

Name of the Research Paper:

**“Challenges and Opportunities for outdoor Catering business: A Case
Study of Pune City”**

Mr. Vishal Alkonda, Assistant Professor

Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune

Department of Hotel Management

Introduction—

Pune was regarded as the Paradise of Pensioners, and therefore those who had retired and wished a quiet life came to live here. The town is currently one of India's fastest growing metro companies and is already a hub for the automotive, data technology, engineering and a place for quality education. And the city has tremendous scope for outdoor catering business.

Outdoor catering is cooking and serving food, drinks at a location away from the own business place. Outdoor catering includes the provision of food and drink away from home base and suppliers. Outdoor catering includes best catering services for functions such as marriages, parties, corporate or office events etc.

It is a well-known to everyone that the catering industry is in the middle of a continuous up gradation for continuous business and customer satisfaction. Over the years, Catering industry has observed changes from basic facilities to state-of-the-art technological contributions, local to world cuisines and the list goes on. Likewise, when it comes to corporate events and family occasions, people now prefer more of an open space than the four walls of a hotel. people choose to outdoor catering facilities when hosting both small and large functions in an open area, farm house, lawns etc. Four and five-star hotels were the most preferred options in the past. However, customers have started to realise the potential of hosting their events outdoors. The open-air venues have more space to hold larger functions without the place looking very crowded. Outdoor catering allowed the aroma of the food to spread around and opened up new possibilities for outdoor catering business.

Starting a catering business does sounds like an exciting way to showcase your culinary skills, but the job comes with quite a few Challenges. At the same time, if you put in all the efforts it becomes an opportunity. Before you get on a catering career, take care of challenges which are going to come in a way. Your business is good when the new satisfied customers are being added to your customers list and all you need to continue it through setbacks and stress. The results of outdoor catering are very important to both as a marketing tool for business and in enhancing customer satisfaction.

Findings -

Outdoor catering as a concept is gaining an attention in Pune, as city is moving towards a major and smart city. The scenario of catering has changed. Guests have now started to prefer outdoor catering to being cooped indoors on occasions. The trend is been observed specially in Pune city. In addition, events like the Commonwealth Games, Live shows and 'Khelo India', weddings, corporate events have pushed this idea ahead, making it more popular.

Weddings are key business drivers for outdoor catering. Wedding forms the biggest opportunity to the outdoor catering business, specifically where the guest list includes a mix of guests from different cultures. Since the traditional Pune wedding involves so many functions with the local guest list, most families like different variety of cuisines at the different functions.

As the biggest challenge begins here that a new setup is required for every event. Preparing food in open air or at base kitchen, getting everything together in time at the venue, making it presentable for large amount of guest lists, different buffet setups required for different cuisines, service staff should be trained, preparing for sudden unpredicted natural calamities, etc. are all foremost challenges in outdoor catering business. Amongst the numerous encounters faced by outdoor catering, less availability of infrastructure in terms of kitchen equipment and transportation and high rates of real estate are possibly the major challenges.

Pune is fully prepared to serve to any kind of event in a hotel, where raw material and staff is easily available. Outdoor Catering has totally different sets of requirements. Over the past years Logistics related lot of issues have been observed through the growth of professional banquets and event organisers. Though, the business has its own problems in maintaining quality, when serving food and drinks away from the production facility. Limited resources, competition, weightage given to pricing rather than quality and a flow of new entrepreneurs entering into business without any background of catering, menu planning, emphasis on quality, etc. are some of the challenges faced by catering industry. Another challenge is that different ways of marketing will help bring in business for outdoor catering. Marketing is entirely depending upon word of mouth. Repeat business is totally depends on the guests who have experienced the quality of food and service. Caterers usually bag a new order at a function that they are catering. So, the Service needs to be perfect at all times.

Apart from above mentioned challenges caterers need to focus on following challenges which they normally tend to neglect a bit

Infrastructure-

All caterers need a base kitchen space and kitchen equipment's for a basic preparation of a menu. Basically, caterers look for a kitchen space which is close to all proximity of event venues. Most of the new entrants do not have that much of investment to go for a well-equipped infrastructure. There is also a facility for caterers that they can hire an equipment's from rental shops and some other caterers' infrastructure is used on rental basis.

Menu-

Most of the customers requires a customized menu for their functions. And each function requires a different setup for to go with the venue décor. Procurement of suppliers and raw material depends upon the location of the function. If it is too far from the city market then the suppliers have to make sure that they have a proper arrangement for the storage of the material which are perishable.

Costing –

Lot of costs are included in the outdoor catering, as it is away from the base of the caterer. Labour cost, overheads, buffet setup costs, service gears if any required.

Food cost is the important part of the costing. Food cost has to be between 20% to 25% of total revenue. Caterer can reduce the costing by working on the forecasting of the menu planning and budgeting of purchase. Most important is to reduce the wastage of the food and leftover. To save this caterer can focus on standard recipe and standard yield for the required menu

Long Hours-

Catering involves long hours of working on your shoes. You have to be flexible and able to work successfully out of each location every day. Sometimes you may put in 16 hours per day or more and work into the hours of the morning in order to get everything done.

Dealing with Stress-

A catering operation is a high-stress job with demanding clients. If you're catering a wedding, you can't be running late when its time take feras. Each client isatithi and you have to be ready to take criticism and keep a professional attitude even if someone is abusive to doing something wrong. Be ready for the unexpected disasters.

Thinking Creatively-

Caterers have a lot of competition and you'll need to think creatively in order to stay ahead of the pack. This can involve much more than just attending catering events.. In addition, join online networking groups where caterers discuss ideas and unique plans to generate new ideas for your business.

Conclusion

Being a great chef and having catering experience aren't enough to make a catering operation succeed. You need to handle the challenges of making big business decisions too. You'll need the financial skills to pick competitive prices for your services, negotiate deals, oversee loans and balance the budget. You'll have to handle the marketing side of the business, advertising your services to find customers. You'll also work in a human resources capacity, handling payroll issues, hiring employees and dealing with conflict among your staff. For some, this business side of a catering operation can end up being the most challenging.

A successful catering operation must be precisely organized or it will fall apart. Have everything down to a science, from loading and unloading trucks to cleaning dishes and everything in between. You can't discover that you're missing a serving utensil or a key ingredient at the last minute. Everything must be planned down to the smallest detail. For example, rent more plates than you need for a particular event, in case something is broken.

Although outdoor caterers cherish big events involving both Indian and global cuisines, as they get an opportunity to showcase their talent and expertise, the complex serving requirements of global cuisines pose some challenges when outdoors.

“There is great scope for more cuisines like Mexican, European or oriental to come into outdoor catering. The greatest challenges are the logistics of moving food and drink at correct temperatures to prevent degeneration. Also, well-behaved and well-groomed staff is must. Parties can go on late at night and staff can be up to their own tricks and start enjoying themselves at the cost of the caterer and the client.

