

## Food and Catering Trends 2008

For the past three years Catersource has asked me to report and sometimes predict the new trends for the upcoming year in catering cuisine. Trends have been strong and exciting for the past three years and we have been able to predict, recognize and shape them in a very dynamic manner. Take the simple spoon, man's first eating utensil. In the past five years it has reached a level it never knew existed. These days we are serving Hors d'oeuvres and courses and sauces and even desserts on spoons that look like they came from another world. I am told that a creative caterer wanted to incorporate a broth with an hors d'oeuvres. The only way to do this was to place it on a spoon. Voila, we have the crazy spoon trend and now manufacturers and chefs are creating custom made spoons and vessels to hold specific food items.

Trends have has been pretty easy conversation, since most of us have enjoyed a very prosperous time in the industry. The economy has been strong and clients have been eager to see the next new thing. It is easier to get people to accept new ideas and trends in a growing economy because the cares and concerns are fewer. They are open to the newest and the greatest.

So here is a little recap of our reports and predictions:

### *In 2006 and 2007 we said-*

~ What is hot for 2006 and 2007?

-Nostalgia with a hip twist is what I am seeing on the horizon.

Swanky cocktail parties with a city edge and nostalgic flavor will reign in the upcoming year.

-Food ideas: Kobe Beef Sliders, Tomato Soup and Grilled Cheese Sandwiches

-Presentation ideas- Fun Holders for food like Standing forks, bowing spoons, demi tasse cups, shot glasses.

Many of these have all been on the mark and many of you have been implementing them or have seen them come to your market place.

These trends begin with an idea or an article or a manufacturer and then they grow and morph into new and exciting concepts that really excite your guests. So it seems that trends can be either predicted or influenced by magazines like Catersource and the vendors of Catersource as well as the creative caterers throughout the nation.

So what about 2008? Some economists are predicting a slow down in the economy, I hope they are wrong and am doing my part to keep the economy growing by continuing to invest in my company. But when our clients hear these economic concerns, they become more conservative and less apt to embrace edgy new concepts. That is where we must look to see what new trends can we embrace that will please our clients. This is where we embrace luxury for the masses. Let them all eat cake!

I have been researching for weeks now trying to nail down what the experts are predicting is hot for 2008. I have been talking to my team to see what they are seeing, and of course reviewing my own experiences as I travel the country. It all seems to boil down to one strong and significant movement. It's the youth movement in this nation. It's the ME generation. Everyone wants to be pleased no matter how young or old they are. They want it there way, because in America that choice is always available and in catering, we forget that sometimes. We give them the same meal as everyone else; we give them the same two wine choices at the bar. We give them one dessert. We give them the hosts choices, not their own. This of course helps with cost control, but maybe the pie is a bit bigger than we thought and at times, we can actually give them more choices and increase our revenues.

Certainly whether we offer more choices for the guests or not, the client has changed and will continue to change. In the wedding market, brides and grooms are making their own decisions. In the corporate market, young entrepreneurs and corporate meeting planners want to put a personal mark on their events. Even older executives and couples are thinking younger. What is that saying? "60 is the new 50"? For 2008, think young and personal. Everyone wants to be younger and feel younger, so give them that young experience. Give them youthful, casual but wonderful food and ambience.

This also fits perfectly with clients that are concerned about budgets and pricey concepts. It is a more casual package with high quality ingredients and a more fun, whimsical presentation.

If your staff is still wearing tuxedos, bow ties and carrying shiny silver platters, you may want to look around. The world has changed and your competition is most likely ahead of you. Thinking young and casual means paying attention to fashion, food and technology. It also means that you must do a little more homework on your individual client to see what will turn them on.

## **Here are some hot trends in the food world right now:**

Exotic Spices- Indian, North African and Asian  
South American Techniques- Wrapped Foods and South of The Equator ingredients  
Local ingredients and Regional cooking styles  
Organic and Natural Foods  
Green Events  
Sustainable Seafood  
Small Plates with Big Tastes  
Comfort Foods with remarkable flavor and unique presentation  
Vegetarian Friendly Foods  
Wine and Food inventiveness  
Specialty Crafted Beers  
Signature Drinks  
Chocolate Drinks with Spice  
Colorful and Wacky Wedding Cakes  
Interactive Food Stations where the guests are involved in the final product

I thought we could take a few of these hot trends and approach the need and desire of our clients today. Here are a few ideas on ways to implement these hot trends into your catering business, while paying heed to the guest that wants it their way.

### **Hot Trend:**

*Indian and North African Spices-* These spices are becoming more and more popular because they are different and they are exotic. A hint of curry for many people ten years ago was a turn off, while now for those people it is a flavor enhancer because they have now been exposed to more flavorful ingredients especially through the strong Asian movement that has taken this country by storm.

### **Catering Idea:**

For years we have had clients order their own fillings for omelets and tacos, but have we ever given them the chance to create their own spice blends? How about if we set up a grill station that allowed our guests to choose between 30 different spices, which ones they would like on their meat before it is grilled? How about if the setting was more casual (lounge seating) and they had a place to sit and relax enjoy a cocktail and munch on exotic spiced popcorn before they made their choices? To me this is more comfortable, interactive and if we are concerned about budget, the meat choice of chicken here may be quite interesting and not seem as mundane as your usual chicken dinner.

**Hot Trend:**

*Vegetarian Friendly*- Too many Chefs have ignored our vegetarian clients. Now there are all kinds of Vegetarians or Sudo-Vegetarians. We have Lacto Ovo Vegetarians who do not eat meat, fish or poultry, but eat eggs and milk. There are Lacto Vegetarians that do not eat meat, fish, poultry or eggs, but includes dairy products in their diet. There are the Vegans who do not eat any fish, meat, poultry, eggs, dairy products or foods that contain any of these products. Vegans often do not eat honey, because bees may be killed while harvesting it. A Macrobiotic diet is mainly vegetarian, macrobiotic diets often include seafood, but may not eat nightshade vegetables such as potatoes, peppers, eggplants or tropical fruits. Then we have the fruitarian person who only eats fruits and vegetables that are actually classified as fruits such as avocados, nuts, seeds, eggplant, zucchini and tomatoes.

Of course we then have the hybrids, which will eat white meat and fish but not red meats. Or my favorite, a friend of mine considers herself a vegetarian, but she also considers bacon a vegetable. Just a little pork fat humor there, but it is true. She is simply trying to eat healthy, but allows herself a little discrepancy.

**Catering Idea:**

How about developing a list of menus that cater to these people? Create a white meat dinner party menu, a “You won’t miss the meat” Menu or a stations party that emphasizes the ability for everyone to be satisfied with their choices? Lastly, whatever you do always have a special vegetarian entrée available that is not pasta tossed with the leftover crudités’ from the cocktail hour.

**Hot trend:**

*Chili and Chocolate* is an old act from the days of the Aztecs. But many Americans have yet to discover this trend coming on strong. In fact Chocolate is becoming a partner to many different spices and flavors.

**Catering ideas:**

Create flavor combinations that incorporate the heat of the chili and the bittersweet joy of excellent chocolate for desserts or for bar beverages. This can extend beyond the pre-plate dessert and into an interactive station where guests can choose their combinations and be amazed at the joy of chocolate and spice, or even wines. This winter create the Ultimate Hot Chocolate Bar where guests can add cinnamon, spice and everything nice into their hot chocolates.

**Hot Trend:**

*Local Foods, Sustainable Seafood, Green Events and Regional Cooking Styles.* It is about time that we realize that these issues are not political or even trendy; they are essential to our own prosperity. Have you seen the price of Seafood lately? How about the price of additional shipping charges on your invoices? For us to maintain profit margins and prepare foods for our clients that will satisfy them, we need to incorporate all of these concepts into our general game plan. By employing the strategy that we will use foods and styles that are local will satisfy our guests taste. By introducing foods that are farm raised and incidentally better for the environment, we shave a few points off our food cost. Lastly, by using such green concepts, we are able to use the promotional value that is so important today in our menu promotion.

**Catering Idea:**

Why not create a list of menu items that are “Green” and can play into this hot new trend. There are a few catering companies around the country that are using this concept and finding the rewards exciting. There are many companies these days that are creating “green teams” to review all of their own business practices in an effort to become more conscientious parts of the community. These companies are target markets for these types of menus.

**Hot Trend:**

For years now, I have been beating the drum about the growing trend of *Wine and Food pairings*. Every year it becomes more and more apparent that all demographics are beginning to enter the world of wine and become more knowledgeable. The trend also continues with micro brew beers and specialty crafted beers. The real trend here is choice of flavor for each individual. I continually conduct wine tastings and here people tell me, I love wine, but only white and not dry wine. Or I will hear I only drink red wine and not too sweet. What these consumers are telling me is that they have a preference for something other than the basic bar wine. The same lies true for beers, whereas a guest at a tasting does not like beers that are bitter or too “hopsy”. Again they are expressing there personnel taste, just as all youths are doing

**Catering Idea:**

Wine Bars and Crafted Brew Bars are very easy to present and can be very profitable. Create these bars as a food station so that the selection of beverages actually makes sense with the foods presented. These foods do not have to be very complicated; in fact, cheeses, dips, tapenades or even small pick up hors d'oeuvres can work fine so that the station does not have to be manned by a Chef, just a bartender with knowledge of the beverages.

In 2008, treat your guests to a more youthful experience with choices and bold flavors fit for a new generation of foodies and party goers. This year your success lies in the ability to read your customer and create something fresh and new. This year it is time to step out of the past and into a new world. Have fun creating new ideas and keep me posted at [chefjerry@catersource.com](mailto:chefjerry@catersource.com)