

Caterer

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If you've ever found yourself cooking for friend's birthday parties, school fund raisers and other special events, you might have considered starting a catering business from home. The home kitchen has long been the domain of small catering startups; if you are an excellent cook, have great communication skills and don't mind working long hours, this might be the next work at home business for you. A catering business can be started with existing home assets, create a sustainable income and has great potential for expansion.

Before The Start-Up, Let's Not Get Ahead Of Ourselves

You don't need to be a professional chef to start your own catering service, but any training is very helpful. It is essential however that you have experience cooking and setting menus. This doesn't necessarily have to be commercial experience as its quite possible to gain such experience cooking for large family functions or volunteering to cook for your local community event.

The Start-Up

There are many different options to consider before deciding what you would like to specialize in. You might consider specializing in big corporate functions, or keep things small and prepare lunches for sale to office blocks and local businesses. Your choice will ultimately depend on your budget, access to equipment and cooking specialties.

Initially its possible to start your service out of your home kitchen, although you might find this inadequate as your business begins to grow. Keeping overheads low is the name of the game in all small startups, you might consider better outfitting your home kitchen as required, however if you get to the point where you need to hire staff you might need to consider renting access to a commercial kitchen or creating one yourself. If you do outfit your own commercial kitchen, consider second hand equipment, especially equipment for sale at liquidation sales.

Try to build a strong brand from the beginning, think of good name for your business and develop a logo to go along with it. Use every opportunity to get your name out there, your food's packaging and your own vehicle are great places for free advertising.

Finally don't forget that your kitchen is where you'll create your businesses product, but your office is where you'll create your business systems. For a home office you'll need a work space, preferably a room with a door, a desk, phone line and a fax machine to place orders with your suppliers. These are the bare necessities; once you are more successful you'll find it helpful to buy a computer, Internet connection, printer and other office equipment to make your life easier.

Making It Work

If you've ever read a book called Rich Dad, Poor Dad, you'll know that one of the author's favorite examples is the McDonald's Burger. Robert Kiyosaki would often ask people presenting him with a

new product if they could make a better hamburger than McDonalds, when they answered yes he'd then ask them if they could create a better business system than McDonalds, their answer was always no. The point of this story is that although your catering product is important for the success of your business, your business system is even more important.

Plenty of excellent catering services go under every year, not due to bad products but bad business systems. Spend time developing your business systems, look at ways to streamline communication with clients, increase cash flow and manage your time effectively. In the end, the effectiveness of your business systems will determine the success of your business.

Marketing

Once your business is successful, referrals and word of mouth will likely make up the bulk of your new business, until then you'll need to do some more conventional marketing. Try to spend money on marketing efforts that product the most guaranteed results, direct mail to niche customers, networking in the catering community and brochures to distribute at functions are some examples of these.

Don't Forget

This is a very demanding business that may require you to work long hour's often on weekends or holidays. Before you are able to hire staff you'll also be required to handle everything from setup to cooking and cleanup. If you are prepared to make it through the initial hardship this can be a very rewarding work at home business, especially if food is your passion.

Finally don't forget that in most countries there are numerous laws and regulations that apply to the preparation of food. Get informed about the zoning, health and safety and product liability laws that apply to your business.