

Catering unit appearance



Guides



Catering unit appearance and maintenance

Customers will make repeat purchases from a caterer and recommend to colleagues, family and friends if buying their breakfast, lunch, snack or supper is an enjoyable experience. Besides the quality of the food the business will be judged upon the appearance of the unit. There are a number of things the caterer needs to take into consideration both aesthetically and legally before trading.



Appearance

The appearance and style of the unit can have a major impact on the type of venue to trade at and the customers being targeted. If the unit is selling a menu based on hearty English breakfasts and burgers, based at a DIY store or in a lay-by then customers would not be expecting a unit that has had £,000's spent on it – but they would be expecting it to be clean and maintain high hygiene levels. If the unit is going to be based at a supermarket or shopping centre then a theme and décor would play more of a part and would help with sign-off from the property owner. A unit being used for festivals or street food markets would be expected to reflect the food being sold, probably based on the country of origin.

- Attractive – does it appeal to customers and does it stand out in comparison to the competition?
- Clean and tidy – does it give a positive perception and do customers feel safe purchasing food?
- Menu board clearly visible – can it be easily read and understood?
- Surrounding area – is it clean and safe with no rubbish or debris?
- Seating – when and if allowed do you have a seating area (with shade) to increase dwell time?
- Contact information - is website / social media / telephone / email details easily available – so customers can explore the menu before visiting or even order in advance.

Types of Unit

Most catering units would fall into the 'mobile category' were they are brought to site under their own power or hitched to a van or car. But, depending on the offering, the audience and the target location there are other formats to consider.

Coffee bikes don't take much space up and can be a great revenue earning proposition in the right location. These look great and are welcomed by a lot of venues. Highly mobile they can be removed at night or put into overnight storage (if available) on the property. As many shopping centres and retail parks have coffee outlets, a commercialisation agency can recommend the most appropriate sites.

Vintage van / converted horse box have a growing popularity. They can be taken on as a conversion project by the proprietor and themed specifically to the offering. When done they can look really special and would be accepted at a host of venues. Many have become mobile bars adding to the events they can target such as weddings and garden parties.

Static units are not commonplace as very few sites would accept them however certain venues may be open to a conversation. The initial outlay could be restrictive and there could be risk of non-renewal of contract. This option has to be something that the caterer is committed too. The suggestion would be to try the business concept in a mobile catering unit and should it be successful and the targeted site is open to the more permanent static unit then the change could be made.

Branding

Branding can be as important to the unit as the actual unit itself. The brand can tell the customer what to expect before they make a purchase – not only the cuisine they are about to purchase but the quality to expect. It adds professionalism and can be carried across the unit(s), staff uniforms, menus and communication platforms.

Customers will start to recognise the brand and use it to recommend to friends, family and colleagues. They will automatically spot social media messages and particularly when advertising specials and meal deals.

The brand creates the familiarity with customers and helps gain repeat business.

Is your branding distinct? It can set you apart from every other catering unit and it can create a distinct brand to help ensure longevity. Strong branding is memorable and makes it easy to understand what is being sold and supports word of mouth recommendations.

- **Logo:**
Choose a simple, easy-to-interpret logo so customers immediately understand who you are and what you represent.
- **Font:**
A creative font is an effective way to support the overall mood of your business, but make sure it is legible and can be easily read.
- **Graphics:**
Most food truck operators decorate their units with eye-catching graphics that entice customers to buy their products. By decorating the outside of your units, you will advertise your business as you drive around town.

Maintenance

- A catering van has to be mobile and roadworthy (MOT, serviced, Taxed) and can be moved as and when required.
- Ensure cooking equipment is working correctly and all certification is up-to-date (PAT testing, Gas Safety etc.)
- Frequent cleaning regime in place, both internally and externally.
- Regular checks of power supply (generators/gas cylinders/etc.)
- Waste is correctly disposed of, recycling wherever possible.

Food Hygiene Rating

Your Food Hygiene Rating should be displayed so people can make an informed choice when dining out (In Scotland It is a legal requirement) and having a clean and well maintained unit will improve your score.

Remember that you only get one chance at a first impression.

