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EVENT CATERING
TREND REPORT

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Event catering has increasingly become an important component of live communication in recent years. A successful catering strengthens the experience-oriented staging of events, conveys brand messages and makes a decisive contribution to the success of events.

Culinary experiences express appreciation and hospitality, ensure well-being and enjoyment and are therefore remembered by the guests. Catering increasingly seamlessly fits into the event setting in terms of Integrated Brand Experiences, conveys topics and messages, and becomes a part of the brand presentation.

“We event catering as a component of multisensory event concepts is becoming increasingly important.”

(Prof. Dr. Cornelia Zanger, Chemnitz University of Technology)

A professional and modern event catering allows the addressing of (gustatory) senses that can hardly be reached through other elements and ensures a unique position of the event catering sector. That results in intensive, holistic brand experiences that cause long-term positive memories of the event and the brand.

This report examines future trends in the event catering area. Such trends are primarily medium-term processes of change that are characterised by people’s life experiences and can be noticed in the consumer and product worlds. That however also applies to short-term trends that are not only of a modern nature and reinforced by media influence but also reflect sociocultural and value change processes.

Major social trends that are often very lifestyle-oriented are addressed in event catering. That is evident, for example, in the organic food and health trends or popular street food concepts.

The trend report is based on a comprehensive secondary analysis and a focus group discussion with members of the Leading Caterer Association (LECA). The leading experts contributed with relevant experience, their expert knowledge and their feel for the sector and that allowed major developments and priorities to be discussed and assessed in terms of their importance for the sector.
In summary, the following event catering trends could be identified:

- Catering is no longer just a tasty accessory for events but instead contributes its own catering concepts to event design. That also means that the conceptual expectations from the event catering will further increase over the next few years.

- Event catering must have a feel for lifestyle and developments in society as a whole, translate them into catering concepts and creatively present them. Street food concepts inspired by international hotspot experiences, for example, currently play a major role in event catering.

- Younger generations introduce new nutritional habits and consumption patterns that also have an impact on catering.

- Against this backdrop, sustainability and local produce as requirements in event catering are not just a short-lived craze but will instead also be an important trend in the coming years.

- Healthy nutrition will also be ‘in’ in the coming years and will, under the healthy food heading, be the basis of another trend that will shape event catering in the future.

- An extraordinary presentation of the food and drinks is expected from event catering. The presentation of the food even often has its own event character.

- The digitalisation trend will increasingly reach event catering as well. Processes in the planning and quotation stages could become completely digitalised in the next few years. Customer integration will also be increasingly handled through online channels. This trend is also primarily pushed by younger generations whose lifestyle is more strongly characterised by digital business models.

- The need for event caterers to increase their own efficiency is a challenge that must be overcome in the next few years by having qualified staff and a holistic process management.

The following information summarises the results of the analysis and allows a more in-depth examination of future event catering trends.
2 Concept Catering and Major Food Trends

2.1 Concept-Catering
As already stated in the introduction, catering presentation today plays a decisive role within the scope of Integrated Brand Experiences. The integration of catering into the overall concept of an event is becoming increasingly important and the multisensory experience is becoming a highlight of successful events and an objective for companies and agencies.

The development and implementation of multisensory event concepts involve great demands on, and require a professional cooperation by all partners. Event catering allows brand messages to be delivered in a new, often surprising, context. The story behind an event is becoming an increasingly important element. The creative story is the golden thread of an event, actively involves visitors and is also reflected by the event catering.

“Catering supports the brand message within the scope of the overall communication mission.”
(Farroch Radjeh, FR Catering)

Event catering, in terms of the concept catering approach, is clearly becoming an important part of the event presentation, in which not only major social trends are addressed and translated into the ‘language of event catering’ but also brand-specific requirements are taken into account. They support a clear brand positioning and characterise the brand image of a company or an event.

2.2 Presentation of Food Trends
Catering concepts often live from the presentation of current social developments. The trends originate from a change in daily life and lifestyle that involves a high degree of mobility and spontaneity. This lifestyle often means dissociation from traditional nutrition patterns. Vegan or meat-containing food, convenience or slow food, takeaway or home cooking. The ‘conscious consumption’ topic is also gaining increasing importance in this connection. Fair, local and sustainable.

Especially the younger generation tries to give consumption a meaning and increasingly questions its own behaviour in terms of moral and ethical values. That however does not mean that behaviour is always consistent.
There are also spontaneous decisions based on ‘here and now’ and price aspects. However, a growing trend towards more quality and sustainability is increasingly evident. A strong lifestyle orientation is a further aspect.

This development results in a very important trend that focuses on sustainability and local produce. Both topics increasingly play a role in people’s daily life and will also become important topics for the event catering sector.

**Sustainability and Local Produce**

The sustainability term is not clearly defined. Terms such as local produce, bio, organic, Fairtrade, vegetarian, vegan, health, etc. are associated with these topics.

Within the scope of the held focus group discussion, sustainability and local produce were also important trends that cause great efforts in the event catering sector. Both topic areas were interconnected with aspects of the trade and craft production, the local origin of the products, and craft or home-made products, such as jams or lemonades. A return to passion, traditional production and preparation can also be noticed. Cooperation with local producers and producer cooperatives, domestic farming and large-scale abstinence from industrial convenience products reflect these values. A further aspect is the catering presentation that emphasises sustainability and local or traditional production.

Behind this effort, there is also the wish of customers and companies for more ‘back to basics’, a trend away from very big ‘high-gloss events’. Companies thus position themselves close to sustainability values and incorporate them in holistic brand experiences.

Event catering thus shows a high demand that is oriented towards social values and lifestyle. That however simultaneously results in great challenges, for example, in terms of pricing and competitiveness of sustainable offers. Due to these high demands by companies and guests, the event catering sector continues to be faced with a great balancing act.

Overall, it can however be assumed that the trend will be reinforced in the future and the awareness and acceptance of the trend will increase.
This assumption is especially justified by the fact that the established nutritional and consumption habits among the younger generations, also include vegetarian or vegan alternatives.

The sustainability trend however involves further issues. For example, trust in the taste and quality of vegetarian and vegan catering offers is often still missing and companies and agencies therefore prefer to stick to proven catering. The offer thus remains a niche right now but the trend is unstoppable according to experts.

“Vegan. That would be a trend for the next five years. If someone is really good at it..., I’d say that’s something to roll out in five years’ time.” (Georg W. Broich, Broich Premium Catering)

Furthermore, the sustainability idea not only involves terms like ‘organic’ and ‘fair’, which predominantly reflect a customer-oriented view. For catering insiders, it is also about quality seals and certificates that prove the origin of the products, integrative workplaces, apprenticeships, environmental management, etc. Against this backdrop, a strong mission statement to include sustainability is becoming increasingly necessary to allow companies and agencies a transparent tracking of the value-added processes and convey sustainability values to the outside world. The aim is to increase sensitivity to, and awareness of, the topic, which will strengthen the acceptance and appreciation of the offers, particularly among the younger target groups.

**Themed Catering**

Besides the overriding sustainability trend, there are also very different developments that are strongly oriented towards lifestyle and at the same time have an ’in’ character. They are therefore overall characterised by more short-termness and spontaneity but also indicate current and future trends in event catering. They however also partly reflect both sustainable and health-oriented trends which support the central trend.
Both the focus group discussion and the secondary analysis revealed very different event catering trends that on one hand are based on specific food and its (international) origin and on the other hand particularly focus on the presentation of the offer.

Of particular importance was the street food trend that captures the setting of, sometimes exotic, metropolises and applies it to event catering.

Inspirations from international hotspots result in street food concepts that reflect the current eating culture and express the zeitgeist. On one hand, these concepts take into account the above-described sustainability aspects in terms of high quality and craft or home-made products and, on the other hand, the special ambience creates a very casual and relaxed atmosphere that supports the networking among the guests and introduces 'Leisure Fine Dining' to the event scene.

Many food trends in everyday life can also often be found in event catering and thus convey a casual lifestyle to company and work environments. An example is the lifestyle world of coffee with its baristas – mobile coffee bars strike a chord and bring street food flair to events.

Another central trend is determined by health and allergy topics. Healthy nutrition is 'in' and, under the healthy food heading, expresses a lifestyle and attitude towards life. Almost forgotten food with a high health potential and new taste experiences is enjoying a renaissance in green smoothies, drinks or desserts.

“A healthy diet, where the products come from and how they are reinterpreted are becoming increasingly important aspects.”
(Natascha Müllerschön, Rauschenberger Catering)

Although the health trend predominantly remains in a niche, it shows the lived individualism of society. The demographic change additionally promotes these developments so that a growth in the healthy food segment can be expected in the coming years. That particularly
results from the fact that the eating habits of people are today much more health-orientated. Food is increasingly directly associated with health.

The healthy food trend in event catering is therefore primarily an expression of social lifestyle and supports the presentation and styling as part of events according to the interviewed experts.

The themed catering segment increasingly covers exotic country presentations that copy the Israeli, Mexican, Asian, Taiwanese or Hawaiian cuisine and reinterpret foreign lifestyles.

**Creation, Presentation and Development of Trends**

The great importance of Integrated Brand Experiences focusing on the creation of holistic brand experiences was already mentioned above. That is why the trend is to present catering as extraordinary as possible. The presentation of the food often has an event character itself.

The experts then often work with show kitchen concepts in cooperation with TV or star-rated chefs that make catering particularly tangible and communicate and show sustainability and local produce as strong lifestyle trends.

Particularly important in this connection is the presentation of trends as a part of storytelling and their integration in the overall concept in accordance with the concept catering approach.

Instruments that additionally support the presentation of trends are also very important for event catering. Relevant in this context are the location, the ambience, the furniture and the decoration.

The presentation and the overall picture are equally supported by elements that capture major social trends from different areas and transfer them to the event catering. Accordingly, ideas come from, for example,
shop concepts in the retail or fashion sector, social media (e.g. Pinterest, Instagram), international restaurants and cafés. Creative presentations offering extraordinary experiences and unforgettable moments are also produced in coordination with agencies that are in constant search for new presentation ideas.

Highlights in the presentation of food trends are, for example, pop-up restaurants which capture phenomena that especially represent the zeitgeist for a limited period of time. That often addresses younger target groups that are very open to new, sustainable, or health-oriented food trends. This concept is therefore ideal for introducing one’s own catering company, presenting current food and lifestyle trends and for setting and strengthening new trends.

For the creation and adaptation of trends, the interviewed experts pursue very different strategies. Whilst some companies very much act as trendsetters, others deliberately stick to specified agency concepts, adopt trends, change them or develop them further. Especially the inspiration from international trends requires a special feel for the scene, the lifestyle and the assessment of the possibilities of transferring different concepts, lifestyles and consumption styles to event catering. Last but not least, it also needs a good amount of courage to watch, test and introduce new trends to the market and thus influence, enthuse and push the sector with new trends. England, especially London, seems to be an interesting source of inspiration for catering ideas.

2.3 Business Processes and Digitalisation
Besides the conceptualisation and presentation of food trends, changes in communications with customers and an efficient design of business processes will in the future be vital topics for the sector. In the coming years, digitalisation will become a major aspect for increasing demands on organisers and event agencies, especially in the planning and decision-making stages of an event. Workflows within corporate business processes can be optimised on this basis at the same time.
Digital Customer Service

Digitalisation and its integration into event catering concepts were given much attention in the expert discussion, which emphasises the importance of the topic for the sector. The fact that digitalisation increasingly determines people’s life and hence also increasingly shapes the work environment also played an important part in the discussion. The digitalisation of interfaces with the customer will therefore be very important in the future.

According to the experts, the digitalisation of processes will initially be relevant for the planning and quotation stages in the coming years. Direct communication processes with customers will then have to be integrated as a next step.

Nowadays, digital pioneers already offer planning tools that allow the sector to compile and calculate quotations for an all-in event catering – ranging from the location to the ambience – without personal contact with the service and sales team. That offers event agencies the possibility of receiving a quick and direct response to quotation enquiries – a great advantage in the fast-moving event business.

This development is also supported by an increasing professionalisation in customer relationship management (CRM). CRM systems will in the future find even greater usage in the sector to optimise the customer-oriented design of catering concepts.

Service and advice and an emotional addressing and communication between the partners continue to play a vital role in event catering according to the experts. That especially applies to the planning of highly individualised premium catering within the scope of holistic branding. Digital platforms will however be indispensable in the future, especially for the planning of largely standardised events, conferences or employee meetings.
The development of innovative digital business models can be expected in the coming years due to the increasing digitalisation trend. Their impact on the sector is however currently difficult to foresee.

“The light at the end of the tunnel cannot be seen yet. We have the disruption topic in other sectors. That has not even arrived here yet.” (Georg W. Broich, Broich Premium Catering)

The number of start-up companies such as ‘CATERWINGS’ or ‘LEMONCAT’ is already growing noticeably in the catering sector. Renowned investors such as Rocket Internet are investing in this segment.

Against this backdrop, business models that are aimed at sharing-economy concepts can also be expected in the event catering sector. The degree of individualisation of the processes will also grow so that even less standardised concepts will become feasible with digital platforms. Conceivable here is the development of recommendation / service assistants that fully support the quotation process for producing a precise, individual quotation for the customer. The focus here is on a high level of modularity so that quotations can be produced from various modules compiled to create a complete package.
Efficient Business Processes

Cooperation with location providers or furniture lenders will also be necessary for that. Especially findings from different surveys show that single-source, all-in packages are becoming increasingly important to event agencies and companies. The digitalisation of environments and the 'here and now' expectations that primarily younger generations have also clearly require the development of holistic platforms in this area.

Efficient Business Models

Higher expectations for productivity that can be noticed across all sectors and entail new requirements for business processes can also be seen in event catering. In this connection, the interviewed experts from event catering companies see themselves faced with the need to increase their own efficiency. However, as the above-mentioned trends also show, there is also a demand for an increasing individualisation of offers. According to the interviewed experts, business processes will become much leaner in the tension between efficiency and individuality.

A major aspect in this connection is also a process organisation in the background. That includes, for example, workflows both in logistics and directly in the kitchen. The experts are convinced that the processes will become increasingly professional, also due to the use of lean management methods, so that a high standardisation of in-house processes can be achieved whilst the greatest possible individuality on 'stage' is simultaneously maintained. Developments from abroad are often interesting.

“America is a good example of how big catering companies manage to give the impression of providing highly individual offers although their organisational structure is based on food service with standardised structures.” (Natascha Müllerschön, Rauschenberger Catering)

According to the experts, the digital mapping of business processes will also increase the transparency within the organisation, reduce sources of error and finally result in a higher process quality. Digital planning tools will, for example, be increasingly used for the staff assignment in order to offer all service staff maximum transparency and thus avoid mistakes that can, for example, be made as a result of inconsistent staffing plans.
In summary, the trend report shows an assessment of the developments in the event catering sector and puts a special focus on players in the premium segment. The secondary analysis and the held focus group discussion gave an overall clear picture of future trends in the sector. On one hand, they concentrate on the presentation of food trends and, on the other hand, elaborate on developments in terms of digitalisation and process optimisation opportunities.

It became evident that the developments overall primarily range between individualisation and effectiveness. The required starting point is to integrate event catering into the overall event concept as a part of Integrated Brand Experiences and thus create perfectly presented multisensory worlds of brands.

Of central importance in this context is the expectation of a very strong lifestyle orientation that addresses social developments and trends. The trend is primarily towards sustainability and local produce and increasing health awareness. Especially with a view to the younger generations, topics like ‘conscious consumption’ and ‘healthy food’ are gaining increasing importance and acceptance.

In respect of specific food trends, it was evident that the sector is very fast-moving and characterised by relatively short-lived fads. It was therefore generally possible to describe currently relevant trends quite well but future trends were often not foreseeable or tangible.

Main discussion topics were, for example, street food in combination with a general lifestyle orientation, healthy food and international orientation with Israeli or Mexican cuisine. Interesting new trends can be well adapted on an international basis, for which, for example, London is an important think tank.

Major developments became evident again with a look at the event catering presentation topic. That supported the finding that above all the overall concept, combined with a suitable story, is decisive for the success of an event. The main focus for the event catering sector is therefore the presentation of central lifestyle topics.
A very intensive discussion covered digitalisation, new digital business models and optimization of in-house processes. These developments will in the future also be brought into every corner of new company and work environments.

Against this backdrop, it is even conceivable to use the LECA as a starting point for a joint digital platform. Joint objectives, especially strong external communications and visibility, with high quality standards and the in-house exploitation of synergy effects could be implemented by using a joint planning and reservation tool. That would simultaneously open up opportunities to optimise in-house business processes, an aspect that is also of high importance in the aforementioned tension between individualisation and effectiveness.

Today, the first pioneers in the sector are already using planning tools that perform the entire planning and calculation of largely standardised events and thus also achieve an invaluable time advantage in quotation production. Attention is also given to completely new business models that are based on the sharing-economy idea and holistic planning tools that cover location, catering, furniture and decoration and can also gradually take more individual requirements into account.
Event Catering Between
Individuality and Effectiveness

Presentation and Digitalisation
as Challenges

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