

catersource®

2021 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

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To Our Friends and Colleagues,

Needless to say, it's been an extraordinarily challenging year. Some have found this year to be the perfect canvas for reflection and growth, but most have found it to be the source of the most severe personal and professional struggles in their lifetime. And for others - it's been both!

We at CORT Events want to take this moment to acknowledge your resilience, your open minds and hearts, and your dedication towards coming back stronger than ever. If nothing else, your passion for our industry and its recovery has proven this saying true: "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life."

As we inch towards 2021, here are some things we're asking Santa for:

- Strength to guide our ongoing fight to recovery.
- Our colleagues', friends' and loved ones' well-being.
- Not a comeback, but the brilliant evolution of our industry.
- Continued solidarity amongst us all.

Regardless of what the near future holds, please trust us to be open ears to your hopes and concerns. We're very fortunate to have the Berkshire Hathaway name behind us to grant us the stability and reliability necessary to be your steady partner and willing resource as we heal together. We look forward to serving you in the new year.

Have a safe, love-filled holiday season,
The CORT Events Family

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At CORT Events, we're sharing expert design tips when planning for safe experiences. Contact us to learn more.

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WINTER 2020
VOLUME 18, NUMBER 4



State of the Industry 2021: Moving Forward

It's time to move forward after a year of disruption. Our annual State of the Industry can be found starting on page 27.



22 Positive Predictions for 2021

Your catering peers share heartfelt stories about how they learned from the hardships of this year and plan to make the best of next year



Partnering with Properties

Tips for caterers seeking hotel business during and after the pandemic



behind the cover

Individual was the name of the game for much of 2020 as caterers, balancing safety and style, opted for individualized appetizers, with a little help from the humble cloche, like these s'mores bites from Hospitality Collaborative, Los Angeles, CA.

Photo courtesy Ryan Phillips

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Anything but pivot

Swivel. Evolve. Veer. Alter. Reconcile. Recalibrate. Juggle. Notice I left out pivot? Using the word “pivot” to describe most everything COVID-19

doesn't cover the myriad transitions we've been through in the past nine months.

Transform. Rework. Adjust. Customize. Jolt. Rethink. Adapt.

The events we've lost, the money we've lost. The businesses lost. It's staggering.

Hustle. Accommodate. Reorganize. Re-engineer. Revise. Modify.

We've done all of this to stay viable. And here we are, on the cusp of 2021.

Previous *Catersource* State of the Industry reports have covered a lot of *sturm und drang* related to issues with staffing, disaster recovery, restaurants encroaching upon the doorsteps of traditional catering companies, Gen Z, #MeToo, robots. Then we generally migrate into up-and-coming trends. Disruption has been the theme for the past two years running. Well, kids—it's been disruption times a thousand in 2020. Am I wrong?

So, this year, for the first time in many, I sent out a survey to you all... taking the industry's temperature, I suppose, and thank goodness, many of you filled it out. Turn to page 27 to get the industry lowdown.

Beyond the crunching of data for our Industry feature (and let me first say that it is not all negative), we leaned on the insightful Anthony Lambatos to talk about leadership and a positive environment for our staffs; took a happy turn with 22 Positive Predictions for 2021 featuring many of your favorite peers; and are also offering you a number of recipes to start your new year off very tastefully.

From all of us at *Catersource* magazine, we wish you the best this holiday season has to offer, a profitable 2021, and a truly joyous new year. Cheers!

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**Subject to change*

by Kathleen Stoebr



Conference updates

CS/TSE 2021 event details

CATERSOURCE CONFERENCE & TRADESHOW UPDATE

All systems go for a gathering in Miami Beach, July 19–22, 2021! Catersource + The Special Event staffs are excited to provide you with the means to network, learn, and get excited by an industry once again on the upswing. Here is an update on all of the goings on!

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REGISTRATION: Registration is open! Super Early Bird rates are in effect until February 01, 2021. Take advantage of the lowest prices available and enjoy exclusive access to webinars, virtual events, networking meetups, award nominee and session sneak peeks, and other exciting show-related niblets that only registered attendees can receive. If you want the inside scoop before the show so you arrive in the know, head over to conference.catersource.com/pricing to review pricing packages.

CALL TO ARMS: Would you like to get involved in the planning of Catersource + The Special Event's showcasing events? Do you have a product or service you want to showcase? Work with your peers?

The Call to Arms virtual meeting on January 13, 2021 is where you can get more information and join the planning. Go to thespecialeventshow.com/call-arms for more information or to register to attend the free event.

ACE

Achievement in Catered Events

BIG AWARDS COMPETITION

NEWS: It feels good, when the world is changing so drastically, to hang onto pieces of “before COVID” as a semblance of normalcy. There’s always an awards season, we love to celebrate accomplishments, and it feels right to get dressed up and cheer for colleagues as they accept an award for their hard work and talent. We work hard, we have to play hard, too!

Because we plan our yearly conference and tradeshow (with all of its moving parts) so far in advance, Catersource + The Special Event had the ball rolling by early summer setting up our awards portal, creating art and copy for the advertisements, and building new awards categories that reflected the changing catering and events landscape.

But even seven, eight months out from the show, it started not feeling right. We began to feel that celebrating accomplishments across a playing field that has been severely damaged isn’t the right approach, at least not for 2021.

There have been some incredibly beautiful events across the world this past year—live, virtual, hybrid—most definitely deserving accolades.

“What we need to celebrate in 2021 is tenacity. We need to celebrate survival. We need to celebrate the industry as a whole.”

But not enough of them, it pains me to say. Just not enough.

What we need to celebrate in 2021 is tenacity. We need to celebrate survival. We need to celebrate the industry as a whole. We also need to mourn those businesses who won’t make it—or have already left us—due to this world-changing pandemic.

At Catersource + The Special Event next July, we will still offer awards during our Leadership Lunch: the Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement Award; the SE Lifetime Achievement Award; the Richard Carbotti Gala Award; and the Steve Kemble Leadership Award. But the Industry Awards evening event as a whole will take a brief pause in 2021.

One more thing: We are, however, going to leave that awards submission portal open (hang in with me here) for another year. (You read that right.) And then, when we get to 2022...only then will we close it up. The awards ceremony we host in 2022 will be a culmination of events that occurred any time after September 30, 2019 (pre-COVID), all the way through to December 31, 2021. We will also be changing some of the categories to reflect circumstances, solutions, and charitable endeavors.

For now, let’s remember that we are all in this sea together—maybe in different boats with varying levels of ability to steer and putter forward—but we are one industry and we are #eventstrong.

See you in July.



THE DICED COMPETITION will be held at the Miami Beach Convention Center on July 21, and we are currently seeking chefs to compete in this lively (and slightly revamped for 2021) event. Single competitors,

versus teams of two, is the biggest change attendees of the event will see. Axe the stovetops and watch competitors working with standalone induction burners? Yes, you might just see that, too. One thing that hasn’t changed, however—a cash prize for the winner!

Email Kathleen.stoehr@informa.com for details or to express your interest in competing, or go to <http://conference.catersource.com> to look at past competition photos.



Gasping for Air

Teams struggle to keep spirits high & motivation strong

If you're like me, COVID has felt like being caught in an undertow on the beach. Being pulled into the ocean, coming up for gasps of air between waves before being repeatedly slammed back onto the beach and pulled out again. The waves seem to just keep coming. It has taken a toll on our companies, leaving us battered, beaten, weary, and in some cases a shell of what we used to be.

We are in the people business and it's personally been very trying for me to see the impact it has had on the people who have chosen a career in catering and dedicated their lives to this industry. After talking to dozens of catering and special event companies, I believe staff retention is in a fragile spot. What companies and leaders choose to do now will have a lasting impact on their future success. Here are some of my takeaways from my experience and the conversations I've had.

Engagement is a priority...for some

The companies and employees I've talked to seem to be split on their approach to employee engagement. Many

have acknowledged that they have more important things to worry about now or don't feel right about bringing people together. On the flip side, there are a lot of companies that are doubling down on their engagement efforts with their current team members and those that are on furlough. Through newsletters, virtual happy hours, and informal meetups, companies are finding creative ways to engage with team members they don't currently have work for—but hope to, soon. Some companies are also using this time to invest resources in training for their teams and making it a point to bring them together in new ways through both virtual and in-person platforms.

Swiss Army knives are in high demand

While companies previously had the luxury of paying specialists to fine tune a particular aspect of a company, they are now turning their attention to generalists who can make an impact via two or three skillsets. People who can contribute in a variety of ways have made themselves extremely valuable to many of the organizations I've spoken with. At Footers, for example, our décor manager used her previous culinary experience to help in the kitchen, took over photography responsibilities for the marketing department, and has been willing to work as an event lead. Team members are setting themselves apart from others with their ability and willingness to work outside of their normal responsibilities.



“THE COMPANIES THAT ARE DOING A RESET WITH THEIR CORE EMPLOYEES AND SEEING STRESS THROUGH A MOTIVATIONAL LENS ARE BUILDING STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT ORGANIZATIONS. THEIR TEAMS ARE MORE BONDED AND COMMITTED THAN EVER.”

Burnout is a real concern

Cost cutting measures have led to people being asked to do more with fewer resources. They have had to deal with playing a game where the rules keep changing. The exhaustion from constantly trying to reinvent a business is taking its toll on owners and employees. When I asked one leader within a large off-premise catering company what the best part of their company culture was, she told me “honestly at this point in COVID, I’m not entirely sure. To be completely transparent, I’m very burnt out and not able to fully see the positivity or excitement.” As leaders, we must be aware of our own state of mind and take care of ourselves so that we are better able to respond to the needs of our teams. Failure to do so will result in good people walking out the door on their own accord.

The shared experience

Author and happiness researcher, Shawn Achor, created a documentary called “State of Play: Happiness.” In the film, he explored how to create a positive culture in organizations where the culture or conditions (like the military, police departments and the National Football League) make it difficult to talk about “happiness.” One of the conclusions they found was that stress made people feel more bonded with their organizations.

The team members that are left standing in our companies have been through a traumatic experience. They’ve had to say goodbye to friends they worked with and many have experienced survivor guilt. Layoffs and terminations have not been restricted to the lowest salaries. Many senior executives are no longer with their employers. The companies that are doing a reset with their core employees and seeing stress through a motivational lens are building stronger and more resilient organizations. Their teams are more bonded and committed than ever. Those companies are talking about vision, the path toward 2021 and beyond. They are acknowledging the challenges ahead without being irresponsibly optimistic. And they understand that

stress needs to be a burden carried by the group, not an individual.

Street cred

The dust is far from settling and there will still be companies that won’t survive. Many talented people have been furloughed, laid off, or were part of companies that have gone out of business. There is also a decade worth of college graduates that are learning what it means to want a job and not automatically be able to secure one. The labor market has swung in favor of employers in the hospitality industry and as unemployment benefits wind down, it will continue to move further in that direction. While I don’t know of many companies currently hiring again, there are some that are starting to strategize and prepare for that process. One company I talked with has revamped their company structure and the positions in their organizational chart, they have job ads already written, and a timeline with benchmarks for when they will hire those positions.

No one knows how long COVID will last, but if we believe it will eventually come to an end, then we have a responsibility to do our best to position our companies and teams to be ready for the day when it ceases to be a challenge. Despite the obstacles we continue to face, if we take this time to grow as leaders and lead with our hearts, we can create awesome places to work for our teams and build better organizations for the future. 



Anthony Lambatos is melding the historic Footers name with new and exciting trends in catering. He grew up in the business, from scraping plates for his dad, founder of Footers Catering Jimmy Lambatos, to hosting his own concession stand at Parade of Homes while in high school. He has worked full time for Footers Catering since 2004 as Vice President and became co-owner and CEO at the beginning of 2010. Anthony is passionate about taking the knowledge he has learned from his father and putting a fresh spin on it.



Ready to Rise: 2020 ICA Survey Results



Each year, the International Caterers Association polls our members across the globe to gauge the state of the industry. This year looks different. It's no secret that 2020 turned our industry upside down. As caterers, we have experienced hardships greater than ever before, but in turn, we have also become more creative. We've relied on each other and created deeper relationships. This year's survey confirmed that COVID-19 has severely affected all caterers in some way, shape, or form.

About the participants

This year, we had 145 caterers from across the globe respond to the ICA survey. The highest percentage of participants hailed from the Northeast at 22.07%, followed by 21.38% in the Midwest, 18.62% in the Southeast, 17.24% in the Southwest, 10.34% in the West and 4.83% in the Northwest. We even had just over 6% participation from international caterers this year—a new record!

Sales & financials

While there is no surprise that COVID-19 impacted our businesses adversely, it is still sobering to see the effect. Over 75% of caterers noted that business had decreased by 70–90% when compared to this time last year, with 90.34% noting that their projected revenue for 2020 is less than half of that the previous year. Less than 1% of caterers are seeing an increase in business during this tumultuous time.

Current state of events

While many were forced to close their doors or get innovative with the types of services they offered, most were still able to cater events as cities began to reopen. On a positive note, over 30% of caterers have been able to safely cater events with over 120 participants since March 14, 2020. However, the average number of event participants allowed per local

guidelines remains around 50 people for the time being, limiting the size of gatherings for most caterers.

Looking back at the final quarter of the year, caterers had about 35 events on the books for the remainder of 2020, which means an average of two or more events weekly—a positive outlook as we begin to move forward!

While we are starting to meet again, COVID-19 events do look different. From the size of the events to the sanitation and safety practices required on-site, adapting to this new way of doing business has been no small feat financially or operationally. Despite the increase in cost of staffing and sanitization for events, only about one-third of caterers are charging extra for the sanitization services implemented, the rest are accepting it as the cost of doing business.

In terms of event size, one piece of business many have seen a rise

in is micro weddings, with over 75% of caterers noting they've had an uptick in inquiries for this new trending way to celebrate love and commitment. This is a trend we see remaining in the near future, probably beyond.

Future forward

Moving forward, we must maintain hope and positivity, as our industry has a long road to recovery. Just over half of caterers surveyed were optimistic about a quick recovery, while the other half were a little more reserved in their expectations. In order to recover, the creative services many have been offering during this time will need to remain. In order to earn new business, many have been looking toward new markets. Some have hosted private cooking classes or imaginative pop-up restaurants. Others have catered

celebration-of-life ceremonies and discovered lucrative areas such as the private aviation industry. Many have teamed up with unlikely partners, aiding hotels and office buildings with furloughed catering teams. And of course, many are taking advantage of the boon in the micro wedding industry.

For now, many events are still happening virtually or outdoors. While these trends may be temporary, they need to be embraced for recovery. We found that many caterers are offering picnic menus or curated boxes that can be shipped directly or made available for curbside pickup. These services were implemented to keep doors open during the early months of the pandemic, but we do believe they are here for the foreseeable future.

Not only are the types of events changing, but a new layer of

complexity has been added for many teams: furloughed staff. Over half surveyed are staying in touch with their furloughed team members until they can welcome them back, while about 40% did not contact for fear of legality or disgruntled staff. Teams that did stay in touch did so via email with updates on local guidelines and events. Some even implemented morale-boosting activities like Zoom happy hours, Facebook groups for daily connection, socially distanced drive-in movie nights, or food programs that send meals to staff weekly.

In catering, our teams are like family. We are all looking forward to the day our teams can be together again, catering events and bringing families and communities together. 

For more information, visit internationalcaterers.org.



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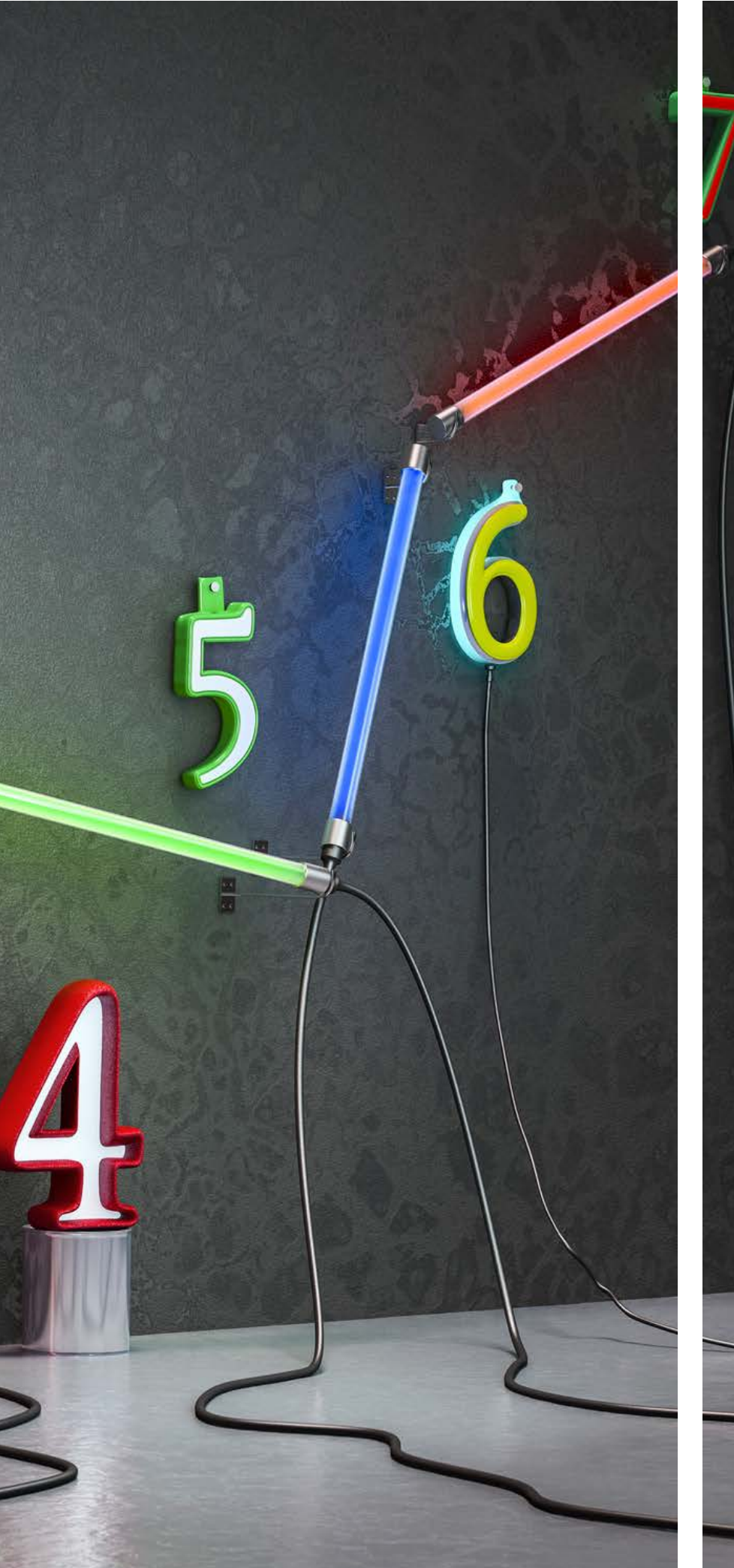
IDEAS THAT DELIVER 

FOODSERVICE

22 Positive Predictions FOR 2021

Tired of all the gloom and doom of 2020? So are we! Here are 22 ways your peers have learned from the hardships of this year and plan to make next year their best one yet.





The COVID-19 pandemic, the economic fallout, the chaotic U.S. presidential elections—you don't need us to tell you that 2020 was not the best of times for most of those who, up until March, had been cooking on all burners. But catering professionals are nothing if not forward-looking, quick-learning survivors who, as Bill Hansen, CEO of Bill Hansen Catering & Event Production says, are finding ways to make lemon cake out of the lemons 2020 has tossed their way.

Hansen, our Catering Ambassador for Catersource's July 2021 annual conference and tradeshow in Miami Beach, is just one of the 22 top industry thought leaders sharing their perspectives about what they have learned through these extraordinarily trying times, and what they are looking forward to as we round the corner into what hopefully will be a much better 2021.

From lobbying for legislative support to completely retooling product and service lines, here are just a few of the ways our industry peers have coped, and the ideas, trends, and positive perspectives they have for the future.

Do you have a story to tell? Let us know! Contact *Catersource* Editor in Chief Kathleen Stoehr at kathleen.stoehr@informa.com to share your own lessons learned and thoughts for 2021.



HERE: **Reuben Bell**, President, *Blue Elephant Events and Catering*, Editor, *Real Maine Weddings*
RIGHT: **Fausto Pifferrer**, Co-Founder and Vice President, *Blue Elephant Events and Catering*

Now we have started a conversation about the need to hire a professional lobbyist to represent the needs of the Maine wedding industry, something we've raised enough support to accomplish.



1

We started a campaign called #postponedontcancel this summer to encourage our wedding and special event clients to postpone their 2020 events and also to buoy the spirits of our colleagues in the Maine wedding industry. It has been shared across the U.S. and internationally, and we feel that it really has made a positive impact on the industry. In lieu of a large gathering, we held a photo/interview session in which over 30 Maine wedding industry business owners were photographed by Focus Photography; SP Films created a video, too.

"The pure reliance on creative and divergent thinking has been a resounding win for all and will continue as we push into 2021. The absolute need for innovation within our services and the scope of their possibilities has insisted our industry get outside the box to survive." – Renee Miner

Renee Miner, Owner,
*Empyrean Events and
Catering*

As we look to 2021 and work to keep inspiration and motivation high, we've found through a daily practice of "what's good" that there are many areas to find hope and excitement in the coming year. While not all of us may feel entirely secure in our outlook, no good comes from dwelling in uncertainty.

The pure reliance on creative and divergent thinking has been a resounding win for all and will continue as we push into 2021. The absolute need for innovation within our services and the scope of their possibilities has insisted our industry get outside the box to survive. This type of thinking and creative work will continue to flourish in the coming year. Our eyes-wide-open approach to how we can better serve our clients right where they are in their lives has provided opportunities many of us would not have reached for otherwise.

Our team has found success in highly styled cooking and cocktail kits. These weekly, monthly, and quarterly subscription culinary and cocktail kits have proven to be



a tremendously successful way to continue to serve our clients outside of their normal special event needs. With the launch of this product line, we've found new ways to serve our current and past clients. The rise in subscription boxes moving into the food and beverage industry will continue to find success. While caterers may find this outside their normal service scope, it does provide a great opportunity to continue to serve your clients in a more granular way. Our industry is filled with creative, design-focused minds which have found a home in curating these stylized kits. The combination of these skillsets and the talent in the chefs and mixologists has really proved powerful in the development and deployment of these subscription kits.

Julia A. Kendrick Conway,
CEO, *Assaggiare Mendocino,
Inc.*, Director for Government
Affairs and Legislation,
*California Association for
Private Events*

3 I have spent the 2020 season working with CAPE, California Association for Private Events, to convince the State of California to allow us to reopen weddings and events safely based on restaurant and other guidelines already in place. We did a "Walk for Weddings" at the State Capitol on October 13, which went viral in the



media, and finally got the attention of the appropriate people in the Governor's office so we are moving forward at last.

CAPE (www.capecalifornia.org) is a diverse team of planners, caterers, and other service providers representing some of the state's top destination wedding markets. Advocacy has been a full-time job since late April, when it became clear that COVID was going to last more than a month or so. I started at the local level, and thanks to networking with contacts built over years of Catersource attendance, I connected with this amazing group. 2021 bookings are strong, so it looks like a promising year ahead.



Brittny Drye,
Editor-in-Chief, *Love Inc. Magazine*

Depending on how this election will go and given the recent Supreme Court Justice confirmation of Trump-appointed conservative Amy Coney Barrett, I predict we'll see an increase in LGBTQ+ elopements due to the threat that marriage equality will be overturned and the strong chance that, once again, they will no longer have the right to marry.

I predict we'll see a lot of shifts that were made due to COVID stick around long past pandemic times.

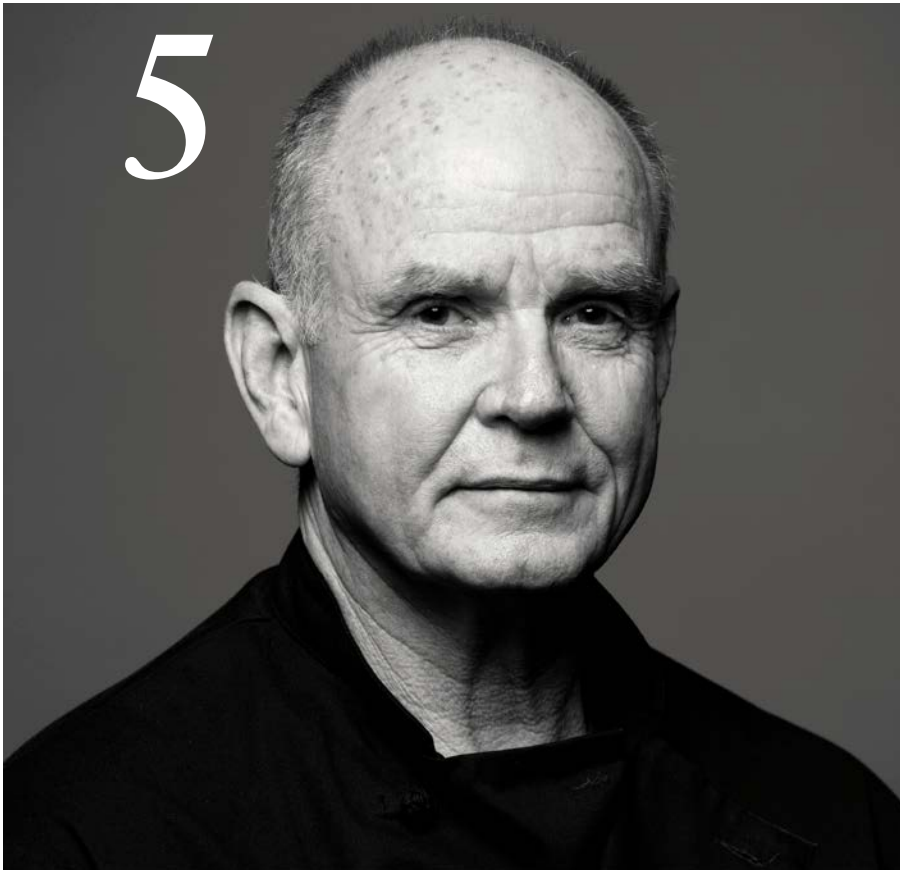
- Outdoor weddings have always been a popular option, particularly for the ceremony, but I feel we'll see a rise in tented receptions, and not necessarily as a Plan B.
- Individualized cocktail hour apps, drinks, and desserts: Grazing tables had their moment, but they're certainly not COVID-friendly. Instead, caterers took those same concepts and put them in individually packaged delights: mini jars of dips, individual charcuterie plates,

canned cocktails, and single-serve mini cakes. The micro wedding trend that was boosted to follow COVID guidelines has allowed for more focus, and budget, to go to the individual guest experience.

- Out-of-the-box entertainment: You did not want to see dance floors packed at 2020 weddings, and this is likely to extend into 2021. Keep guests entertained with other forms of performance entertainment, such as fire dancers, magicians, and drag queens.
- Upgraded lounge areas: Due to wanting to offer proper social distancing, styled lounge areas will become even more popular, often having more than one area dedicated to safe sitting.
- Virtual guest care packages with Zoom: Even if you are unable to have as large of a guest list as you had hoped, you can still involve loved ones from afar. I love the idea of sending a care package to virtual guests that include gifts like mini cakes and champagne, so that they are able to toast the new couple via Zoom.

"There are lots of opportunities to get creative, meet the needs of your clients and your marketplace, and save the day!" – Lon Lane

5



Lon Lane, Founder, *Lon Lane's Inspired Occasions*; Chairman, *International Caterers Association Educational Foundation*

As we approach the upcoming holidays, limited family gatherings will be common. Unless something really changes, restaurants will be packed due to limited accessibility, creating the need for new products to meet our client's needs.

Virtual holiday dinners could be dreadful, long, and boring. Virtual cocktail hours have been done, so instead, consider offering ways they can start the day together. Create products that can be shipped to family members for a holiday brunch that would not require a lot of time commitment from the virtual brunch members but will bring families together for the start of the day.

Start developing romantic dinner packages for two for Valentine's Day with food, beverage, napkins, candles etc.

There are lots of opportunities to get creative, meet the needs of your clients and your marketplace, and save the day!

Anthony Lambatos,
Co-Owner, *Footers Catering*, *MIBE Tribe*

Anytime something is taken away from us we all gain a greater appreciation

6 for things that we may previously have taken for granted. People are starving for in-person interaction and once this [pandemic] clears, they will be even more excited about planning and attending events than they were before COVID-19. Our industry is resilient, and we've all learned a lot about ourselves and our teams over the past eight months. I believe the companies that make it through will be stronger on the other side and ready to create incredible experiences through live events.



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Warren Dietel, CEO and Owner,
Puff 'n Stuff Catering

Things are without question improving at Puff 'n Stuff Catering, but we still have a long way to go. We have kept our team busy supporting a number of community programs feeding the food insecure and a variety of smaller social events. This helps us retain a core group of leaders and also put many on-call team members back to work. We are a 40-year-old company, and this is the first time our predictive model has simply broken apart. The forecast for 2021 is better than 2020, but it is still significantly smaller than previous years and we need to develop new channels to grow revenue. We have traditionally focused on corporate, weddings, and social business, and now we have to recalibrate to find a way to support our customers in their homes and when they return to their offices. The question becomes, how do we create a model which drives

efficiency and a fair profit while creating something that works for our customers in their homes and businesses?

When COVID-19 first hit, out of necessity we quickly shifted to providing family meals. It was mildly successful, but we realized there was something more to the model. We decided to land the proverbial airplane and develop the model while on the ground versus when it's already mid-flight. We took a step back and analyzed all the data we collected and explored paths on how we could do this efficiently. We are now developing an app we plan to soft launch in December as the beginning of a four-phase business plan for a new company. Heirloom is built on the nostalgic ideal of bringing the family back together at dinner. We will deliver individual and family meals first, provisions, and support for

small gatherings then expand into a corporate network delivery model, and ultimately a ghost-kitchen model that will include third-party aggregators like Grubhub, UberEats, etc.—all e-commerce-based. Ultimately, we think it could be bigger than our existing business model and we intend to continue beyond the time when our traditional business returns.



Kristin Banta, Creative Director,
Kristin Banta Events

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We have all been blindsided and hurt by what came with 2020 but there is always a positive result that stems from any negative, a pendulum swing. In reaction to social distancing and a lack of socialization, we all find ourselves desperate to connect and to gather. I believe this need will spark a renewed enthusiasm for events and a post-COVID resurgence for this medium as a cornerstone for connectivity. Further, it is likely that companies forced to furlough teams or to revise operations to a work-at-home model will have the impetus to turn focus back to community culture in order to maintain team synergy. Budgets previously dedicated to traditional models of operation may now be unallocated dollars that will need to be leveraged toward company events and team building, compensating for remote employment. This all indicates that when we are on the other side of this, we will party—and we will party harder than ever.



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Kris Reinhard, Partner,
Fifth Group Restaurants and
General Manager,
Bold Catering & Design

It feels like the corporate work-from-home trend might be here to stay, or at the very least change the way corporations operate in the near to mid-term. Post-COVID, this trend will be a positive for the events industry. People will still need to come together and with more remote workers, we expect team-building events and remote meeting capabilities will be in high demand.

Roy Porter,
Activities Director,
Engage Works

Think of the COVID experience as if one were tempering the steel of a good knife. We're learning about this situation all the time in terms of treatment and prevention, and I'm positive that business is going to return. In the meantime, to get through these rough challenging days, recall your purpose and will to survive and succeed again. Also, remember the key is not to adopt to the circumstances, but to adapt to them. There will be many new, different challenges and opportunities in the future. Instead of fighting—or just giving in—look for creative solutions, ways to adapt to come out on top and still accomplish what needs to happen. Unfortunately, there will be many closures of customers, caterers, venues, and suppliers. Look at these as opportunities to increase your market share and customer base, to add venues and new creative partners. The economy will return and in time be very strong. History shows that those who weather these storms are stronger and better in the long run.

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Ken Barrett-Sweet, Vice President of Catering,
The Catered Affair

The trend that will hold over from 2020 into 2021 is the importance of experience relative to catering and events. This crisis has provided us the reminder that we must clasp onto all that matters most to us—the relationships and the experiences with those who hold the greatest significance in our lives. Lavish weddings, for example, will no longer be the keystone to proving one's stature in the community, but rather we will find more focus on the celebration of life and love. We could see that these celebrations will be smaller in number, but clients will invest heavily on those intimate gatherings. As we transition into 2021, we should focus on the experiences that we facilitate as a part of our services to clients. These “intangible” feelings will resonate with the buyers in 2021.

As nonprofit and corporate event planners navigate hybrid events, I do not see the “boxed gala” going away any time soon. We could have never imagined that luxury vendors would turn their focus from in-person activation toward creating impact on a device and remotely. Chefs are handing over their artwork to be left in the hands of home-based amateurs in hopes that the outcome will be fantastic. We are learning how to communicate more effectively, create value, experience, and joy in a consumer relationship where we have no interaction—challenging, but necessary. This will not change for the foreseeable future as corporate “trainings” develop in a remote, work-from-home world.

Bill Hansen, CEO,
Bill Hansen Catering & Event Production

We are doing our very best to make lemon cake out of lemons. Our sales team of 10 works remotely with daily 9:00 a.m. Zoom meetings that have helped us all stay connected and focused. We've also taken this opportunity to commence an awesome sales training program by Grant Cardone.

Although corporate business has ghosted for the most part, couples marry regardless of the economy and 2021 will be a record year for weddings at my Villa Woodbine in Coconut Grove, and our exclusive venues in the Redland in southwestern Dade county.

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Meryl Snow, Senior Consultant,
Certified Catering Consultants;
Feastivities Events Philadelphia

The pandemic has amplified challenges, exposing weaknesses in existing sales models. We need to refocus, retool, retrench, and rebound. The future of selling events during and post-COVID will not be about touting your awards and company accomplishments, it will be about how you will keep your clients and their guests safe. The event industry will be scrutinized to determine how to usher in these

new changes. So many companies, organizations, and social events will be counting on us to create the 'new normal' as we prepare for recovery. Every company has no choice but to focus on sales and the sales team structure and strategy. The magic may be the brand, but the reality is the sales force. Your brand can't fly without it. Your brand can get them to the door, but your sales team needs to close the sale.

Alan Berg, CSP,
Global Speaking
Fellow, Author,
Business Consultant,
Professional Speaker,
Sales Trainer

One of the big positives I see coming out of the crisis are that those who have learned how to sell remotely, without meeting the client in person, have picked up a valuable skill. While it's nice to sit across the table from a prospect or client, it hasn't always been necessary. Some businesses did it out of habit, and some people had convinced themselves that it had to be done

that way. Those that have mastered this can continue to sell this way, even when it's safe to meet in person. Think of the time you'll save by not having all of those in-person meetings! Another positive I see with my clients is packaging your services differently and positioning yourself as more than just a caterer. Selling on a per-person cost for catering will limit your profits when guest counts are down. Clients are going to be reluctant to agree to higher minimum headcounts for a while. Those companies that provide more than just catering (rentals, décor, planning, full-service

packages, etc.) can hold onto more profit. If you can maximize your profit per event now, that will translate into exponentially more profit as things pick up and headcounts increase.

You all need to think about selling the results of choosing specifically for your business. If you're selling catering, someone else sells it cheaper. You need to make yourself more valuable in the eyes of the client. Have them see you as a resource, not an expense. Hopefully, this crisis has made you all think about what really differentiates you from other caterers. If you've

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learned how to articulate that now, it will pay dividends for you in the future!



Keith A. Lord, Founder & Principal, *Strataje Fourteen, Culinary Operations & Logistics Consulting*

It has a year of tension, hardship, loss, the unknown, and, well, let's face it, simply waiting around. Hurdles aside, we are the most adaptable group of human-driven business leaders in the country. We thrive on the challenge of the next. So, what is next, how is it going to work, what will come from the lessons learned from this year?

I am most excited about the new virtual world we have all become immersed in. Pajama-wearing business Zoom meetings aside, this may be our biggest takeaway win from 2020.

Although many companies have had to make culinary adjustments such as keeping production chefs and leaving the dreams of research and development chefs behind, this may be the best business decision we all did not necessarily make for ourselves.

Going forward, through this new virtual world, we can now bring ideas like new spring/summer menus to sales, Instagramable wedding food packages, and all those new pretty appetizers to our kitchens without infringing on production time, and at far less cost.

In 2021, I am most looking forward to working with clients across the country, helping their teams to design menus, dishes, and to bring those items to production

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life. Virtual assisted, this can all be achieved in a new way we never thought it could be before. This is the new R&D component of our businesses—without the staffing overhead, or the expense of travel and accommodation—that may have prevented us from having these types of discussions in years past.

We will all adapt, grow in ways we never thought about before, and expose our teams to new ideas—and continue to do this together.



Robin Selden, Managing Partner & Executive Chef, *Marcia Selden Catering & Events*

We have been strategizing, reinventing, and reimagining our business since Friday the 13th of March when we returned from Catersource (fitting, right?!). While there is breath in my body, we will do every creative thing possible to come through this

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pandemic stronger, wiser, and better than we were before. You cannot take hospitality and the love of entertaining out of someone when that's what they love. We bring hope to humanity and evoke joy through our food. People are longing to be together, so we are paving the way, setting safe social standards, and establishing entertaining routines so that our clients feel safe at our catered events.

My mother, Marcia Selden, has big dreams and plans for Marcia Selden Catering and despite a pandemic will continue to trailblaze through, make those plans, and create incredible memories for our clients! Our food brings so much happiness to people as its made and designed with love and they can feel it. We've embraced the socially distanced party and definitely changed the way we present our food—even if it's arriving as a party in a box or as a pre-packaged meal, I guarantee that you will feel that love in every bite!

Our fall and winter seasons are filled with small at-home gatherings with family and friends. Over the last several months, our clients have enjoyed entertaining safely outdoors, with carefully planned parties, intimate weddings, mitzvahs, birthdays, and milestone celebrations. In addition to the custom-catered experiences we are known for, we are most excited about our newest concept called "Dinner-Party." Specifically, we will provide a turnkey "Dinner-Party" complete with unique and curated menus, custom-printed menu cards, tabletop rentals that are designed based on the menu theme, florals to complement the tabletop, awesome wines, and specialty crafted cocktails. Our thought was to take the stress and the work out of entertaining and to provide our clients with everything that they need to host just the perfect dinner party at home.

Adam Noyes, President, *Proof of the Pudding*

Looking ahead, I am optimistic about the recovery of our catering industry, which has been one of, if not the hardest, hit by COVID-19. While very challenging, managing through this crisis has made us all better and more efficient in doing more with less so that when business does return to more normalized levels, we will be in a good position to improve our margins.

In terms of business, looking forward in 2021, we are seeing pent-up demand, particularly in the social market segment. After a year of mostly canceled or virtual events, there are tons of events that were postponed for those who have been waiting to get married, celebrate an anniversary or birthday, or finally enjoy large family and friend gatherings. Out of necessity, the nonprofit fundraising gala market must get back to business as soon as possible as their fundraising has been negatively impacted without live events. The corporate segment will be the slowest to rebound, but my opinion is that it will be faster than many are predicting due to the fact that businesses have struggled to get in front of their customers

and employees to maintain crucial relationships. Companies that are first to get back to entertaining, launching new products, and holding employee functions will gain a competitive advantage in sales, and employee retention and engagement. I believe March 2021 will be the real beginning of the rebound, with most of the pent-up event demand booking in the second half of next year.

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Cindy Marshall, CPCE, Conference Services Manager, *University of Alaska Anchorage*; *National Association for Catering and Events* local board member; *Visit Anchorage* committee member

Our conference services department at the University of Alaska-Anchorage, handles conferences on campus, meetings, events, and guest housing for attendees at conferences, as well as academic year housing for guests who wish to stay at least a month in our apartments on campus. We also have some condos available for long-term rentals. We have received some approval since COVID-19 to submit housing reservations for military and medical-related groups/guests. Any event/housing still needs to have final approval from our risk management division, and we see this trend continuing, but as things get hopefully better in 2021, we hope to increase our housing and events. Currently we are receiving a lot of outdoor requests for events in parking lots on campus, which tend to be safer under state/

local guidelines, and we see that trend continuing for early 2021. Many of our repeat annual clients were forced to do virtual meetings, but with the outdoor/parking lot options, we see that as a positive way to still have an in-person event.

We also see the hybrid model of work for staff and employees continuing and being productive into 2021. We rotate office hours with working from home and see this as a positive way to move forward in 2021. We are getting a fair number of inquiries for 2021 of student groups/university-related events/conferences and also see this moving forward for the better in the new year.

The important thing we are focusing on is remaining positive and finding a way to move forward with requested events under new protocols. We have



a high trust level with our existing/repeat clients, and together we will work toward a positive outcome for partnering events and conferences for 2021 and working toward success with new COVID protocols.



Christina Matteucci, Executive Director, *David Beahm Experiences*; *TEDx Speaker*

Due to an increasingly restricted 2020 holiday season, society will be aching to gather in 2021. As indoor dining options continue to come back online and safety concerns are assuaged, I believe the gateway for the return of larger indoor special events will be intimate dinners hosted in unique locations. Venues never previously considered for smaller affairs due to their exclusivity, as well as their vastness and grandeur, will now be on the table. Yes, we will see the resurgence of many restaurants' private dining rooms, but I predict innovative and unforgettable gatherings for 50 guests or less popping up in expansive museum galleries; atop the massive stages of unused theaters and grand opera houses; and embraced by the vaulted halls of historic castles and stately homes around the globe. The sense of spaciousness these venues provide will comfort hosts and guests; give culinary and event creatives the space to dream and create once-in-a-lifetime affairs; and provide invaluable support to many arts and non-profit organizations who have struggled to survive COVID-19.

20 **Chef Peter McCaffrey**, Culinary Director, *Leading Caterers of America*; Senior Consultant, *Certified Catering Consultants LLC*

Thirty years in this industry, and I've seen nothing like 2020. 2020 has devastated the catering industry with COVID-19, political unrest, and racial tensions. Is there any good that has come out of all this bad? I've seen some positive developments through these challenging times.

1. Healthy eating habits are here to stay! This trend has been growing more and more over the last 10 years. Now with the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever to stay healthy and keep health challenges like obesity, heart disease, and diabetes in check. Plant-forward, flexitarian, and clean eating are a way of life. Healthy diets help the immune system and that is more important than ever before. I see customers embracing this lifestyle like never before!

2. Diversified companies are weathering the storm best. Those firms that have government

contracts, school contracts, and cater to those experiencing natural disasters can use those accounts to help keep key personnel employed until there is a vaccine and our industry returns. I see companies embracing new opportunities.

3. Out-of-the-box thinking!

Caterers are one of the most creative people I know. I've seen companies pivot to find work, from food trucks to ghost kitchens to home-delivered meals. Just because you haven't



done it before or it's out of your normal business profile, doesn't prevent caterers from adjusting to the times. Owners care about their team. I've heard time and time again, "I need to keep my team busy."

4. Chefs create in the kitchen.

Chefs have the time to dig into and update their menu and recipe portfolio. They are experimenting and getting ready for 2021-22 trends. Working with chickpeas (the new cauliflower for 2021), fruit and veggie jerky, plant-based dairy, mushroom broth, and new cuisines. I'm looking forward to the new taste and innovative dishes coming out for 2021.

As I look ahead, I'm going to embrace the new year and new possibilities. To me, the glass is half full. Our industry will survive and once again thrive when COVID-19 is finally put to rest, the 2020 election is behind us and we respect and listen to all people.



Jennifer Perna,
Founder, *Fulton Market Consulting*

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2020 has been a year of heartache, stress, and financial pain. It also has been a year of incredibly tough decisions and forced change. Is there a silver lining in this? Absolutely. It has made us all sit back, reflect on what is really important, and remember why we are in this business in the first place.

I have had many conversations with clients of all revenue sizes regarding what is next. From a \$1 million caterer on the West Coast to a \$50 million caterer on the East Coast, these conversations are all the same. I encourage each owner to remember their first day in this business and why they started it. Was it their passion for creating beautiful food? Are they the third generation of the family-owned business? Did they just want to make lots of money?

Well, here's the great news. This forced change has made all business owners decide what is next and if this is what they really want to do. How many times have you said, "if I could start all over again, I would do it this way"? How often do you get a reset button? How often do you have the time to slow down, look at everything around you and decide if this is what you want to do for the next 5, 10, 20 years? If there is one thing this year has given us, it has been time to think. Chances are, if you have made it this far, you are probably going to be in business in 2021.

Look at 2021 as your new start. Take advantage of this opportunity now to be even better than before. Make 2021 whatever you want it to be.

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Ron Ben-Israel, Owner,
Ron Ben-Israel Cakes + TREATS

Everyone involved in the food business specializing in custom work in events has suffered greatly. At first, we had no words when faced with such a global calamity. Then, missing my colleagues and friends and wondering how they were doing, I went online to my beloved Instagram and Facebook. I started a weekly Instagram LIVE event called *CakeTalk with Ron and Friends*. I haven't missed a week. I talk with cake people, and also chocolatiers and pastry chefs, and now we have up to 10,000 people joining and commenting and learning during each 45-minute segment. Now I have caterers and special events planners from all over the world who want to be on the show. It's very uplifting.

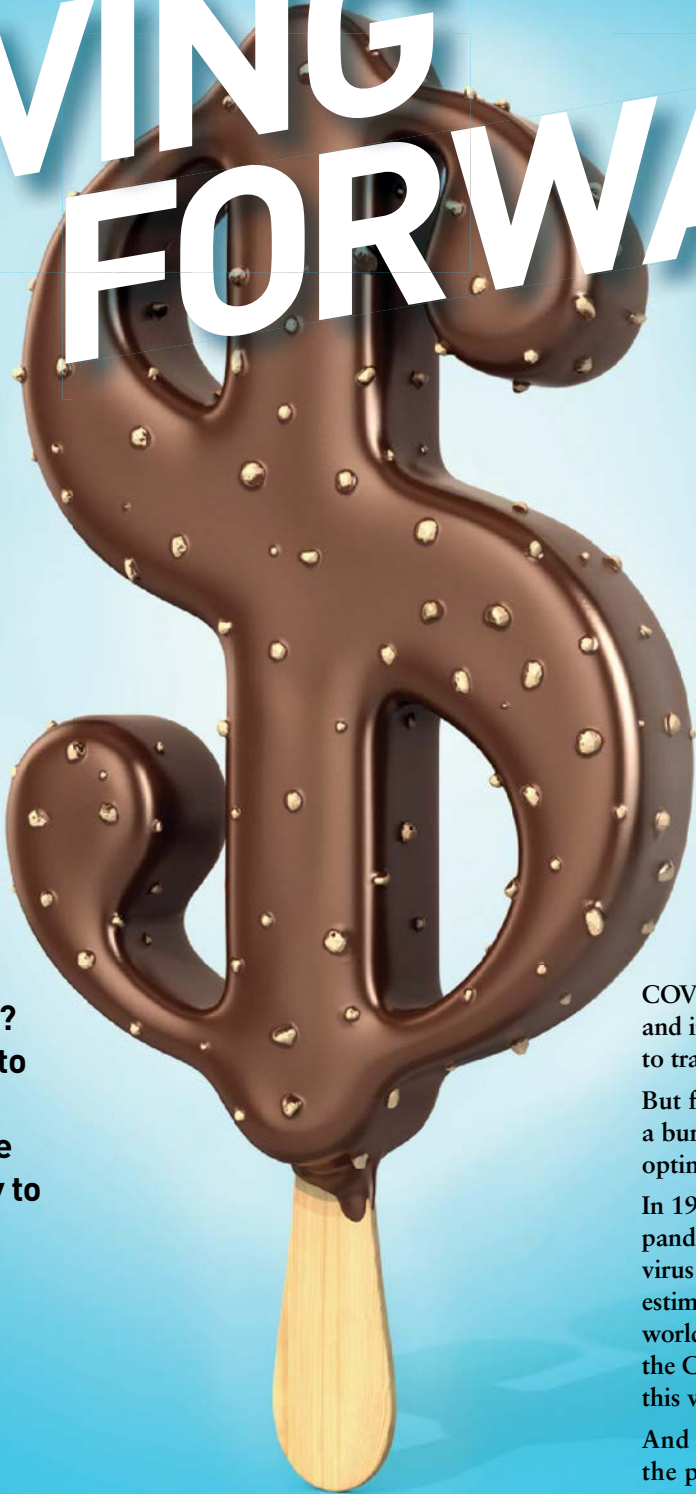
I have always specialized in custom-made cakes, but in order to pay the rent this summer when weddings were downsizing from 200 to

20, I had to do something with my empty kitchen. I partnered with pastry chef Tom Smallwood to create Ron Ben-Israel Treats, which makes limited-edition mini-cakes, cookies, and macarons. We started out delivering locally on our bicycles, but then everyone around the country wanted their piece of cake, so to speak. Now we ship our mini-cakes and other treats around the country, and even as far as Puerto Rico. The response has been tremendous. Instead of being asked to provide one wedding cake, now people are asking us to provide 160 mini-cakes and ship them all over the country so their virtual guests can join the wedding party. Charities also are ordering our treats to ship to their contributors and donors. We also create custom packaging for the event and include messages and gift cards.

There are so many ways to stay afloat by changing your focus. For me, that meant delivery boxes for the holidays instead of large catered events. I don't think I ever would have gone in this direction if it wasn't for COVID. 

"There are so many ways to stay afloat by changing your focus. For me, that meant delivery boxes for the holidays instead of large catered events. I don't think I ever would have gone in this direction if it wasn't for COVID." — Ron Ben-Israel

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY 2021: MOVING FORWARD



By Kathleen
Stoehr

It has been quite the year, hasn't it? We all stepped into 2020 with a great deal of confidence and enthusiasm, only to have it dashed.

To that end, in October, *Catersource* sent out a survey to its readership and show attendees, to determine the current status and health of the industry, as well as gather thoughts on the impact of

COVID, thoughts on diversity and inclusion, and willingness to travel.

But first, I'd like to begin with a burst of forward-thinking optimism.

In 1918–1919, an influenza pandemic caused by an H1N1 virus spread worldwide. It is estimated that one third of the world's population (according to the CDC) became infected with this virus.

And yet, what happened after the pandemic? The opulence



↑ MASK WEARING DURING THE PANDEMIC IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY.

Photo by Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

and over-the-top decade of The Roaring Twenties from 1920–1929, replete with surging economy, a cultural edginess that gave birth to the Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance, and the passing of new political freedoms! Parties, despite Prohibition, were legendary.

What I'm saying is that despite everything, we must choose optimism. The catering and events industry will rise again, and we will thrive. We are resilient. If you don't believe it, turn back to page 12 first and read our 22 *Positive Predictions for 2021* feature! That will put a smile on your face.

So, let's begin, shall we?

First, about those who responded to the survey: →



SURVEY RESPONDENTS

47% OF THOSE WHO RESPONDED ARE CATERERS, PRIMARILY THE ON- AND OFF-PREMISE MARKETS

39% ARE FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESSES

63% WORK FOR OR OWN A COMPANY THAT HAS BEEN IN BUSINESS MORE THAN 20 YEARS

25% ARE WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

22% ARE BIPOC-OWNED BUSINESSES

72% HAVE WORKED IN CATERING OR EVENTS FOR MORE THAN 15 YEARS

47% HAVE POSITIONS IN MANAGEMENT OR OPERATIONS



↑ GUESTS DANCING IN THE BALLROOM ABOARD CUNARD LINER 'BERENGARIA' AT SOUTHAMPTON DOCKS. THEY ARE ATTENDING A DANCE AND CABARET TO RAISE FUNDS FOR CHARITY.
Photo by Puttnam/Getty Images

THE IMPACT OF COVID ON OUR BUSINESSES

This is not going to be a pleasant section to read, so let's just get it over with, OK? The first question I asked, related to COVID was:

Do you agree that the COVID-19 pandemic represents the most severe challenge your company has ever faced?

DEFINITELY
86%

Possibly
9%

Probably
3%

No
2%

Essentially, 98% chose an answer that leaned more toward yes than no. That is really a strong "yes" statement, especially for those companies who have been in business for decades and made it through the recession, 9/11, even fires that destroyed company headquarters. Only 2% said, "no." No, this is not the most severe challenge my company has ever faced.

POSITIVE PIVOTS

“ Party on the 'go'... example: working with a corporate client to host their summer picnic. Each employee drove through a line in the office parking lot and was handed a family-size picnic dinner and a set of branded picnic blankets and branded thermoses. Employees took these items home or to a park, but all celebrated on the same day.”

“ Our coffee shop stayed open during the pandemic and did to go orders with curbside pick-up. Some of the items were favorites like Family Style Chicken and Beef Tips. People really loved this. Our space is large enough and [we] have several banquet rooms so we social distanced all our rooms, added space onto all our weddings and were able to keep weddings going from August thru November.”

“ Boxed meals, donations to local charities backed by high end regular clients—everyone paying it forward and acting as community—all in it together.”

“ We've been working to implement 'celebration boxes,' as have many folks across the industry, self-contained high end meal boxes to safely enjoy a special occasion.”

“ Our at home delivery service of meals—hundreds weekly, boxed everything! Parties in every shape and form served out of a box!”

REGARDING CATERED EVENTS

Most of us experienced event cancellations, reschedules, or that the deposit provided for an event was now enough to pay for the entire event, with greatly diminished “attendance.” **I asked those surveyed to report on their events between March 14 and September 30, 2020.**

58%
of all events were
entirely cancelled

4%
were completed
on the date contracted

6%
of events were completed
on the date contracted but
with greatly reduced
attendance numbers

3%
had events rescheduled
and completed
before 9/30/2020

3%
had events rescheduled
into Q4 2020

26%
had events
rescheduled into 2021

What does this mean? Essentially, with 58% of events cancelled in 2020 and 26% rescheduled into 2021—caterers have been operating on about 16% of the revenue they are used to, and even that pittance is no doubt diminished given that many events had guest counts cut to the base minimum, depending upon state mandates.

POSITIVE PIVOTS

CREATIVE IDEAS FOR EXPERIENCES “IN A BOX” RAN RAMPANT THROUGHOUT THE INDUSTRY, LIMITED ONLY BY BOX SIZE AND AVAILABILITY.

Photo courtesy Jeffrey Selden



THE UNSCRIPTED DURHAM HOTEL OFFERS GUESTS THEIR OWN PRIVATE IGLOOS. DESIGNED WITH FESTIVITY AND SOCIAL DISTANCING IN MIND, THE IGLOOS CAN ACCOMMODATE UP TO 10 PEOPLE WHO WILL ENJOY WEEKLY LIVE ENTERTAINMENT AND SCENIC VIEWS OF DOWNTOWN DURHAM, NC.

Photo courtesy Unscripted Durham



DRIVE IN EVENTS IN THE SUMMER MONTHS BECAME AN IDEAL MEANS TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER—BUT DISTANCED.

Photo courtesy Luxury Wedding & Events



CHEF KATHY CASEY PRESENTED TWO TYPES OF CONTAINED BEVERAGES AT CATERSOURCE IN MARCH 2020 THAT WOULD BECOME EVEN MORE TRENDY THAN EXPECTED: **THE BOTTLED AND (SHOWN) BAGGED COCKTAILS.**

Photos courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



LIKewise, DRIVE UP TO-GO BECAME A MASSIVE TREND IN 2020 THAT KEPT CATERERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN BUSINESS.

Photo courtesy Footers Catering



DESPITE THE MASK AND GLOVE REGULATIONS, CATERERS STILL MANAGED TO MAKE SERVING STYLES JOYFUL.

Photo courtesy Rachel B Photography



CHEFS TOOK TO THE SMALL SCREEN, WITH HELP FROM ZOOM, TO PRESENT FOOD AND BEVERAGE DEMOS FOR AN AUDIENCE HUNGRY TO INTERACT.

Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



Regarding **revenue**, and pointing directly to March through September only, respondents estimated that revenue decreased by 76% YOY.

Regarding **number of events**, respondents estimated that they would complete 75% fewer events in all of 2020 versus 2019.

Regarding **deposits on events**, 50% noted that they returned all deposits with no holdbacks or held back a certain amount for costs already incurred.

Finally, let's look ahead to the rest of Q4 and into 2021.

Bookings are 85% "worse" in Q4 2020 than they were in 2019. Forward bookings into 2021 compared to the same point the previous year (end of 2019 and Q1 2020) are 54% "worse" than the prior year. And, about half of respondents say it's unclear if 2021 will be busy because potential clients have been in a "wait and see" mode.
Comments:

"I think a lot of people will stay in the 'wait and see mode' for 2021, and bookings for 2022 will increase significantly."

"We have clients holding off booking our services, and we already have clients moving their events from Q12021."

"I believe 2021 will be better, but I think it will take longer than 2021 to recover or see a more normal number of events booked."

"All of the rescheduled events from 2020 on top of the 2021 events that were planned."

"Completely booked for 2021."

FUTURE THINKING

The big question is... When do you think the catering and events industry will return to some semblance of normalcy? Here is what your peers said:

Q1 2021
4%

Q2 2021
17%

Q3 2021
29%

Q4 2021
17%

Q1 2022
14%

Q2 2022
13%

Other
7%

And, "other" does not necessarily mean beyond Q2 2022. Some pointed to widespread distribution of a vaccine as the tipping point, some to a return to normalcy after the new political administration occupies the White House, many were unable to speculate, and one stated, "2020 is a wash; 2021: fixing everything; 2022: some profit; 2023 hopefully back to normal."

We clearly hope it doesn't take that long, but if we tally the first three listed percentages above, we are at a solid 50% of the group who believe

events may be somewhat back to normal by June 2021 and beyond.

When we are once again "normal" most caterers (72%) answered "yes" to: **If you have the opportunity to reconstitute your business to what it was before the COVID crisis, would you do this?** Those on the fence (unsure – 7%) offered interesting observations, however. I appreciated the person who mentioned that good lessons were learned from this experience that they would not change, but "that said, if I could re-employ all those who lost work, I would." Another added, "It's really a mix. Some things we are glad to see go—we're focusing less on large weddings and events and adding a greater focus on our catering delivery service and in-house private dining. As a wise mentor once told us: mine the diamonds in your own back yard."

To stay afloat, caterers have turned to delivery/pick up, contract foodservice, and disaster services catering. Food trucks, meal kits for one or many, hybrid and virtual events, online teaching, hotel partnerships (see more about that on page 54), retail sales of branded merchandise, groceries, PPE development, and corporate holiday gifts were other new business implementations mentioned.

We do what we can to keep the lights on.

TRAVEL TIME

For those of us who travel for our jobs, or who offer destination events, here is some **good news** for you: people are already twitchy (in a good way) to board planes: 36% of respondents named Q4 of 2020 as when they would be ready to travel personally. It gets better. By Q2 2021, that percentage jumps to 69%.

POSITIVE PIVOTS

For business, by Q2 2021, 61% will be traveling for business. OK, so we at Catersource were interested especially in Q3 2021 (...our big show and all...) and personal travel rises yet again to 83%. For business: 78%. Whoo hoo! Considering Miami Beach is also a great location for a family vacation, we can only expect that we will see you all live there next July!

MONEY MONEY MONEY

Over half (57%) received **government assistance** in the form of PPP or grant; 39% of companies returned event deposits with no holdback; 11% returned deposits with some offset for costs already incurred; 22% returned some deposits but held onto some others per the terms of the contract. Of the remaining 28%, respondents were either unsure or were able to move deposits into a rescheduled date. Only 16% of caterers asked that a non-disclosure/non-disparage agreement be signed before money was returned.

REGARDING COVID PROTOCOLS

We have seen some wonderful new products come through from manufacturers and suppliers, springing to assist us with the challenges we face—not just with guest interaction, but also for use within our own companies. So, let's talk health and safety protocol for a bit.

While we can do everything under the sun to mask up, glove up, spritz and shield our employees (68% of companies do health screenings themselves in house), issues related to guest compliance remain challenging. We asked:

In your estimation, what

“We launched a company for drop off corporate catering. We advertised our sprinter van for ‘nights on the town.’ We started an outdoor open-air farmers market for small scale artisans.”

“We normally have 2000 catering events and 200 special events. We have been pivoting for each event and very specifically the special events for our members. At the beginning we took the Mother Daughter Luncheon and turned it into a Mother Daughter Glamping To-Go for them to pick up and enjoy the weekend with. It had activities and virtual aspects. As stay at home orders and restrictions lifted, we have gotten even more creative in bringing the events to our members in some way or form.”

“Adding tents to accommodate social distancing, which normally would not have been needed.”

“Supplied meals to furloughed employees during pandemic to keep them in touch with company. Developed new COVID-19 butler passed boxes to protect guests.”

“We implemented a daily delivery program Tuesday thru Saturday. Provided a new menu each week that contains appetizers, salads, soups, entrees, a la carte and dessert. Very well received 40–80 deliveries to private residences each week.”



POSITIVE PIVOTS



CHEFS ALSO TOOK TO THEIR OWN VANS TO DELIVER THEIR NEW, DELICIOUS PRODUCTS, BORN FROM FURLOUGHS AND LAYOFFS.

Photo captured from Instagram @piehighchefs



FROM CONTAINERS OF SALAD DRESSING TO FULL ON FDA APPROVED FROZEN DINNERS, CATERERS WORKED WITH WHAT THEY HAD AND MADE THE BEST OF THEIR SITUATIONS.

Photo captured from Instagram @hickorystreetcatering

percentage of your events have you experienced client- or guest-imposed violations of COVID-related regulations or operating restrictions?

48%
have experienced violations imposed by guests



How is this handled? Not all companies are assuming responsibility for the policing of their guests, though overwhelmingly (68%), said they are absorbing the cost of PPE and other COVID-related necessities.

In most states, masks, social distancing, and limited guest counts are the norm. In 52% of the respondents' states, buffets were not allowed as of September 30, 2020. If buffets were allowed, most respondents noted that they had to be attended by masked and gloved staff, and buffet food shielded from guests—no self-service.

REGARDING STAFFING

Despite that furloughs definitely occurred, 73% of respondents said they had not been furloughed during the prime time of March through September 2020. Perhaps this is due to the type of people responding, being that so many who completed the survey are in management.

However, I also asked for a comparison about number of employees on staff in 2019 versus 2020 so we could gain an overall view regarding how companies have been affected. Overall, staffs have been reduced by 54%.

For those asked to return to work, push back came primarily from concerns about potential COVID

contagion, with difficulties in homeschooling children, as well as unemployment compensation being higher than work pay also high scoring.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Finally, we asked about company culture with an eye on diversity, inclusion, #metoo, and other concerning issues. We asked the following statements, and how strongly one agreed or did not agree with them:

- **My company employs an adequately diverse group of employees.**
- **My company needs to proactively address issues of diversity & inclusion.**
- **Racial, ethnic, LGBTQ and gender-based jokes or comments are not tolerated at my company.**

What did we uncover? Over **80%** agree or strongly agree that their companies could employ a more diverse group (a *stunningly high* number); **29%** agree or strongly agree that their companies need to be more proactive in addressing issues of D&I; and **87%** agree or strongly agree that their companies do not tolerate jokes or comments that target individuals. Company policies may be strong, but are the practices?

Additionally, **72%** noted that they have not been aware of discrimination at the companies they work for and **90%** said they have not been discriminated against at their companies of employ. While 90% is pretty aces for a grade, any discrimination is too much discrimination. This is another area to work on in 2021 and beyond.

Better times are ahead, my friends. 



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**Subject to change*

IN THE GLASS

*

By Amber Kispert

There comes a point in the depths of winter (*cough* now *cough*) when only something hot will do. A warm drink can certainly make anyone feel cozy, but what about options for those who may be lactose intolerant or are eschewing dairy?

Many people are moving toward dairy alternatives for myriad reasons, including better health or to reduce their impact on the planet. However, a struggle that many people face when giving up dairy is what to replace it with. Fortunately, there are many delicious dairy-free options available to enrich your comforting winter warmers.

Check out these winter warmers with dairy alternatives to stay toasty until spring. 

Winter Warmth



SOYMILK EGGNOG

The most well-known dairy alternative is soy. Originating as a broth in China around the fifth century, soy milk has become a staple around the world due to its similar appearance, taste, mouthfeel, and nutritional value to animal milk.

YIELD: 5–6

INGREDIENTS

4 beaten eggs
 ½ cup sugar
 4 ½ cups unsweetened soymilk
 ½ cup soy-based cream or creamer
 2–3 tsp vanilla extract
 Nutmeg or cinnamon, to taste and garnish
 5 or 6 cinnamon sticks
 Optional alcohol: brandy, bourbon, whiskey or dark rum

METHOD

1. Combine all ingredients in a blender; blend until smooth.
2. Add spices a little at a time until you get desired flavor.
3. If warm eggnog is desired, put in individual microwaveable mugs, microwave until warm. If warming in a saucepan, add to medium saucepan, heat over medium until warm. Be careful not to use high heat or eggs might curdle.
4. If alcohol is desired, add before serving. Options: brandy, bourbon, whiskey, or dark rum
5. Garnish with a dusting of nutmeg. Cinnamon stick is a great swizzle.

WINTER WARMER HORCHATA

Rice milk tastes sweeter than other dairy alternatives. It is also more watery than other options but comes in many varieties and can be a great replacement for milk in cereal.

YIELD: 10

INGREDIENTS

1 tsp chipotle powder
 500 ml añejo tequila or reposado tequila, such as Herradura añejo
 2 cups uncooked long-grain brown rice, ground to powder in a spice grinder
 1 cup lightly toasted almonds, ground to powder in a spice grinder (see note, below)
 Two 3-inch cinnamon sticks, broken into pieces
 3 cups hot (not quite boiling) water
 1 cup cold water
 13 oz rice milk
 1 ½ T vanilla extract
 4 oz turbinado syrup (see below)

METHOD

1. Infuse the tequila. Dry-roast the chipotle powder briefly in a small, dry skillet until it's fragrant. Remove from the heat and allow it to cool. Add the tequila, stirring to blend well. Allow the mixture to sit for 1 to 3 minutes, tasting it frequently to assess the spice level—the infusion will happen quickly. When it's spiced to your satisfaction, strain the liquid through a coffee filter into a jar or bottle and reserve for the beverage.

2. Combine the ground rice, ground almonds, and cinnamon sticks in a large bowl and cover them with hot water. Stir the mixture, then cover and allow it to cool to room temperature. Refrigerate for at least 8 hours.
3. Strain the rice/almond/cinnamon mixture through a cheesecloth into a blender jar, reserving the liquid and discarding the solids. Add the cold water, coconut milk, vanilla extract, and turbinado syrup; blend on high speed until well incorporated; the yield of the horchata is about 5½ cups, and should have the consistency of heavy cream.
4. To serve cold, fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Add 4 ounces of the horchata and 1½ ounces of the infused tequila (for a single serving). Shake well, then strain into a cocktail (martini or coupe) glass.
5. To serve warm, punch-style: Heat the horchata gently over medium-low heat. Add 1½ ounces infused tequila to each small mug, then ladle in the horchata.

TO MAKE TURBINADO SYRUP

1. Combine 1 cup turbinado sugar with ½ cup of water in a pan, and heat gently over medium-low heat, stirring until the sugar has dissolved. Cook for a few minutes; cool completely before using.

Note: Toast the almonds in a small, dry skillet over medium-low heat, shaking the pan as needed to prevent scorching, until the nuts are fragrant and lightly browned. Cool completely before using.



RICH & BOOZY HOT CHOCOLATE

Coconut milk is naturally very fatty, which helps it provide the same texture as cow's milk. Many people use coconut milk in their coffee because of its creamy texture.

YIELD: 6

INGREDIENTS

2 T unsweetened Dutch process cocoa powder (alkalized)
3 cups (two 13.5 oz cans) unsweetened, full fat coconut milk
2 T brown sugar
Generous pinch kosher salt
3 oz bittersweet chocolate, chopped
3 oz milk chocolate, chopped
1 tsp vanilla extract
¼ cup VS cognac, plus more if desired
Whipped cream, for topping (optional)

METHOD

1. Place cocoa powder in a small saucepan. Add a splash of coconut milk and whisk to make a paste. Gradually pour in the rest of the coconut milk, whisking to combine to prevent lumps. Whisk in brown sugar and salt.
2. Bring the mixture to a simmer over medium heat, whisking to prevent scorching. Remove from heat, add the chocolate, and stir until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Stir in vanilla extract and the cognac. Taste and add more cognac if desired. Top with a dollop of whipped cream if using, serve immediately.



ALMOND HOT TODDY

Almond milk is a popular alternative because it is easy to make, cheap to buy, and many find it delicious. Almond milk does not have the strong flavor that some other plant-based milks may have.

YIELD: 2

INGREDIENTS

2 cups vanilla-flavored almond milk
2 oz spiced rum
1 oz brandy
¼ tsp almond extract
½ tsp cinnamon
¼ tsp nutmeg, plus more for garnish
Light whipped cream to garnish
Slivered almonds to garnish

METHOD

1. Over low heat, combine almond milk, rum, brandy, almond extract, cinnamon and nutmeg in a medium saucepan, stirring constantly with a whisk until very warm.
2. Pour into large mugs, leaving an inch of room to the top.
3. Top with whipped cream, almonds, and a sprinkle of nutmeg.



What Does the Future of the Catering Industry Hold?

To gain perspective on the catering industry's likely future and the changes brought about by COVID-19, it may be useful to look at the history of catering in the U.S. The modern off-premise catering industry began to take shape in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many of the current familiar catering brands around the country were founded during that period.

(Please note that the financial data points in this article reference catering by caterers. They do not include catering revenue generated by other providers such as hotels, clubs, restaurants, contract foodservice providers, retailers, and institutions.)

Similar to the current situation, the U.S. economy was in a tailspin during the early 1980s. For those of you who are old enough to remember that era, inflation, driven by oil price increases, was through the roof. To get inflation under control, the Federal Reserve raised interest rates drastically, to the point where in early 1982 a regular 30-year mortgage had an interest rate of 17.5%.

With interest rates at that level, it was amazing that anyone could afford a place to live, much less be able to hire a caterer. The entire economy was affected, with unemployment peaking at 10.8% in November 1982—well above the current level.

Yet during that period, when it seemed this might be a downward economic spiral from which we'd never emerge, the catering industry began to recover and start its march toward very substantial growth. In 1982, the catering sector broke \$1 billion in annual revenue for the first time. For most of the following two decades, the catering sector was the fastest growing foodservice sector, except for snack (coffee) bars.

Even taking inflation into account, growth in the catering industry in the intervening years has been awe-inspiring. The revenue pool in 1982 of slightly over \$1 billion would be the equivalent of \$3 billion today. Instead, in 2019, catering sector revenue was just short of \$13 billion—the additional \$10 billion representing organic growth.

Since the early 1980s, the industry has faced a sequence of crises—some of which were more serious than

others, but all were highly impactful on at least some parts of the industry. The Black Monday stock market meltdown in 1987, the tech sector's implosion in the late 1990s, 9/11, and the Great Recession all represented significant challenges for caterers. Yet up until March of this year, the industry as a whole continued to thrive.

We are confident that the industry will recover from this crisis as well. However, we believe that there may be some inflection point changes to our industry due to the current downturn. It's accepted wisdom, not just in catering but in the broader business universe, that the pandemic accelerates already existing trends. Some of these trends may be reversed once the immediate crisis passes. Our goal is to try to analyze and predict which of these changes may be permanent and which are transitory.

Following are some of the areas we believe may be impacted:

Corporate delivery catering – With many white-collar workers toiling from home, the market for corporate delivery catering has shrunk substantially, in some markets by as much as 90%. However, we believe that a substantial number of workers will return to their offices once the pandemic recedes. These will include many high value-added employees, who are often the beneficiaries of office catering orders.

We don't think that the corporate catering market will bounce back to pre-COVID levels for some years. This is both a result of some employees working remotely permanently and some meetings that used to be held in person and catered now being done on camera. But it will undoubtedly improve from where it is currently.

Retail (non-corporate) delivery catering – Many caterers decided to pursue this market, delivering to

“THE BLACK MONDAY STOCK MARKET MELTDOWN IN 1987, THE TECH SECTOR'S IMPLOSION IN THE LATE 1990S, 9/11, AND THE GREAT RECESSION ALL REPRESENTED SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES FOR CATERERS. YET UP UNTIL MARCH OF THIS YEAR, THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE CONTINUED TO THRIVE.”



Carl Sacks is a Senior Consultant, Certified Catering Consultants LLC and Executive Director for the Leading Caterers of America.

private homes, as their event business evaporated early in the pandemic. Some have been relatively successful in developing this as an additional catering line and will retain the business once the event business returns. Other caterers have struggled to find success in this market.

We are confident that once home entertaining is once again allowed, this business will grow substantially. Much of this retail catering business is generated by upper-middle and upper-income households and in areas that are popular for vacation homes. If these describe the areas in which you operate, we'd recommend sticking to this business opportunity.

Lifecycle/social catering – We believe that this business will come back first, well in advance of other full-service catering sectors such as fundraising galas and corporate full-service events. Already the wedding buyers are eager to begin planning their receptions. It may be that it will be some time before the destination wedding market recovers, but local weddings are likely to come back very strongly.

Other life cycle events, such as bar/bat mitzvahs, quinceañeras, and other similar celebrations, will likely also return with a vengeance. Not only are these important to most family units, but many families have also saved some of the funds they would have spent on other celebrations during the pandemic. These will now be made available for future celebrations.

Corporate full-service catering – This sector of the catering business may be the laggard in the recovery. Some corporations that use catered events as a marketing tool will likely want to get started with these as soon as possible. But celebratory- and employee morale-driven catered events may take somewhat longer to return.

Other changes in the industry driven by the pandemic:



Competing with restaurants and restaurant chefs – Many restaurateurs have seen their businesses decimated by the pandemic. To help generate at least some revenue, some restaurants and restaurant chefs have hung out their shingles as caterers, adding more competitors to a market that is already saturated. However, we firmly believe that once the pandemic has run its course, the restaurant industry will come back strong, with a great deal of pent up demand and many weaker restaurants closed. To that end, we predict that with some exceptions, most restaurants that have dipped their toes into the catering market will abandon this business to focus on their restaurant clientele.

Laser focus on profitability

Because the barriers to entry for the catering business are relatively low, many caterers do not focus on their companies' profitability as they really should. Many are happy to take a salary, rather than having a goal for achieving a real profit. We refer to these companies as lifestyle businesses. However, this pandemic

has been a wake-up call for these owners. Most caterers that survive the pandemic will be forced to re-evaluate their willingness to operate on a break-even basis. We believe that in the long run, this will be good for the industry as a whole.

Searching for cost saving opportunities

Relating to the previous point, many caterers are already doing a deep dive into their operations to find areas where there may be potential savings. Among the areas we have heard being explored already:

- Automation of particular preparation and serving tasks—for example, use of portable conveyor belts for plate up
- Outsourcing of some labor requirements
- Purchasing of food items that may have previously been prepared in house
- Requiring operating departments to adhere to expense budgets/cost percentages that may in the past have been honored more in the breach than in the observance

- Developing a more rigorous approach to evaluating the profit generated either per event or by operating division
- Being willing to dispense with certain types of business that may represent a drag on overall profitability
- Requiring managers to take on additional responsibilities

Owner/manager understanding of employee tasks

Speaking to caterers around the country, ranging from small mom and pop caterers to large independent caterers, we have heard a few things over and over. One is that senior personnel have spent at least part of the pandemic doing tasks more typically accomplished by subordinates. For example, they have been loading trucks, working in the kitchen, driving orders, writing proposals, etc.

In the long run, we believe that this will be good for the industry since it will provide the decision-makers with a perspective that they may not have had before, or at least not recently. While it is essential that the owners spend most of their time working on their companies rather than *in* their companies, this temporary reversal of roles should provide greater insight regarding what is being asked of junior employees.

We believe that the current pandemic represents the greatest challenge to the catering industry in the modern era. But we are confident that a substantial portion of the catering business will return as soon as it is allowed and that in the long run, the industry as a whole will return to its substantial pre-pandemic growth pattern. 



By Amber Kispert

Masked & Glitized Up

Entertainment Plus Productions teamed up with Experience Strategy Associates to deliver pop-up COVID-friendly events throughout Nevada

Just eight months ago Catersource Conference & Tradeshow (conference.catersource.com) took over Mandalay Bay on the Las Vegas strip for product innovations, education, and networking. And then COVID-19 hit. Las Vegas became a bit of a ghost town as casinos emptied, theaters shuttered their doors, and Sin City's many entertainers found themselves sitting at home with nothing to do.

Not anymore.

Earlier this summer, Los Angeles-based Entertainment Plus Productions, and Las Vegas' Experience Strategy Associates teamed up to deliver a series of pop-up events around Nevada, including a parade to local hospitals celebrating frontline workers, a fashion show at the Las Vegas sign encouraging everyone to #MaskUp4NV, and culminated this fall with the launch of the new COVID Trace app (nvhealthresponse.nv.gov/covidtrace) which made stops at the Las Vegas sign, Allegiant Stadium, T-Mobile Arena, Caesar's Palace, and other sites throughout Las Vegas. The parade also made stops in Reno and Carson City.





LEFT: AN AERIALIST PERFORMS DURING THE #MASKUP4NV FASHION SHOW. *Photo courtesy Denise Truscello*



PERFORMERS CARRIED SIGNS PROMOTING THE COVID TRACE APP THROUGHOUT THE EVENTS. *Photo courtesy Gabe Ginsberg*



ABOVE: AS LAS VEGAS BEGINS TO REOPEN WITH EVENTS, SUCH AS THE COVID REMINDER EVENTS, SO HAVE THE RESTAURANTS. *Photo courtesy Kate Patay*

LEFT: VARIOUS LAS VEGAS PERFORMERS AND IMPERSONATORS PARTICIPATED IN THE #MASKUP4NV FASHION SHOW. *Photo courtesy Denise Truscello*



LAS VEGAS SHOWGIRLS MADE AN APPEARANCE IN CARSON CITY AS PART OF THE COVID REMINDER EVENTS. *Photo courtesy Entertainment Plus Productions*



THE POP-UP EVENT IN RENO, NV FEATURED THE CHIPPENDALES, LAS VEGAS SHOWGIRLS, VARIOUS MASCOTS, AND IMPERSONATORS. *Photo courtesy Entertainment Plus Productions*

“Everyone is tired of hearing that messaging come from governmental and public agencies,” said Greg Chase, CEO & Founder of Experience Strategy Associates. “What we were able to do was use a population of passionate people to share that message in a different way. When they come to the stage with that message, it makes me think twice about what I’m doing, so it’s more important than ever that we are doing these things, because we know this type of messaging works and it is highly effective.”

“It was a completely safe event for a vital cause that not only helps people physically be safe, but in turn hopefully gets the performing community back to work.”

Many of Las Vegas’ most popular performers made appearances including Las Vegas Showgirls, Chippendales, and the mascots.

“We are trying to pay tribute to our spectacular city where there

are amazing things available if we can just get back to it,” said Doug Johnson, President & Executive Producer of Entertainment Plus Productions.

Living what they preach

Given that these events were reinforcing safety protocols for keeping people healthy, performers

“They were five-minute stops, we would blow in and blow out, because we didn’t want to get a crowd going,” Johnson said.

Chase agreed. “When you go out in the public with that message, you have to make sure that you are living and breathing the expectations you want others to follow,” he said.



Be a Part of Catersource 2021

Registration is now open for both Catersource Conference & Tradeshow and The Special Event, which will be co-located in Miami Beach, Florida **July 19–22, 2021**. Go to conference.catersource.com for information.

and organizers alike took great care in safety precautions while performing, including employing health checklists, applying hand sanitizer, taking temperature checks, enforcing social distancing and, of course, wearing a mask.

Getting back to business

By driving the message home of wearing a mask, in addition to the other safety precautions, guests and attendees can help get event professionals and entertainers back to work that much faster.

“It’s not political, wearing a mask is not a political statement,” Johnson said.

“We want to perform for you, we are ready to perform for you, so help us out by wearing a mask and let’s keep COVID down. Help all our brothers and sisters around the country get back to work and save some lives.” 



Southern Hospitality

By Culinary Design's Owner & Executive Chef William Jones cooked up some southern comfort at actor Niecy Nash's recent nuptials

It doesn't matter where you hail from, in the U.S., comfort food almost always harkens to home. Fried, stewed, slow-roasted, or smoked, these are the dishes that hit you at your core, wrap you up like a bear hug, and that taste, as cliché as it sounds, like home. What better way to warm up this winter than with a little hometown NOLA Cajun spice?



CHEF WILLIAM JONES IS THE OWNER & EXECUTIVE CHEF FOR BY CULINARY DESIGN, AND RECENTLY PRODUCED THE MENU FOR ACTOR NIECY NASH'S SUMMER NUPTIALS.
Photo courtesy Curtis J. Moore

This past summer Chef William Jones, Owner & Executive Chef of Los Angeles-based By Culinary Design, served up a three-course Southern-inspired meal at actor Niecy Nash's California nuptials to Jessica Betts. The menu consisted of three appetizers (caprese skewers, seafood stuffed jalapenos, and lollipop lamb chops) Caesar salad, chicken Tchoupitoulas, and garlic herb butter dinner rolls.

THE MAIN COURSE AT ACTOR NIECY NASH'S WEDDING TO JESSICA BETTS WAS CHICKEN TCHOUPITOULAS, FEATURING OVEN-ROASTED AIRLINE CHICKEN BREAST PAIRED WITH HERB ROASTED POTATOES AND BROCCOLI AND CARROT MEDLEY WITH HERB CREAM SAUCE.

Photo courtesy Curtis J. Moore



New Orleans native Jones developed his love for cooking at a very young age. "I can remember the scent of savory aromas in my mother's kitchen growing up that still bring me back to why I started this journey." Today, he is busy dedicating himself to his craft: honoring the memory

of his mother by keeping the family tradition of cooking with love alive in each dish he serves.

Jones boasts an ability to create signature dishes based on his clients' personal tastes while preserving flavor profiles that marry Creole/Cajun cuisine with fusion food

BELOW: GARLIC BUTTER
DINNER ROLLS.
Photo courtesy Curtis J. Moore



around the world. “I absolutely enjoy the cuisine in Louisiana as we have some of the most sought-after recipes worldwide. We are culturally rich in that way. If I can take the knowledge that I learned in my mother’s kitchen as well as from my formal culinary education to create fusion food with a twist that connects people to one another in a unique way, my purpose is fulfilled.”

Jones has worked in the culinary arts arena for over 17 years, garnering respect for his ability to train, manage, and consult in his field.

Having attended Chattahoochee Tech in Atlanta, the Delgado Culinary Program in New Orleans, and graduating from Sclafani Cooking School, Inc. in New Orleans,

Jones has been recognized with Leadership in Culinary Arts awards and other distinctions throughout his career.

In addition to Niecy Nash’s private nuptials, Jones has also worked with such celebrity clients as NBA All-Star Anthony Davis, Beyoncé, former Saints cornerback Mike McKenzie, former Saints tight end Jeremy Shockey, former Saints safety Malcolm Jenkins, former New Orleans Pelicans point guard Jarrett Jack and Cleveland Cavaliers’ LeBron James.

Here are two of Jones’ favorite Southern-style recipes: Mediterranean Seafood Orzo Pasta and Garlic and Herb Shrimp. *Laissez les bon temps rouler!* 

THE LOLLIPOP LAMB CHOPS, FEATURED AT ACTOR NIECY NASH’S WEDDING, WERE SERVED WITH CANDIED MASHED SWEET POTATOES AND A DRIZZLE OF AGED BALSAMIC GLAZE
Photo courtesy Curtis J. Moore



Chef William Jones has developed a collection of spice blends that are available for purchase. The collection includes five creative and uniquely crafted blends of fresh herbs and spices curated to please your palette. Learn more at:

bcdnola.com/collections/frontpage





MEDITERRANEAN SEAFOOD ORZO PASTA

INGREDIENTS

- 16 oz. orzo
- 5½ cups seafood stock or water
- 1 T kosher salt
- 1 T light olive oil
- 1 cup kalamata olive salad mix
- ½ cup roasted red peppers, diced
- ½ cup roasted yellow peppers, diced
- 4 T Creole seasoning, such as By Culinary Design House Blend Seasoning
- ½ lb Louisiana crawfish tails
- ½ lb crab, claw meat
- A few drops liquid crab boil
- 1 lb gulf shrimp
- 8 oz. Atlantic salmon
- Salmon rub to taste
- 1 cup feta crumbles
- 4 basil leaves
- ¼ cup parsley, freshly chopped

METHOD

1. Add orzo to boiling seafood stock or water, add salt and olive oil. Cook for approximately 9–11 minutes or until done. Strain pasta, cool, and set aside.
2. In a separate bowl, combine kalamata olive mix, roasted red and yellow peppers, and Creole seasoning. Mix well.
3. Marinate the shrimp with 2–3 T Creole seasoning and salmon rub. Cook shrimp (baked, sautéed, pan seared, or grilled), whichever method you prefer. Season with 1 T of remaining seasoning. Chop (keep chunky pieces, not too fine) and place in a bowl.
4. Combine crawfish tails and claw meat with cooked shrimp. (You can add more seasoning to your desired taste level.) Toss seafood mix well.
5. Season salmon and cook. Let salmon cool after finished cooking. Flake off pieces of salmon and combine with the seafood mix (crawfish, crab and shrimp).
6. Combine seafood mix, orzo, salad mix, and all other remaining ingredients. Toss/mix/fold thoroughly.
7. Garnish as you like.



THE PRODUCTION TEAM FOR ACTOR NIECY NASH'S WEDDING: DJ DENSE, LESLIE JONES, LAUREN MONTGOMERY, WILLIAM P. MILLER, MENA WRIGHT, SHANTEE WRIGHT, MARIEA ANTOINETTE, CHEF WILL JONES AND ELTON HAWKINS.

Photo courtesy Curtis J. Moore



GARLIC & HERB SHRIMP

YIELD: 20

INGREDIENTS

5 lbs headless, shell-on gulf shrimp
 ½ cup unsalted butter, melted
 ½ cup olive oil
 6–8 garlic cloves, minced
 ½ bunch of parsley, chopped
 3 sprigs of thyme, minced
 2 sprigs of rosemary, minced
 6–10 sweet basil, chopped
 ½ tsp Zatarain's Liquid Shrimp & Crab Boil
 3 T white wine
 4–6 tsp Creole seasoning blend, such as By Culinary Design's House Blend Seasoning
 Lemon zest

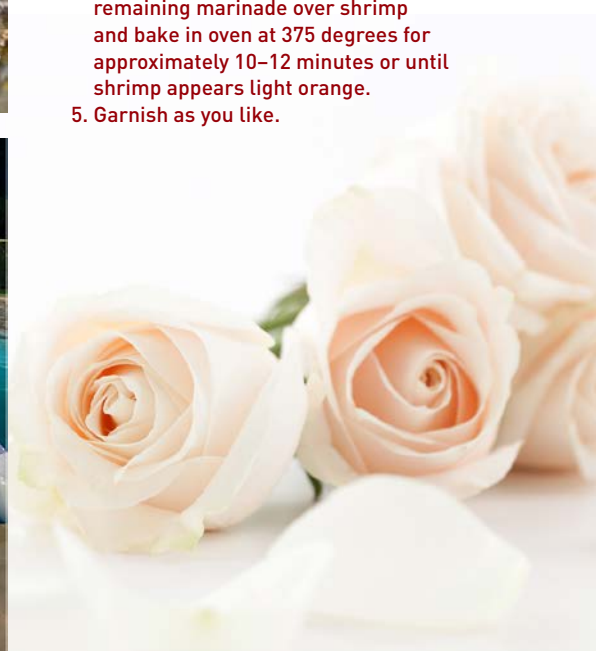
METHOD

1. Thaw shrimp if necessary. Once thawed, place shrimp in a plastic bag or container large enough to hold desired amount and set aside in refrigerator or cooler until further use.
2. Melt butter and mix with olive oil, set aside. Chop or mince fresh garlic cloves and remaining herbs (parsley, thyme, rosemary and basil). Place all chopped herbs into butter and oil blend, whisk vigorously. Mix in crab boil, seasoning, white wine, and lemon zest.
3. Pour butter and herb marinade over shrimp (whether in the plastic bag or container, seal tightly). Marinate shrimp in refrigerator or cooler for at least 10–15 minutes.
4. Place shrimp in a baking pan or oven safe dish. If on a baking pan, line the pan with foil. Pour remaining marinade over shrimp and bake in oven at 375 degrees for approximately 10–12 minutes or until shrimp appears light orange.
5. Garnish as you like.



RIGHT: CHEF WILLIAM JONES WITH ACTRESS NIECY NASH AT HER RECENT WEDDINGS.

Photo courtesy @chefjones504. Instagram post. September 2, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CEp-HUQJYck/>





by Meryl Snow



It's Time to *Rethink* Your Business

This year has been a shocking one, to say the least. Businesses across the industry have faced many challenges in response to COVID-19 and we are still grappling with the reality that the pandemic-related downturn isn't going away yet.

As a result, your company may feel like a start-up again. With waves of layoffs and furloughs, it's currently an all-hands-on-deck situation. You may be leaving behind your future planning and creative ideation to help load trucks, prepare food, pack parties, and sell events. To some, this is arduous work; for others, it's fulfilling to know you're making the strides necessary to keep your business running.

While this year has presented obstacles for everyone, the truth of the matter is that it's rare that businesses have a moment to click the pause button. It's usually full steam ahead at all times, but the thin silver lining of the pandemic is that it's given us a moment to refocus on our goals, retool our operations, and retrench ourselves in the industry—all in an effort to rebound from this crisis situation.

If you're finding a bit of extra time and mental space on your hands, take the opportunity to refocus on these four main departments of your business.

Refocus your culinary processes

Have you been meaning to experiment with some new ingredients? Do you have ideas for new ways to organize your recipes? Is it time to update your catering software? Use this slow period as a time to regain your bearings and put your best culinary foot forward. Start a test kitchen to play around with new ideas and revamp your menus. Revisit your policies and procedures to see if they need to be updated, particularly in light of the pandemic. Preparing the culinary side of your business will ensure that you're ready to roll with fresh and cutting-edge concepts when business picks up again.

Retool your warehouse

A messy warehouse is a sign of disorganization that filters throughout the entire business, so allot some time to clean house and reorganize your warehouse in a way that makes sense for loading and unloading. While you're there, consider purchasing decisions in relation to your inventory—do you often find yourself with an excess of certain equipment? Is there lesser-used stock in the heavily-trafficked areas of the warehouse? How can you make it more efficient for your team? Spending a day or two in full warehouse mode can reveal the areas in which your processes and systems can be improved.

“THE THIN SILVER LINING OF THE PANDEMIC IS THAT IT’S GIVEN US A MOMENT TO REFOCUS ON OUR GOALS, RETOOL OUR OPERATIONS, AND RETRENCH OURSELVES IN THE INDUSTRY.”

Retrench your staff

This year has been particularly challenging for leaders, as many have had to face the pressure of layoffs, terminations, or staff choosing to leave the industry. You may find yourself in a place where you need to hire but are limited in resources, so it’s important to go into the staffing process with a strategy in place. Revise merit-based tier raises to ensure your business is financially sound while still retaining valuable team members. If possible, consider investing in staffing software that simplifies delegation and holds employees accountable for their work.

Rebound your sales

With sales rapidly declining across the industry, now is the time to rebuild and rebound through your sales approach. Take some time to revisit prior sales goals and adjust them as needed based on your year-over-year averages. With realistic goals in hand, you can better guide your team to success by teaching them savvy sales techniques and providing competitive compensation plans. Be intentional about tracking their progress and holding them accountable for closing ratios; an effective sales team is more vital now than ever before.

We can’t predict the future—there’s no getting around that. However, what we can do is prepare our businesses for whatever may come. Rather than sitting around and waiting for the pandemic to disappear, let’s use this time to commit to working on our businesses and, as a result, lifting the industry as a whole. **CS**



With 30 years of experience owning event planning, high-end catering, and design and décor companies, **Meryl Snow** is a Senior Consultant for Certified Catering Consultants and a Senior Consultant & Sales Trainer for SnowStorm Solutions. Meryl travels throughout North America training clients in the areas of sales, marketing, design, and branding.

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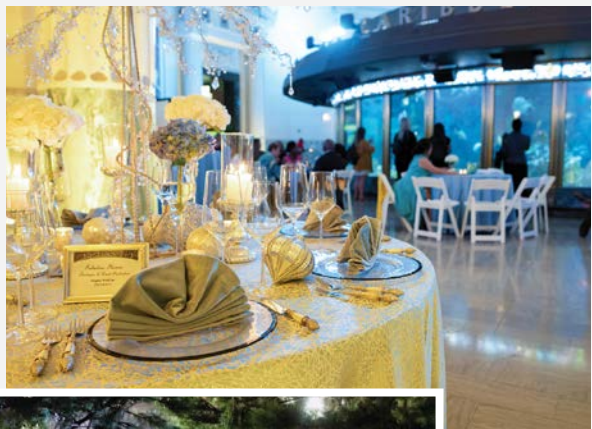
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STEAL THIS

Fresh ideas to use or adapt at your next event.

▼ Sodexo Sports & Leisure - Shedd Aquarium | Belugas & Bows Holiday Catering Showcase

Photo courtesy Sodexo Sports & Leisure



By Word of Mouth | Under the African Sky

Photo courtesy By Word of Mouth



▲ Wei Zhang | "Petite Forêt"

Photo courtesy Wei Zhang



Event Sociétal | Mulan

Photo courtesy AMA by Aislinn

Setting the STAGE

Socially distanced seating? Fill the empty space with color and florals to instantly 'wow' your guests. Get creative with beautiful tablescapes, featuring inspiration from pre-pandemic events!

—Amber Kispert

▲ Tuxedos and Tennis Shoes Catering & Events | Benaroya Hall

Photo courtesy Alante Photography

► Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth | 2019 Daffodil Ball

Photo courtesy Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth





◀ **MGM Resorts Event Productions | Catersource + The Special Event**
Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



◀ **LUX Catering & Events | Modern Garden**
Photo courtesy LUX Catering & Events



Sodexo Sports & Leisure - Shedd Aquarium | Belugas & Bows Holiday Catering Showcase
Photo courtesy Sodexo Sports & Leisure



▲ **Blue Plate | Destination Dinner: Grab Your Passport to Our Spicy Soiree!**
Photo courtesy Blue Plate



Detroit Athletic Club | Back to the Club Night
Photo courtesy Detroit Athletic Club



▲ **Beyond the Box Catering | Mayfield Events**
Photo courtesy Beyond the Box Catering



Ellwed | International Wedding Trend Report
Photo courtesy of Lefteris Kalampokas

PARTNERING *with* PROPERTIES

Tips for caterers
seeking hotel
business during and
after the pandemic.

by Michael Costa



TO-GO MEAL SET UP.
Photo courtesy The Confidante Miami



MANY OUTSIDE CATERERS
ARE PROVIDING FOOD AND BEVERAGE
SERVICE FOR RESTAURANTS AND BARS
LOCATED WITHIN A HOTEL.
Photo courtesy The Valley Hotel



BRANCATO CATERING HAS PARTNERED WITH HOTELS TO PROVIDE
FOOD & BEVERAGE SERVICE WHILE HOTEL F&B STAFF REMAIN
FURLOUGHED, Photo courtesy Brancato's Catering



CATERERS HAVE SEEN THE MOST SUCCESS
WITH SMALLER, BOUTIQUE HOTELS.
Photo courtesy The Valley Hotel



IN-ROOM CELEBRATORY SET UP.
*Photo courtesy
The Confidante Miami*

While Coronavirus has been devastating to the foodservice industry, independent caterers are among the best-positioned to survive during the pandemic and afterward, due to their nimble operations. That is, most are not tied to a physical structure where food is prepared and served in the same location, like a restaurant or hotel, and also have a solid idea re: how many people they will be serving. Thus, caterers have fewer fixed costs and more options to pivot and secure new business.

Hotel partnerships have been trending for caterers in 2020 due to the deep drop in demand for large events, coinciding with drastically reduced business travel. Many hotels booking smaller groups or social business, like weddings, cannot afford to bring back their F&B staff to cater for those groups because they do not have sufficient guestroom revenues to justify the labor costs. This is where an outside caterer can help a hotel.

“Hotel partnerships have become more relevant in our market this year with a number of properties needing service since they don’t have the revenue or the budgets to bring back F&B staff for the foreseeable future,” says Brian Ingalls, Director of Sales and Business Development at Brancato’s Catering in Kansas City, Kansas. “We’ve established temporary relationships that we hope will turn into longer-lasting relationships once hotels see the benefits of working with a company like ours.”

Boutique is best

Hotels are categorized in tiers based on the number of rooms, amenities, and size of their facilities, but for catering purposes, they can be broken down into two categories: large, full-service properties with a ballroom and multiple event spaces (and sizable staff

to service those spaces) and smaller, boutique properties, that may have one or a handful of smaller venues for gatherings. Both options are viable for caterers who hope to partner with hotels, but boutique properties currently offer the most opportunity for a long-term relationship, according to Ingalls.

“We’re finding boutique hotels are looking to gain a competitive advantage in a dwindling market. As hotels close and are unable to survive the pandemic many boutique properties are looking to enhance their offerings similar to large hotels with in-house catering.

We’ve even seen boutique hotels open semi-permanent tent structures to add potential event revenue to their facilities,” Ingalls said. “Our strategy for approaching hotel clients has been to present our options and offerings as a supplement to the hotel bringing back their entire F&B team. We’re here to bridge the gap for groups that do not have the ‘heads in beds’ to support full-time F&B personnel. We’re looking to secure these properties long-term by providing exceptional service and food at comparatively little cost to the hotel, providing a better profit margin for them further down the road,” he says.

Cost vs. profit

Francisco Christian, Managing Partner at Taylored Hospitality Solutions, says caterers should realize that many hotels view in-house catering as a cost and not necessarily a profit center, so “the main reason a hotel would bring in a catering partner is to improve their bottom line. If the hotel can add profit from the catering cost center, then the hotel will look better on monthly financial reports,” Christian says. “Currently with hotel occupancy well under 50%, some hotels are not going to open their banquet facilities until they restaff with 100% occupancy. Hotels that can still offer F&B and discounted hotel rooms will be more sought after by smaller event groups.”

Ingalls says Brancato’s has helped hotels in their area fill that small event niche this year. “One example was a medium-sized hotel with large meeting space for rent. They needed a caterer to supply staff and provide food as they did not bring back any of their staff. We built a menu that was simply presented with multiple service options for the hotel to sell,” he explains.

“We had entrées, sides, and salads that fit into the price point requested. The menu was priced in tiers with food only; food and buffet staff only; and full-service staff from Brancato’s using the hotel’s china. The additional selling point to that client was our COVID-19 protocol and our staff having been trained and executing many



BRANCATO'S CATERING STAFF DON MASKS AND GLOVES AT ALL CATERED EVENTS, *Photo courtesy Brancato's Catering*

events to that point, which mitigated their need to train hotel staff coming back.”

Partners & profits

Christian says caterers need to do their homework ahead of partnering with a hotel to ensure the agreement is aligned with the business goals of both parties, since the property is possibly looking at the partnership only as a short-term solution and a cost-cutting measure, while caterers might be looking to parlay the same agreement into a long-term relationship.

“Hopefully, the partnership opportunity is not a short-term agreement. Most agreements are a minimum of three years or more since hotel bookings can be made years in advance to block hotel rooms. Also, depending on the initial capital investment that may have been required, the caterer will need time to recoup that investment unless there is a buyout clause. After the 2008 recession, one of our hotel partnerships included the option to rehire some of the hotel staff before we hired new staff off the street. When the catering company business starts to ramp back up, there will be a need to bring back your seasoned staff, so adding experienced hotel staff helps because they already know how you operate,” he says.

Overall, hotel partnerships may appear alluring in a time when any new business is a positive, but Christian cautions that hotels may have more leverage in negotiations due to their size and resources.

“Caterers have to remember that not all new revenue is good revenue. If there is a hotel partnership opportunity, take your time to review out-clauses and early termination so it is fair to both parties. The hotels might have more time and attorneys to leverage the agreement in their favor. Caterers should always cover their profit margins first when working with a hotel that is focused on cutting costs.” 



DAVID BEAHM, FOUNDER, DAVID BEAHM EXPERIENCES, DAVID BEAHM DESTINATIONS, THISTLE DEW FARM

Editor's note: David Beahm was a balm for me during the early days of the shutdown. Broadcasting via Facebook Live from Thistle Dew Farm, he imparted words that—as I think I said earlier in the year—caused me to “calm the hell down.”

David wrote this note for our 22 Predictions article (see page 12), but in launching this new column for *Catersource*, I felt that his words, coupled with that exceptionally jaunty holiday-invoking suitcoat and bowtie, made a perfect fit for this winter issue.

Should you be interested in writing the send-off note, **The Digestif**, for a subsequent issue of *Catersource* magazine, please drop me a line.

—Kathleen Stoehr, kathleen.stoehr@informa.com

Back in 2008 when I saw \$1.5 million-worth of business vanish in less than a week, I turned to one of my favorite, smartest clients who, basically, sits on the board of the world and said, “Should I shut this thing down?” He very kindly dropped by my office and spent all of five minutes looking at my books and said, “Shut up. Say yes to everything, regardless of the profit margin. Just keep money running through the business and it will come back.” He was right.

Keep breathing and do everything you can to let your clients know that you’re here to stay and you will be there for them, no matter what. Even if it means being ruthless with cuts until more fluid times. Slash and burn can be your friend, not your enemy. Change is good.

If there’s one thing I’ve learned in the business of special events, **EVERYTHING** is cyclical, including your bottom line. When it goes down, know that it’s going to eventually come back.

Patience must be your virtue.

People need to gather. So, they call on us.

People fall in love every day. So, they call on us.

People need to celebrate life. So, they call on us.

People are going to be chomping at the bit to share their stories and engage clients. So, they call on us.

It is going to be us in special events who are going to have to be more creative and flexible than we’ve ever been. There is no group out there in this world who is more equipped to step up and take their calls. Buckle up, the ride is going to be better and more thrilling than any roller coaster. Be ready for the calls. 

Don't just read... *Listen*

A top-down photograph of two hands holding white coffee cups filled with latte and dusted with brown powder. The cups are on a dark, textured wooden table. The image is framed by a dark red border with a torn-paper effect.

Juicy food ideas, dazzling event designs, and other boots-on-the-ground tips to help caterers and event planners like you be more successful in your business.

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WINTER 2020

LOOKING
FORWARD
to 2021

Industry Professionals
Share 22 Positive
Predictions for 2021

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P. 10

**FLORALS GO
BIG & BOLD**
P. 46

To Our Friends and Colleagues,

Needless to say, it's been an extraordinarily challenging year. Some have found this year to be the perfect canvas for reflection and growth, but most have found it to be the source of the most severe personal and professional struggles in their lifetime. And for others - it's been both!

We at CORT Events want to take this moment to acknowledge your resilience, your open minds and hearts, and your dedication towards coming back stronger than ever. If nothing else, your passion for our industry and its recovery has proven this saying true: "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life."

As we inch towards 2021, here are some things we're asking Santa for:

- Strength to guide our ongoing fight to recovery.
- Our colleagues', friends' and loved ones' well-being.
- Not a comeback, but the brilliant evolution of our industry.
- Continued solidarity amongst us all.

Regardless of what the near future holds, please trust us to be open ears to your hopes and concerns. We're very fortunate to have the Berkshire Hathaway name behind us to grant us the stability and reliability necessary to be your steady partner and willing resource as we heal together. We look forward to serving you in the new year.

Have a safe, love-filled holiday season,
The CORT Events Family

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Your special events professional peers share heartfelt stories about how they learned from the hardships of this year and plan to make next year their best one yet.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

AND, HELLO TO YOU

I would first like to acknowledge the transition of long time *Special Events* editor, Lisa Hurley, into retirement. She left the company in mid-September, just as the Fall issue was going to (digital) press. Many people were all, “wait—what? Why?!” She was well loved and respected, maybe not by *all* of you, but enough to make it intimidating for me. Not that I’m easily intimidated.

I *have* been intimidated by this year, however, and am angry too. This isn’t what any of us expected, and we certainly didn’t deserve to have such a dumpster fire of a 2020 (apologies to epic dumpster fires but this year surpassed even the best of those). It wasn’t just our businesses affected, but our family lives too. Our day-to-day rituals. The things that bring us joy.

Enough. I will not dwell on this in yet another end-of-the-year ad nauseam lament as we writer types try to put our unique spins on what we all, already know.

But I am thankful that I am picking up the torch on this publication. It’s meaningful. It has hopefully helped you along the rocky road to career success. I am also confident that it can be an inspiration to you in years to come. Lisa left me bread crumbs to follow, so the transition is not entirely abrupt.

In this issue, I am pleased to present our annual State of the Industry feature, which will illuminate the many challenges we have been through this year, via the voices of those who responded to a survey I sent out in October. I’m also excited to share with you an article on actor Niecy Nash’s wedding, and...I think my favorite piece of all—again, via the voices of your peers—a beautifully upbeat feature, *22 Positive Predictions for 2021*. It starts on page 16.

From all of us at *Special Events*, we wish you the best and brightest of the new year. Shine on, shine on, you crazy diamonds.

Kathleen

Kathleen Stoehr
Director of Community & Content Strategy

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Winter 2020 THIS ISSUE

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Marketing expert
Christie Osborne
reveals the myths behind
Google Analytics



Award winning
businessman
Bill Hansen offers
thoughts on company
culture

Plus, a special **thank you** to everyone
who contributed to the State of the
Industry survey and the 22 Positive
Predictions for 2021 feature

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LCA specializes in corporate events of all types - marketing, celebratory, client related, employee morale, and others. Whether held in the hosts' facility, or in an off-premise location, LCA members are able to deliver a high value corporate event experience.

Photo Credit: Pure Joy Catering



Weddings

At its collective portfolio of some of the most desirable wedding venues in North America, the LCA caters many thousands of weddings annually. Most LCA members have dedicated wedding specialists on staff, to ensure that this most important day is executed flawlessly, no matter the level of complexity.

Photo Credit: Red Table



Social

Bar and bat mitzvahs, first communions, quinceañeras, retirements and graduations, and even funerals are all important life cycle events. Superb food and service are crucial to making these events special and memorable, and the LCA is a perfect resource for those products.

Photo Credit: LUX Catering & Events



Nonprofits

Galas and fundraisers are key to the success of most charitable ventures - including both financial and membership. The LCA is highly attuned to the needs of most charities, and is a great resource for all the necessary components to make these gala events successful.

Photo Credit: Catering by Michaels

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CONFERENCE NEWS

by Kathleen Stoehr

Conference updates

TSE/CS 2021 event details

THE SPECIAL EVENT UPDATE

All systems go for a gathering in Miami Beach, July 19–22, 2021! The Special Event + Catersource staffs are excited to provide you with the means to network, learn, and get excited by an industry once again on the upswing. Here is an update on all of the goings on!

REGISTRATION: Registration is open! Super Early Bird rates are in effect until February 01, 2021. Take advantage of the lowest prices available and enjoy exclusive access to webinars, virtual events, networking meetups, session sneak peeks and other exciting show-related nibbles that only registered attendees can receive. If you want the inside scoop before the show so you arrive in the know, head over to thespecialeventshow.com/ pricing to review pricing packages.

CALL FOR SPEAKERS: Our Call for Speakers is closed and sessions are in the process of being decided upon. You can expect that the education portal (thespecialeventshow.com) will begin to fill up with classes shortly after the start of the new year. We are excited to be able to bring you the best and brightest in live education!

CALL TO ARMS: Would you like to get involved in the planning of Catersource + The Special Event's showcasing events? Are you looking for experience in the industry? Do you have a product or service you want to showcase?

The Call to Arms virtual meeting on January 13, 2021 is where you can get more information and join the planning. Go to thespecialeventshow.com/call-arms for more information or to register to attend the free event.

SPECIAL EVENTS *Gala Award*

BIG AWARDS NEWS

It feels good, when the world is changing so drastically, to hang onto pieces of “before COVID” as a semblance of normalcy. There’s always an awards season, we love to celebrate accomplishments, and it feels right to get dressed up and cheer for colleagues as they accept an award for their hard work and talent. We work hard, we have to play hard, too!

Because we plan our yearly conference and tradeshow (with all of its moving parts) so far in advance, Catersource + The Special Event had the ball rolling by early summer setting up our awards portal, creating art and copy for the advertisements, and building new awards categories that reflected

the changing catering and events landscape.

But even seven, eight months out from the show, it started not feeling right. We began to feel that celebrating accomplishments across a playing field that has been severely damaged isn’t the right approach, at least not for 2021.

There have been some incredibly beautiful events across the world this past year—live, virtual, hybrid—most definitely deserving accolades. But not enough of them, it pains me to say. Just not enough.

What we need to celebrate in 2021 is tenacity. We need to celebrate survival. We need to celebrate the industry as a whole. We also need to mourn those businesses who won’t make it—or have already left us—due to this world-changing pandemic.

At Catersource + The Special Event next July, we will still offer awards during our Leadership Lunch: the Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement Award; the

SE Lifetime Achievement Award; the Richard Carbotti Gala Award; and the Steve Kemble Leadership Award. But the Industry Awards evening event as a whole will take a brief pause in 2021.

One more thing: We are, however, going to leave that awards submission portal open (hang in with me here) for another year. (You read that right.) And then, when we get to 2022...only then will we close it up. The awards ceremony we host in 2022 will be a culmination of events that occurred any time after September 30, 2019 (pre-COVID), all the way through to December 31, 2021. We will also be changing some of the categories to reflect circumstances, solutions, and charitable endeavors.

For now, let’s remember that we are all in this sea together—maybe in different boats with varying levels of ability to steer and putter forward—but we are one industry and we are #eventstrong.

See you in July. ●



CONFETTI

A Perfect Marriage: **Social Consciousness & Safety**

**Actor Niecy Nash brought people together
for her wedding to Jessica Betts**

BY Amber Kispert
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY CURTIS J. MOORE





LEFT: **Chef Will Jones** of Los Angeles-based By Culinary Design prepared a three-course menu for the wedding.

Actor Niecy Nash made headlines earlier this summer when she announced her marriage to Jessica Betts. But even more surprising? That the media was paying more attention to her same sex marriage, than highlighting that 95% of the businesses hired to execute the wedding were owned by people of color or women.

The planner for the event, William P. Miller, Owner of WP Miller Special Events, said that given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever to highlight Black-owned businesses because they have been hit extremely hard, especially in the wake of social unrest around the country.

"Though I've been in the business for 22 years, Black event professionals are often not considered for opportunities to produce weddings or other high profile social events for celebrities with the same budgets as white producers," he said. "Niecy wanted to use her wedding as an opportunity to make a difference and bring exposure and opportunities to businesses that are often overlooked."

Vendors for the wedding included: Faheem Smith of Inkredible Dance Floor, who designed a custom bridal walkway that was the perfect accent to the floral arrangements designed by Ezai Florals; and Davon

Johnson, who curated an experiential photo wall where guests took a commemorative photograph prior to dining on a delicious three-course meal prepared by Chef Will Jones of By Culinary Design.

Nash described her wedding day as, "A magical day that she loved." Collectively, each vendor contributed to creating and executing a flawless celebration.

Rustic chic nuptials

A total of 24 guests attended Nash's "rustic chic" nuptials at her home in Bell Canyon, CA.

"Niecy normally likes bling and glamour, so this was different from what she and I have done in the past," Miller said. "My vision was an exquisite magical experience that would merge their rustic chic with what I knew about Niecy from working with her the past 15 years. I incorporated infused nature with botanical elements accented with crystal bling that we carried throughout the wedding design."

TOP: The production team for actor Niecy Nash's wedding: DJ Dense, Leslie Jones (wedding coordination), Lauren Montgomery, William P. Miller (wedding producer) Mena Wright (logistic coordination) Shantee Wright (logistic coordination) Mariea Antoinette (jazz harpist), Chef Will Jones, and Elton Hawkins.

LEFT: William P. Miller of WP Miller Special Events served as producer for actor Niecy Nash's recent nuptials to Jessica Betts. Photo courtesy Robert Ector.





A tree in Niecy Nash's backyard served as a backdrop and was adorned with twinkle lights and beautiful shades of peach roses.



TOP RIGHT: The menu consisted of three appetizers (caprese skewers, seafood stuffed jalapenos, and lollipop lamb chops), Caesar salad, chicken Tchoupitoulas, and garlic herb butter dinner rolls.

Classic gold rimmed china brought sparkle to each setting.

A few of the elements that made the wedding unique included:

Tree of life: A focal point during the nuptials was a tree in Nash's backyard, which was used as the backdrop for the ceremony and dinner. The tree was adorned with twinkle lights and beautiful shades of peach roses. As an added personalized touch to the tree, a custom wooden swing inscribed with both women's names and wedding date was installed. "The couple will be able to sway and enjoy their moment for years to follow," Miller said.

Capturing memories: Instead of a traditional photo booth, the wedding incorporated a photo experience for the guests to enjoy. In order to curate a bucolic vibe, Davon Johnson brought in an array of shabby vintage props, to create a 10-foot wall filled with rustic chic décor and experiences.

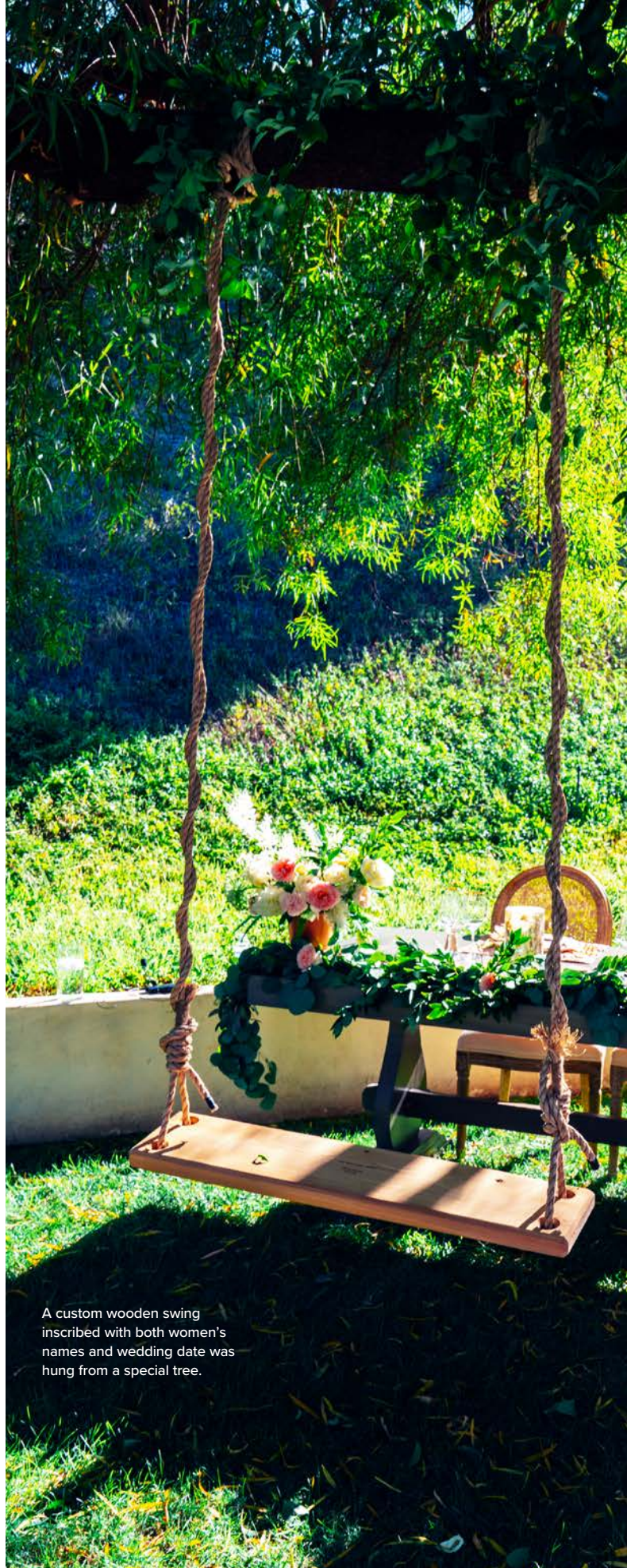
Custom touches: Unique custom touches were incorporated throughout the wedding, including candles with a custom scent, an aisle with a custom monogrammed decal, and a butterfly release to honor Betts' mother. "Tailoring experiences and transforming the grounds of their home into an elegant botanical garden of love made this wedding unique," Miller said.

Safely gathering

In addition to social consciousness and customization, safety was also on display during Nash's wedding. Several precautions were implemented to ensure everyone's safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, rapid onsite COVID-19 testing was administered to every guest and vendor prior to entering the event. Upon arrival guests also received a themed amenity box which contained their branded mask, personalized hand sanitizer, fan, and handkerchiefs as well as a pen for signing the guest book.

During dinner, servers administered hot towel service prior to dining; additionally, individual bottles of drinking water, salt and pepper shakers, and coffee condiments were placed at each setting.

"Working with William was a blessing in the midst of trying times," said Nash. "When I said I wanted to get married during the pandemic, William said 'OK.' He made sure I had proper COVID testing for my guests. When I requested African American vendors, William also provided quality companies that I would hire again and again," Nash said. "William made my wedding experience feel completely custom while supporting Black owned businesses." ●



A custom wooden swing inscribed with both women's names and wedding date was hung from a special tree.

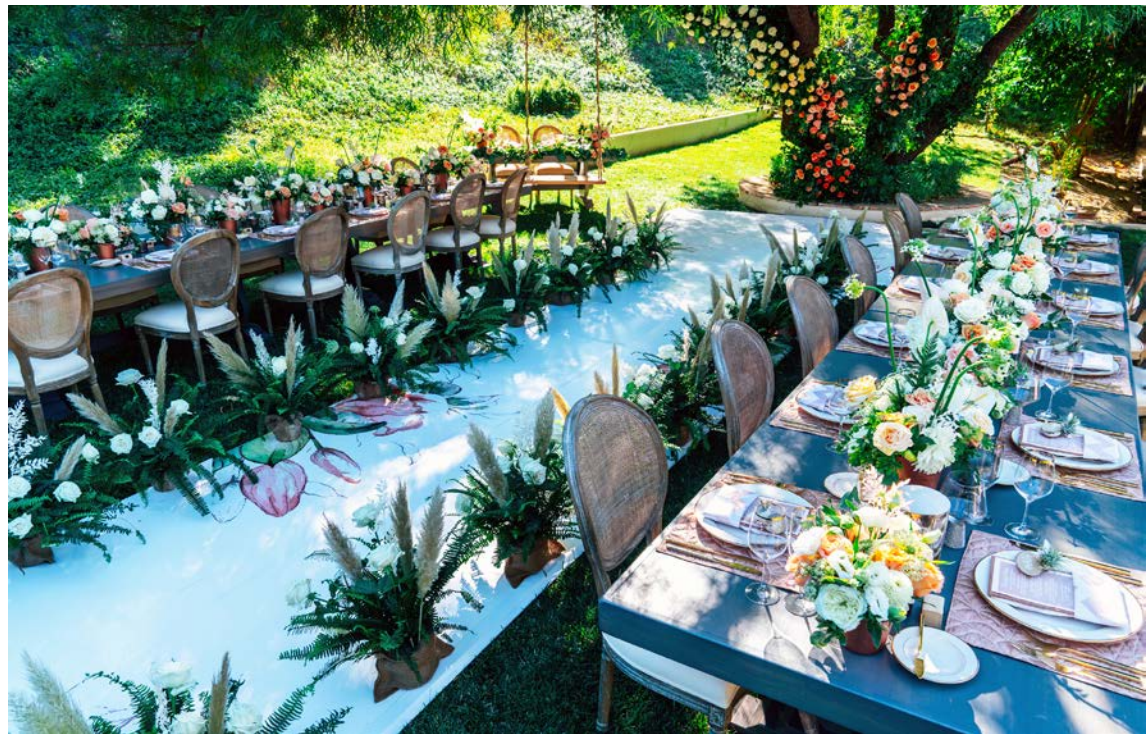


“Tailoring experiences and transforming the grounds of their home into an elegant botanical garden of love made this wedding unique.”

—William P. Miller

RIGHT: William P. Miller and Davon Johnson in front of the photo experience

BOTTOM: Guest seating was designed using linen-less communal farm tables and stylish cane back dining chairs





Positive
PREDICTIONS
FOR 2021

Ready to kick 2020 to the curb?
So are we! Let's start by sending some
good karma into the new year with these
heartfelt stories from your peers about how
they learned from the hardships of this year
and plan to make next year their
best one yet.

THOUGH IT STARTED

off as a banner year, 2020 quickly slid into the ditch as COVID-19 hit. The economic fallout of the pandemic hit the special events industry particularly hard, as you know all too well. But special events professionals are nothing if not flexible, forward-looking, quick-learning survivors who, as Aleya Harris, CPCE, Owner, Flourish Marketing says, “Change is neutral. How we relate to that change determines if it is ‘good’ or ‘bad.’”

Harris is just one of the 22 top industry thought leaders we asked to share their perspectives on what they have learned through these extraordinarily tough times for this industry—and what they are looking forward to as we round the corner into what hopefully will be a much better 2021. From building a side hustle into a new revenue stream, to retooling both products and services and how they are delivered, to developing new business models that may just completely transform

their businesses for good, here are just a few of the ways they have coped, and the ideas, trends, and positive perspectives they have for the future.

Do you have a story to tell? Let us know! Contact *Special Events* Editor in Chief Kathleen Stoehr at kathleen.stoehr@informa.com to share your own lessons learned and thoughts for the coming year.



1

Aleya Harris, CPCE,
Owner, *Flourish Marketing*

WHILE 2020 WAS a year of great challenge and change across the industry, it was also a catalyst for collaboration, community-building, and cooperation. The new business lines

and bonds that began this year will manifest into more dynamic and flexible operations in 2021. We have learned tough lessons and gained resiliency that will propel us to thrive

when combined with our innate ingenuity.

Change is neutral. How we relate to that change determines if it is “good” or “bad.” The way we do business has been profoundly

altered. Those who see that as an opportunity to serve clients in new and creative ways while diversifying their income streams will see an exponential reward for their effort.

“Change is neutral. How we relate to that change determines if it is ‘good’ or ‘bad.’”

— ALEYA HARRIS

2

Brian A.M. Green,
CMP, CMM, CEO &
Creative Director,
By BrianGreen

BY FAR, THE most significant trend for 2021 as we look toward a new year living with a global pandemic is creativity. As our world changed so drastically, events planners and our vendors will need to reinvent how we inspire our clients and engage their guests. Simultaneously, we still need to be doing all the necessary things to keep us safe until a therapeutic or a vaccine is widely available. We may never return

to the way we used to hold special events. I think that may turn out to be a blessing in disguise because it has presented us with an incredible opportunity to dive deeply into our creativity and break barriers around what we do and why we do it so exceptionally well. We will see exciting new thought processes of how we can all bring our events to life in ways we wouldn't have done before. With research saying that people are prone to travel but are more comfortable if it is closer to home (within four hours), feel safer in outdoor spaces, with technology to ensure safety, and smaller crowds—the possibility of flexing our creativity is endless.

Luxury is not going away. We will reimagine it in exciting new ways, from private island getaways to beautiful outdoor weddings with a festival vibe that allows guests to craft personal experiences while enjoying the singular event safely!

There is no question that COVID-19 has been terrible in many ways, from the infection rates and death tolls to the loss of many events and businesses. But we are a resilient industry, and our clients depend on us to help them navigate through 2021 and beyond to celebrate their special moments and milestones still while keeping them safe and engaged. I am so ready to bring on the creativity in 2021!

3

Brit Bertino, CSEP,
CGSP, Event Producer
and “Side Hustle
Specialist,”
Event Excellence

EVERYONE HAS ALWAYS dreamt about a side hustle and for those in the special event world, the COVID-19 chaos of 2020 gave many of us doers and dreamers opportunities to go big and get things done! Even if one would find oneself in a tight bind, with the stereotypical world at our fingertips, as long as you know how to tap into the vast number of opportunities found in the digital paradise of cyberspace, you can earn some extra income. Many of



us realized during this time that our hospitality skills could be applied to several other activities in and outside the special event industry.

One thing to look forward to in 2021 is that many of our industry friends may be starting a new business, launching new products, discovering new strategies in the new era, and making some career changes which will only broaden our network and make us even more creative than ever before. Don't forget to reach out, support, and congratulate those that made the decision to create their side hustle. I can't wait to see what 2021 has to bring for everyone in the special events realm.

5

Morgan Montgomery,
CPCE, CMP,
Co-Owner,
Paisley & Jade



4

Ty Kuppig, Founder & Creative
Director, *TYGER Event
Design + Production*

AS WE APPROACH 2021, we look forward to getting closer to emerging from the COVID pandemic. I am confident that together we will rebound and return with greater wisdom, new strategies, and a heightened appreciation for the luxury of being able to gather together.



FOR 2021, WE'RE really excited about the increased personalization of events and weddings. Even though creating a unique guest experience isn't anything new to our industry, as a reaction to this year's postponements and event adjustments, we're hearing from

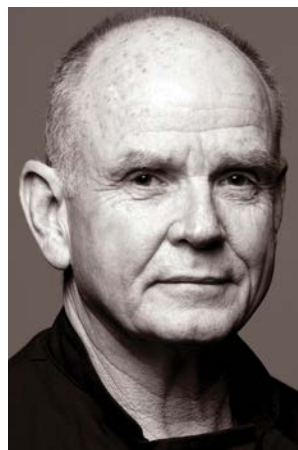
clients that they want to make an even bigger impact with their future events. As a specialty rental company, this is energizing us for the future and we are thrilled to be using our creative talents to explore how we can expand our products and services to help our clients achieve this goal. We're

designing and building new pieces that can be customized to theme and style, bringing on new services like vinyl printing and application for lettering and decals, and reimagining current pieces in new ways to help our clients create memorable and impactful events in 2021!



6

Lon Lane, Founder, *Lon Lane's Inspired Occasions*; Chairman, *International Caterers Association Educational Foundation*



COMMUNICATION

IS CRITICAL. As many businesses are in the throes of continually adjusting their business models to meet the needs of the constantly changing marketplace, top-of-mind brand awareness has never been more important.

Not only are our business needs changing but our clients' needs are changing weekly, if not daily. It is critically important to stay in touch personally with your core clients. They need to remember who you are, what you do, how you have served them and how you can continue to be of service to them and met their culinary and entertaining needs.

Reach out with phone calls. Tell them you are checking in. Ask how they're doing and inquire if there is anything you can do to help them and their families.

When we emerge from this crisis, the business owner who stayed connected with their client base on a personal level will reap the rewards.

We are in a new age. Virtual interaction and exchange have become normalized during 2020 for fundraising galas, corporate events, and weddings. I wholeheartedly believe that nothing compares to the sensory experience of an in-person event, so virtual will never be a replacement. But when we do return to in-person events, I see the importance of maintaining a virtual component as a valuable supplement to further reach and amplify messaging—allowing events to become more engaging than ever before.

I also see a positive takeaway stemming

from the trend of micro-events. For small gatherings during COVID, we created experiences aimed to be equally as immersive and impactful as a larger version would have been, but on a more intimate scale. In a large event, exaggerated elements create the biggest impact, but in micro-events, the power comes from very small, intricate details and customization. When we return to full-scale in-person events, I look forward to continuing to create immersive experiences for our clients and their guests, infused with even more unexpected detail!

IF I KNOW ONE THING

about my colleagues who represent the special event industry, it is that they are the best problem solvers, artists, and operational masterminds in the professional world. I also know (because I see it in myself) that special event professionals are creatures of habit. We all have our own ways of doing things and sometimes we like to keep those furtive strategies to ourselves. However, during COVID-19, I've

witnessed imaginations forced to spark; operations pushed to become infinitely streamlined; technology throttled forward; areas of expertise driven to expand; and a global ecosystem come together and share those ideas and information to ensure our collective survival. Therefore, my positive prediction is that all the above will fuel a reinvention of the special event industry, and the innovation emerging from that reinvention

will yield a stronger, faster, and more unified global network that will carry us forward into 2021 and beyond. In other words,

the tenacious and resilient event world will emerge from COVID-19, and when we do, we're coming out swinging!

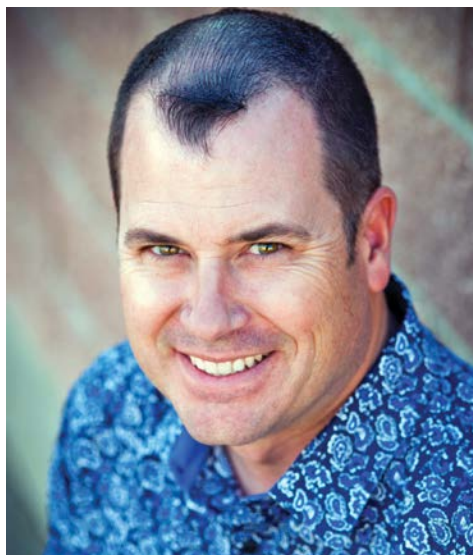
7

Christina Matteucci, Executive Director, *David Beahm Experiences*; *TEDx Speaker*



“I’m looking forward to getting back to grass roots *everything!*”

— KRISTIN WILSON



8

Kevin Dennis, CPCE, Owner, *Fantasy Sound Event Services*

AS AN INDUSTRY PRO that's huge on tech and entertainment, we're going to be keeping an eye on new trends and developments for 2021. Virtual weddings have been

introduced, of course, but in this new era of social distancing, it's high time that we incorporate more technology into amping up the guest experience. Small, in-person events are making a slow return, so it will be interesting to see which entertainment or lighting trends become the new norm.



CeCe Todd,
Owner/Principle
Designer, **CeCe
Designs and Events**

THE BIGGEST POSITIVE takeaway from the changes we've all experienced in 2020 leading into 2021 is that clients have refocused on what is important. This is a great opportunity as wedding professionals for us to remind them of the importance of a wedding day that meets or exceeds their vision and expectations. People will continue to reduce their guest counts at the

beginning of the year, but that does not mean they are reducing the lushness and lavishness of their designs. In our experience, it has been just the opposite. Our clients are still giving us the freedom to create beautiful designs with the same elaborate detail that we have become known for over the past few years.



Kristin Wilson,
Owner and CEO,
Our DJ Rocks

I'M LOOKING FORWARD to getting back to grass roots everything! Being forced to make major financial cutbacks makes a CEO not only rethink operating

expenses and marketing dollars, but also payroll and the value that a team member brings to the culture and to our clients. We are so excited and already seeing big

results from innovative, grassroots marketing with social media and using reels to reach new clients. As events continue to build on our calendar, and needing more event staff, we're also digging in deep to which new applicants really fit the brand and can bring it to life. We're looking for top talent and passionate humans to really elevate us in every area.



11

Leah Weinberg, Owner & Creative Director, *Color Pop Events*

IN 2021, I am looking forward to seeing all of my vendor friends and colleagues in person again at events. You know those memes about people who give hugs for too long and it gets awkward? Yeah, that's going to be me, and I cannot wait. I'm going to be especially mindful about savoring those moments and never taking them for granted. I am also looking forward to clients who have a renewed sense of joy and happiness about their weddings since 2020 brought them so much uncertainty and grief.

12

Kylie Carlson, Owner, *The Wedding Academy*

IF YOU WERE to think of a wedding in 2019, some general elements typically followed a formula: row seating for the ceremony, grab-and-go hors d'oeuvres, mingling without social distancing, and more. This year completely shifted everything, and couples and industry professionals alike have surprised everyone with avant-garde concepts.



Mixologists, table-service catering, and unique rentals are just a few that have found their place, and I'm looking forward to more innovative trends.

“You know those hugs for too long going to be me,



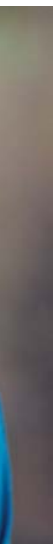
13

Eddie Zaratsian,
Owner, *Eddie
Zaratsian Lifestyle
& Design*

ALTHOUGH 2021 IS shaping up to be another year of micro weddings and intimate celebrations, I'm excited to see clients going bigger and bolder than ever before. Despite the tone of 2020, we've been able to stretch our creativity and craft over-the-top floral installations, take at-home weddings and dinners to the next level, and really go off the beaten path in terms of color, textures, and more. We would love for this to continue on into the next year.

e memes about people who give
g and it gets awkward? Yeah, that's
and I cannot wait. ”

— LEAH WEINBERG



14

Bron Hansboro,
Chief Creative,
*The Flower Guy
Bron*

I'VE HEARD MANY people relate 2020 to the worst year in history. Yes, this year has been filled with uncertainty, but we have also been graced with an immense amount of unprecedented time. Time to focus on you, the person behind the business, your family and friends, your invaluable support system, and time to absorb the potential energy that is waiting to be unbound.

15

Juls Sharpley,
Founder, *Bubbles & Bowties*

AS REOPENING BEGAN

and our county put into place guidelines for events, I took on a new strategy for 2020. I wanted to be (and appear to be) very, very busy. I wanted everyone who had a wedding in Aspen to use me and I wanted everyone watching weddings in Aspen to think I was the only business with anything going on! I dropped my minimums and just listened to clients about what they needed and wanted and from there created truly customized levels of service for each couple.

I also thought that people were going to come out of quarantine ready to just get married, no matter what that meant in terms of size and/or scale. So I got together with some



of my creative partners and came up with some pre-negotiated rates for all-inclusive wedding packages. This allowed us to say, "If you want to come to Aspen and get married in a very short timeframe, we've put together the best of the best. You will simply be able to show up and trust that we've put together a beautiful wedding with top-tier selections." These packages were wildly successful, so much so that we are carrying them into 2021.

16

Jamie O'Neill, Fashion Director,
The Bridal Finery

DUE TO COVID-19, a new trend for weddings in 2021 are intimate gatherings with more experiences. Couples are wanting to reunite with their beloved friends and family and host a full wedding. Full weddings will continue in 2021; however, they will be on a smaller scale. With fewer guests in attendance, couples are using their wedding planning budget in other areas. Larger floral designs, more food options, and special guest experiences are some of the areas that will be expanded at weddings in 2021. Although large weddings have been viewed as more desirable in previous years, smaller weddings with more guest experiences will be so memorable for everyone. The bride and groom will spend less time greeting guests and more time celebrating.



17

"When
will all
and re
to plan
days o





Nora Sheils,
Co-Founder,
Rock Paper Coin

2020 WASN'T ALL BAD—it was the year that event pros had time to take a step back, analyze their businesses, and streamline processes (and also bake lots of bread in the process!). They implemented new software (or are still in the process) and are ready to rock once events come back in full force! There is no time like the present to automate your business and take back some of that free time you enjoyed while business was slow. Event pros are grinders, but if COVID has taught us anything, it is that we are also survivors always coming up with that creative solution.



18

Tommy Waters,
Senior EventCoordinator,
The Renaissance

I'M POSITIVE THAT there is a huge windfall for everyone in the wedding industry that will come next year. There are a lot of couples out there that are hesitant, more than any other time I've ever seen in my more than 20 years in the industry. When that dam breaks, we will all be busy with excited and relieved couples looking to plan one of the happiest days of their lives. And we will all be right there to help make it possible. I've created proposals and toured (at The Renaissance) so many couples that are all ready to go, ready to sign, ready to get started planning ... but the threat of low headcounts, city/state mandates, and contractual obligations are slowing them down from doing just that. When that threat is removed, and it is going to happen, we will all be in a very good place—doing what we love and making every minute count!

When that dam breaks, we will be busy with excited and relieved couples looking to plan one of the happiest days of their lives. ”

— TOMMY WATERS



19

Janice Carnevale, Owner,
Bellwether Events

I AM LOOKING forward to a return to a focus on the guest experience in 2021. Our industry sometimes gets a bad rap for ideas like swans in pools, and I think 2021 couples (and beyond) will want to take that time, energy, and budget and reorient it to making their guests feel loved, appreciated, and safe. In the immediate future, guest lists will be smaller—either due to government restrictions or decreased travel on the part of the guests. This will allow couples to invest more into gracious hospitality for the guests that do attend in person. Weddings can be personalized to reflect the couple getting married, but the details can be customized to the guests in attendance. Guests will always remember the way the hosting couple made them feel while at the celebration, and that should be embraced.

20

Sandy Hammer,
Co-Founder &
CMO, *Allseated*

WE ARE LOOKING ahead with a positive attitude to 2021! We are really hoping to see the return of in-person events as we miss our industry peers who we really consider our family and close friends. And of course, we are hoping to see the pressure of entire event community's financial situation improve.

As a tech company, we are beyond excited to see the

advancement of technology and how it has taken over the world. I actually feel incredibly proud that as an industry, we are leading the way in virtual events powered by incredible technology. Augmented and virtual reality will be the next big part of our growth as an industry and our platform will be leading the way!





21

David E. Merrell, CEO/
creative director, **AOO Events, Inc.**

COVID-19 HAS OPENED up the possibility of more virtual events. Largely due to the fact that we were forced into virtual events being the only way you could celebrate and connect, the tools that existed for virtual events have had a healthy round of practice and adjustment. It is apparent that all of us are desiring that time when we can meet and celebrate again in person. When it does come back, I believe that there will be a place for virtual elements within many of the live events, as there is a value for including a larger audience. Hybrid events will become commonplace for corporations in the future!

“Hybrid events will become commonplace for corporations in the future!” — DAVID E. MERRELL



22

Laura Maddox, CWP,
Owner, *Magnolia Celebrates*

I TRULY THINK that the service industry has heightened the guest experience in a way that we will not go away from. Chef-attended stations instead of buffets, more bartenders, fewer people at a table, innovation of new outdoor/indoor spaces, and so much more! ●



FOOD FOR FÊTES



Four flavors, four chefs

by Kathleen Stoehr

IT WAS LITERALLY one of the last “real” gatherings of 2020, even if we were only a quarter way into the year. Gala, ACE, and CATIE award nominees mingled prior to the industry awards ceremony at The Special Event + Catersource the evening of March 12, 2020 for small bites, conversation, and music that, who would have thought—was centered around a theme of The Roaring Twenties. The Roaring Twenties... a decade of opulence sprung from the jaws of a pandemic. Oh, the irony!

But there was nothing but joyful enthusiasm for the passed appetizer bites provided, by way of four chefs who truly know their way around a kitchen.



TOP: **CHEF KAREN O'CONNOR** (SECOND FROM RIGHT) OPENED THE CULINARY EXPERIENCE STAGE ON DAY 1 WITH FELLOW CHEFS JOANNE PURNELL OF GOOD GRACIOUS! (FAR LEFT) AND ELGIN WOODMAN OF A JOY WALLACE CATERING, NOW PIE HIGH CHEFS (FAR RIGHT). ROBIN SELDEN, MARCIA SELDEN CATERING AND EVENTS (SECOND FROM LEFT) SERVED AS EMCEE. PHOTO COURTESY KATHLEEN STOEHR

ABOVE: CHEF KAREN O'CONNOR'S CHICKEN ROULADE



LEFT: **CHEF MARK ELLIS**. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CHEF

ABOVE: SMALL PIPETTES WERE FILLED WITH CAESAR DRESSING VIA SOUS VIDE

A little back story: the four chefs, Karen O'Connor of Daniel et Daniel, Toronto, Canada; Clay Brunton of Beets Hospitality Group, California; John Reed, Customized Culinary Solutions, Illinois; and Mark Ellis of The Chef's Table, Massachusetts presented demo sessions on the Culinary Experience stage at Catersource earlier in the week. Each offered an appetizer recipe for the awards event that would pair with their presentations. Go listen to the chef, then sample their creation at the reception. It was a dream to have such a beautifully curated experience for our The Special Event and Catersource audiences.

Each bite briefly transported us into the aesthetic each chef was attuned to for the conference. For Chef O'Connor, it was the many ways chicken can be utilized at events of any kind. Her chicken roulade, normally a center of the plate entree, became a delicious small plate.

Chef Ellis, who presented a session on sous vide, offered a tiny Caesar salad with an accompanying pipette that had been filled via his clever sous vide-style method, demonstrated earlier at his session.



ABOVE: **CHEF JOHN REED**. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CHEF

LEFT: POTATO TIKKA FRITTER FROM **CHEF JOHN REED**. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CHEF



FOOD FOR FÊTES



The satisfying crunch of potato tikka fritter garnished with beet threads and cilantro came from Chef John Reed, who in his earlier session discussed global cuisine and the development of appealing flavor foundations.

Finally, Chef Brunton was all about the trends in dumplings in his Thursday session, and later that evening, guests were able to sample a swoon-worthy crab and shrimp sui mai.

It is this attention to detail: unique flavors, delightful textures, utilization of price-conscious proteins elevated into something extraordinary that make event appetizers most appealing. Your care in providing an elevated menu for your clients, one that moves beyond the ordinary and into the realm of “I can’t stop thinking about how good that was” will win you the

job year after year.

In these difficult times—but also times of opportunity as clients are spending more on providing a boutique food and beverage experience for their smaller guest lists—now is the time to push your creativity, explore and expand upon low margin/high profit tastes, and usher in a beautiful aesthetic for 2021. ●

ABOVE: CHEF CLAY BRUNTON, DURING HIS SESSION ON THE CULINARY EXPERIENCE STAGE AT CATERSOURCE + THE SPECIAL EVENT
RIGHT: CHEF BRUNTON'S CRAB & SHRIMP SUI MAI



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State of the Industry: Forecast 2021

By Kathleen Stoehr





Picture this:

It's 1919, and a pandemic is raging across the world. It's the H1N1 virus and one-third of the world's population has been infected. As it subsides, the opulence and over-the-top decade of The Roaring Twenties, replete with surging economy, a cultural edginess that gives birth to the Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance, and the passing of new political freedoms arrives! Parties, despite Prohibition, were legendary.

Jumping forward, we can look to the late 1970s and early 1980s, a time period in which many catering and events companies were founded. And yet, says Carl Sacks, executive director of the Leading Caterers of America, in an article for *Catersource* magazine (a sister publication of *Special Events*), the U.S. economy was in a tailspin during the early 1980s. "For those of you who are old enough to remember that era, inflation, driven by oil price increases, was through the roof. To get inflation under control, the Federal Reserve raised interest rates drastically, to the point where in early 1982 a regular 30-year mortgage had an interest rate of 17.5%," he said.

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY FORECAST 2021

“With interest rates at that level, it was amazing that anyone could afford a place to live, much less be able to hire a caterer. The entire economy was affected, with unemployment peaking at 10.8% in November 1982—well above the current level,” added Sacks.

Yet during that period, when it seemed this might be a downward economic spiral from which we’d never emerge, the industry began to recover and start its march toward very substantial growth. “In 1982,” Sacks says, “the catering sector broke \$1 billion in annual revenue for the first time. For most of the following two decades, [it] was the fastest growing foodservice sector, except for snack (coffee) bars.”

Since then, there have been other crises that have tested the mettle of the catering and events industry: the 1987 Black Monday stock meltdown, 9/11, the Great Recession...all momentous challenges. But nothing like COVID-19.

The event industry felt confident going into 2020, with 90% of in-house event professionals and 79% of independent event professionals predicting they would stage the same number or more events in the new year than they did in 2019.

Other “stand out stats” saw coping with new technology affecting both in-house and independent planners; huge jumps related to the uncertain economy, but also affecting independent planners much more than in-house; and, for in-house event planners, the “uncertain finances” of their companies was top of mind. And while reduced client budgets are a challenge for independent planners, there is a sad bright spot for those who are still in business: a 29% jump in the likelihood that they would have *less* competition in 2021, than more.

For well over a decade, *Special Events* has been conducting a study that touches upon statistics such as the above, as well as the outlook for specific types of events, technological challenges, and more. This year, we added a few new questions to gather thoughts on the impact of COVID,

as well as diversity and inclusion, and willingness to travel. Let’s have a look:

THE IMPACT OF COVID ON OUR BUSINESSES

So, how does the ongoing pandemic resonate with our surveyed audience? We asked,

Do you agree that the COVID-19 pandemic represents the most severe challenge your company has ever faced?

**Definitely
83%**

**Possibly
9%**

**Probably
6%**

**No
2%**

Essentially, 98% chose an answer that leaned more toward yes than no. That is really a strong “yes” statement, especially for those companies who have been in business for decades and made it through the recession, 9/11, even fires that destroyed company headquarters. Only 2% said, “no.” No, this is not the most severe challenge my company has ever faced.

REGARDING SPECIAL EVENTS

Most of us experienced event cancellations, reschedules, or that the deposit provided for an event was now enough to pay for the entire event, with greatly diminished “attendance.” I asked those surveyed to report on their events between March 14 and September 30, 2020.

Continued on page 41

Controlling quality over quantity. Staying strong on costs/prices. Looking after our team and guiding our clients to the new normal.

*Relationships and p
This will be the true
of the relationships
the years to be able
those who you have
and vice versa.*

Flexibility and creativity. We will need to diversify our income streams while watching costs closer than ever before. There is no appetite for events that are not profitable in the non-profit sector.

*Hitting the m
right time to
new trends,
waiting for a
fatigue an*

Adapting and evolving—the ones who are unwilling to educate themselves on the new technologies in the post-pandemic world will get left behind so it’s crucial to figure out how to pivot and be adaptable and prepared for quick turn arounds and last-minute changes.

Secrets to Success in 2021

Risk mitigation, engaging in new ways to entice, encourage, and incentivize both attendees and exhibitors to come back in 2021.

Financial planning and the ability to wait out the worst part of this pandemic. We are in the hands of others and how we work together to mitigate this pandemic. We won't be able to truly control our own destiny until the country moves to a place where safety regulations are more common and testing is more widely available.

Being adaptable is key—I have found those in my industry that moved forward with new technology in March are doing well.

Everyone is scared to put their name on an event or sponsor it if something were to happen COVID-related. Trade shows need to open to get brands back to spending money on marketing and promotions. Pop ups need to be safe and accepted without public opinion frowning on them for happening. We also need to focus outside of the big cities. No one is going to even think of booking anything in the big cities till at least the end of 2021–2022.

To persevere. It is BRUTAL out there. We work with all the top brands and there are zero dollars allocated for live events right now. Everything has gone virtual and AV/tech is exploding with business, yet all other event providers are dead in the water. MANY, MANY vendors and businesses have closed.

Be visible (advertise) and follow up. People want to gather, but they are afraid of businesses that failed during COVID due to undercapitalization. Companies and couples need to know you're going to be able to deliver and that you're still around to fulfill their needs.

Partnerships. Showing built over to rely on supported

market at the capitalize on rather than attendee tech d burnout.

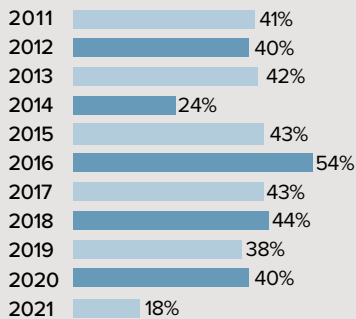
HOW'S BUSINESS?

How will the number of special events you stage this year compare with last year?

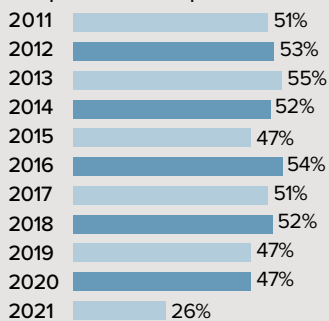
Responses for each new year, 2011-2021

"WE WILL STAGE MORE EVENTS THIS YEAR"

In-house event professionals

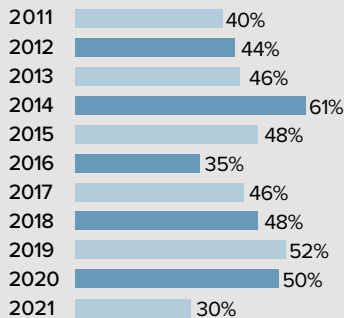


Independent event professionals

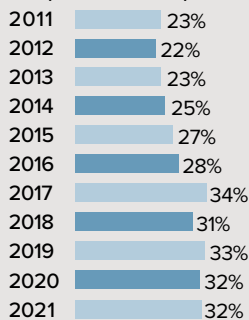


"WE WILL STAGE APPROXIMATELY THE SAME NUMBER"

In-house event professionals

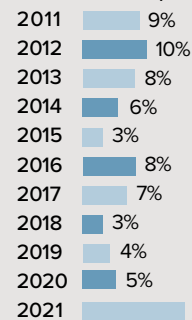


Independent event professionals

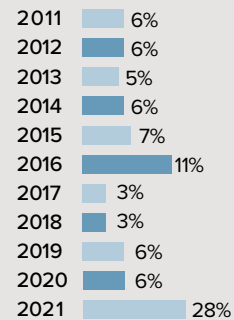


"WE WILL STAGE FEWER"

In-house event professionals



Independent event professionals



Unsure (2020 responses) 38%

In-house event professionals: 28%

Independent event professional: 42%

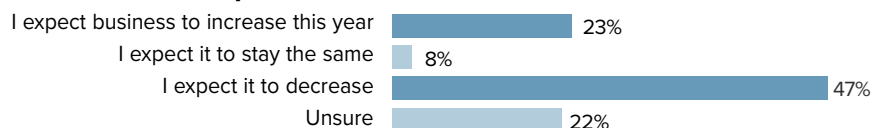
All respondents: 38%

WHO HAS THE BUSINESS?

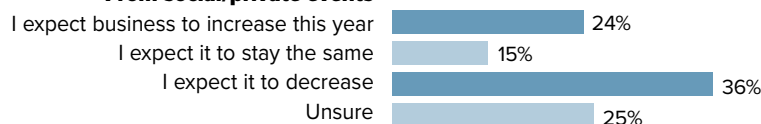
Compared with last year, how do you expect revenue from different types of events to change in 2021?

Base: Independent event professionals

From business/corporate events



From social/private events



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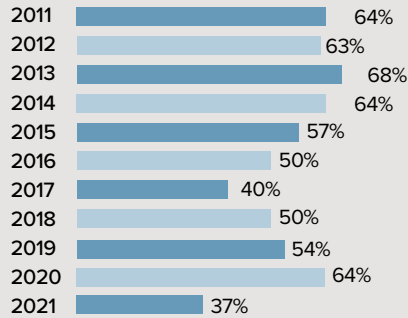
CONFRONTING CHALLENGES

What are the greatest challenges facing you professionally this year?

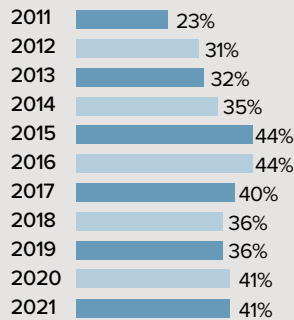
Multiple answers possible

IN-HOUSE EVENT PROFESSIONALS

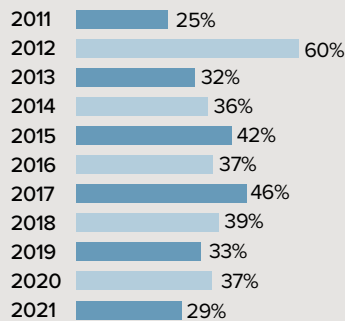
Reduced budgets to work with



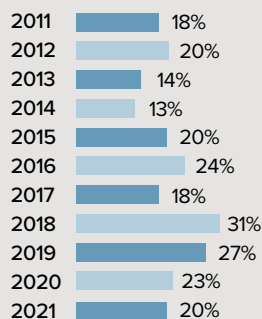
Demonstrating the value/ ROI of special events



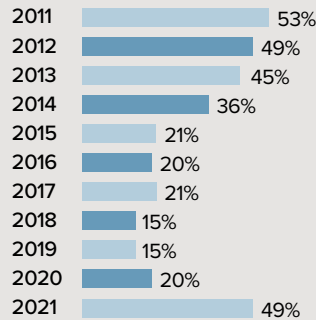
Shorter lead times



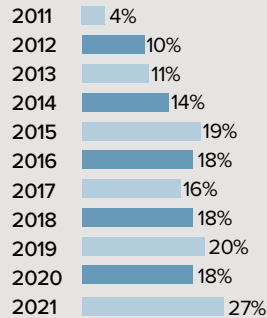
Labor shortage/ lack of skilled labor



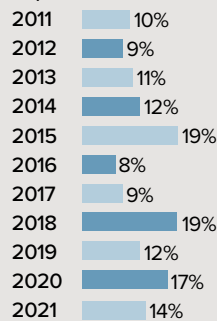
An uncertain economy



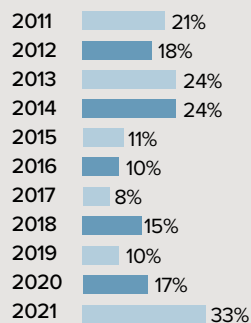
Coping with new technology



Dealing with my company's procurement/purchasing department

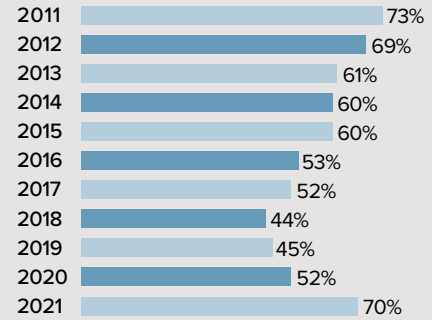


My own company's uncertain finances

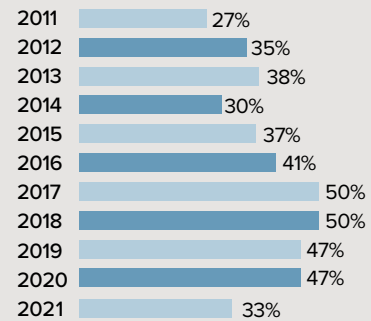


INDEPENDENT EVENT PROFESSIONALS

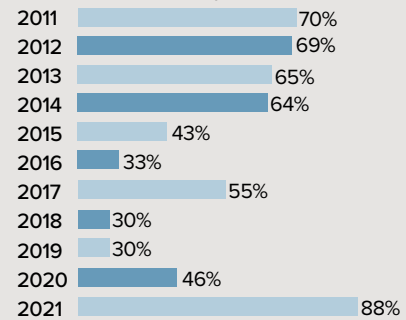
Reduced client budgets



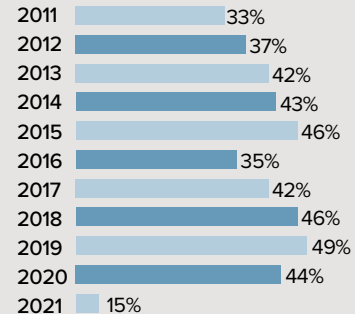
Shorter lead times



An uncertain economy



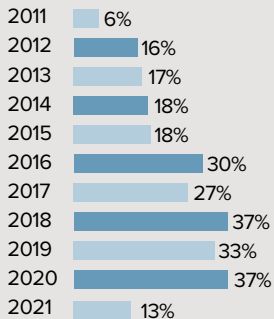
Increased competition



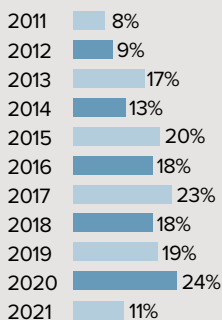
CONFRONTING CHALLENGES

What are the greatest challenges facing you professionally this year?
(continued)

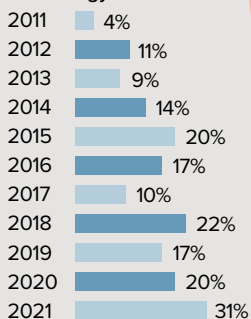
Labor shortage/
lack of skilled labor



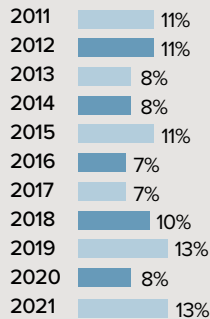
Dealing with my
client's procurement/
purchasing department



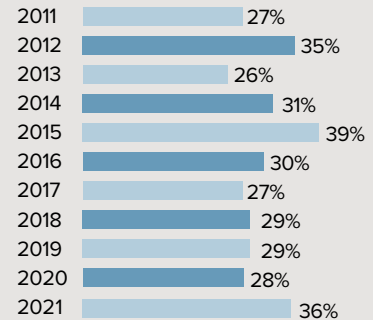
Coping with new
technology



Consolidation of
client base



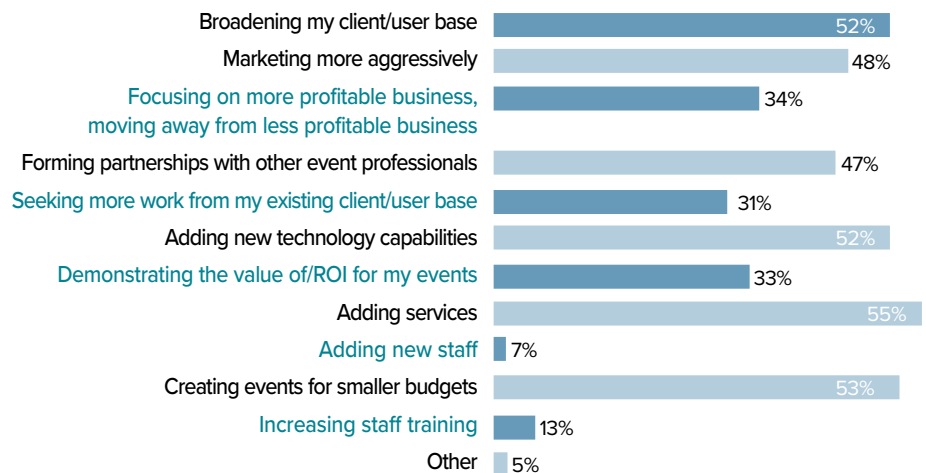
Demonstrating the
value/ROI of special event



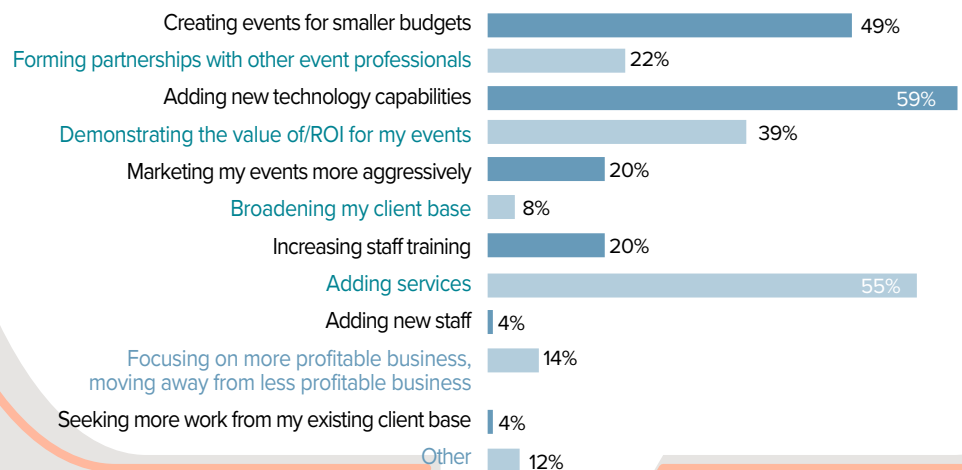
SECRETS TO SUCCESS IN 2021

What key steps are you taking this year
to improve your event operations?

Base: Independent event professionals; multiple answers possible.



Base: In-house event professionals; multiple answers possible.



REGARDING SPECIAL EVENTS *(continued)*

59%
of all events were
entirely cancelled

5%
were completed on
the date contracted

4%
of events were completed on the
date contracted but with greatly
reduced attendance numbers

4%
had events rescheduled and
completed before 9/30/2020

3%
had events rescheduled into Q4 2020

26%
had events rescheduled into 2021

What does this mean? Essentially, with 59% of events cancelled in 2020 and 26% rescheduled into 2021—planners have been operating on about 16% of the revenue they are used to, and even that pittance is no doubt diminished given that many events had guest counts cut to the base minimum, depending upon state mandates.

FUTURE THINKING

The big question is... When do you think the catering and events industry will return to some semblance of normalcy? Here is what your peers said:

Q4 2020

1%

Q1 2021

3%

Q2 2021

21%

Q3 2021

29%

Q4 2021

14%

Q1 2022

16%

Q2 2022

11%

Other

5%

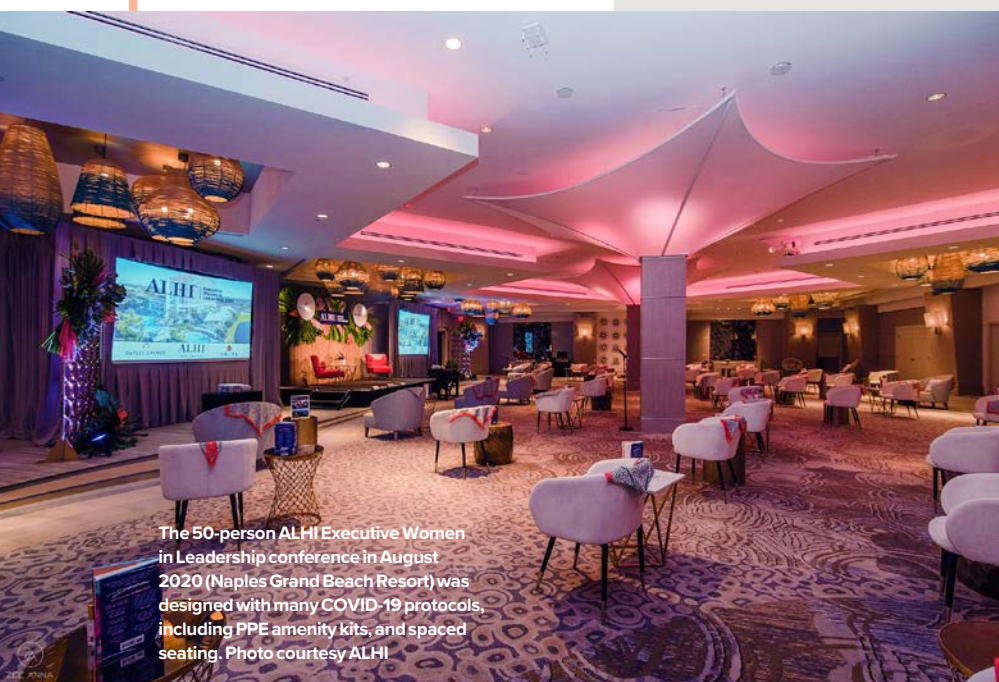
Ridgewells Catering developed beautifully appointed single serve boxes to provide to client guests having an otherwise virtual event experience. Photo courtesy Ridgewells Catering



And, “other” does not necessarily mean beyond Q2 2022. Most comments pointed to widespread distribution of a vaccine as the tipping point, many were unable to speculate, and one stated, “As 2021 is still very unclear about what events can and will occur, the worst may still be ahead. The need to work efficiently and profitably on each job is crucial.”

We clearly hope it doesn’t take that long, but if we tally the first four listed percentages to your left, we are at a solid 54% of the group who believe events may be somewhat back to normal by June 2021 and beyond.

When we are once again “normal” two-thirds of event planners (66%) answered yes to: *If you have the opportunity to reconstitute your business to what it was before the COVID crisis, would you do this?* However, almost one-third (29%) believed that business was poised for greater success in its new form. Just 5% were unsure... but unsure in what seemed to be a more positive light. One respondent said, “We certainly can’t wait to get back to producing large, live events, but on the flip side, some great things have come out of this for us during this time.” Another noted, “I believe some changes and adaptations were for the better and should be carried forward and other changes will be difficult to maintain but will likely be the way of the future.” Finally, “retirement beckons” for others.



The 50-person ALHI Executive Women in Leadership conference in August 2020 (Naples Grand Beach Resort) was designed with many COVID-19 protocols, including PPE amenity kits, and spaced seating. Photo courtesy ALHI



TRAVEL TIME

For those of us who travel for our jobs, or who offer destination events, here is some good news for you: people are already twitchy (in a good way) to board planes: 40% of respondents named Q4 of 2020 as when they would be ready to travel personally. It gets better. By Q2 2021, that percentage jumps to 70%. For business, by Q2 2021, 64% will be traveling for business. OK, so we at *Special Events* were interested especially in Q3 2021 (...our big show and all...) and personal travel rises yet again to 82%. For business: 80%. Whoo hoo! Considering Miami Beach is also a great location for a family vacation, we can only expect that we will see you all live there next July!

MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY

Over half (59%) received government assistance in the form of PPP or grants; 31% of companies returned event

deposits with no holdback; 41% returned deposits with either some offset for costs already incurred or held onto some deposits per the terms of the contract. Only 16% of event planners asked that a non-disclosure/non-disparage agreement be signed before money was returned. 58% of companies made substantial changes to their event contract terminology, such as adding a waiver of liability clause/hold harmless agreement) because of the current crisis.

REGARDING COVID PROTOCOLS

We have seen some wonderful new products come through from manufacturers and suppliers, springing to assist us with the challenges we face—not just with guest interaction, but also for use within our own companies. So, let's talk health and safety protocol for a bit.

While we can do everything under the sun to mask up, glove up, spritz and shield our employees (54% of

companies do health screenings themselves in house), issues related to guest compliance remain challenging. We asked:

In your estimation, what percentage of your events have you experienced client- or guest-imposed violations of COVID-related regulations or operating restrictions?

51%
have experienced violations imposed by guests

How is this handled? Not all companies are assuming responsibility for the policing of their guests, though nearly two-thirds (62%), are absorbing the cost of PPE and other





TOP: In a tent that normally holds 300 people, Marcia Selden Catering and Events accommodated one-quarter the number, and placed signifiers for guests to occupy when on the dance floor. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering and Events

LEFT: Fundraising galas went online and included food delivery, some aspects of live, and big stars, happy to dial in remotely for a good cause. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering and Events

COVID-related necessities.

In most states, masks (89%), social distancing (91%), and limited guest counts (90%) are the norm. In the area of F&B, buffets (53%) and stations (29%) were not allowed as of September 30, 2020.

REGARDING STAFFING

Despite that furloughs definitely occurred, 71% of respondents said they had not been furloughed during the prime time of March through September 2020. Unfortunately, the other 29% did and of that, 19% were still furloughed when filling out the survey.

I also asked for a comparison about number of employees on staff in 2019 versus 2020 so we could gain an overall view regarding how companies have been affected. Overall, staffs have not been reduced much, only by about 9%. That is incredibly lucky.

I'd like to point out a comparison. I also asked this question of our catering audience via *Catersource* magazine. In that survey, staff have been reduced by 54%, an industry much harder hit.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Finally, we asked about company culture with an eye on diversity, inclusion, #metoo, and other concerning issues. We asked the following statements, and how strongly one agreed or did not agree with them:

- **My company employs an adequately diverse group of employees.**
- **My company needs to proactively address issues of diversity & inclusion.**
- **Racial, ethnic, LGBTQ and gender-based jokes or comments are not tolerated at my company.**

What did we uncover? 36% agree or strongly agree that their companies could employ a more diverse group; over 29% agree or strongly agree that their companies need to be more proactive in addressing issues of D&I; and 88% agree or strongly agree that their companies do not tolerate jokes or comments that target individuals. A mixed bag of news but at its core, the event industry has a way to go in developing a more diverse employee

base. Conversely, in the catering industry, over 80% of individuals surveyed agreed that their companies adequately do not employ a diverse group of individuals. That's a *huge* jump.

When asked about discrimination on the job, 77% noted that they have not personally witnessed discrimination at the companies they work for and 90%



Oysters XO upped their game with a new COVID-safe outfit, adding a face mask, plastic gloves (in addition to the shucking glove), and exchanged business cards for a QR code. Servers also place shucked oysters in a sustainable bamboo boat so that guests are the only one touching the oysters after they have been opened. Photo courtesy Oysters XO

said they have not been discriminated against at their companies of employ. Good news, yes, but not banner news until we reach 100%.

In closing, I'd like to note that the tenacity and creativity of event professionals and caterers is inspiring. I salute you!

Better times are ahead, my friends.●



MARKETING & MEDIA

Google Analytics: 5 Myths Event Pros Believe About Google Analytics



While a common misconception is that **“direct traffic”** means someone has typed in your URL directly and is familiar with your brand and website, **direct traffic really means “I don’t know where this came from” in Google Analytics.**

By Christie Osborne

When attempting to reach and engage with prospective clients, a website is a company’s most valuable tool for providing information and influencing purchasing decisions. While you may have great social media feeds and lots of email subscribers, all roads ultimately lead to your website.

Business owners who fail to evaluate their website’s performance for converting traffic into leads and customers miss vital opportunities to optimize their websites for inquiries and sales.

Fortunately, tools for evaluating your website are already at your fingertips—if you know where to look. Google Analytics is the most powerful platform for gaining insights regarding how well your website converts traffic into inquiries. It allows you to maximize your presence on all of your channels. There are many myths about Google Analytics, particularly with people who don’t regularly use it to make data-based decisions in their businesses.

Here are the top five misconceptions about Google Analytics and the truth behind how this platform can take your marketing approach up a few notches.

MYTH 1. You need a lot of traffic to be successful.

It’s natural to think that quantity is more important than quality. After all, seeing thousands of pageviews per month is exciting. However, if none of those views lead to an inquiry, they’re virtually worthless. A quick look at a geography report may show that a bulk of this traffic is coming from places like Russia or Ukraine, indicating that many of the

visitors are actually spambots. Even if your traffic is qualified, you have a problem if people find your site only to click away from it moments later.

That’s why your conversion rate is a far more accurate representation of the health of your business. Not every successful company is getting loads of traffic and not every business that sees high traffic is successful. Instead of setting your sights on how many people visit your page, focus on how many of your website visitors are taking the next step to get in contact with you.

MYTH 2. A low bounce rate is important.

Many people see a low bounce rate and assume that it means their website is effectively keeping their users’ interest. While it can mean this, a low bounce rate isn’t necessarily an indicator of success. For example, a low bounce rate could mean that the Google Analytics code was installed twice. A low bounce rate could also mean that visitors cannot find what they’re looking for on your website, so they click through a bunch of pages before going elsewhere.

Similarly, if you are driving traffic to a landing page or inquiry page (as opposed to your homepage) and eliciting them to call you, Google won’t understand that they took an action offline. They’ll consider it a bounce when, in reality, it was simply someone who was warmed up and already prepared to take the next step. If you want to confirm your low bounce rate is a sign of efficacy, you’ll need to match it with other engagement metrics, like time spent on pages or a custom event, like scroll depth.



MYTH 3. Direct traffic means they know about my business and typed in my web address.

While a common misconception is that “direct traffic” means someone has typed in your URL directly and is familiar with your brand and website, direct traffic really means “I don’t know where this came from” in Google Analytics. For example, if someone bookmarked your page, you’ll see it as direct traffic. These visitors may have bookmarked a number of your competitors. Bookmarking is not the same as remembering and typing in a URL. That’s not to say they don’t have strong recognition of your brand; it simply means you can’t make that assumption.

Direct traffic can also come from private emails, whether you’re sending links directly or someone forwards your email blast to someone else. In some cases, Google is unable to tell it’s from an email and won’t associate it as an email referral. For these reasons, I typically ignore the direct traffic report because you can never be certain what is in there. Instead, focus on more defined reports with cleaner data, as those will provide more actionable insights.

MYTH 4. You don’t need to install Google Analytics if you are using built-in analytics from Squarespace.

Squarespace websites are versatile and easy to set up, but their analytics fall

flat compared to Google. Squarespace ships with high-level, basic reports, like geography, referrals, and most popular pages. While such reports prove useful for data at a glance, you miss out on a lot of the customization offered by Google Analytics. For example, Squarespace may tell you what social media platform drives the most traffic, but Google will take it further by revealing which platforms actually convert those website visitors into inquiries and customers.

Additionally, you can create segments in Google Analytics and run custom reports based on your audience. Say you want to review website activity of females between the ages of 25 and 34, you can run a report on Google that will tell you precisely what your target audience is looking at and how much time they’re spending on each page of your website. There’s certainly merit to tracking your Squarespace metrics, but you’d be missing out if you didn’t also take the opportunity to crunch more data and access comprehensive reporting with Google Analytics.

MYTH 5. Google Analytics is complicated to set up and customize.

A glimpse at a Google Analytics dashboard and all of the possible reports at one’s disposal can seem overwhelming, particularly for creatives who much prefer aesthetics to analytics. However, the truth is that Google Analytics has a pretty low barrier to

entry and a gentle learning curve. It’s easy to get caught up in the possibilities, but you don’t need to touch every corner of Google Analytics to make use of it. While there are nearly 200 reports available out of the box and countless options for creating custom reports, the simple fact is that you really only need a handful of data points to help your business grow.

Additionally, online resources abound to help you navigate and optimize your Google Analytics dashboard. When in doubt, turn to YouTube for on-screen tutorials to help you accomplish everything from setting conversion goals to generating custom demographic reports.

For all intents and purposes, Google Analytics is simply another tool in your belt. It’s up to you, as a marketer, to ask the right questions of your data so you can gather the insights that will inform your outreach strategies going forward. The numbers will always be there, but it’s what you do with the data that truly matters. ●

Christie Osborne is the owner of Mountainside Media, a company that helps event industry professionals brands develop scalable marketing strategies that bring in more inquiries and leads. Christie is a national educator with recent speaking engagements at NACE Experience, WIPA, and the ABC Conference.



DIVINE DECOR

Floral Trends: Big, bold and beautiful

SMALLER GUEST LISTS ARE GIVING WAY TO CUSTOM STATEMENT FLORALS BY AMBER KISPERT

It's been a difficult and challenging year for engaged couples. Destination weddings have had to relocate closer to home, guest lists have whittled down, buffets and action stations have been rethought, and generally, weddings have been forced to become a “micro” of what they once were. However, one element that hasn't been hit, and continues to be a shining light, is florals. In fact, flowers have become even more important at today's weddings because they are the one element couples do not have to compromise on.

“People need inspiration more than ever, and florals are a great way to do that,” says Virginia-based florist



Bron Hansboro. “Flowers bring life to an event. Having that natural element to a wedding brings a freshness and signifies the beginning between two people.”

Given the increasingly lower guest counts at weddings, many couples are opting to allocate considerable portions of their budgets to flowers instead, says Michelle Howard from Las Vegas' Flora Couture.

“Couples are putting more money into making a ‘wow’ statement for a much smaller group of people,” she says. “These displays are what a couple would have loved to have in their dream wedding but they couldn't before

“People need inspiration more than ever, and florals are a great way to do that.”

— BRON HANSBORO



Bron Hansboro | Virginia

because they were having 200 guests. Now they are able to build this dream in their head that they didn't know was possible.”

A FLORAL EXPERIENCE

When deciding upon wedding florals, couples are looking for impact, value, and an experience, Howard said.

“They want to create an experience, not only for themselves but for their family and the friends who they are able to share this day with,” she said. “They have this small intimate location, but they’re making sure the décor is something their guests will never forget. They are making certain that the overall vision and experience is something the guests are seeing, touching, smelling, feeling—everything.”

Floral trends that have risen in popularity, and will continue to grow, are hanging floral spirals, floral backdrops, floral chandeliers, and other large-scale flower structures, Hansboro says.

“They’re wanting to get as much big impact, and Instagramable moments as they can,” he says. “Where they would have had multiple opportunities for the wow factor, now they only have limited moments.”

When creating a vision for these over-the-top floral displays, florists need to tap into the personalities of the couple and not just create something that has been done many times before.



Photo courtesy Rachel Takes Pictures



Photo courtesy Casey Jade for Flora Couture



Photo courtesy Blue Plate Catering



Photo courtesy VASIO Photography for The Special Event



Photo courtesy Kevin Dennis

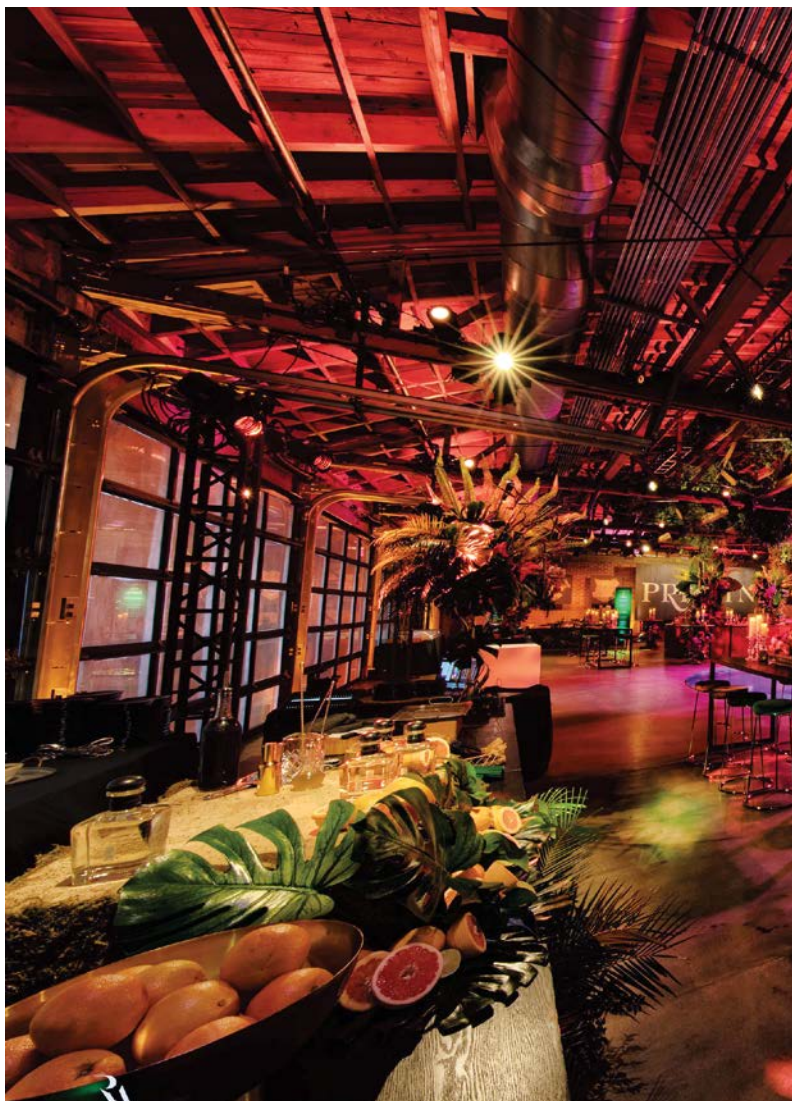




Photo courtesy Casey Jade for Flora Couture

“We want guests to walk into a wedding, and say ‘Oh my God, that is so Bill and Sue.’”

— MICHELLE HOWARD



Michelle Howard | Flora Couture

“We want guests to walk into a wedding, and say ‘Oh my God, that is so Bill and Sue,’ Howard says. “We want guests to think that it’s exactly what they would expect from the couple. It’s about figuring out what the flowers say about them.”

COLORFUL & CHEERFUL

Regarding color, Howard says she is seeing a lot of purples on trend, along with a mix of coral, pink, and soft blues to add depth. Additionally, “don’t underestimate the appeal of traditional hues such as white and blush.”

In Bron Hansboro’s world, “People are reimagining the typical color palette,” he says.

In the fall, Hansboro saw couples moving away from traditional burgundies and blushes, and instead choosing mochas and jewel tones. He also saw a reimagining of traditional tones. For example, rather than a traditional blush, maybe a more vibrant hot fuchsia.

As we continue to navigate the effects of COVID-19, one thing is for certain, flowers and color can go a long way in brightening any event.

“Guests want happy, they want cheerful,” Howard says. “They need to connect with their families, they want to give their family and friends happiness, and they want to give their family and friends this amazing piece that takes them away from what’s going on in the world. Let’s stop time for a while and just enjoy us.” ●



Photo courtesy 24 Carrots Catering & Events

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THE LAST WORD



Company culture eats profit for breakfast

By Bill Hansen

After 40 years as the CEO of my own catering and events firm, I've had great company culture...and lousy culture too. It's never an easy road.

Starting in 1980, the last thing I thought about was a team sharing the same beliefs and values. I was too busy as an entrepreneur making money at a downtown Miami club I operated—the club from where I launched my off-premise catering business.

Frankly, I think my culture was pretty good back then because as the owner I worked side-by-side with my team, doing everything except the cooking (if I had done the cooking, we would definitely have gone belly up before 1981!).

I have learned that all it takes is for a couple of toxic personalities to destroy a good company. I mistakenly hired a misfit in 1986 who quickly soured our culture, though grew our profits.

Less than two years later she was gone, and I scaled my company back to a manageable size, with the mantra that being bigger is not necessarily better. (Had I known then to place culture before profit, I would have ended our time together sooner.)

In 2011, I decided to grow my business again.

I was irked that one of my former employees had formed their own firm in 1988 and were now beating me at my own game. Not that I wanted revenge, but I did at least want to compete on a more level playing field. As such, over each of the next five years we grew our sales by 25% or more.

While we were doing this our culture occasionally suffered from individuals who failed to fit in but were great for business. Two could sell and one scrutinized every expenditure while driving the sales team hard. But...toxic.

All three have moved on into jobs that fit them better, making our company culture better off, too.

I'm big on employee engagement, knowing that only 20% of workers are truly engaged. Lack of employee buy-in costs firms billions of dollars each year.

What is that culture solution? Is it bringing your dog to work, free lunches, unlimited PTO, or casual Fridays? Nope. All these perks accomplish, according to bestselling author Matthew Kelly, in his book, *The Culture Solution*, is foster entitlement, complacency, and mediocrity. Here are some parting thoughts:

#1 We need to make culture a priority. We use the program, Culturewise, at Bill Hansen Catering & Events. Go to www.culturewise.com if you wish to check it out.

#2 Culture needs to be overcommunicated. One and done will not work. People forget fast. In my company, we focus each week on one of our 26 core culture fundamentals with stories, texts, emails, rallies, and contests.

#3 Hire with rigorous discipline. If you're new in the business you might hit .500, but with time, like GE chairman and CEO Jack Welch, you should hit at least .800. My COO and I take the hiring process very seriously. Yes, we've made some mistakes, but the mistakes either leave themselves or we ask them to.

#4 Let people know what you expect. This goes back to our mission, to delight our guests.

#5 According to Matthew Kelly, great companies grow their teams by creating a coaching culture. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care."

In closing, I'd like you to take a look at the accompanying photo. These team members appreciate our culture. How much? The lady to my left and two others started working with me in the late 1980s. I'll take that as a win. Blessings. —Bill ●



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