lindahl@informa.com
Sales Account Executive Devin Barnes, devin.barnes@informa.com
Managing Director Melissa Fromento, melissa.fromento@informa.com
Ad Operations Specialist Denise Walde, denise.walde@informa.com

WEBSITES

catersource.com
specialevents.com
leadingcaterersamerica.com
informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/
informaconnect.com/art-of-catering-food/

CONTRIBUTORS

International Caterers Association, Anthony Lambatos, Carl Sacks, and Meryl Snow

Foodservice Group

Catersource is published quarterly by Informa Connect Foodservice Group and Catersource LLC, 650 Third Ave, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10158. Subscriptions: Go to catersource.com and sign up to receive Catersource’s quarterly issues and/or monthly e-newsletter products. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission prohibited. ©2024 Informa Connect Foodservice Group. All rights reserved.

Where caterers
meet event planners

under one roof!

catersource® + **THE SPECIAL EVENT®**

FEBRUARY 24-27, 2025

**BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA**

Catersource + The Special Event is the only annual event of its kind. A show of unrivaled influence and inspiration, it's a spirited gathering of all the people, ideas, and trending innovations shaping the catering and events industry.

SECURE YOUR SPOT!

CATERSOURCE-TSE.COM



Conference news

Get ready to meet in Fort Lauderdale—the land of beaches, world-class restaurants and bars, and the famed Florida Everglades.

catersource® + THE SPECIAL EVENT®

FEBRUARY 24-27, 2025 | BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

Registration for Catersource + The Special Event is Now Open!

Catersource + The Special Event is the only annual event of its kind, and in 2025 it returns to Fort Lauderdale, FL from February 24–27. A show of unrivaled influence and inspiration, it's a spirited gathering of all the people, ideas, and trending innovations shaping the catering and events industry.

The time is now to [register](#) at the best rates available to experience three days of conference sessions (February 25–27, 2025) coupled with two full days of tradeshow exhibitions, opening and closing general sessions with Will Guidara (restaurateur and best-selling author) and Brett Culp (Stage Story), awards ceremony, happy hour, and multiple evening events to keep you busy! All the major




Laura Schwartz interviews Eric LeVine, Art of Catering Food keynote

industry associations will be in attendance, conference sessions will allow attendees to keep their accreditations current, and “surprise and delight” installations are in the works to keep your social posts snappy.

It's also open for Art of Catering Food!

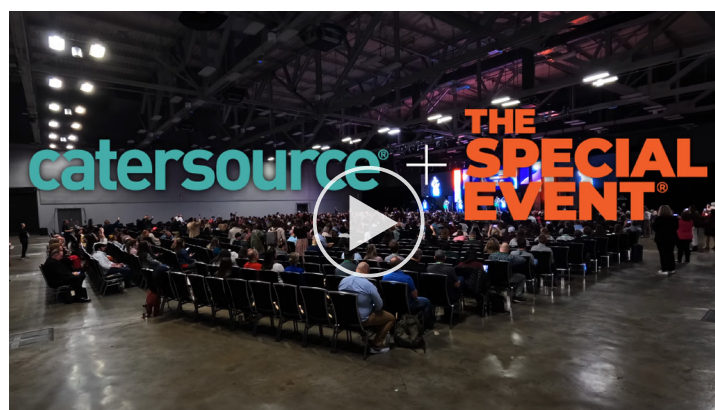
Start your week early by attending [Art of Catering Food](#), two packed days (February 23–24, 2025) of chef-forward sessions that promise to inspire and elevate the work you do, be it on-prem, off-prem, from large festivals to intimate weddings to corporate fundraisers. Taste samples as chefs demo the cuisines on stage, ask questions, and network with other chefs from around North America during breaks, lunches, and an end-of-day happy hour. Chef Eric LeVine will deliver this year's keynote session.

Get a sneak peek at what to expect from this year's conference by watching a snippet from our 2024 show and then previewing some of this year's speakers (in conversation with 2024 Catersource + The Special Event keynote Laura Schwartz) in the accompanying videos.

We can hardly wait to see you in Fort Lauderdale this February! 



Laura Schwartz interviews Sebastien Centner, Eatertainment Events & Catering



Catersource + The Special Event will take place February 24-27, 2025 at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, FL



Challenging Catering Norms

It's easy to stick with your go-to stations. Guests expect them, and they like them. But what about adding the wow factor? What about pushing guests out of their culinary comfort zone to try new things that might become their favorite plate?

That's what this year's International Caterers Association Best [Action Station](#) or Buffet CATIE Awards finalists did. We hope their innovation inspires your team to think outside the box and challenge your guests to look at traditional ingredients in new ways.

WINNER: D'Amico Catering, "Du Jour"

This station offered a blend of interactive chef-attended charm and traditional bar elegance, pairing fresh, local gazpachos with spirits to complement the gazpacho flavors. Think elevated Bloody Marys.

The challenges

The biggest challenge was guest education. Since this spirited bar station had never been seen before in the market, the team had to train service staff to engage with guests upon arrival at the station and explain the experience. Guests could select a refreshing chilled summer soup or a low-proof cocktail.

Another challenge was fine-tuning the gazpacho recipes so they could stand alone or be mixed with the guest's choice of spirit. They settled on a Green Melon Gazpacho paired with London-style dry gin, a Yellow Watermelon Gazpacho paired with smooth tequila, and a Roasted Red Gazpacho with chilled vodka.

The execution

The setup was nearly as important as the offer itself. They added color and texture with fresh produce, displayed the gazpachos in curvy milk bottles to captivate guests, and used thin coupe glasses for the final presentation.

Colette's Catering & Events, "Spa & Nourish: Women's Wellness Buffet"

Colette's Catering & Events' submission was a stunning buffet for a women's spa day retreat featuring [vibrant, healthy options](#).

The challenges

Without proper kitchen facilities, they had to create a makeshift kitchen behind the scenes. Additionally, space limitations for the buffet itself required a setup that maintained visual appeal and ease of access for guests.





"Sardines" from Culinary Crafts was a finalist in this year's CATIE Awards for Best Action Station or Buffet. Photo courtesy Culinary Crafts/International Caterers Association

The execution

To overcome these challenges, they had a "dress rehearsal" the day before with event planners, venue staff, and their team. This trial run helped them cultivate a visually appealing buffet with fresh, high-quality options, including a grazing station, summer fruit and cheese station, mini tea sandwiches, fennel orange salad, and a mandarin orange mousse parfait—because even healthy events need dessert.

Culinary Crafts, "Sardines"

Culinary Crafts' submission, "Food You Didn't Know You Like," featured action stations with out-of-the-ordinary ingredients. The coal-roasted sardine station was particularly popular.

The challenges

Culinary Crafts likes to push culinary boundaries, but the challenge is often getting guests to try new foods. For a Utah bridal magazine event with planners from across the state, they aimed to impress top planners with new bites, hoping to inspire confidence in steering future clients toward unique options.

The execution

Three chefs manned the station: two at the pizza ovens prepping sardines and flatbread, and one greeting and educating guests. Despite local reservations about fish heads and tails, they kept these intact to surprise and delight guests. Timing was crucial since sardines are best served fresh and hot. Everything was roasted and served in small batches as guests chatted with the chef. The sardines were roasted, drizzled with olive oil, sprinkled with salt and pepper, and plated with flatbread brushed with butter and garlic. A fiddlehead fern salad with spring peas, radishes, rainbow chard, and edible violets in a vanilla and champagne vinaigrette accompanied the dish. [CS](#)



(Left) D'Amico Catering took home this year's CATIE Award for Best Action Station or Buffet for "Du Jour." Photo courtesy D'Amico Catering/International Caterers Association; (Above) "Spa & Nourish: Women's Wellness Buffet" from Colette's Catering & Events was a finalist in this year's CATIE Awards for Best Action Station or Buffet. Photo courtesy Colette's Catering & Events/International Caterers Association

Colette's Catering & Events, Culinary Crafts, and D'Amico Catering are proud members of the ICA. The International Caterers Association provides education, encourages peer-to-peer relationships, and inspires creativity while embracing all segments of the catering industry. For more information on how to join the ICA and to be notified of future catering industry webinars, events, and education opportunities, visit internationalcaterers.org.



by Anthony Lambatos

Supercharge Professional Development with these Four Questions



Growth is a key driver for many employees, especially the generation currently entering the workforce. It is expected by top talent when they are looking for new opportunities and it is a major factor in the decision employees make to stay with a company. High achievers are continuously looking to grow. They want to enhance their skillset so they can take on more responsibility or find ways to improve their performance so they can reach new heights in their current position. The problem is that most managers struggle to effectively help their direct reports on this path. Here are four questions that managers should be able to answer when looking to help their team members grow.


1. What drives them? We often make the mistake of thinking everyone will be motivated by the same things. It's important for leaders to take time to understand their employees as people. Get to know their background, their personal circumstances, their core values. Understand what precluded success in the past, how did they get there? The more you know about your people, the better position you are in to help them reach their goals.

2. Where do they want to go? Don't assume that everyone wants to go where you want them to go. I've had team members at Footers Catering that have been in the same position for 20 years and found growth through the evolution of how they do their job; I've also had team members that have been promoted three times to higher level positions over the course of two years. Not everyone wants to manage other people or take on additional responsibility, but that doesn't mean they don't want to grow. When you understand where your team members want to go, you are better equipped as a leader to help them get there.

3. How do they like to learn? There is a wide variety of options when it comes to training and development. Some people learn by doing, others learn by watching. Some people like structure in their development, others prefer

more of a freelance go-at-their-own-pace approach. Knowing this will help you align resources and training with that person's learning style.

4. What does support look like? As a manager it's critically important to ask your team members the question, "How can I support you?" Do not confuse this with picking up the slack or taking over someone's responsibilities. This is about how you can assist your people as they grow. Do they want weekly check-ins? Are they looking for advice and coaching from you? How do they want feedback delivered? Do they need introductions? Being able to cater your approach individually will help them reach a higher level of potential than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Investing in the growth and development of your team members pays huge dividends. It decreases turnover, increases productivity, inspires innovation, boosts morale, and ultimately brings more value to the company. But before you begin, find out the answers to these four questions so you can maximize the investment of your money—and more importantly—your time! 



Anthony Lambatos grew up in the catering business working for his father and founder of **Footers Catering** in Denver, CO. Anthony and his wife, April, purchased the business in 2010 and have successfully made the transition to a second-generation family business. They recently moved Footers Catering into a new facility that also houses their newest venture—an event center called

Social Capitol. Anthony is passionate about helping other companies create great places to work and inspiring people with heart leadership and does that through his sister company **MIBE** (acronym for make it better everyday).

The premier awards recognizing the finest work in catering & special events worldwide



catersource® + THE SPECIAL EVENT™

ACE Gala AWARDS

Start working on
your entries today!
DEADLINE EXTENDED:
OCTOBER 31, 2024



The ACE and Gala Awards
will be presented during
Catersource + The Special Event,
February 24-27 in Fort Lauderdale.

Find all the details at
ace-gala.awardsplatform.com

catersource®

**SPECIAL
EVENTS**

PLANNING THE PERFECT POP-UP

Caterers are increasingly tapping into the popularity of pop-up events, experiences, and dinners

BY AMBER KISPERT

Caterers are breaking free from the confines of working within their clients' visions and instead are putting control back in their own hands through pop-up experiences.

"Pop-ups really aren't that much different than regular events," says Dana Buchanan (Primal Alchemy Catering), "but this time we are the ones calling the shots and creating the experience for the guests."

These pop-up experiences (usually ticketed) are a mix between culinary experimentation and guest experience. Think: A five-course holiday meal, an artisan cheese and wine pairing themed to a new art exhibit, or a sit-down family-style feast in the middle of a farm. With pop-up events, caterers are limited only by their imagination.

"It's nice to have an outlet for creative freedom," says Chef Itamar Abramovitch (Blossom Catering). "Even though I truly enjoy formal/fine cooking, and I love catering for all our clients, pop-up events allow chefs to prepare food that might not always be on our menu for catering events."





BISSELL

The Meijer Gardens Culinary Arts & Events at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park hosted a one-of-a-kind pop-up dinner where guests enjoyed four courses (each in a different picturesque location throughout the space).

The first course, featuring a salad of summer peaches and heirloom tomatoes with burrata, lemon-basil oil, flake salt, and balsamic glaze, was enjoyed in the Bissell Corridor. Photo courtesy Janelle Christine Photography

Pop-ups aren't strictly defined as ticketed events, however; pop-ups can also mean utilizing a singular menu concept repeatedly across multiple dates throughout a defined timeframe. For example, corporate offices or museums may showcase a chef-in-residence at their in-house cafes and restaurants, or [university dining services](#) may feature a themed dining experience (such as a pasta or pizza pop-up).

"With this model caterers should focus the food and experience into a singular focal point," says Ryan Whitten (Bold Catering & Design*). "Don't add more components, just figure out ways to modify and change while limiting your item count."

Where exclusivity meets experimentation

Today's clients are looking at [brand activations](#), immersive themed experiences, and pop-ups as the new frontier of engagement, says Constellation Culinary Group.

According to [Eventbrite](#), the experiential diner is driven by the desire to be immersed in something new and cost is not a factor: three in four (75%) believe it's simply worth paying more money for a unique dining experience. They seek an unexpected, memorable location (76%), a surprising menu or theme (84%), or a one-of-a-kind experience (74%), and these events provide the experience guests crave and are willing and eager to pay top dollar for.

"The current generation of foodies views food as an experience, not just a meal, and is highly focused on the social and one-of-a-kind, ephemeral qualities that this new wave of events offers," said Sarah Hoffman, head of food and drink marketing at Eventbrite, in an [article](#). "It's a win for guests who get to experience chefs at their most creative, but also for



The Meijer Gardens Culinary Arts & Events at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park hosted a one-of-a-kind pop-up dinner where guests enjoyed four courses (each in a different picturesque location throughout the space). The third course, featuring Blueberry Butterfly Pea Flower Cheesecake with blueberry-lemon compote and pepita brittle, was enjoyed overlooking the Tassell-Wisner-Botrall English Perennial Garden. Photo courtesy Janelle Christine Photography



the industry; chefs and restaurants are able to build their brand and differentiate themselves through these pre-paid, ticketed experiences that help reduce food waste and deter no-shows.”

The transient nature of pop-ups is meant to generate buzz and create a sense of urgency for potential customers, thus enticing food enthusiasts to seize the opportunity to participate.

“The draw for pop-up dinners and events lies in their exclusivity and novelty,” says Chris Sanchez (LUX Catering & Events*). “Guests are attracted to the idea of a limited-time experience that feels special and unique. The ephemeral nature of pop-ups creates a sense of urgency, encouraging people to attend before the opportunity passes.”

(Left) Journey down the rabbit hole into a culinary wonderland created by Constellation Culinary Group at The New York Botanical Garden's immersive exhibition, “Wonderland: Curious Nature.” For those looking for a Mad Hatter's experience, the Hudson Garden Grill hosts an enchanting Tea Party on Thursday afternoons, offering visitors the opportunity to bring Wonderland to life with individual pots of tea, delectable savory hors d'oeuvres, tea sandwiches, and an array of sweets. Photo courtesy Steve Legato



(Left) During an Alice in Wonderland themed pop-up event at the Waldorf Astoria, guests enjoyed Magic Mushroom Focaccia Toast with herb aioli, whipped miso tahini, and baby arugula during a Mad Tea Party. Photo courtesy Waldorf Astoria Washington DC; (Above) Duck pâté en croute with foie gras from Chef Hoon Rhee was served during a pop-up event at The Philadelphia Museum of Art's restaurant, Stir). Photo courtesy Michelle Corban



(Above) The Philadelphia Museum of Art hosted a pop-up dinner (at its restaurant, Stir) with chef-in-residence Chef Hoon Rhee featuring a French-inspired, multi-course tasting menu designed to complement and reflect artist Mary Cassatt's body of work in honor of their exhibit “Mary Cassatt at Work.” Shown: Pommes Souffle featuring Royal Osetra caviar, onion ash, and smoked crème fraîche. Photo courtesy Michelle Corban

“Scarcity breeds obsession,” adds Chef Keith Sarasin (The Farmer’s Dinner).

“When someone is offered a one-night-only event, they tend to see the value in supporting a local chef but also getting something truly special.”

Pop-ups are truly about giving guests something they couldn’t get anywhere else.

The novelty isn’t strictly reserved for guests either. Pop-ups are a great opportunity for chefs and caterers to experiment with new dining concepts or menu items.

“As a catering chef in Napa, much of what I love and do is considered formal dining, which isn’t always accessible or preferred for some guests,” says Abramovitch. “[Pop-ups] not only bring a unique and exciting experience for the guests, but it’s also something creative and fun for the chefs. Lots of chefs have the dream of having their own restaurant with their name on the door, and for many, this is a way to achieve that—even if it’s just for a night.”

Make it memorable

Given the nature of pop-ups, they require more emphasis on creativity and innovation, as they are often designed to provide a unique experience. This is where immersive elements such as [themes](#) and unique menus become paramount.

“It’s about creating a vibe and an experience that engages all five senses,” says Brittany Glover (Constellation Culinary Group).

Start by choosing a theme that resonates with your target audience (and what will sell to them) and aligns with your brand. Look at your market and see what’s missing. Also, consider where your passions lie.

“The best themes come from a chef’s passion. Once you have a theme,

think of the dining experience and how it can fit the theme,” says Sarasin. “Food is only part of an experience. A terrible dining experience cannot save incredible food. If you are hosting a pop-up you need to make people feel special, because they are.”

Think: farm-to-table dinners, immersive [environments inspired by fictional worlds](#) (i.e., Moe’s Tavern, Luke’s Diner, the Krusty Krab, or Alice in Wonderland), tasting menus inspired

by [museum exhibits](#), blindfolded dinner experiences, chef tables, and anything al fresco.

“There is inspiration everywhere. Part of the fun is creating the experience with a menu to match,” says Buchanan.

Incorporate the theme into every aspect of the event, from the menu and décor to the music and entertainment. Pay attention to details like table settings, ambiance, lighting, and staff attire

Chef Keith Sarasin founded The Farmers Dinner in 2012. The Farmers Dinner hosts upscale dinners on local New England Farms. Photo courtesy Matthew Lomanno



to enhance the overall atmosphere. Ensure the theme is consistent and cohesive throughout the event, not only in food and beverage, but also in the details.

“Think about the whole experience, from beginning to end,” says Buchanan.

The venue where a pop-up event is held is almost just as important as the theming and menu as well.

“Venues that work best for pop-ups are those that offer flexibility and can be easily transformed to fit the event’s theme,” says Sanchez.

Consider places like museums, art galleries, farms, gardens, rooftops, warehouses, vacant retail spaces, breweries, wineries, and historic buildings. Be mindful though; unique venues bring with them their own set of challenges (more on that in a bit).

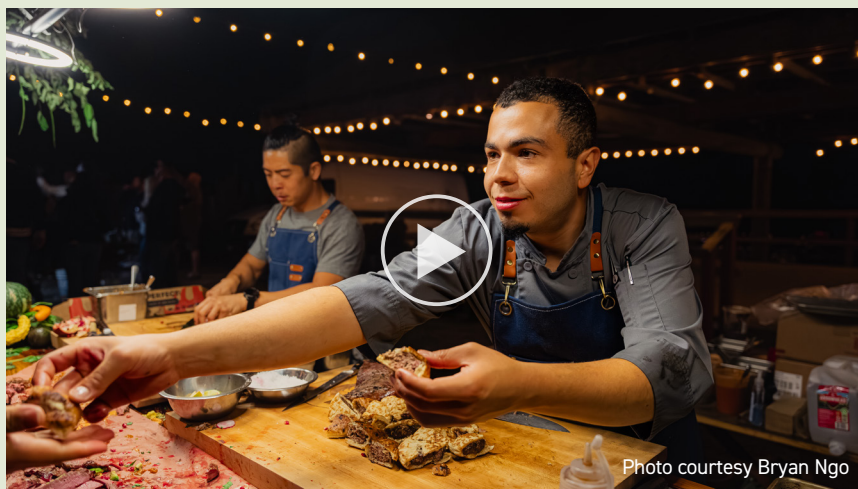


Photo courtesy Bryan Ngo

M(EAT) CARNIVAL from Blossom Catering (Napa) is unlike any other pop-up event: attendees don’t know where the event will be held until only a week prior, and once they arrive, they are handed a wine glass, a towel, and nothing else. Each pop-up event brings a team of chefs, each showcasing varying interpretations of Mediterranean-American cuisine cooked over a live fire. Each event takes place outdoors where chefs are given ingredients and are challenged to whip up meat-focused dishes on the fly, which is why no two pop-up events are ever the same. As attendees traverse the various stations (sans plates and silverware) they use their hands to grab the food they wish to try while dining al fresco.

“The draw for pop-up dinners and events lies in their exclusivity and novelty. Guests are attracted to the idea of a limited-time experience that feels special and unique. The ephemeral nature of pop-ups creates a sense of urgency, encouraging people to attend before the opportunity passes.” —Chris Sanchez



The Philadelphia Museum of Art hosted a pop-up dinner with chef-in-residence Chef Hoon Rhee featuring a Korean-inspired tasting menu designed to complement its exhibition “The Shape of Time: Korean Art After 1989.” Shown: Yeonggye-baeksuk (chicken, jook, jujube, chestnuts, gamtae). Photo courtesy Michelle Corban



Constellation Culinary Group hosted a pop-up dinner at the Sarasota Art Museum’s Bistro restaurant that showcased creative culinary offerings that were inspired by a recent exhibit, “Chakaia Booker: Surface Pressure and Booker’s Artwork.” Each course was inspired by a specific piece from the exhibition. Shown: Chicken al Mattone “Under a Brick” with potatoes and Italian salsa verde. Photo courtesy Sarasota Art Museum



The Waldorf Astoria hosted an Alice in Wonderland themed immersive pop-up experience. This afternoon tea featured a delightful array of delectable treats at "A Mad Tea Party." From savory delights fit for the Mad Hatter's tea party to sweet temptations that would delight the Queen of Hearts herself, the afternoon tea transported guests to a realm where imagination knows no bounds, where guests encounter fantastical elements such as oversized teacups, playing cards, and whimsical furniture. Photo courtesy Waldorf Astoria Washington DC

Great for business

The temporary nature of pop-ups means that logistics, such as location scouting, permits, and setup, are bit more complex. For example, maybe your venue doesn't have a kitchen onsite, and you'll need to build a temporary field kitchen. Ensure that you pay attention to the flow of service, kitchen efficiency, and guest comfort. Smooth operations are vital to the success of a pop-up event.

"We depend on checklists to stay organized—and we continue to refine it with each event—and that helps us understand gaps and anticipate issues ahead of time," says Abramovitch. "The more you prepare for the unexpected, the more smoothly the event will run overall."

With all the added nuance and effort that goes into planning a pop-up event, you might be asking yourself why you should even bother? Well, the answer is simple—with pop-ups, you can:

- Temporarily test out menu concepts
- Offer high-end, gourmet food at an affordable price
- Offer total creative freedom to chefs without a large risk factor
- Demonstrate what you do to a whole new set of potential clients, as well as allowing current clients to see you in a new light
- Build your own opportunities
- Have increased visibility and brand awareness
- Tap into the off-season

And lastly, they can create a new revenue stream for your business. However, make sure to go in with realistic expectations.

"You're not going into this to become millionaires—you just don't get that with pop-ups," says Sarasin. "The reality is, you're doing this because you're passionate."

With pop-up events, caterers can control the environment, making them the decision-makers and driving creativity.

"Ticketed and pop-up events can fill in gaps to keep the kitchen busy and are great for marketing," says Buchanan.

Speaking of marketing, that's the secret sauce when discussing pop-up events.



(Top) During an Alice in Wonderland themed pop-up event at the Waldorf Astoria, guests enjoyed The White Rabbit's Carrot (shrimp salad, piquillo pepper, and carrot tops). Photo courtesy Waldorf Astoria Washington DC; (Middle and Above) Next, guests enjoyed various sweet treats including: The Pocket Watch (lemon macaron), Alice in Shortbread (lavender orange), The Queen of Tarts (strawberry mousse and coconut custard), Meadow of Flowers Tea Cake (lime and raspberry), Cheshire Gateaux (blackberry cake with banana mousse), and various scones. Photos courtesy Waldorf Astoria Washington DC

HOW TO CRUSH YOUR NEXT POP-UP DINNER

1. Identify your niche and brand

- Find what YOU do better than anyone else
- What are the passion points you want to convey to a customer?
- What are two sentences that tell what you do?

2. Legal documents and things you need to know

- Register with the state and get an LLC
- Get a solid CPA or learn to love Quickbooks®
- Business insurance is a must

3. Finding hosts for your pop up

- Leverage your network
- Get creative
- Go underground

Information above courtesy Chef Keith Sarasin



The free, all-ages indoor winter pop-up, Getaway at the Greenhouse, returned this past February at the Fairmount Park Horticulture Center. Hosted by Philadelphia Parks and Recreation in partnership with Constellation Culinary Group, the event featured an obstacle course for the kiddos through a Child's Play Challenge and food and beverage by Constellation. Photo courtesy Constellation Culinary Group



Since 2012, The Farmers Dinner led by Chef Keith Sarasin (right) has hosted over 87 farm-to-table events across New England and fed more than 17,000 customers raising over \$125,000 for local farms. Photo courtesy Matthew Lomanno



Primal Alchemy (shown, Dana Buchanan, left and Paul Buchanan, right) frequently holds pop-ups at farmers markets and other outdoor spaces. Photo courtesy Primal Alchemy

Success lies with marketing

For many pop-up events, success begins and ends with how well a company can market themselves and the event. Leverage social media and digital marketing to create buzz and anticipation. Use platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to share teaser content, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and event details. Partner with local influencers, bloggers, and media outlets to amplify your reach. Utilize email marketing to engage with your existing customer base and encourage word-of-mouth promotion.

“But you can’t just throw up a post and expect it to influence ticket sales,” says Abramovitch. “You need to understand your demographics and figure out what’s going to draw them in. From there, remember that once is never enough when it comes to marketing an event—generate endless content in all formats—images, video, text—and then get the word out.”

For example, Sarasin relies on the 5, 3, 1 Marketing Principal when promoting his Farmer’s Dinner pop-up:

- 5 weeks from the event, launch!
- 3 weeks out, remind everyone on all platforms
- 1 week out, set reminders and email logistics info

If you’re thinking about offering pop-up events, consider branding them separately from your catering company, helping your marketing to stand out.

“People don’t want to go to catering events, they want to go to chef events,” says Abramovitch.

As the culinary landscape continues to evolve, embracing the pop-up phenomenon can propel your catering business to new heights.

“Pop-up events are a fantastic way to push the boundaries of traditional catering and offer something truly unique to guests,” says Sanchez. “They provide an excellent platform for caterers to experiment, innovate, and connect with their audience in new and exciting ways. By embracing creativity, paying attention to detail, and staying adaptable, caterers can create memorable experiences that leave a lasting impression. Not to mention, they can create stronger bonds with your clientele and even build or strengthen your client base.” **CS**

* LUX Catering & Events and Bold Catering & Design are proud members of the [Leading Caterers of America](#), a consortium of the top catering and event planners throughout the United States and Canada.

a boutique event
created by chefs for chefs

the **ART** of
CATERING FOOD

FEBRUARY 23-24, 2025

**BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA**

AOCF is a bustling hub for culinary inspiration and education, introducing chefs like you to new ingredients, fresh ideas for menus, and valuable business lessons that you can bring back into your own kitchen.

REGISTER NOW!

ARTOFCATERINGFOOD.COM



By Amber Kispert

The Auburn University blue and orange were balanced with white and gold, glass and velvet, and the 41 tables were spread out, each one its own island.

An Event Touchdown

Proof of the Pudding takes home the ACE award for Best Off-Premise Catering for companies above \$2 million annual revenue with its event, War Eagle!



The décor oozed luxury sports, with lounges, bars, and dining tables.



Each table was dressed in spectacular florals representing Auburn University's colors: blue and orange.



Smoked corn fritters accompanied with tabasco aioli.

In celebration of Auburn University's new football training facility, guests were invited to a VIP dinner, titled War Eagle!, on the indoor field. Seated on turf and surrounded by magnificent décor, guests enjoyed a fine dining experience (hosted by Proof of the Pudding) infused with the team's war cry, team colors, and steakhouse cuisine.

The event proved to be a touchdown success after being named Best Off-Premise Catering for

companies above \$2 million annual revenue during the [ACE Awards](#) ceremony (held during [Catersource + The Special Event](#) in February 2024 in Austin, TX).

Since the dinner experience took place on the stadium's field, which was built for a very different purpose than events, the architecture of the space and the flow of the event presented Proof of the Pudding with a few catering challenges including:

- **No kitchen available.** Food was prepared in their off-site stadium kitchen, which is used almost exclusively for on-site events (Proof of the Pudding regularly provides concessions and catering at the stadium).
- **No prep room available.** Proof of the Pudding constructed two 20' x 20' field pantries on the floor of the playing field right next to guest

seating, concealed only by pipe and drape. This meant that noise and order was a critical factor during the event, particularly during the speeches and entertainment at the beginning of the program, during which time the team played in complete silence.

- **Limited service access.** Load-in took place front of house, through the reception foyer into the far end of the field.
- **The brand new indoor turf** had to be protected at all costs. Proof of the Pudding had to load in all equipment including hot boxes via a path of plywood panels along three-fourths of the field. During the event, wait staff were

Deadline Extended: Submissions now being accepted for 2025 ACE and Gala awards

Submissions are now being accepted for the Catersource 2025 Achievement in Catered Events awards (ACE)! We invite you to submit your best work from the past year. Join in the excitement and the spirit of our industry as we celebrate the hard work and exceptional accomplishments of our peers.

Get your submission in now before the portal closes on October 31st!

To submit an entry to this year's ACE awards, please visit our [awards portal](#).



(Top) Branding included custom tiger and eagle print towels to match the décor, and the signature cocktail vodka blend featuring an Auburn University logo wafer; (Above) A white grand piano served as the room's focal point.



was an orange-colored focal point.



The dual entrée consisted of braised short rib over chargrilled carrots and pan seared sea bass with wild mushroom risotto.



The wedge salad was presented with a playful plate composition featuring baby romaine, smoked cheddar, lardon, heirloom tomatoes, radish, and green goddess dressing.



Barbecue chicken skewer with Doux South mustard.


repeatedly reminded to exercise extreme caution to avoid spills. No glass was permitted on the field, so the team sourced premium, shatterproof drinkware made from recycled materials.

- **Timing.** Because the plywood flooring had to be removed before guests arrived, an early food load-in was necessary. This was an important consideration in menu planning.

To satisfy guests' preferences for familiar ingredients and preparations, the menu featured a dual entrée of braised short rib over chargrilled carrots and pan seared sea bass with wild mushroom risotto. The first course wedge salad was presented with a playful plate composition and the alternating pre-set desserts all hinted at the team's colors (blue and orange): dark chocolate cake with orange mirror glaze, puffed rice crunch, and blue anglaise; and a spiced pecan caramel cheesecake with bourbon Chantilly cream. All dishes were served on branded plates provided by the client.

The hors d'oeuvres tempted guests with tiny forays into culinary adventure while remaining in their comfort zone. A dab of green harissa with the lamb lollipops, corn fritters spiced up with smoked corn, a mini lobster BLT instead of the game-day favorite lobster roll (turn to page 28 for a deeper look at game-day favorites).

"Our service was seamlessly slotted into the evening's program, which was precisely timed and executed just like a football game," according to Proof of the Pudding's award submission.

Congratulations to Proof of the Pudding and all of this year's recipients! Check out the full list [here](#). 



Components of Sustainable Catering, Part 3

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles that discusses what sustainability means to caterers and their communities; [part one](#) looked at supply side sustainability and [part two](#) looked at demand side sustainability.

We've already discussed supply and demand side sustainability variables. Now it's time to review some other areas that influence how individual caterers can impact the overall sustainability of the industry.

Corporate sustainability

The operational policies and procedures of any given catering company can (and do) have an impact on its carbon footprint.

Delivery policies: Every delivery represents both a financial expense and a negative impact on the environment. Outbound deliveries are (of course) necessary for off-premise caterers, but there are tools to make these more efficient and less environmentally costly. These include fleet management and GPS routing systems for vehicles, delivery scheduling programs, and pricing to encourage off-peak deliveries and pick-ups.

Servingware offerings: There has always been a conflict between those who advocate for use of disposables, and those who promote use of permanent serving pieces (i.e., china, silver, and glass). Single use items seem to be wasteful by definition, but there are costs associated with permanent items as well, such as pickup and warewashing expenses. There are also concerns about minimizing the use of plastics, but there are many lines of sustainable servingware options available.

Food waste: It is commonly accepted that about one-third of food is lost to waste in production. This is catastrophic for the planet—particularly when, even in a wealthy

“This preference for sustainability is widely held and should be the model for the catering industry as it navigates the future of the planet.”

country like the United States, a substantial number of people are food insecure. In the catering sector, [food waste](#) is endemic in two areas: on the event level and in production.

- **Event food waste:** Food waste has always been a challenge for caterers of all types, but most specifically for buffet specialists. Since caterers are loathe to allow buffets to look sparse, even for the last guest through the line, this has always been a challenge. But there are workarounds for this issue, such as providing to-go boxes—not just for clients, but also for guests. Other options include scheduling an employee meal at the end of a shift to use up leftovers, and/or arranging for pickups of leftovers by food banks or soup kitchens. Some caterers even allow clients to designate a [charitable recipient](#) for leftovers on their behalf.

- **Production food waste:** Some caterers have set a goal of zero waste from their commissary production, meaning that the only residual outputs besides food sent to events would be compost and recycling. This is naturally a challenge, but with the help of some new technologies and careful product selection, it may be achievable. The technologies include a combination of hardware and software, including scales, cameras, and advanced cooking technologies such as low temperature cook and hold ovens and combination oven steamers. On the software side, advances in artificial intelligence (check out the adjoining *Special*

Events magazine for a deeper look at AI) just in the past several years have been applied to enterprise systems to help identify, track, and minimize waste in production. These combined hardware/software systems, while requiring a substantial initial investment, can pay back based on minimized waste in just a few years.

Community sustainability


Every caterer, particularly those specializing in full-service events, depends on a community of stakeholders for support and success. These stakeholders include rental companies, food and beverage vendors, professional services providers, employees, contract workers, venues, clients, and others. We have seen many caterers make it part of their ongoing dialogue with these community members to encourage them to be attuned to the sustainability dynamic as well.

For example, some caterers have agreed to consolidate rental orders with catering deliveries to minimize

truck miles to their events. Others have encouraged their wedding clients to change the default entrée selection(s) to emphasize plant-forward options.

Other community examples include making sustainable, non-plastic servingware a standard for delivery catering; encouraging staff to carpool by offering gas subsidies to the drivers; and working with venue managers to help minimize utility costs.

All these efforts, as well as many others not covered here, are designed to help maximize both the perception and the reality of sustainability in the catering industry. This will help diminish the concerns of clients and guests who are concerned about the environment.

A recent article in the *New York Post* states that two-thirds of Americans believe sustainability should be the default for companies. This indicates that this preference for sustainability is widely held and should be the model for the catering industry as it navigates the future of the planet. 



Carl Sacks has spent more than 17 years as a consultant to the catering industry, starting at Catersource, and currently as the managing member of Certified Catering Consultants. His list of clients includes many of the most prominent and successful caterers in the industry.

He is regarded as the top expert in several catering related areas, including maximizing financial returns, strategic planning, and exit strategy development and implementation. He is also widely known for his expertise in contract and venue RFP response development. Carl also provides advisory services to both buyers and sellers of catering companies, and he has been involved in many successful transactions.

Game Day Grub

Progressive Field (home of the Cleveland Guardians) features the fun and whimsical Slider Dog from local restaurant The Happy Dog, with pimento mac and cheese, bacon, and Froot Loops®. Photo courtesy Delaware North

Caterers can score big business with elevated takes on game day favorites

Game day. It's not just about the action on the field; it's about the experience, the camaraderie, and the food. For caterers, game day presents a golden opportunity to shine, transforming traditional tailgate and couch snacks into gourmet delights that leave fans cheering for more. "Food is an integral part of the [game day] experience, and we challenge our chefs and team members to create exciting, signature food items that put a twist on a

hometown favorite," said Ken Gaber (OVG Hospitality) in a press release.

The MVPs of a game day menu are similar from year to year—finger foods like wings, nachos, hot dogs, sliders, and fries reign supreme.

"The old standards never go out of style," says Jimmy Petracci (Proof of the Pudding). "We are hearing from our clients and guests that simple food, executed well consistently, is more important than ever."

However, today's diners are also craving twists on these classics.

"There is always room for our chefs to take basic game day items to the next level," says Petracci. "The foundation of game day fare gives chefs a great jumping-off point to add their own touches. Whether it's elevating a tired nacho plate to a brisket burnt-end nacho bar or creating custom chef's tables around a game day favorite concept, the sky is the limit."

Let's look at how your game day foods can make a play for the big leagues.



Tailgating is a well-loved tradition. Celebrate the big game with a delicious cheese ball, featuring creamy gouda cheese and candied bacon in every bite. Photo courtesy Wisconsin Cheese

Play ball

While football may by far be the sport that people entertain around the most, serving classics such as chicken wings, chili, nachos, and sliders, it's not the only sport that brings with it a slew of game day favorites.

Can you imagine watching a baseball game without hot dogs, peanuts, soft pretzels, and a box of Cracker Jacks®? Although not necessarily considered a “foodie” sport, soccer fans often reach for popular tried-and-true favorites such as pizza, empanadas, churros, or tapas; and don't forget about hockey foods such as poutine, buffalo wings, and beef chili.

"There is also an opportunity to highlight the changing seasons through creative menus as the sports seasons progress through the year," says Petracci. "Football is all about hearty foods to keep you warm in the fall and early winter, and as we progress into spring basketball and baseball seasons, we start to serve lighter fare to fit with the warming weather."



This buffet setup is offered in the Broadway Club hospitality suite during Auburn University sporting events and features cheese and charcuterie, the market salad, a shrimp cocktail, coleslaw, Chef Carved Prime Auburn Meat Lab Smoked Brisket, mac and cheese, and smoked chicken wings. Photo courtesy Proof of the Pudding

Cheer for the home team

Whether it's concessions, a watch party, or even a themed event, game day foods are the perfect vessel to deliver a little bit of local flare. Put a twist on game day food by celebrating themes and local cuisines from the city or team being celebrated. Think: Philly Cheesesteak-style hot dogs, Chicago-style pizza bites, Nashville Hot Chicken wings, or how about sliders served on San

Francisco sourdough buns?

"Focusing on local can certainly elevate a dish," says Bruce Kraus (Sodexo Live! New Orleans). "Are there local ingredients? Is the dish cooked in a style that's popular regionally? Are we partnering with a local company to bring the dish to life? There are lots of ways you can look to elevate a dish but focusing on the small details and finding ways to make the dish connect with fans is just one example. Not only do you want to give visiting fans



“Food is an integral part of the [game day] experience, and we challenge our chefs and team members to create exciting, signature food items that put a twist on a hometown favorite.” —Ken Gaber

a taste of the city they’re in and a unique dining experience, but local fans love to see their city represented, too.”

Knock it out of the park

Now, game day foods may not scream elevated cuisine, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t ways to elevate these fan favorites to new heights.

“It’s about blending the classic and the

modern,” said Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) during a session at Catersource + The Special Event 2024. “Concessions are not just a ‘craptacular’ hot dog or a ‘craptacular’ burger on a ‘craptacular’ bun anymore—everyone wants a little bit better and they’re willing to pay. The customer is demanding it because they want the elevated experience.”

First, consider your ingredients. Gourmet toppings like caviar and burrata can step potato skins up a notch (recipe below); try homemade pizzas with prosciutto or truffle oil,



BOIA DE'S CRISPY POTATO SKINS

Recipe and photo courtesy Chef Alex Meyer at Boia De



recipe

ingredients

4 ea. russet potatoes
Canola oil for frying
Sliced scallions
Burrata

Caviar of choice
2 ea. hard boiled eggs
Kosher salt

method

1. Poke the potatoes all over with a fork and bake at 350° F until cooked through (45 minutes-one hour 15 minutes).
2. Allow it to cool thoroughly for easy handling then cut in half lengthwise and half again.
3. Use your hands to rip the potatoes into wedge-like shapes.
4. Fry potatoes in a tall pot with a couple inches of canola oil at 375° F using a slotted spoon to gently drop into the oil.
5. Cook until golden and move to a paper towel-lined tray, season with Kosher salt immediately.
6. Arrange in a single layer in an oven-proof baking tray and cover with creamy burrata. Bake in the oven at 450° F until the cheese is melting, which should only take one to two minutes.
7. Top with scallions, grated hard boiled egg, dollop of caviar, and serve immediately.



(Clockwise starting with far left) These Irish Nachos at Fenway Park (home of the Boston Red Sox) feature waffle fries, corned beef, sauerkraut, sour cream, Thousand Island dressing, and queso fresco. Photo courtesy Aramark; Cubano sausage dogs were served during the College Football Playoff National Championship in 2021. Photo courtesy Sodexo Live!; Elevate your game day experience with cauliflower wings with spicy gochujang honey dipping sauce. Irresistibly crispy, spicy, and sweet—a perfect combo. Photo courtesy Unilever Food Solutions

or more upscale dips and sides such as guacamole with fresh mango or deviled eggs made into a creamy shrimp dip topped with fish roe. For example, if the guests would like an elevated hot dog, why not serve a footlong Wagyu beef dog with caviar mustard and black truffle shavings? Or how about lobster nachos with white cheddar queso, avocado crema, and microgreens?

You could also incorporate international flavors into your game-day fare, such as Korean barbecue wings with gochujang sauce, garnished with sesame seeds and green onion; Mediterranean dishes like Greek yogurt marinated chicken skewers, and a whipped feta dip; or Vietnamese street-style fries.

Making mini or bite-sized versions of favorites is another great option for elevating game day fare, especially if it's for an event outside of the sports world (turn to page 22 for a look at an event that took place on a football

field). Nacho bars (with cheese on drafts) are also consistent crowd-pleasers.

“The game day theme works across the board through chef action stations and themed menus,” says Petracci. “We have done weddings at sporting facilities that have featured food items from the bride and groom’s favorite stadium and team.”

“Game day foods are comfort foods, so they are a perfect choice for the ‘after party,’” adds Andrea Correale (Elegant Affairs).


Elevating game day food isn’t just about the flavors; it’s also about the presentation. Consider using elegant platters, tiered stands, and individual servings to add a touch of class. Small details like garnishes, artisanal bread baskets, and decorative table setups can transform a simple snack table ([check out our article](#) for an exploration of the snacking lifestyle) into a gourmet experience. Presentation enhances the game day

experience by increasing appetite, improving perceived food quality, and encouraging social sharing. Paying attention to presentation can also ensure convenience, reinforce themes, and complement the festive atmosphere.

“Presentation is always important. It’s the presentation that separates the home spread from the catered spread,” says Correale.

“Especially when the meal you present isn’t just for the eyes in the stadium—it can be for millions of people to see at home via social media, too,” adds Kraus.

By infusing gourmet elements into classic game day favorites, you can transform a casual gathering into a memorable culinary event. So, gear up, get creative, and let your game day menu score big with fans.

“The desired fan experience is evolving, and we evolve with it,” says Kraus. 

The Psychology of Selling: Understanding Customer Behavior & Decision-Making

In sales, understanding the psychology behind customer behavior and decision-making can be a game-changer. It's not just about what you sell but how you sell it. By delving into the cognitive processes and emotional triggers that influence purchasing decisions, salespeople can tailor their approaches to better meet the needs and desires of their customers. Let's explore key psychological principles that can enhance your sales techniques and drive success.

The role of emotions in decision-making

1. Emotional triggers: Emotions play a significant role in purchasing decisions. People often buy based on how a product or service makes them feel rather than its logical benefits. Tap into emotional triggers by highlighting the positive feelings your product can evoke. For example, luxury goods often appeal to the desire for status and exclusivity.

2. Storytelling: One of the most powerful ways to connect with customers emotionally is through storytelling. A compelling story about how your company has transformed someone's life can create a strong emotional connection. Stories make abstract benefits tangible and relatable, making it easier for customers to envision themselves experiencing the same positive outcomes.

Building trust and rapport

1. Mirroring: Mirroring is a technique where you subtly imitate the body language, speech patterns, and behaviors of your customer. This can create a sense of familiarity and trust. However, it's crucial to do this naturally and not come across as mimicking, which can have the opposite effect.


2. Active listening: Active listening involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and then remembering what the customer has said. It shows that you value their input and are genuinely interested in helping them. This builds rapport and makes the customer feel heard and appreciated.

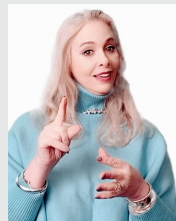
The power of scarcity and urgency

1. Scarcity principle: The scarcity principle suggests that people place a higher value on things that are scarce. Limited-time offers, exclusive deals, and low-stock notifications can create a sense of urgency and drive immediate action (turn to page 12 to learn how this principle applies to pop-up events). Highlighting scarcity can make your service more desirable.

2. FOMO: Fear of missing out is a psychological trigger that can be leveraged in sales. Customers are often motivated by the fear of missing out on a great deal or an exclusive opportunity. Phrases like "limited-time offer!" can prompt quicker decision-making. Try adding a proposal expiration date.

Understanding the psychology of selling is about more than just closing deals; it's about creating meaningful connections and addressing the underlying needs and desires of your customers. By leveraging emotional triggers, cognitive biases, trust-building techniques, and the principles of scarcity and urgency, salespeople can enhance their effectiveness and build lasting customer relationships.

Incorporate these psychological insights into your sales strategy, and you'll not only see an increase in conversions but also foster a loyal customer base that values your genuine approach. Remember, the best salespeople aren't just selling products and services—they're selling experiences, solutions, and emotions. 



With 30 years of experience owning event planning, high-end catering, and design and décor companies, Meryl Snow is on a mission to help businesses get on their own path to success. As a Senior Consultant for [Certified Catering Consultants](#) and a Senior Consultant & Sales Trainer for [SnowStorm Solutions](#), Meryl travels throughout North America training clients in the areas of sales, marketing, design, and branding. As a valued industry speaker, she speaks with groups from the heart with warmth and knowledge and covers the funny side of life and business.

The premier awards recognizing the finest work in catering & special events worldwide



catersource® + THE SPECIAL EVENT™

ACE Gala AWARDS

Start working on
your entries today!
DEADLINE EXTENDED:
OCTOBER 31, 2024



The ACE and Gala Awards
will be presented during
Catersource + The Special Event,
February 24-27 in Fort Lauderdale.

Find all the details at
ace-gala.awardsplatform.com

catersource®

**SPECIAL
EVENTS**

All About Ombre



Visually stunning layered cocktails are grabbing the attention of guests

In the world of mixology, trends come and go, but some manage to capture our imaginations and tantalize our taste buds in ways that leave a lasting impact. One such trend taking the cocktail scene by storm is the visually stunning and deliciously layered ombre cocktail. As vibrant and picturesque as a sunset, these gradient drinks are as much a feast for the eyes (turn to page 44 for more on that) as they are for the palate.

“Ombre cocktails captivate guests because they offer a visual feast even before the first sip,” says Chris Sanchez (LUX Catering & Events*). “The gradient effect creates a sense of wonder and anticipation, making the drink feel more special and celebratory. In an era dominated by social media, these visually stunning drinks are highly photogenic, making them perfect for sharing and generating buzz.”

The anatomy of ombre

Ombre, derived from the French word meaning “shaded,” perfectly describes these cocktails that showcase a beautiful transition of colors within a single glass. The key to their striking appearance lies in the careful layering of ingredients with varying densities.

Typically, bartenders start with the heaviest ingredient at the bottom and gradually build up to the lightest, creating a seamless gradient effect. However, there are actually two other ways to layer a cocktail: floats and sinkers, whereas a float is a stripe of liquid (whether wine, spirit, bitters, or juice) that is carefully applied to the surface of a completed drink, while a sinker (also poured in last) falls to the bottom of the glass due to the ingredient’s weight and density.



This Joy at Sunset layered beverage is a hybrid of gently infused colors and flavors, with magenta prickly pear purée topping a layer of blood orange lemonade, which tops a layer of roasted pineapple horchata flecked with piloncillo; all covering small chunks of roasted pineapple and an additional splash of prickly pear purée waiting to be discovered at the bottom of the glass. Photo courtesy George Lomas Photography on Instagram @glomaspotos via *Flavor & The Menu*

Here's a basic formula to get you started:

1. Base Layer: Begin with a thick, sugary syrup. Think of options like grenadine or blue curaçao.

2. Middle Layer: Choose a juice or mixer that is slightly less dense than the syrup. Orange juice or pineapple juice work well, providing both color contrast and a flavor bridge between the layers. These juices sit perfectly in the middle, adding bright and vibrant colors to the mix.

3. Top Layer: Finish with a liqueur, spirit, or a lighter mixer. Vodka, gin, or even sparkling water can cap off the drink, often adding a final pop of color. These are lighter and can be floated on top to complete the beautiful gradient effect.

One classic example is the Tequila Sunrise, in which red grenadine sinks beneath a mix of tequila and orange juice, giving the drink the picturesque effect hinted at in the name.

Color craze

Vibrant and contrasting colors work best for ombre cocktails. Think: comforting pastels, vivid hues, warming orange-reds, soft earthy greens, and darker brooding blends. The key is to choose colors that transition smoothly while remaining distinct.

“Colors that exist on the same side of the color wheel tend to do better for ombre cocktails,” says Matt Foster (Culinary Canvas). “Strictly speaking, ombre cocktails are those whose colors gradually bleed into each other, if not being the same color and just gradually changing from darker to lighter shades.” ([Check out the summer issue of *Special Events* magazine](#) for a deep dive into color theory.)

Create a signature ombre cocktail that matches the event's color scheme or

theme. For example, a beach wedding could feature a blue-to-green ombre cocktail reminiscent of ocean waves, while a fall corporate event might offer a rich, amber gradient drink.

Setting the scene

Incorporating ombre cocktails into a catered event is a surefire way to elevate the experience, making it memorable for guests and setting a vibrant tone for the occasion.

“In today's influencer-driven world, where aesthetics are paramount, bringing the ombre cocktail trend into events is a great way to add an element of sophistication and novelty,” says Sanchez.

Themed bars

Creating an ombre cocktail station where guests can watch the layering process adds an interactive and engaging element to the event. Decorate the bar with ombre-themed elements like gradient backdrops, glassware, and even napkins to reinforce the theme. Or how about a DIY ombre cocktail station where guests can create their own layered drinks? Provide a selection of syrups, juices, and spirits along with clear instructions on how to layer them. This interactive element is both fun and educational, allowing guests to engage with the mixology process.

Pre-mixed options

For larger events, consider having pre-mixed ombre cocktails ready to serve. This ensures that the drinks maintain their perfect layers and reduces wait times at the bar. Display these pre-made drinks on a stylish, tiered stand to showcase their beauty.

“The gradient effect creates a sense of wonder and anticipation, making the drink feel more special and celebratory.” —Chris Sanchez

“From an execution point of view, having simple recipes that your team can easily batch and execute will help ensure the fun themes and ideas aren't lost in the experience,” says Foster.

Tasting flights

Offer tasting flights of mini ombre cocktails. This allows guests to sample a variety of flavors and colors in smaller portions. It's an excellent way to introduce your guests to different combinations and encourage them to try something new.

While the visual appeal of ombre cocktails is their most immediate draw, their layered construction also allows for a dynamic tasting experience. As you sip, the flavors evolve, each layer bringing something new to the palate. This gradual unveiling of tastes keeps each sip interesting and encourages a slower, more mindful drinking experience.

Also ensure that the flavors of the ombre cocktail complement the event's menu. For instance, a citrusy ombre cocktail can pair beautifully with seafood appetizers, while a berry-toned drink might complement a rich chocolate dessert.

The perfect pour

For those eager to impress guests with their mixology skills, creating ombre cocktails is a fun and rewarding endeavor. Here are a few tips to ensure your creations are both beautiful and delicious:

This Ombre Pink Grapefruit & Rose Champagne Cocktail features grapefruit juice, rose water, rose petals, champagne, and agave syrup. Photo courtesy @Thehungrywarrior



This Harmony-Colada (from Eet by Maneet) is a vibrant twist on the traditional piña colada showcasing delicious, colorful layers inspired by the Pride flag. Photo courtesy Eet by Maneet



This Blackberry Champagne Cocktail features fresh blackberry syrup, champagne, and rosemary. Photo courtesy The Cookie Rookie

LEMON OLEO, ROSEMARY, AND BUTTERFLY PEA FLOWER COCKTAIL

Recipe courtesy Matt Foster (Culinary Canvas); Photo courtesy RJ Hartbeck



ingredients

- 1 oz lemon oleo (lemon peel-infused sugar syrup)
- 2 oz gin
- 1 oz fresh lemon juice
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- ½ oz butterfly pea flower tea (steeped and chilled)
- Ice
- Club soda
- Rosemary sprig for garnish

method

1. Prepare Lemon Oleo: Peel three to four lemons, avoiding the white pith. Combine the lemon peels with 1 cup of sugar in a sealed container. Let it sit for at least 24 hours until the sugar has dissolved into a syrup infused with lemon oils.
2. Steep Butterfly Pea Flower Tea: Steep 1 T of butterfly pea flowers in ½ cup of hot water for five minutes. Strain and chill the tea.
3. Make the cocktail: In a cocktail shaker, muddle the fresh rosemary sprig to release its oils. Add the lemon oleo, gin, fresh lemon juice, and ice to the shaker. Shake vigorously for about 15 seconds.
4. Assemble the drink: Strain the mixture into a tall glass filled with ice. Gently pour the butterfly pea flower tea over the back of a spoon to create a layered effect. Top with a splash of club soda for a bit of fizz.
5. Garnish with a sprig of rosemary.

- **Use clear glassware:** The right glassware enhances the visual impact of ombre cocktails. To fully showcase the ombre effect, serve your drinks in tall, clear glasses like highballs or Collins glasses.
- **Lighting matters:** Proper lighting can amplify the beauty of ombre cocktails. Strategically place soft, ambient lighting around the bar area to highlight the drinks. LED coasters or light-up drink stirrers can add an extra layer of visual interest, especially for evening events.
- **Pour slowly:** When adding each layer, pour slowly over the back

of a spoon to help the liquids float rather than mix.

- **Experiment with colors:** Don't be afraid to play with different juices, liqueurs, and spirits to create unique color combinations.
- **Temperature control:** Colder liquids are denser, so chilling the components can help maintain distinct layers.

In the end, the allure of ombre cocktails lies in their perfect blend of beauty and taste. These cocktails bring a splash of color and a touch of elegance that will make your event truly unforgettable.

“Ombre and layered cocktails are more than just drinks; they are an experience,” says Sanchez. “They embody the perfect blend of art and mixology, delighting the senses both visually and taste-wise. Incorporating these into events not only elevates the beverage menu but also enhances the overall aesthetic and ambiance, making any occasion unforgettable.”

Cheers! 

* LUX Catering & Events is a proud member of the [Leading Caterers of America](#), a consortium of the top catering and event planners throughout the United States and Canada.

CATERING TO DIVERSITY

BY AMBER KISPERT



The dress is one of the most important details of a quinceañera, much like a wedding. Photo courtesy Pixel Studios LLC



Fifteen & Fabulous:

Essential Tips for a Flawless Quinceañera

A quinceañera is a significant milestone in a young girl's life, marking her transition from childhood to womanhood on her 15th birthday.

"This event is not just a birthday party; it is a rite of passage that blends heritage, faith, and community—making it one of the most cherished celebrations in a young woman's life," says LeAnn Cammarata (Martin's Caterers). "Also, given that we are a land of immigrants and some of these young ladies were born in this country, it is through this celebration that they can embrace their heritage and share their culture with their peers."

One of the most essential components of a successful quinceañera is the catering. Providing a memorable and delicious dining experience can set the tone for the entire event, ensuring that guests leave with fond memories of the celebration. As the celebration's centerpiece, the catering satisfies the palate and enhances the event's cultural significance.

"The menu for a quinceañera carries significant cultural importance, reflecting traditions and values cherished by Latin

American families celebrating this milestone event," says Cammarata.

From traditional Latin American dishes to modern culinary fusions, quinceañera catering offers a diverse array of options that can be tailored to reflect the unique tastes and preferences of the guest of honor and her family.

"It's important to bring some special touches that are part of the families' memories already," says Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events*), "but then also to weave new and exciting elements into the story and menu that will surprise and delight the guests and the family."

Where food and family come together

A quinceañera is more than a birthday party; it is a significant cultural milestone that is steeped in rich customs, blending elements of Spanish, Aztec, and Catholic heritage. Quinceañeras are deeply rooted in Latin American culture and are often accompanied by vibrant festivities, family traditions, and elaborate

ceremonies; the celebration typically begins with a Mass, followed by a reception filled with music, dancing, and an elaborate dinner.

"I think that the small details and traditions that go into the timeline of a quinceañera are super special," says Kornel Grygo (Tasty Catering*). "Although some may feel dated, it's still a nice way to honor your culture."

"The girls work really hard on their parties," adds Carmen Davila-Hernandez (Events by Carmen). "There are so many traditions that are passed down from year to year."

Each element of the quinceañera, from the gown to the décor, is imbued with symbolism, and the food is no exception.

In many cultures, especially in Latin American communities, food is a big deal. It's a way of sharing love, showcasing heritage, and bringing people together. At a quinceañera, each dish tells a story, each flavor carries a tradition. Whether it's a beloved family recipe or a modern twist on a classic dish, the food at a quinceañera reflects the guest of honor's taste and her family's roots. It's all about creating a connection between the food and the significance of the

quinceañera. It's where your clients can truly showcase their heritage, their tastes, and create a memorable dining experience.

"We often see how many of our clients try to preserve their culture with the food," says Davila-Hernandez.

Connection to roots

The menu typically includes traditional Latin American dishes that connect guests to the cultural roots of the honoree and her family. These dishes may vary based on regional culinary traditions, such as Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, or others, but they all serve to reinforce cultural identity and pride. This is where things like family recipes become so vital.

One dish that is sure to be on any quinceañera menu is empanadas.

"All Latin countries have an empanada that is specific to their country and one that each family makes," says Selden. "We always include one on the menu and this is specifically the item we like to get the family recipe for."

Honoring guests

Food plays a central role in bringing together family and friends to celebrate. The communal aspect of sharing a meal during the quinceañera signifies unity and strengthens social bonds within the community.

Serving a variety of dishes often demonstrates hospitality and respect for guests attending the celebration. It is a way of expressing gratitude for their presence and participation in this special event.

"A meticulously planned menu that includes Latin specialties not only highlights our respect and appreciation for their culture

but also reflects our dedication to mastering the preparation of these dishes," says Cammarata. "Food holds a deeply personal significance, serving as a meaningful way to connect with our clients and demonstrate our commitment to making their event exceptional."

Fusion fare

While traditional dishes are essential, modern interpretations and [fusion cuisines](#) may also be incorporated to appeal to diverse tastes and preferences, reflecting the evolving cultural landscape of Latin American communities.

When approaching traditional dishes like tamales, enchiladas, mole, and carnitas, authenticity is paramount. However, modern quinceañeras may also incorporate fusion dishes or international flavors to reflect the diverse tastes of the guest list.

For a modern twist, consider incorporating fusion dishes that blend traditional Hispanic flavors with other cuisines. Think of dishes like chipotle-glazed pork chops, or cilantro-lime shrimp skewers. These contemporary options can add an exciting and unexpected element to your menu.

By blending traditional Latin American flavors with contemporary culinary trends, caterers can create unique and exciting dishes that appeal to younger generations while respecting tradition.

"While we want to make sure traditions aren't lost," says Davila-Hernandez, "we see a more modern vibe emerging not only in décor but in menu selection as well. I think it's about focusing on how to make dinner not only a beautiful presentation but also appealing for teenagers."



When generations collide

Successful quinceañera catering requires close collaboration with the family. While the guest of honor may have one vision for her celebration, her parents may have a different idea in mind.

"I think the biggest challenge is understanding that we need to please adults and teenagers at the same time," says Davila-Hernandez.

Schedule a meeting with the guest of honor and her parents to gain an idea of what's important to them. What is the tone/vibe for the evening? Is it more traditional? Black tie or casual? What customs and traditions must be incorporated? Understanding both parties' vision and preferences is crucial.



“We approach things with a lot of diplomacy,” says Selden. “In the end the parents are our client and while we want the birthday girl to be super happy, we also want to build a great relationship with the parents as they will likely be entertaining in the future with graduation parties and potentially their daughter’s wedding one day. We are looking to make such delicious memories for them that they will be with us for the long haul and use us for all their catering needs.”

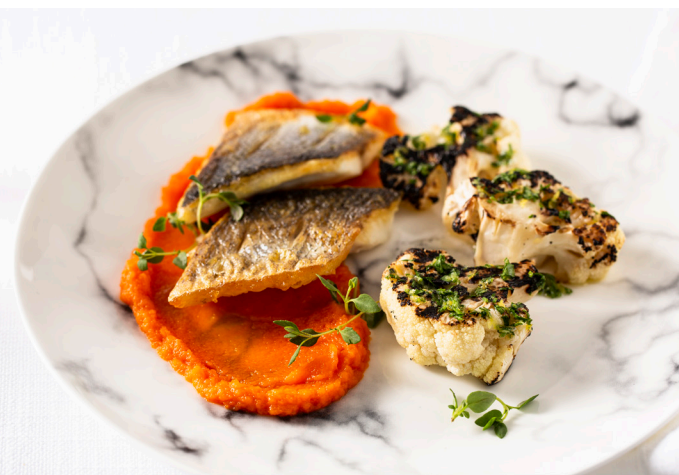
YOLO

There’s a growing emphasis on creating unique, personalized experiences that reflect the honoree’s personality and preferences. From bespoke menus that incorporate the honoree’s favorite dishes to themed food stations that mirror the event’s color scheme and motif, customization helps create a unique and memorable experience.

“It’s a challenge reeling in the birthday girl’s vision while still giving her an amazing event,” says Selden. “We need to put into perspective that while this will be extravagant and special, there still is a budget to work within. It’s our job to balance those expectations.”

For example, most teenagers do not want to be seated formally at tables of 10 and instead want to have the ability to dance and be social. This is where interactive food stations, passed hors d’oeuvres, and even small plates work well. Think of interactive food stations like a churro bar where guests can choose their own toppings and sauces, a taco or fajita bar, and even a build-your-own [mocktail](#) or sangria station.

“This assortment ensures a vibrant and delicious experience, allowing everyone to enjoy the rich flavors of [Latin] cuisine tailored to their liking,” says Grygo.



(Above) Every quinceañera shines with a stunning cake at its center. Whether the guest of honor opts for a traditional tiered masterpiece or a modern, artistic creation, the cake is more than just a dessert; it’s a symbol of their journey into young adulthood. Photo courtesy quinceañera.com; (Middle) Pan seared branzino with grilled chimichurri cauliflower and brown butter sweet potato mash from Marcia Selden Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Julie Bidwell Photography; (Left) Mini chicken empanadas with savory tomato sofrito and micro cilantro from Marcia Selden Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Jenae Weinbrenner Photo & Video



“This event is not just a birthday party; it is a rite of passage that blends heritage, faith, and community—making it one of the most cherished celebrations in a young woman's life.”

—LeAnn Cammarata

Food trucks are also becoming more commonplace at quinceañeras. Additionally, **themed** quinceañeras are trending and the theme of the quinceañera can easily be a great starting point for catering. For example, a tropical-themed quinceañera could feature a tiki bar with exotic mocktails and a seafood station with fresh displays.

Quinceañeras are also known for their grandeur and visual appeal. Invest in elegant presentation styles, thematic décor, and vibrant plating techniques that align with the event's color schemes and themes.

“Once we have the main menu determined, we look at ways we can bring bright colors to life,” says Grygo. “These elements not only add a pop of color but also enhance the festive atmosphere of the event.”

Lucrative business

Quinceañeras offer a unique and lucrative opportunity for caterers to expand their services and tap into a vibrant cultural market.

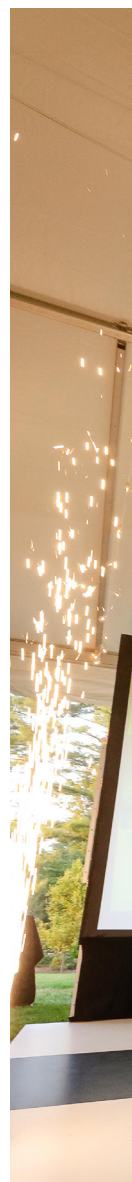
“These events are not only known for their high dollar value and profitability but also for their deep family significance,” says Cammarata.

So, what makes quinceañeras such profitable business?

High demand for comprehensive services

Families often seek full-service catering that includes not only food and beverages but also event planning, décor, and entertainment coordination. Offering a one-stop solution can significantly boost your appeal.

“This market not only offers immediate financial benefits but also establishes long-term relationships and potential for continued business growth with clients as they celebrate additional milestones in their lives,” says Cammarata.





Cultural significance and willingness to spend

Quinceañeras typically have a large guest count and a sizable budget, making them lucrative events for caterers. They occur year-round, providing opportunities to fill in slower seasons.

Additionally, given the importance of this milestone, families are often willing to invest significantly in making the event memorable, and high-quality culturally appropriate catering is a key part of this.


If you're interested in bringing quinceañeras into your portfolio of services, make sure to do your research up front.

"Be sensitive to the specific cultural traditions as each family within each country will have different customs and traditions that are important to them," says Selden.

Here's a tip for success: Ensure your information is available in both English and Spanish, and use a native speaker for translations, as AI translations can sometimes be inaccurate. If possible, hire bilingual staff members to better serve your diverse clientele.

"These language barriers can sometimes pose challenges," says Cammarata.

Catering for quinceañeras offers a substantial growth opportunity for your business. As the industry continues to evolve, those who master the delicate balance of authenticity and innovation will set the standard for unforgettable quinceañeras.

"The careful balance of tradition and celebration ensures that the event is not only a milestone but also an unforgettable experience for the honoree and their guests," says Cammarata. 

** Marcia Selden Catering & Events and Tasty Catering are both proud members of the [Leading Caterers of America](#) (a consortium of the top catering and event planners throughout the United States and Canada) as well as the [International Caterers Association](#).*



(Clockwise from top left) Marcia Selden Catering & Events offers a Taco Station that features various toppings including assorted salsas, grilled corn salad, and jicama slaw. Photo courtesy Kari Otero Photography; During the quinceañera, the guest of honor will often dance the traditional waltz with either their father or a young escort called the chambelán; event by Marcia Selden Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Jenae Weinbrenner Photo & Video; Themed entertainment (such as a live mariachi band) can add a touch of fun to any quinceañera. Photo courtesy Tasty Catering; Quinceañeras are known for their grandeur and visual appeal, which is why elegant presentation styles, thematic décor, and vibrant plating techniques are essential. Photo courtesy Pixel Studios LLC



A Feast for the Eyes

When you ponder art, the first works that come to mind are probably paintings, photography, and sculptures. With food there is a growing trend toward “edible art,” which moves beyond sustenance and puts the focus on presentation. Edible art, the practice of creating artistic displays using food, transcends traditional culinary boundaries, turning ordinary ingredients into extraordinary visual masterpieces. Today, caterers and chefs are harnessing their artistic talents to create visually stunning and Instagram-worthy dishes that leave a lasting impression on guests. —*Amber Kispert*



Garden Mosaic of edible flowers & blossoms, micro lettuce & spring vegetables | Photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering



Dessert inspired by Picasso's cubist style (gilded chocolate cubes and Valencia orange gelée) | Photo courtesy Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth | Photo courtesy Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth



Potato Pear Croquettes | Elegant Affairs | Photo courtesy Elegant Affairs



(blossom water) served during
 een Elizabeth



Coconut Mousse with passionfruit, raspberry & mango coulis, crispy fruit salad, and shaved coconut
 Eatertainment Events & Catering | Photo courtesy Kennedy Pollard



(Above Left) **Chocoberry Sunset (Tainori Chocolate, Moelleux Cake, and Sea Buckthorn Berries)** | Luce (InterContinental San Francisco Hotel) | Photo courtesy InterContinental San Francisco Hotel;



(Above Right) **Earthen Rosebud (Beetroot, Rose, Concord, Yogurt, Jaguar Seeds)** | Luce (InterContinental San Francisco Hotel) | Photo courtesy InterContinental San Francisco Hotel



(Left) **"Things Aren't Always As They Seem,"** made with cheese molded to resemble summer fruits, pumpkinnickel "dirt," chocolate-covered "grasshoppers," edible "pebbles," and grilled bread. Blue Plate | Photo courtesy Blue Plate;
 (Above) **Árbol de Caramello (dark chocolate soufflé, crème fraîche gelato, Amarena cherry compote, and spun sugar)**
 MDRD (Amway Grand Plaza) | Photo courtesy Quinn PR