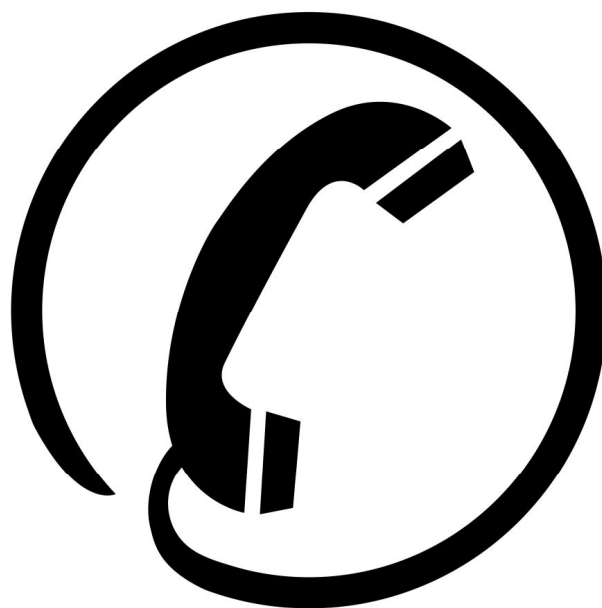


The Ultimate Telephone Training System for Catering Sales



By Michael Attias

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The Ultimate Telephone Training System for Catering Sales

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Introduction

Last year one of my clients brought me in to speak to their franchisees about catering. They wanted me to share how to sell and market catering with my low cost, high return strategies.

It is very easy to impress a crowd with a mailer that looks like an X-Ray that brought in over \$17,000 worth of catering from only twenty hospitals. I have many marketing rabbits up my sleeve that are both creative and effective.

When I came to the part of my presentation dealing with the phone, most attendees lost interest. There is nothing sexy about answering the phone. When I played an actual mystery shop call I performed, you could see people take notice. The person I shopped really flubbed the call.

I asked the franchisees a very simple question, "With you being at this meeting, if I were to call your store right now, do you have confidence your people would do a good job handling a catering call?"

One woman leapt up, "I know my people would do a great job. I've personally trained them."

I then proceeded to call her store, put it on speaker phone and mystery shop her store in front of her peers.

Not only was she embarrassed, but every franchisee came up to the franchisor afterwards asking to have a phone training system developed.

A few months ago I received a call from a gentleman who was the franchisor for a small, growing concept. He was interested in licensing our marketing materials to help his franchisees bring in more catering sales.

He was particularly interested in my phone scripts. I let him know that he could research our members only website, RestaurantProfitPoint.com and find lots of great telephone training material in the back issues of our newsletters.

Restaurant Catering Systems is far more than a catering software company. We are always seeking tools and services to help our clients find, book and keep more catering business. We are about to launch a catering phone line service which will record each incoming catering call. This will allow the owner or manager to audit calls for training purposes.

If you spend all of this money to get your catering phone to ring and

your staff forgets to up sell, doesn't capture contact info or drops the ball, you've wasted your ad dollars. Chances are you'll blame me or an ad rep for terrible marketing. You will rarely look inside.

This manual was developed to help you and your catering sales team do a better job answering phones, fielding questions and selling/up selling catering.

There are three parts to this system.

1. **Basics On Answering Your Phone:** This material was adapted from a phone training video I produced for my restaurant. The lessons are timeless and will give you a great overview of the basics.
2. **Menu Questions:** A few years back a regional pizza chain invited me in to speak to their operators about building catering sales. At the end of the presentation, I spent about an hour role playing different telephone scenarios. That transcript has been adapted to help you.
3. **Advanced Telephone Scripts:** Since 2003, I have been publishing my monthly client newsletter. In that time, I've written many articles about how to use the phone and some powerful scripts.

Between the three sections, you have a goldmine of telephone training material. This should be a bible for anyone on your team responsible for answering your phones and/or taking catering orders.

If you have any catering questions you've been challenged to answer, please email them to me at: Michael@RCSEmailBox.com. There's a good chance it'll make a blog article or a future newsletter article.

I hope you profit from this system.

To You & Your Catering Success!



ZX.

Michael Attias
Founder
Restaurant Catering Systems

Section 1

Basics On Answering Your Phone

1. PROPER GREETING

Smile Before You Pick Up The Phone

Thank the Caller

Identify Yourself

Offer to Help

STAFF: *“Thank you for calling Corky’s. This is Wanda. How may I help you?”*

2. QUALIFYING

Uncover whether a customer desires a Party Pack (Self-Service Catering) or a Full Service Catering.

STAFF: *“What type of catering did you have in mind?”*

3. EDUCATE

Explain the Full Service Catering vs. the Party Packs

STAFF: *“Well we offer a Full Service Catering where we come out, set up your buffet, serve your guests and clean up after ourselves. We also offer a Party Pack. It’s a self-service option served in disposable aluminum pans.”*

4. QUANTIFY & QUALIFY

Find out how many guests they need to take care of and if they are interested in full service or self-service. Any order over 30 guests, I would train the hostesses to transfer the call to a manager. Note: I like to use the phrase “take care of” instead of “feed”. You feed animals and take care of guests.

STAFF: *“How many guests are you trying to take care of? 100? If you wouldn’t mind holding, I’ll get my manager to help you”*

5. EXPLAIN YOUR PARTY PACK

Description of Menu

Quantities They Receive

Packaging

STAFF: *“Your party pack comes with our fresh pulled pork shoulder. You get enough for 1 ½ “GOOD SIZED” sandwiches per person. You also receive our famous baked beans, cole slaw, barbecue sauce and buns. The food comes packaged in disposable aluminum pans with lids for simple serving. The pans are ideal for re-heating leftovers.”*

6. OPTIONS

Dealing with requests for other meat/entrée options in a Party Pack. NOTE: You want to develop colorful language to sell your food. Offering “pizza” is not as exciting as offering “hand tossed Neapolitan pizza cooked in our wood-fired pizza ovens with fresh buffalo mozzarella we FedEx in weekly from Italy”.

STAFF: *“Of course we have other meats available. We have a great barbecue beef brisket that just melts in your mouth or a hand pulled bar-b-q turkey breast you just can’t beat. You can substitute either the brisket or turkey for the pork and you only pay \$8.49 per guest plus tax.”*

7. ASK FOR THE ORDER

You want to ask for the order, so the customer doesn’t consider anyone else. People want to be led. Never tell them to wait to the last minute. Lock in the order as soon as you can. You can always let them know they can change quantities up to the last day.

STAFF: *“Would you like me to go ahead and take your order? Great!”*

8. ENTER YOUR ORDER INTO THE RCS SOFTWARE

Confirm the # of People, Name, Company Name, Phone Number, Date & Time and order before hanging up.

STAFF: *“Let me go ahead and write up your order. Now that was the Basic Party Pack with pork, beans and slaw for 40 guests? Good. Your name please? Mrs. Jones - and what company are you with? Your telephone number please? And when would you like to pick that up? Monday, the 5th - at what time?”*

9. UP SELL ADD-ONS

Always suggest paper packs, drinks and desserts

STAFF: *“Now the party pack doesn’t come with plates and utensils. We can go ahead and get you a paper pack that includes a 3 compartment plate, fork napkin and wet nap for only 45¢ per guest. Good. We also offer iced tea and lemonade for \$1.25 per per guest. You get enough beverage for each of your guests to get at least 2 glasses each. It also comes with cups, ice, sweeteners spoons and lemons. Would you like me to add that to your order? Thanks. You might also want to consider our fudge nut iced brownie. For only \$1.50¢ each, it’s a great way to top off your meal. I’ve got you down for 20.”*

10. DELIVERY

Delivery is available from an outside courier with at least 24 hours notice. If your delivery is different, you'll want to create your own script

STAFF: *“Yes delivery is available. We use an outside courier and just pass along their fee to you, which is \$17.50 to most parts of Nashville. All we ask is 24 hours notice to line up the courier.”*

11. DIRECTIONS

With RCS, you have Google Maps built into the ticket. Not only should you always get a complete address for deliveries including suite numbers and special instructions, but you may wish to pull up the map and confirm with them over the phone.

STAFF: *“Where exactly do you need that delivered? 1024 Hillsboro Road. What suite? 224 in the East tower. I see here on my Google Map, you're directly across from the mall. Is that correct?....We'll have it there by 11:45.”*

12. PAYMENT FOR DELIVERIES

Always find out how the customer wishes to pay for deliveries. Credit Cards and company checks are preferred. House charges need to be approved by a manager.

STAFF: *“We take all major credit cards or company checks. House charge? I'll need to get my approval for that. Would you mind holding a minute?”*

13. REPEAT THE ORDER

Repeating the Customers Order Avoids Any Confusion: Review Menu Ordered & Pick Up or Delivery Details

STAFF: *“Now just to go back over what we discussed. You’ll be getting the party pack for 25 people @ \$7.99 per guest, and you’ll pick up your order this Saturday at 1PM. Great!”*

14. PICK UP PROCEDURES

Always direct the customer to pick up the order at the drive thru window. Explain it might take a few minutes since we assemble the order once they arrive to insure freshness. (If your procedures are different, then change up this script accordingly.

STAFF: *“To get your order Mrs. Jones just go to our drive thru speaker and give them your name. Stay on the line and you can pay at the window. After that we’ll load it in your car for you. It’s the quickest, easiest way to get your order.”*

15. PUTTING SOMEONE ON HOLD

Apologize For Putting A customer On Hold & Let Them Know When You’ll Be Back

STAFF: *“I’m sorry. I’ll need to put you on hold for just a minute while I check with my manager.”*

16. PICKING UP AFTER SOMEONE HAS BEEN ON HOLD

Apologize again for putting them on hold and proceed with the call

STAFF: *“I’m sorry you had to wait. What type of catering were you interested in?”*

Section 2

Catering Menu Questions

GENERAL CATERING MENU QUESTIONS

1. A catering client wants to order two entrees. Instead of ordering a package that comes with two entrees, thus insuring each guest can enjoy both entrees, the client wants to order a one entrée package. They want to order one entrée for half the guests and another entrée for the other half of their guests.

CLIENT: *“If I have fifty guests, can I get twenty-five basic party packs with pasta and twenty-five with pizza?”*

STAFF: *“Mrs. Jones, yes. We are happy to do that, but let me tell you where you can run into a little challenge.*

You never know who exactly will go for the pizza and who will go for the pasta. Just imagine the first twenty-five people who come through get the pizza, and it is depleted. The twenty-sixth person really wants pizza and there is nothing left but pasta. That guest is going to be really upset. He could be one of your important clients or guests.

What I would recommend is picking one entrée or the other. For only two dollars more per guest, you could get the Deluxe Party Pack and get pizza and pasta. We give you enough of both to make sure everyone gets a serving of each. That way everybody gets what they want and you won't run out of food.”

2. A guest wants to know if you will cater for less than your minimum.

GUEST: *“I see here on your catering menu you require a minimum of ten guests. There are only nine of us. Will you still cater our lunch?”*

STAFF: *“Sara we will be happy to cater your lunch, but just to let you know our catering packages start at ten people. That is why we are able to offer them at such a reasonable price. We are going to need to go ahead and charge you for ten. Is that okay, or would you prefer to order individual meals?”*

NOTE: By walking the client through the math of ordering nine individual meals, they still save money by ordering a party pack for ten.

3. What happens if a client wants a party pack split up into individual meals?

CLIENT: *“I really like the Super Deluxe Party Pack, but I am sending it to different offices. Can you individually package them?”*

STAFF: *“We can't individually package it by person, but as long there are a minimum of ten people per office, we are happy to send a package to as many locations as you'd like. For instance, we could send a package for ten to this office, a catering for twenty to this office, and a catering for fifty to another.*

The reason our prices are so reasonable is because we sell our packages in bulk. As opposed to buying individual meals and charging you twelve dollars per guest, we can make

it all in large pans and pass that savings to you. Will that work for you?"

4. How to handle a request to order one catering package for half your guests and another catering package for the other half of your guests.

CLIENT: *"Can I get the Basic Party Pack for half of my guests and the Deluxe Party Pack for the other half of my guests? There are going to be some ladies at the event, and they are not going to eat that much."*

STAFF: *"How many total guests do you have?"*

CLIENT: *"I have twelve people coming."*

STAFF: *"Our minimum package is for ten guests, so you will have to have at least ten per package. I will let you know about a challenge you'll probably face splitting up the packages. The Deluxe Party Pack comes with an extra entrée. If you only have enough of that second entrée to feed half your guests, what will you do when you run out of food as someone really important, like a client comes through? You are going to be embarrassed and the last thing I would want for you is to be embarrassed in front of these important decision makers."*

5. How to handle a request for a substitution you normally don't make.

CLIENT: *"Can I substitute the spaghetti and meatballs for the ziti marinara on the Deluxe Party Pack?"*

STAFF: *"Shane, normally, we charge an extra dollar per guest to upgrade to the spaghetti with meatballs, but since I know you are going to be a great customer for us. I am more than happy to do this for you, but anytime in the future you just have to come to me and I will take care of you. It is not something that we normally do, I can get in trouble with my boss, but I am happy to do that for you."*

(You could also mention that no one else in your company would have the authority to do that, so they must come through you for the favor. Even if someone would not get into trouble for doing this, it's a great way to get brownie points with your client.)

Here's the response, if you must charge extra.

STAFF: *"Mrs. Jones, the reason the price is so reasonable on the Deluxe Party Pack is because we have limited it to pastas without meat. For just an extra dollar a person I am happy to substitute the spaghetti with meat balls. Would you prefer the ziti marinara, or would you like to upgrade for your guests to the spaghetti with meatballs?"*

6. How to handle a request to add extra food to a package.

CLIENT: *"Can I order extra meatballs with my spaghetti and meatballs?"*

STAFF: *"Absolutely Mrs. Jones! For only a dollar fifty per guest, we'd be happy to give each person*

an extra meatball.”

NOTE: Take note of what your guests are requesting. If they are asking to include a third side, extra entrée or more of a particular item, you'll want to build a package around it or offer an upsell. You want to resist having to tell someone “No.” A guest understands an up charge for more premium items. Once presented with the options, they can choose whether they really want it or not. This eliminates you being the bad guy.

7. How to handle a question about whether the amount of food is enough.

CLIENT: *“I know your Deluxe Party Pack comes with one meatball per guest. What if somebody takes two meatballs?”*

STAFF: *“Mrs. Jones, what you are going to find is that some people aren't big meatball fans and will take none. Other guests will take two, so it will average out.”*

NOTE: Alternate Script

STAFF: *“Mrs. Jones, why do you ask? Are you expecting a group of extra hungry guests?”*

CLIENT: *“Yes. My son's football team is coming over. These kids can really put it away.”*

STAFF: *“Mrs. Jones, I'd either recommend getting the Deluxe Party Pack for 25% more guests (insert the number you believe would work best for her group), or we could add an extra meatball per guest for just \$1.50 per person. Which would work better for you?”*

8. Dealing with a question about set up of the catering.

CLIENT: *“Michael, when your guys come out, do they set everything up for me? How long does it take?”*

STAFF: *“Absolutely, we put everything out for you. All you have to do is remove the lids, put in the serving utensils and let your guests help themselves. We aim to have it set up and ready to go five minutes before your serving time.”*

9. Dealing with a question of clean up.

CLIENT: *“Do you clean up the mess and take it back with you as part of this process, or do you leave that up to us?”*

STAFF: *“Mrs. Jones that is a great question. The package we've been discussing is a drop off package. If you need someone to watch the buffet, I am happy to send one my guys to do it for \$75. Your drop off event would be served in disposable, re-usable packaging. Basically, all the aluminum pans have lids. I recommend after everyone has eaten, you throw away whatever you don't want to save. Then put the lids back on the pans you want to keep and put them in the refrigerator. You can either take them home for dinner or have them as leftovers the next day in the office. Will that work for you, or do you need someone to come out and keep an eye on the buffet and clean up afterwards?”*

10. How to handle last minute catering orders.

CLIENT: *"I would like to have the Super Deluxe Party Pack delivered in one hour. Can you do that?"*

NOTE: There are many ways to answer that based on availability and your policy and practices

STAFF: *"Let me check on that for you Mrs. Jones." (Get answer from manager). I am so sorry Mrs. Jones. We are booked up for deliveries today. Next time, if you call me at least the afternoon before, I can take care of you. Do you have anyone who could come here to get it? I'd be glad to throw in free cookies for your trouble."*

Answer 2

STAFF: *"Let me check with my courier to see if I can find someone, I will call you back in fifteen minutes. Is that ok?"*

NOTE: Obviously, deliveries have many variables. You may be able to have two orders go out at the same time in one vehicle, if close together.

You can also let them know you could drop it off a little earlier or later than their preferred time. The more options you give them, the better. It also let's them know you are always trying for them.

11. How to deal with extended serving times.

CLIENT: *"How do you keep the food warm? We are going to be eating in shifts, about an hour and a half apart?"*

STAFF: *"How many people per shift are you going to have?"*

CLIENT: *"Fifteen."*

STAFF: *"We can do one of two things. Do you have an oven and a fridge in your break room?"*

CLIENT: *"No we don't."*

NOTE: Obviously, if they have an oven and fridge, they should use that.

STAFF: *"I don't think the food quality will be there after three hours. If it was 90 minutes, I could lend you some of our insulated bags. To make sure the food is at its best, I recommend we make two deliveries for you."*

CLIENT: *"Is there an extra charge for that or is it free?"*

NOTE: This is a judgment call. If the group is large enough.

12. How to deal with clients who want a different food option than the options offered in one of your packages.

CLIENT: *"I see your basic party pack comes with a choice of pork, beef or turkey. Why can't I order it with ribs?"*

STAFF: *"Mrs. Jones, the basic party pack was created for those on a budget, so we limited the meats. If you order the super deluxe party pack, that comes with ribs. Would you like to get that? I also have another option. I can sell you ribs by the slab for only \$14.99 each to add to the basic party pack. Which option would be better for you?"*

ANOTHER OPTION

STAFF: *"I'd be happy to substitute the ribs for only \$4 per guest."*

13. How to convert a package for adults to feed kids.

CLIENT: *"I want the Premium Pizza Buffet to cater for a kids' event at my church, but I want smaller slices of pizza. Can you do that for me for less money per person, because they are smaller pieces for these kids?"*

STAFF: *"We would be happy to cut the slices in half for you, more than happy to help you out. Let's just figure out how many kids you have and their age range. We can then estimate how many adult equivalent portions you need. For kids under 4, I would calculate a 1/4 portion. For kids between 4 and 11, I would calculate half of an adult portion. For kids 12 and over, I would calculate a full adult portion. I know my twelve year old son can easily put away two of our large slices. How many kids do you have under 4, in the 4 to 11 age range and over 12?"*

CLIENT: *"We have 12 kids under 4, 20 kids in the 4 to 11 age range and 30 kids 12 and over."*

STAFF: *"So that comes out to 3 for the little kids, plus 10 for the 4 to 11 year olds and 30 for the older kids. That would be a Premium Pizza Buffet for 43 guests. And I'm happy to cut the slices in half, plus throw in extra paper products to take care of you. Would you like to go ahead and lock in that date? And by the way, if you're numbers change, we can adjust the numbers with no problem up to 24 hours in advance."*

14. How to handle a request for a half portion per guest on a package.

CLIENT: *"On your Premium Pizza Buffet I only want to get one slice per person. Can I get that?"*

STAFF: *"You only want one slice? Let me explain Mrs. Jones. I am happy to let you have only one slice per person, but very rarely will we find one slice will do. But if you want to, if you have a group of twenty people let's say, just order the Premium Pizza Buffet for ten and you will get one slice a person, but you will only get paper products for ten. We're happy*

to sell you extra paper products for only 50 cents per guest. Who are these guests you are feeding, Mrs. Jones?"

CLIENT: *"Admins."*

STAFF: *"Admins? How important are they to you for your job?"*

CLIENT: *"They are very valuable. They send me a lot of business."*

STAFF: *"They sound very valuable to me. Let me ask you, would it be a shame for you to go through all this trouble to bring in lunch for the secretaries and they don't get enough or you run out? That could turn the whole positive experience into a negative one."*

Is it worth saving fifty bucks to possibly upset a valuable referral source?"

CLIENT: *"No. Let's just go ahead and order the package as is."*

15. How to handle the question of making a second delivery, if the client runs out or needs more food.

CLIENT: *"I need to feed roughly twenty people, but if I don't have enough will you give me a second order, maybe a half hour later?"*

STAFF: *"As long as it is for a minimum for ten people, I am happy to do that, but you will have to pay an additional delivery charge. How many people do you have, twenty?"*

CLIENT: *"Twenty, roughly."*

STAFF: *"Twenty, what kind of group is it?"*

CLIENT: *"We are all construction workers."*

STAFF: *"Construction workers? I would recommend... which package were you looking at catering?"*

CLIENT: *"We are interested in the Basic Party Pack."*

STAFF: *"With the Basic Party Pack, normally I would tell you, get an extra slice of pizza per person because I know construction workers are going to want more than two. For that same two dollars, I think you would be better off getting the Deluxe Party Pack. For only two dollars more per guest, you are getting salad, our famous dipsticks, and you are getting pizza and pasta. They are getting a great variety and there is plenty to fill them up. It is a far better deal."*

Would you like me to go ahead and get you the Deluxe Party Pack?"

16. How to handle a request for something extra in a package you must charge extra for and the client doesn't understand why.

CLIENT: *"Can you throw an extra roll per person on our party pack?"*

STAFF: *"I'd be glad to get you an extra roll per guest, but I have to charge you 45 cents per roll."*

CLIENT: *"Why? When I come into the restaurant, I can get as many rolls as I like."*

STAFF: *"Mrs. Jones, that's a great question. If you were to get the equivalent to the basic party pack off of our dining room or take-out menu, you'd pay \$8.99 per guest. By putting together a package in bulk and limiting it to one roll per guest, you save \$2 per guest."*

17. How to handle a request from a non-profit for a discount on a catering order.

CLIENT: *"I need to order a catering for my church for twenty people, but we are on a tight budget. I need to know if you give discounts."*

STAFF: *"We do give discounts. You automatically get a 9.25% discount." (use your sales tax percentage for my number).*

CLIENT: *"Really?"*

STAFF: *"Yes. Since you're tax exempt, you don't have to pay the 9.25% sales tax. (Laugh). I'm sorry I can't discount any of our packages. They're already 25% less expensive than ordering the same meals individually, but I'd like to help you out. I want to give you free brownies on your order. That's like getting a 12% discount. Would you like me to go ahead and reserve that catering for you?"*

18. How to handle requests from a regular client to honor old prices, when you've just increased your catering prices.

CLIENT *"I really like your new catering menu. I was wondering if I can still get the pricing from your old menu?"*

STAFF: *"We raised our prices 10% just to cover our increased costs. Our pork shoulder alone is 47% higher. I'm sure you've noticed everything at the grocery store has gone way up. I'm sorry I can't give you the old pricing, but I'll be happy to throw in free cookies on this order."*

NOTE: You may choose to pull a favor for a regular client, but let them know...

STAFF: *"I'm happy to help you out this time, but next time we'll have to go with the new menu pricing. Is that fair?"*

19. How to deal with requests for guests with special diets.

CLIENT: *“One of the employees I am feeding at this event has gluten allergies. Is there anything you can do to help us out?”*

STAFF: *“Absolutely! I am happy to include a small, gluten free pizza for your employee. Just make sure you keep it to the side for that person, so no one accidentally eats it. What two toppings would you like?”*

Section 3

Advanced Telephone Scripts

1. The Importance Of Answering Catering Calls Live

Just about every restaurant or catering operation invests money in advertising and marketing with the purpose of uncovering new customers. Without a constant influx of new buyers to your fold, your base will eventually shrink to a point of closure.

How much effort is spent on how those first time guests are treated before they even enter your front door? Before I opened my restaurant I played catering prospect with my competitors. I would pretend to be in the market for a catered event to see how my competition would handle the call.

What I uncovered in the shoes of a prospective customer created a policy that I firmly believe has allowed us to prosper. Most of my competitors never answered their phones. Overwhelmingly, I received an answering machine or voice mail.

If I did get a live person, they couldn't answer my questions. Imagine you (meaning as prospect) are investing your lunch hour to book a catered event or find a party room and you get voice mail.

Most people go on to the next name on their list or on their Google search. Your prospects want to talk to a live, intelligent human being. The fear of leaving a message and never getting a return call is more pressure than most people can handle.

Even if a prospective customer calls in the middle of your lunch rush, make sure you thank them for their inquiry and promise a very specific time you guarantee to call them back by.

Years ago I acquired Miller's Grille Catering. The former owner had his calls forwarded to a cell phone. Rarely would you get a live person. How much business did he leave on the table by not answering live?

I know for a fact he spent around \$250 each month on a yellow page ad at the time. Today, Google Ad Words would be the equivalent. It's a great and terrible media all at once.

The people surfing the web are in the market for your services, but your competition is also there. So when you get a call, it better count.

When we first took over Miller's Grille, my entire management staff thought we should leave the phone as is—let the voice mail pick it up. I felt it should be a fourth line at Corky's and we'd train everyone to answer it, *"Thanks for calling Miller's Grille. This is _____, May I help you?"*

By the end of the first meeting they came around a little and thought that maybe we should install a phone in the office and if someone were around, they'd pick it up. Otherwise, voice mail would be checked and calls returned. I knew not to shove my opinion down people's throats.

One day, my partner Brandon was in the office and the Miller's Grille cell phone was on while he was wrapping up paperwork waiting for a returned catering call. It rang. He answered it. And it turned out to be a booking for a 500 person event.

They found us in the yellow pages. Remember, Miller's Grille has practically zero brand recognition in Nashville. Brandon knew from his conversation with that large company, that if he were not there to

have answered the phone live, she'd have moved on to the next caterer in the yellow pages. Over four thousand dollars would have been lost.

Brandon's experience was all it took for everyone to enthusiastically buy into answering the phone live at all times. What are you doing with your phones?

If I were to call and ask about booking a catering, would a real person answer? Would they know what to say? Would they get the sale or waste a hot lead?

To take this conversation a step further, consider playing phone prospect at your establishment. I think you'll be surprised at what you discover. Remember, there is no use in focusing on advertising and marketing, if you screw it up when your prospective client calls.

This lesson goes double for how you treat first time guests that walk into your dining room. That's why a lot of companies use mystery shoppers. Everyone knows how to behave when the boss is there.

Make sure you always put your best foot forward. I often see great marketing fall on its face because of piss poor execution.

Please don't drop the ball. You won't get a second chance. A national burger franchise company that caters has all of their calls go through an 800 number. The leads are forwarded the next day.

I'm sure this is some VP's idea of genius. Let's hope they don't get this manual. Because you'll clean their clock every day of the week, if you follow this advice and they don't!

2. How To Explain Why You Charge Extra For Paper Products

On a recent consulting call with a member, we were discussing the challenges that pop up when you decide to not include paper products (plate, napkin, wet nap) with your self-service catering packages.

"What do you mean it doesn't come with paper products," you're sure to hear from a catering client that just ordered for 50 guests.

You have two options. If the order is large enough, you can succumb to the pressure and throw them in, or you can use the following sales script:

"Mrs. Jones, when we were putting together our party packs, we decided to keep your cost as low as possible. We knew some companies and organizations stock their own paper products and we didn't want to add that to their cost unnecessarily. That way you can choose exactly what you need for your event and not be charged for what you don't need."

It's all in the positioning and education. Once you can give your client a "reason why", they are more understanding. You can take the opposite approach and price your packages to include paper products. The script to use would be: *"Your package comes with paper products? Will you need them?"*

A fair number will say no. Just like many fast food restaurants today are asking if you want ketchup with your takeout order, asking if your clients want paper products allows you to keep a little extra

profit from those that opt out.

3. Selling Desserts That Aren't Homemade

My friend Gene used to own a little home cooking restaurant out in the country. He gave me a great line you can teach your catering sales staff. When going for the up sell of desserts let's say, and you describe the item in delicious detail, you might have a customer ask...

"Is it homemade?"

Train your staff to reply, *"I think it's better than homemade."*

This is a reply that will make selling dessert easier.

4. How Not To Lose Money When Bad Weather Is Forecasted

Last Wednesday, the day before a lot of holiday party orders were written up and booked, Nashville was bracing itself for ice and snow. Looking at the storm's path and radar made icy conditions a pretty sure thing in the eyes of a rank amateur meteorologist like myself.

I had recalled in years past that when the streets get icy in Nashville, the city shuts down and lots of pre-called in orders get canceled. Faced with cooking shoulders for all of these orders (22 hour cook time), I came up with a plan to prevent cancellations.

My staff and I called each person that had placed an order; full service, drop-off and pick up to confirm their orders and intentions. Here's a paraphrase of our call script:

"Hello Ms. Jones. This is Michael from Corky's. How are you doing?"

"Great. I just wanted to call to confirm your order for tomorrow at 11am. (Review order). Ms. Jones, you know they're calling for 2 inches of snow and ice tomorrow? My staff and I will be here regardless of the weather. It takes us 22 hours to cook our shoulders and they're about to go on (you can substitute "I'm about to pick up tomorrow's supply of meat, etc.). I just want to make sure you still want your order. Because once we start smoking barbecue for your order, there's nothing we can do with the meat if you cancel."

All of the people we called that day did decide to keep their orders. You may choose to take a credit card number for a deposit as added security.

How perishable your menu is will dictate how strict you need to be with your catering clients. You're expected to honor your commitments with your vendors. If you use the above script in a professional manner, the decision making is placed on the shoulder of your client and their verbal commitment will be all you need.

5. How To Handle Price Before It Even Comes Up

When a catering prospect calls up to get information, what's the first question that comes to mind? Do you blurt out, "What's your budget?" like Pavlov's dog salivating over the bell?

Live by price, and you'll die by price. Here are a couple of down and dirty selling scripts you can incorporate into your repertoire. Please share with your staff.

1. "Could you please share with me the vision for your _____?" (Wedding, picnic, holiday party, etc.)
2. "If I had a magic wand and could give you one wish for your event, what would it be?"

Both these questions get the prospect talking and you listening and taking notes to what they consider to be their "hot buttons". As I learned from Napoleon Hill's, *Think & Grow Rich* in college, it's better to be interested rather than interesting. In fact, at a college graduation party I made it my challenge to try just shutting up and asking questions. By the end of the evening, a dry college professor became my new best friend and I had learned a valuable lesson.

Armed with a prospect's vision and "hot button(s)", you are prepared to weave that into your discussions and make your prospect believe you are the best choice regardless of price. Try it. It works remarkably well.

6. Transcript Of A Telephone Mystery Shopping Audit

It is eye opening to listen to a recording of a mystery shopper calling your restaurant posing as a prospective catering client. As part of a catering seminar for a private client, I personally called four of his stores and played prospect.

Overall, I'd give his people a B. Some were better than others, but each store had areas that could use improvement. What really took the audience by surprise was the replaying of the recording for all to listen and learn from. Below is the transcript of the call with any reference to my client omitted. My comments are bolded in parentheses.

Phone ringing

(Picked up within 3 rings. You don't want to make a client wait any longer than that.)

Bob: Bob's Deli.

Michael: Yes, I've got a meeting there next week, and I need to talk to someone about catering for about 15 people.

Bob: Okay. I'll grab a pen here. What would you – for 15 or 50?

Michael: Fifteen – one, five.

Bob: Fifteen, okay. Do you have one of our brochures or fliers or anything?

(Great question. Is qualifying me to see if I know of his company or not and offering to send me information)

Michael: No, I don't. I was given your name by a contact down there. Can you sort of walk me over the phone what you have?

Bob: What we do the most of is the Sub Platters where you mix-up ham, turkey, roast beef. It comes with a big bag of chips and dip.

Michael: I'm sorry it comes with what?

Bob: A big bag of chips and dip.

Michael: Chips and dip?

Bob: Yeah.

Michael: What kind of dip?

Bob: It's kind of a ranch dip.

Michael: Gotcha.

Bob: For-

Michael: And, how much does that run a person?

Bob: It's broken down – 12-14 people is \$45, 14-18 people is \$50.

(Side Note: Stick with “Per Person Pricing”. Don’t make your client have to do math in their head).

Michael: So, probably we would go with the 14-18. Okay, and what about any other sides?

Bob: Well, I mean we have coleslaw or potato salad or something, but they don't normally come with that.

(This question threw him a little bit for a loop. Missed a great opportunity to upsell me sides. He didn't have it as an option with prices. Also, a lot of clients will want something perceived healthier than chips).

Michael: Okay.

Bob: Just the sandwiches and the chips.

Michael: Okay, and-

Bob: We also – I don't know what kind of meeting you're having – we do a lot of box lunches for schools and stuff, too. That comes with a six-inch Po' Boy with either ham, turkey, roast beef, and you get a chips and a cookie and a drink for \$5.50 per box.

(Good suggestion. You always want to direct a client to the items/menu you feel would best serve their needs.

Michael: I gotcha. Do you have any other types of box lunches or is that it?

Bob: Well, we have meat trays. Do you mean box lunches?

Michael: Yeah, like some people have different types of box lunches like you get either a bigger sandwich or you get more sides.

Bob: Oh, not really. I mean we can do whatever you want, but only – I mean, like our six inch Subs come with a quarter pound of either ham, turkey or roast beef on it. It's not too skimpy.

(Did a great job of making me feel like my folks would get plenty of food, but should have offered a higher end Box Lunch. Either bigger/more deluxe sandwich, upgraded side/dessert. You leave money on the table just having one option and if your only option doesn't “hit” them right...they'll call someone else.)

Michael: I gotcha, and let's see, dessert – what are dessert options on the Sub platter?

Bob: We have little individual pecan pies, either chocolate pecan or regular.

Michael: Oh, those sound good.

Bob: Yeah, those are really good.

(They sounded good, but his wife mentioned in our meeting that her mom baked them each day. I would play that up big time in selling them. Little things make big differences and could cause loyalty to his catering because of his mother-in-laws baked goods.)

Michael: How much are those?

Bob: They're \$1.50.

(A slightly more effective way to say it... "They're only \$1.50")

Michael: Okay, and - \$1.50 each – and what if I wanted to substitute those in the box lunches?

Bob: Well, the cookies are normally 50 cents.

(To someone in the shop: If you want to substitute pecan pies instead of the cookies for the box lunches, how much more you want to do?

How much are the cookies? Cookies are 75 cents.

Bob: Cookies are 55 cents.

Seventy-five cents – depending on how many guys, I mean-

Bob: He says there's 15.

Fifteen? Ah yeah, that's 75 cents.)

I could do 50 cents more. Normally, the cookies are 50 cents. The pecan pies are \$1.50. So, split the difference, a dollar difference, it would be 50 cents more.

(Anybody answering your phone, and this guy owned the store, should know their prices and options cold. You should also have a list of commonly asked questions and the answers to keep from stumbling and looking unprofessional. Also, since the desserts are made by his mother-in-law, he can justify the higher price. I would upsell those desserts each and every chance I had).

Michael: Oh that's not bad. And, do you all take credit cards?

Bob: Yeah, Visa, Mastercard and Discover.

(Credit cards make it convenient for the customer. Add American Express. The higher fees are justified with all the corporate cards out there. The cardholders buy their clients lunches. Shame to lose a sale over a percentage point or two.)

Michael: How much notice do you all need?

Bob: If we could have at least a day's notice that would be great.

(Good statement, but I'd add: "Though I can't guarantee it, we'll move heaven and earth to get you an order if you call the same day." Letting your customers know that last minute orders are not a problem for you will get you more business. There's a cult of people that wake up and realize at 9am that they have 25 people to feed in their office)

Michael: And, do you all deliver?

Bob: Where exactly? Deliver where?

Michael: My secretary's got that information. I've got to fly down for business. I think it's near

your place because I was told to give you all a call because it was close by.

Bob: What time of day?

Michael: Probably around noon.

Bob: Okay, it gets a little crazy around here at noontime. That's probably going to be the hardest time. We could make arrangements, though. We could get somebody to deliver if it's nearby. That shouldn't be a problem.

(This is a segment you need to hear to get the full effect. He stumbled, had little confidence and had to think hard before he could commit to delivery. Lack of confidence kills the sale. Either deliver or not. But be firm in lines of communication. If I had been a real customer, there would have been doubts to his ability to not embarrass me or deliver on time. I would have used someone else.)

Michael: Okay, and your name?

Bob: Bob.

Michael: Bob, okay. Well, let me-

Bob: Monday – I don't know what day you were talking about.

Michael: Wednesday.

Bob: Okay, we're going to be closed on Monday. We're actually leaving Friday to go to an annual meeting. We won't be back until Monday evening. So, you could get a hold of us Tuesday, Tuesday morning, if you want to do something for Wednesday.

Michael: Great, I don't think I have any other questions. Okay.

Bob: Do you want me to fax anything to you or does that answer your questions?

(It was a good idea to suggest faxing me a menu and ask if I had any other questions, but where was the "Close". Zig Ziggler says that shy salesmen have skinny kids. He should have asked me..."Would you like me to go ahead and take that order for you. That way you won't have to make any other calls/worry about your event..." At minimum, he should have captured my name, company name and phone number and offered to follow up. We all spend a lot of time and money to get the phone to ring, not asking for the sale and/or capturing leads, makes your marketing investments perform poorly.

Michael: I think I've got enough information. I appreciate it.

Bob: Okay, then.

Michael: Thanks.

Bob: Bye.

Overall, Bob performed acceptably until he hemmed and hawed about the delivery. But you've seen areas that you can use to improve your own team's performance. Please let all your phone people read this article. In fact use it as a basis for a training program.

If you're interested in having our office perform ongoing mystery shopping telephone audits, please call 615-831-1676 or email Michael@RCSEmailBox.com. Whether you hire us or do it yourself, it's a valuable and profitable exercise.

7. Bringing Up “Negatives” To Sell More Catering

Revealing your weaknesses may make you feel vulnerable, but believe me, like a lot of women, they want to see your softer side. No, I’m not referring to pointers for making the final four of *The Bachelorette*, I’m talking about a sales technique your servers can use to build customer loyalty, and you can use to close more caterings.

An amateur server would try to upsell the 18 ounce rib eye to an eighty-seven year old grandmother. A strategic server, would explain, “Mam, that’s a really large steak. You might want to go with the queen-sized cut. I’d hate to see you not be able to finish it.”

Whichever steak our “grandmother” chooses, she’ll know this server was looking out for her best interest. That’s the basis of customer loyalty.

Let’s illustrate with a catering example. A hospital recently booked an on-site catering for 2000 guests featuring rotisserie seasoned chicken and fried chicken. They wanted us to provide brownies and mini-pecan pies. In the past, we brought out our famous fudge-nut iced brownies that required plating. I brought the following to the client’s attention:

ME: We normally serve our fudge-nut iced brownies. But with all of your employees just having enough time to grab a to-go box, get their food and report back to their stations, carrying a brownie on a plate was awkward last year. We can get a wrapped brownie with chocolate chips and nuts. I personally don’t think it’s as good as our regular brownies, but it’ll make the lines go smoother and get your folks back to their stations quicker. Let me know what works best for you.

The hospital chose to go with the wrapped brownies. We ended up saving a nickel a brownie and cut out two dedicated dessert servers. We placed the wrapped desserts in wooden bushel baskets identified with signage and only had to restock once.

Most people disguise the bad or ugly. I say bring it out so your customers and prospects can witness your integrity and jump start a long term relationship.

Everyone knows there’s always an upside and downside to most decisions. Bringing these out places the choice in your customer’s court and makes you look like a professional and not a slick salesman.

I’d use this as an opportunity to sit down with your catering sales staff and brainstorm a list of perceived “negatives” you can use to close more caterings.

8. Using The Phone To Reactivate Lost Clients And Form Bonds With New Ones

It amazes me that a restaurant owner can watch their sales erode to the point of closure, yet not take any pro-active measures to remedy the situation. If you were put in such a spot, what would your resources be? Time. Obviously, with little or no business, you’d have some extra time on your hand. The telephone is another, often overlooked marketing resource. Arguably your most powerful, and free for local calls.

You don’t have to be in a sales bind to get some great results from the telephone. When things had

slowed after the winter holidays, my restaurant partner, Brandon, used some of his extra time to call past catering clients. He used a two pronged approach. He called customers that we hadn't seen in a while to touch base, ask how things were going and ask for their business.

He also called drop-off catering clients within a day or two of purchase to touch base and see if the order met or exceeded their expectations.

I interviewed a million dollar a year caterer in Atlanta, who was generous enough to share her strategy for building her business in a year. She would call catering clients after their 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th orders.

This would allow her to form a personal relationship with a new client and find out how the event went. By the time you've contacted a catering client four times, they have confidence in you and feel comfortable calling you back should any issues arise.

These phone calls can spur extra business, reactivate almost forgotten customers and can be a valuable system in your business.

9. How To Handle Clients Unable To Accept Rebates

A member recently asked me what to do for a pharmaceutical rep that was not allowed to take rebates/gifts from suppliers. If you've read the Catering To Drug Dealers manual, you know I'm a big advocate of giving rebates to reward pharmaceutical reps for loyalty.

Though some companies frown on gifts/rebates, I made two suggestions that are incorporated in the following script:

"Susie, I can appreciate that your company does not allow you to personally get a rebate for using us, however, the rebate may be used by you for future orders to doctor's offices. In fact, you may wish to have us keep the rebates on account for you and you can use them towards the end of your fiscal year, should you run tight on your budget and need to feed a doctor's office".

This solution will let them know that #1, you're not just trying to buy their business and #2, you understand one of the problems that they may face in their job. You have the solution and will be regarded as a trusted supplier, not just another caterer.

10. Should Catering Calls Be Handled By Management or Staff?

The purpose of offering catering packages in your business is to make it simple and quick for a hostess or key hourly to take catering orders. I think that's why the fast food restaurants went to value meals and opted out of a la carte menus. But should your hostess handle all catering inquiries?

I think not. My litmus test was that I wanted a manager to handle groups over 50. And any group inquiries/bookings of 200 or more needed to go to me. Why? As the groups get larger, they expect a higher level of knowledge and appreciate working with the top person in the company.

Also, I and my managers were better equipped to handle questions, objections and close the sale. I always offered or insisted on a free sampling for the decision maker(s). It made a big difference in closing the sale.

One of the first questions out of the mouth of the person answering the phone should be, “How many **guests** are you trying to **take care of**?” (Note the word “guests” and we take care of guests, we don’t feed them. We feed our animals. Slight change in wording makes a big difference in raising confidence level).

Armed with the answer to that question your hostess/phone person knows immediately whether to handle the call or have a manager handle it.

11. How To Make Sure You Don’t Lose Catering Sales If A Client Can’t Get Hold Of You

This month’s question comes from John Belt, Crown Coaching Club member and owner of China Palace Express. John writes:

“I had a drug rep call to place an order on Wednesday. When he called he asked for me but I was out of the building running errands. My employee called my cell phone and within 10 minutes I called him back but he said he placed his order with another company already because he wanted to get it over with. Do you think it would be a good idea to mail all my pharm rep club members fax order forms?”

John is going to get an answer to what he asked and what he didn’t ask. As far as fax order forms, I think they have a place...usually with catering customers and prospects that work out of a dedicated office.

Pharm reps spend their life in the car going from doctor to doctor. They are booking lunches between appointments and while driving. Faxing is not a good idea for them.

NOTE: This article was written before online ordering was available for catering. Today, the prudent operator has online ordering available for the convenience of clients who want this option.

Now the better question and the one implied by the letter is, “How can I insure that when one of my regular catering customers calls for me and I’m away from the restaurant, that I don’t lose out on an order?”

There are three strategies to use.

1. Train someone else on your staff to handle catering orders. It must be someone that not only has “presence” on the phone, but makes the customer feel confident in their ability. Invest the time in teaching product knowledge, order taking and phone selling skills. Once trained up, you’ll want to periodically mystery shop your key person and take the time to introduce him/her to your key accounts. Here’s a sample script you can use to make your regulars feel comfortable: “Bob. This is Susie. She’s my right hand when it comes to our catering division at China Palace Express. In fact, she’s the one I rely on to keep me organized. If I’m ever out of pocket, you can depend on her to get your order right. In fact, I’ve already reviewed your file with her and she knows what’s important to you.”
2. If you don’t have the right person on staff or are too small to justify a key person, then either make your cell phone your catering line or give it out to your regular customers only. Check into a phone system that will forward to your cell phone. This is my least favorite option as your catering profit center is reliant solely on you. Get yourself out of this operating mode quickly.

3. Train whoever answers your phone to make the assumptive close. Have them ask questions and start writing immediately: “What’s your name?”, “Which company are you with?”, “What’s your phone number?”, “When did you want this delivered?”, “Where to?”...The point is that by engaging your customer and getting these answers, the customer has time invested in the order and is less likely to start all over again with another caterer.

12. Should You Charge For Catering? How To Handle Questions If You Do

Some of my members charge for deliveries and others do not. Some of you have minimums for free deliveries and some of you don’t.

Since the inception of my restaurant, we always charged for deliveries. Here’s a sample script that we would say if questioned:

“We’re not set up to make deliveries. In fact, we don’t make a dime off the delivery charge. We contract out with an outside courier and pass on those charges to you. We offer it as a convenience to our customers.”

I never had much of a problem, but today I would rethink that strategy. It used to be that every pizza parlor charged for deliveries. One day a newcomer decided he’d offer free delivery to get some customers from Tony’s Pizzeria to give him a try.

He was personally frustrated paying three bucks for delivery. Surely some of Tony’s customers would be as well. That strategy worked. Worked so well that over time every pizzeria had to offer free delivery, and it’s become an industry standard.

I see the exact same thing happening with restaurants that cater. As more restaurants compete for a share of the catering pie, look for more and more operators to include free catering delivery with minimums and to certain parts of town.

Strategically thinking, you want to make this move sooner than later. Solidify your foothold in your market. Now I’m not advocating just giving the delivery away. It adds up to a big number. We spend a couple thousand dollars a month with our courier.

Change your prices to absorb the delivery charges. Maybe it’s a quarter or fifty cents a person. That incremental bump won’t affect who orders, but the free delivery is a big competitive advantage.

Now for those of you ahead of the curve and my predictions... congrats! But what are you doing to capitalize on it? Make your free delivery part of every sales letter and marketing piece you put out. Get testimonials from your best customers stating, “Not only does Cantina Mama Lucia offer the best catered Italian luncheons in the city, but they’re the only caterer that doesn’t charge us for delivery and set-up. That’s why they’re the only caterer I’ll ever use.”

This is not an easy decision to make, but wait too long and the market will make the choice for you.

13. Handling Requests For Catering Menus During Busy Times

You have a wait out the door. A prospect calls in the middle of your lunch rush to inquire about a catering. Problem is, they don't have a copy of your catering menu.

They want you to fax them a copy. How should that call be handled?

Ideally, you want to be able to drop everything and fax them immediately. That's not always possible.

I like to train the staff to use the either/or script:

“Mrs. Jones, I’m in the middle of taking care of some clients right now. I’d be happy to fax or email you a copy of our catering menu in about an hour. Will that work for you?”

If yes, write down their contact information, send them the info, and enter them as a prospect into RCS and call back to check in with them to see what event they are working on.

If they need the menu right away, still try to get their contact info, but direct them to your website.

“We have a complete catering menu available at www.CorkysBrentwood.com you can access now. While there, you can also opt-in to receive our weekly catering specials via email or I can fax you a menu in a few minutes. Which would be better for you?”

Though this might appear to be a minor, insignificant point, it's huge in two ways:

#1, directing people to a website to get opt-ins is a zero-work way to build a database.

#2, the reality is that during a lunch rush, without a dedicated catering phone person, your prospect might have to wait too long to get the menu. That time lapse can make the difference between you getting the sale or the prospect going to the next caterer on their list.

14. Splitting Sides Can Lead To Client Embarrassment

Nothing will kill your catering business quicker than running out of food. Your customer's embarrassment in front of the boss, co-workers and clients will get your business black listed for good. Believe it or not, there are times when the client's desire to pinch pennies is the reason for running out.

Let me illustrate. Many of you subscribe to and use the “package” method of selling catering. For instance, year ago for only \$4.99 a guest at Corky's we offered fresh pulled pork shoulder, baked beans, coleslaw, buns and BBQ sauce.

In a desire to stretch the menu, I would often get the following question, ***“Can we get half coleslaw and half potato salad as our second side?”*** In other words, an order for thirty people would come with a gallon of coleslaw, and the guest would want two quarts of coleslaw and two quarts of potato salad.

I detest doing business with inflexible companies, so we would honor that request. In actuality, they'd end up running out of coleslaw and/or potato salad.

Let me share the script to use when posed that question, so you can help your clients avoid embarrassment and make an up sell in the process.

“Mrs. Jones. I am more than happy to let you divide your second side between coleslaw and potato salad, but I want to let you know about a potentially embarrassing situation for you.

(You are letting your customer know about a potential problem).

If you split up your side, then you’ll only have enough coleslaw for fifteen guests and enough potato salad for fifteen guests. It is virtually impossible that every other guest will like one side or the other. Your first ten or fifteen guests will probably take some of both, leaving the last half of your guests with no second side at all. For only an additional fifty cents per guest we can include a third side, and you won’t have to worry about running out of food and being embarrassed.

(This is a consultative approach. It lets your clients know you’re primarily concerned for them and have a workable solution).

“Would you like me to add that to your order?”

(You must always follow up every suggestion with a closing question).

Nine out of ten times you’ll help the client and make the up sell. But at the end of the day, if the client insists on splitting it up, I recommend letting them.

15. Creating A Catering Menu With Multiple Upsells

Some members do a better job than others of upselling catering. Just a little attention to your menu and training can yield a 10% increase in sales. There are areas you must address in order to maximize your upselling opportunities.

Does your catering menu offer plenty of opportunities for increasing the check average? Let’s examine upselling opportunities to consider:

1. **Packages:** At minimum, you should be offering three different catering packages; good, better, best. For upselling an upsold package think about what would make that meal more premium: a more expensive entrée or addition of an extra entrée. We charged an extra 55¢ per guest to substitute BBQ beef brisket or turkey for pork.
2. **Salads:** All your customers should be given the opportunity to step up from a garden salad to a Caesar or Greek salad. That extra fifty cents or a dollar per guest will add up.
3. **Sides:** If you offer some truly premium side dishes, there is nothing wrong with making them an up-sell.
4. **Bread:** Something as simple as bread is an upsell opportunity; *“Would you like to add an extra jalapeño corn muffin for only 50¢ per guest?”* or *“Would you like to make those garlic sticks into cheesy garlic sticks for only 50¢ per guest? Just about everyone gets them. They’re addictive!”*
5. **Dessert:** This can make for some large upselling home runs. The only thing your catering clients will enjoy more than dessert is a premium dessert. Convert cookie eaters into pie, cake and brownie fans.
6. **Drinks:** The first upselling opportunity is to get your customers to allow you to provide the drinks.

I've seen some members package and sell homemade fruit teas and more premium sodas as their upsell.

Once you've reengineered your menu to give you plenty of upselling opportunities, you need to shift your focus to training and monitoring. My favorite upselling script snippet is:

"Would you like to add _____ for only _____ per guest?"

You could also make this script a Colombo upsell script by starting with, "Oh by the way,...". It's very non-threatening.

Make sure and track check averages by order taker/salesperson. An employee that does not meet your check average goals is costing you mucho dinero.

16. Three Examples of How To Lose A Catering Job

Over the 4th of July weekend, my girlfriend and I threw a combination birthday party for her daughter and party for our friends. Usually, I bend over backwards to whip up some great dishes or chain myself to the grill, but my girlfriend was adamant about me enjoying the party. So we let the thirteen year old decide on the type of food to cater. Through my experiences, you are about to learn some very valuable lessons.

My girlfriend called a local favorite Tex-Mex restaurant near Vanderbilt to get some prices. They were to pre-wrap chicken and steak fajitas and provide rice, beans, chips, salsa, etc. Pre-making the fajitas meant a lower food cost for the restaurant, but skimpier portions for my guests.

Frankly, for the price they were charging, they should have provided a "Make Your Own Fajita Bar" so my guests could control their serving sizes. It would have also prevented the tortillas from falling apart from the hour or two between assemblies and eating. That aside, I love their food and was willing to put up with their deficiencies.

However, they did not offer delivery. If you've ever thrown a party at home, you know running to a restaurant an hour before your event is not an option. We opted to look elsewhere.

The next restaurant had their catering menu online. This is a big plus allowing your customers to get a rough idea prior to the phone order. They offered a "Fajita Bar", the thirteen year old loved their food, so I thought we had a winner.

I made the phone call to the restaurant at about eight o'clock at night and was routed to a manager. The manager proceeded to give me their catering manager's cell phone. A call to the cell took me straight to her voice mail.

Rule number one: never pass the buck. I don't care if this manager had a line out his door. You never, ever put the burden on the customer. If he wasn't busy, he should have offered to answer a few basic questions. Here's the script he should have used with me"

"Karen is our catering manager and handles all of our events. You'll find her great to work with. She

won't be back in until tomorrow morning. Can you wait until then, or do you need me to help you now? Let me get your name and number and I'll call her right away and have her get back with you. Also, let me give you her cell number for your records."

He could have then decided how urgent it was to get hold of his catering manager. Making a catering prospect work to give you money is never a good thing.

Now to our third caterer. This person happens to be a member and is probably going to be reading this. The good news is that they are receiving some very valuable constructive criticism. The bad news: they may get offended and cancel their membership. I'll risk it.

This member owns and is area manager of a local two store chicken tenders chain. Their food is great and a favorite of my girlfriend's daughter. Though their side orders and menus are very limited, we were excited to use them. My girlfriend made the initial contact and was given some rough quantities and prices. They did not offer per person packages. This is very frustrating for the average customer. Being in the business, I knew exactly how much to order.

The frustrating part of this interaction was how hard I had to work to give them my money. I left messages and emails which took too long to return. Even after receiving voice mail and email confirmation my order could be handled, I took it upon myself to call the store as there were still unresolved details the day before the party. The store manager knew of my order, yet no one bothered to call me and confirm the order and details of delivery.

These three stories are examples of these three restaurants having "holes in their buckets". As hard as you or they may work to get prospects to call, it'll be fighting an uphill battle if the ball is dropped. When I first opened my restaurant in 1992, I called all of my competitors and played catering prospect. I found that they either sent me straight to an answering machine or a store manager answered the phone and wasn't able to help me.

Strategically, I made it a policy to answer all catering calls live and instructed the hostesses to route the call to a manager trained in selling catering over the phone. It was part of our culture and was a major factor in us reaching a million dollars in sales. Marketing is much more than fancy ads, sales letters and marketing pieces. Please take the time to play "prospect" in your own business and patch the proverbial holes in your sales bucket.

17. How To Turn Quotes & Inquiries Into Booked Catering Jobs

Getting the phone to ring is the first battle we face in converting a catering prospect into a client. Today, more than ever, it's important we stick to prospects like a dog to a bone. This type of persistence pays. It has always paid off handsomely for me in any business pursuit.

What happens when a prospect calls for a quote or to inquire about an order? Most operators give the information requested and leave it at that. This is when the real work begins.

Are you capturing name, address and email for your database? Are you requesting permission to follow up with a script like this:

“Ms. Jones. If I haven’t heard back from you by next Wednesday, would you mind if I called to check in?”

For larger events are you offering to come out and bring a sampling of your menu? What about inviting the key decision maker or committee into your restaurant for a sampling. These are all examples of persistent marketing that will help you get more sales over the long run.

18. How To Turn New Decision Makers Into Catering Clients Once Your Contact Has Left The Company

There are four reasons a client will stop using your catering service.

1. They are out of business.
2. They have chosen to use someone else, if even temporarily.
3. They have changed their buying habit (budget cut).
4. Your contact has left the company.

I want to share a script you can use to help solve #4. Unless you have a system in place to identify inactive customers, you will let thousands of dollars of catering sales escape through the holes in your bucket. My job is to help you plug the holes so the “water” overflows.

It often takes a phone call to discover your catering contact has left the company. No need to fret. Take the time to find out who has taken over duties (including ordering catering). Here’s a sample script to use once you make contact with the new decision maker.

YOU: Hello Bob? This is Michael Attias with Corky’s BBQ. How are you doing today?

BOB: Great. How can I help you?

YOU: I understand Mary Jones is no longer with American General, and you’ve taken over for her. Is that correct?

BOB: Yes.

YOU: Are you responsible for ordering in lunch every Thursday for the training class?

BOB: Yes.

YOU: Well, Mary used us all the time for her trainee lunches, and I’d love the chance to show you what we can do. Have you eaten at Corky’s?

BOB: No.

YOU: How would you like to be my guest for some of the best ribs and barbecue you’ve ever tried?

BOB: Sure!

YOU: What would work better for you, coming out to my restaurant for lunch or me bringing lunch to you?

BOB: I can come out to you.

YOU: Great! And while you're here, not only will we review what we can do to make your life easier, but I'll explain our Loyalty & Referral Program. This will allow you to earn gift certificates to our restaurant based on the catering you order.

Use this script as an outline to steer the conversation. Be prepared to receive different answers and field objections.

In today's economic environment, it's no surprise if your contact moves up, down or out of the company.

Your job is to create a replicable system for identifying inactive catering customers and getting them back into your fold. And of course don't forget to find out where your contact moved to. Call them to congratulate them on their move and see what catering opportunities there may be.

19. The Importance of Mystery Shopping Your Phones

We've all heard the phrase, "When the cat's away, the mice will play." This assumes the mice, your employees, willfully have no interest in following your rules. What if your mice haven't been taught how to behave when you're not around? In either case, you better have someone monitoring the mice, otherwise, there'll be no cheese to deposit in your bank account.

Recently this lesson became apparent three times over two work days. I have a consulting client that brought me into one of their catering markets for a half day of consulting. Before I drove down, I mystery shopped their store. The store manager answered the phone. He was very confident, painted a wonderful picture of how things would go. The way their store is set up, one person handles all catering calls. The manager could not give me specifics like pricing and packaging, but volunteered to take my information. He told me their catering manager would return my call and forward me a copy of their menu via email or fax. He did not have a faxable or emailable menu to send.

This happened on a Monday, one of the slower catering days of the week. I waited, and waited and waited. Over twenty-eight hours later, I received a call from the catering manager offering to answer my questions. He wanted to know whether to fax or email over the menu. If you're going to call someone back that long after an inquiry, at least have the sense to email and fax a menu. After all, I gave the store both numbers.

Incident two. After what had just happened with my client, I decided to do some free mystery shopping to see how widespread this was in our business.

I received a call from a gentleman looking to add our catering software to his managed cafeteria operation. Our conversation turned to operations and how the phone was answered. I called his manager and was directed straight to voice mail. Since he runs a cafeteria for a corporation in his city, I guess he thought people would be more than happy to leave a voice mail and await a call back.

Incident three: I called a restaurant a week before Christmas to inquire about an order for 100. The manager was almost flawless. Answered every question perfectly. Explained how they operated and what I could expect. He even told me when I'd need to order by Friday...but he failed to ask for my contact information.

In fairness, there was a fourth mystery shop call I placed in the middle of demoing my catering software to a group of restaurant owners. I called one of the attendee's stores who happened to be using our software, and played prospect. The store manager did not let me off the phone without capturing my contact info to follow backup with me.

It matters not how much you spend to market your catering if you or your staff mess up handling calls. What are the lessons here:

1. **Monitor, Monitor, Monitor:** Whether you play prospect or hire someone to mystery shop your catering calls, you must know what's happening. Make sure the calls are recorded and check your local laws. Some states only require one party be aware of the call being recorded. I'd recommend you let all your employees know what you're up to. The purpose of these calls is not to chastise your folks, but use this information for coaching purposes. Most people want to do a good job. They just need some direction.
2. **Always Answer Calls Live:** During normal business hours, you must have a person answering catering calls live. Even if you're in the middle of a big rush or crisis, take a minute to answer the phone. If you must call them back, apologize and give them a specific time they should expect a response.
3. **Make Sure Store Level Staff Are Trained To Answer Basic Questions:** Be it the price for a catering, menu options or faxing a menu, invest to train store level managers and employees to answer the basics. Your catering manager is not available 24 hours a day, nor can they field every incoming call.
4. **Return Calls Promptly:** If for some reason someone must get back with a catering customer or prospect, offer to take their contact info. Never make them do more work like go to a website or call your catering manager directly. You want to make it as easy as possible to do business with you:

"Mr. Jones, Suzanne, our catering manager is outside the restaurant right now. Let me take your name and number and I'll have her call you back later today."

5. **Capture Leads:** A prospect calling in to book or inquire about a catering is a lead, a very hot, ready-to-buy lead. Why would you spend ten minutes selling someone on your catering and not offer to call them back? If it's a large enough event, I would offer to bring out a free sampling for the decision makers/committee.

Share this article with your managers and catering staff. It is a mini-play book on how to handle catering leads. One reason I built a million dollar a year catering business was because our competitors scared away prospects with answering machines and poor follow-up.

20. How To Sell Against Low Priced Competitors

Last week, I had a client from just outside of Nashville, Tennessee, on the phone for a catering menu critique call. He loved the suggestions for his menu, but asked me how to deal with low priced competitors.

I was personally familiar with the restaurants he mentioned, as I had to sell against them for years. Here are a few of my suggestions in no particular order.

Don't compete on price. If a catering prospect calls up mentioning your competitor's lower price, then immediately diffuse the situation.

"Mrs. Jones. Are you just looking for the lowest price? I understand some people are on such a tight budget. If so, I can give you the name of two of my competitors to call. They sell cheap food. But what I've found, if you take a closer look at what you get from them and me, you'll see I'm a much better value."

NOTE: I used the word value not price.

When dealing with these particular competitors, I would spell out the difference:

"Mrs. Jones, I never like to badmouth my competition, but let me tell you some of the differences. Bob's Bar-B-Q just gives you a quarter of pound of meat per person.

When you choose Corky's Basic Party Pack, your guests will receive a third of a pound of our fresh pulled pork shoulder. That's 33% more than you get from Bob's. With us, all of your guests get at least one and a half "good sized" sandwiches per guest, plus you'll have some left over. We don't want you to run out of food and be embarrassed.

If you only want a quarter pound of meat per guest, I can put together a special package for you to help you save a little money. I just need to know where you are on this event. Would you prefer to have more than enough food to take care of your guests, or do you feel comfortable with a little less food?

One more thing I want to mention is the difference in quality. Bob's Bar-B-Q cooks their meat only a few days a week in their commissary. They pull it, chop it fine, cool it down and then reheat it in their stores in a watered down BBQ sauce. Most BBQ guys cook their shoulders for only twelve hours. This allows them to get more meat from the shoulder.

At Corky's, we cook our shoulders for over twenty-two hours in our own pits. Though we get twenty percent less meat from our shoulders, our low and slow cooking process makes for a very lean and melt in your mouth product. We don't have to chop our meat fine to make it appear tender.

Now for your order, we will pull the meat right off one of our fresh smoked shoulders within an hour of your event. Your guests will notice the difference and so will you by all of the great comments. How important is food quality?"

The most important part of selling against price is to really understand your catering prospect. What type of event is this? Who is invited? What are their hot buttons?

Most people are not ordering just food for a catering. They are closing a big deal, showing off to new company recruits in a training meeting, thanking donors of a charity, bragging on their recent high school graduate, etc.

We all justify a purchase logically, but make it emotionally. If I know Mrs. Jones is putting together a graduation party for her daughter. I will ask some questions. I want to connect with her and move the conversation away from price.

“Mrs. Jones. I would imagine you are so proud of Jessica. To get a full scholarship to the University of Tennessee is no easy task. It sounds like this party is a great way to not only recognize Jessica’s incredible accomplishments, but let’s be clear. It’s a way for you to get recognized for the great job you did as her mom. Hey, you both have good reason to be proud.”

By bringing in Corky’s to your party, it makes a statement to how important this event is to you. After all, if you were “just” looking to feed people for the lowest price, you’d run down to Costco and buy a bunch of pizzas in their food court and grab a few two liters and bags of chips.”

This psychology of selling is very important. Even if you have a great catering menu, creating selling scripts like this is important for you and your staff. The sale is contingent on the attitude of the salesperson. We need as much ammo as possible to outsell our competitors.

How can you best assemble this arsenal of sales information? Most restaurant owners have little to no idea what the competition does. You must play prospect.

1. Order catering from all of your main competitors like a local Jersey Mike’s client of mine did for an annual meeting. He brought in different box lunches from his competitors for his staff to sample and analyze.
2. Analyze their catering menus, packages and prices. You don’t need to be cheaper than your competition, but you must be a good perceived value.
3. How do your competitors handle phone calls? Do you get a voice mail, a promise of a returned call or a real person who can help you on the spot?
4. Deconstruct their packages. Analyze their quality, portion size, etc. If your sandwich has an ounce more meat, you need to know that to sell more.
5. How is delivery handled? Are they well dressed and friendly? Are their deliveries “hit & run”, or do they take the time to set everything up and walk you through the set up?

Are you rolling your eyes at my suggestions or are you fired up to kick some ass? Donald Trump is one of the most successful real estate developers, because I guarantee you he does exactly what I mentioned. Before he even thinks about investing in the dirt, he knows exactly what the competitive landscape looks like.

There is no doubt he mystery shops his potential competitors. It’s exactly what I did before opening my restaurant. It’s what you must do to sell more catering.

21. How To Use “Free” To Prevent Discounting

Great marketing is a result of bad marketing tested. Testing a \$5, \$7.50 and \$10 free birthday certificate revealed \$7.50 and \$10 pulled equally well, but the \$7.50 offer made it a money maker.

At RCS, I recently changed up a marketing sequence. Early indications show it will be a homerun. There is an advantage of being A.D.D. in marketing. You can't leave things alone. It's this “squirrel” way of living that gets me jazzed each morning.

So I was faced with the catering question, “Is it better to give a fifty cents a person discount or free brownies?”

Without a doubt giving something away of high value is better for business than discounting. Discounting lets the prospect know you are the proverbial lady of the night. If you'll give me a fifty cents a person discount, maybe I can push for more.

But by using the following script...

“Ms. Jones, I never discount my price. We only use Boar's Head meats. They're a little more expensive, since they're all meat; no fillers. But what I can do for you is throw in the fudge-nut iced brownies. They're thicker and richer than traditional brownies, but not quite as rich as fudge. They're normally \$1.50 each.”

The perception is you're giving away \$1.50. It only costs you fifty cents and builds a higher value to the event.

Now if they are still looking for a lower price, you have three choices.

1. Drop your price. Not a good idea.
2. Create a lower priced package, but let them know they will be giving something up.
3. Give them the number of your low cost competitor. In a nice way, point out the differences between what you and the other guy provides...

“We guarantee all you can eat. If you run out of food at your event, you won't owe us a dime.”

If you don't think #3 works, it was a big part of us building a million dollar a year catering business. It has worked for other members. Here's the message I received from Ivan Swartzentruber, owner of The Dutch Oven.

“I am very happy to say things are looking good that week for us (Hospital Week). After suffering from a major stroke in December 2010. I was unable to do it last year due to health and stress. A previous customer of ours wanted us to bid on their employee day, 3 shifts, a total of 2000 people. We were awarded the job on a Tuesday. The same week on Saturday we fed at the same hospital for 550. We have another small hospital for 200 that same week. Thanks Michael for all the pushing you did to me right after I got involved with you and your program.”

When I called Ivan to ask how he was able to book so much Hospital Week catering, I was expecting to hear how he sent out the X-Ray letter or a cough syrup bottle. Instead, he told me the hospitals had

talked to a lower priced competitor. It was the 120% All You Care To Eat Guarantee he learned from us that closed the sales.

Great job Ivan!

We all love the sexy part of advertising and marketing; the trash can mailer or the X-Ray film mailer, but a large part of marketing is how your staff looks and acts at an event, your packaging, how the phones are answered, follow up and your guarantee.

I know it sucks to lose an event to a competitor, but not all events are worth having. Stick to your guns. Focus on doing business with people who value more than a low price.