

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT CATERER FOR THE JOB!

Written for Catering Australia

Finding a Caterer for any event is an extremely important decision. Corporate, or private, large or small, choosing the **right** Caterer is imperative. There are many catering companies in the market so you need to do your homework and choose carefully in order to guarantee the success of your event. This article gives you a step-by-step guide to choosing the right Caterer along with a useful checklist.

Preparation

Before seeking a Caterer you need to think about your catering needs and gather together information that a Caterer will need to know:

- What is the time and date of the event?
- Do you have a budget in mind?
- Where is your event being held? (Or do you require a venue?)
- Is there a kitchen at the venue?
- How many guests are you expecting?
- Do any of your guests have special dietary requirements?
- Does your event have a theme?
- Do you desire a particular style of cuisine?
- Do you require decorations, flowers, table settings?
- Do you need to hire equipment? (Tables, chairs, linen, crockery etc)

Once you have answered these questions you will have a good idea of the services you will require. A great Caterer will offer a complete service to save your running around organising things separately. Having everything organised by one company will help your event run smoothly and cut down *your* workload.

Research

After you've completed your preparation it's time for some research. First you need to find some catering companies. The best way to do this is to seek recommendations. You can ask friends, family and colleagues. Or visit our [Caterers search](#) for a list of professionally recommended companies.

Now select a short-list of Caterers according to the needs you identified in your preparation. For example you may have identified that your venue doesn't have a kitchen, or that your guests have particular dietary concerns or that you need to hire equipment.

Once you have a list of a few Caterers contact them with a list of questions to make sure they are reputable and are able to handle your particular requirements.

What to look for

First and foremost, does the Caterer offer a range of menu options including the particular cuisine you are after? Most good Caterers will have detailed menu listings on their website. Failing this, you can contact the company and have this information emailed or faxed to you.

What type of function are you organising? Is it private or corporate, small or large, casual or formal, inside or outside? Whatever the case, ensure that your chosen Caterer can handle the type of function you are planning.

Make sure the Caterer is available on the day that you desire. (With no weekend or public holiday loading.) Also check that the Caterer has a 24 hour service and is contactable 7 days a week. Many events are held after hours or on weekends so it will be a great disadvantage and frustration if you can't contact your Caterer in the evening or on a Sunday morning when you suddenly think of something you need to discuss! And you certainly don't want to pay more for your catering just because your event isn't in business hours.

Does the Caterer provide their own waiting staff? Are the staff experienced in the style of event you are planning? Will they be professionally attired? Will the staff take care of everything from delivery and preparation to waiting and cleaning up afterwards?

According to the needs that you identified in your preparation, does the Caterer provide the equipment that you require? This may include tables, chairs, linen, crockery, glassware, cutlery or even ovens and a bar serving area. Make sure they are able to provide what you need so that you don't have to do additional running around after event hire. Also ensure that their equipment is new and in excellent condition. You don't want tatty linen and tarnished silverware to take the sparkle out of your event.

Perhaps you require a venue for your event? If so, a Caterer who can source a venue for you will save you time and have an established relationship with the venue. This will streamline the whole catering experience and make your life a lot easier!

If you plan a theme for your event, can the Caterer help you to achieve your desired atmosphere, from cuisine choices to decorations and table settings?

Where will the food be prepared? If your venue doesn't have a kitchen the Caterer will need to prepare and heat it at their premises and then deliver it ready to serve.

Can the Caterer organise beverages? There's a lot involved in the logistics if you need to do this yourself. First you need to physically purchase the drinks and then transport them to your venue. Then you need somewhere to store them and a method of keeping them cool. On the day you will need staff to serve the drinks along with a bar serving area, plus glasses etc. So if the Caterer doesn't handle anything to do with the drinks you've got a lot more tasks to add to your to-do-list.

Is the company an actual Caterer? (Not just a bakery or café). There is after all a lot more to catering than simply the food, so you need to select a Caterer who is familiar with all aspects of event catering.

For piece of mind, check that the company is a member of the Australian Catering Association. You can also ask for references. A good Caterer should have nothing to hide.

Ensure that the catering company you are considering has an actual premises and isn't just an online middleman. (In the case of the latter, you may have problems with food quality, accountability and find it difficult to contact the company.)

What payment methods does the company accept? Make sure they accept all forms, including credit card, and that there is no additional charge for using a credit. Be very wary of companies that will only accept cash. You have very little bargaining power should things go wrong.

Does the Caterer require a deposit? Almost all will, however the amount will vary considerably. The lower the deposit the better.

What is their cancellation policy? Can you get all your money back should the event be cancelled?

Do they have a postponement policy? Hopefully the Caterer can simply change the date. However some will charge a fee for this.

Here's a quick checklist to help you find the right Caterer:

1. Menu options – Do they have what you are looking for? (Including any special dietary requirements?)
2. Can they cater for your particular function? (Corporate, private etc)
3. Are they available on the day of your planned event?
4. Are they contactable 24/7?
5. Can they provide staff? Are the staff professional and experienced in your style of event?
6. Can they organise equipment hire? Is the equipment in good condition?
7. Can they arrange a venue for you if necessary?
8. If required, can they assist you with theming and decorations?
9. Are they flexible regarding food preparation if you have limited kitchen facilities?
10. Can the Caterer organise beverages?
11. Are they actual Caterers, rather than a bakery or café?
12. Are they a member of the Australian Catering Association?
13. Ask for references.
14. Does the Caterer have actual premises, not just an online reseller?
15. Do they accept all payment methods including credit?
16. Do they have a credit surcharge?
17. What deposit do they require?
18. What is their cancellation policy?
19. What is their postponement policy?

Get a Quote

Once you've gone through the above checklist and identified a reputable Caterer that can fulfill your requirements, it's time to get into the specifics and get a quote.

Good service Caterers generally have a well designed online form to submit for a quick quote which can make things easier and quicker for you. However you may prefer personal service so it's important that the Caterer you select is easy to contact.

In seeking a quote, it's helpful for the Caterer if you can advise a budget. That way, they can help you to design a menu based around what you can spend, how many guests you are expecting and what other services you require (such as staff and equipment for example.) A good Caterer has a wealth of knowledge and will most likely have some

inspired suggestions that may not have occurred to you simply from perusing their menu selections.

Once you settle on the food, staff, equipment, drinks, venue or anything else you require, ask for a detailed quote.

Ensure that the quote covers everything including tax and delivery so that you're not stung with hidden extras once you've committed to the Caterer.

Place your order!

Now you've conducted your initial preparation and research along with obtaining a detailed quote. If you're happy with the price and you've been through everything on the above checklist, it's time to place your order! And you can do so with the confidence of having chosen the *right* Caterer for the job!

[Click here](#) for a list of Caterers recommended by Catering Australia.

Featured Caterers:

[Catering on the Move](#)

Affordable catering for any function. A wide range of menus and a full set of services.

[Elizabeth Andrews](#)

Quality catering when money is no object.

[Impressive Platters](#)

A wide selection of delicious platters, ready to serve.