



APPLYING FOR EVENTS

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Getting Set for the Summer – Applying for Events

Applying for events and festivals, no matter how formal or informal the process, is a fundamental exercise for a successful show and event caterer. Effectively navigating what can often seem like a daunting and overwhelming process, whether you are considering participating in a village fête or a large-scale music food festival, is critical and the process remains the same each time. Doing your research, gathering comprehensive information and establishing clear communication with organisers is vital.

This guide highlights the key points you should consider when applying for events and the key steps you should follow so that you can be as confident as possible that an event is a suitable fit for your business and will be a success, before you even set foot on site.

Learn to Walk Before you Run

If you're new to the industry, we know it may be tempting to jump in at the deep end and apply to trade at the biggest and most well-known events in the industry. However, we strongly advise against this if you're just starting out. As with anything, it takes time to improve or build up to something and it's a case of learning to walk before you can run. **A huge amount of planning and hard work goes into managing an event successfully, so it is always better to start off small and learn the ropes.**

If you do things on a smaller scale to begin with and you succeed, then you are laying the foundations for sustainable growth. Remember, bigger does not always mean better. You likely far better off doing a one-day local show and making £500 profit, than doing a 5-day music festival (with all the costs, work and stress that goes into it) for the same or similar return.

The fact is, few caterers can go to a major event in their first year or two of business and make it work. It's crucial to consider that for large events or festivals, after factoring in all expenses, you might need to generate

more than 10-15k revenue just to break-even. This requires a serious volume of sales, which requires tried and tested, streamlined operations and systems which take time to build and implement in a business. Not to mention, it is a huge amount of pressure which most new businesses are simply not ready for.

So how do you know if an event is too big for you? This is a tough one for businesses to decide as essentially every event where you are not guaranteed a number of sales or portions (such as wedding) is a risk. There are no guarantees and there are many factors that can influence sales positively or negatively. One golden rule is that if a pitch fee (in addition to your estimated costs) is too much for you to lose, i.e., losing that money would put your business in jeopardy, then that pitch fee is too high for you and a risk you cannot afford to take. Put simply, do not gamble what you can't afford, there are no guarantees in events and festivals and every event is a risk, so bear in mind that just because the stakes are higher, it does not necessarily mean that the rewards are.

Submit a Killer Application

The first step in securing an event is typically the application. You can rarely get the information and details you need to make decisions before you apply, so when it comes to applying for an event, how are you going to ensure you are selected?

Generally, events get more applications than they have pitches to let and typically there are other traders out there applying to sell the same or similar food/drink as you are so, think about what makes you stand out? What makes you better than the other traders out there? What makes you a better business to work with? Often, organisers look for experience as one of the deciding factors, therefore, if you are new to the game, you will be up against it so you must use every ounce of your USPs to ensure you are selected. Make your unit, setup, menu and everything you offer appealing and exciting.

It is important to put yourself in an event organiser's shoes and ask yourself what

is going to make this organiser pick your business over anyone else to trade at their event? How will your catering business improve the event experience for the attendees?

Remember, you are critical to an event or festival experience; food and drink traders are one of the biggest spend points at shows and you are customer facing which means you will have more contact with the audience than probably anyone else.

Hospitality is fundamental to the customer experience and you are at the helm of this so the value you bring to a live show is more significant than you might think. You're not just providing food and/or drinks, you are providing an experience that is individual to your business and that enhances an attendees experience, so you must provide the best version of hospitality possible. If you can help an organiser see that having you at their event will add value to the event experience and make their audience happy you've nailed it.

This may sound obvious, but be nice. You are much more likely to establish strong relationships and great communication with

good event organisers if you are nice and easy to work with. Be courteous and professional and always look to give a good impression of your business. Remain transparent and treat people how you wish to be treated; make things easy for them and they'll do the same for you.

Do your Research

Research is paramount in choosing the right event for you and your business. Quite simply, the more you know about an event the better. Some of the key pieces of information you need to know before agreeing to an event include:

- How many people are expected to attend?
- Is the event free or ticketed and if ticketed, has it sold out? If not, how many tickets have been sold?
- Has the event previously been a sell-out? Event organisers typically work to 'maximum' numbers, but what if the day is a total washout and not as many people attend?
- How many days trade might you have?





- Are people camping or staying on site?
- How long will people likely be on site and therefore how many times might people eat throughout the day?
- Can people leave the site to eat and drink elsewhere and come back on site?
- Will the event attendees be allowed to bring food/drink on site?
- How many other caterers will be working at the event?
- How many (if any) other caterers will be serving similar food or drink to yours?
- What type of event is it and what are the event timings? People are less likely to buy food at a one-day rave compared to a weekend family festival.
- What is the target audience for the event and is your food or drink well suited to that audience?
- What can you find out about the organiser(s)? Have they put on events before and were they successful? How long have their events been running? Have they got a good reputation with other traders?

This is all vital information that will not only help you understand an event and its' audience but also help you estimate potential sales, your costs and therefore your potential profit. These are just some of the questions you should be asking before signing on the dotted line as without knowing this you can't possibly know what to expect. Other things you can do include speaking to a council to check if the event is licensed and for how many people. If an organiser has told you the expected footfall is 10,000 (event organisers tend to talk in 'maximum' numbers) but the council say the event is only licensed for 5,000, you'll know that you are dealing with someone that is exaggerating or lying to you about expected numbers, so think about what else they could not be telling you. Can you find photos of the event from previous years, if so, does it look

busy? Visitor numbers are something to be particularly cautious about and as such, the information is best acquired from a variety of sources including fellow traders who may have traded at the event previously.

As a general rule you need to be more cautious with new events as they are less likely to be sell outs since it takes time to build an audience. However, be very wary if an established event is looking for new caterers every year, i.e., no caterers are going back year after year. If this is the case, then you must ask yourself why as this can be a major red flag.

Deciding on which events are right for your business can be quite an unsettling and tricky process. It takes practice and you will make mistakes. However, getting as much information as you can so that you are able to make an informed decision both on the organiser and the event is critical. You will potentially be paying hundreds if not thousands of pounds up front, you must be as confident as you can be that it is the right investment for your business.

Deal or No Deal?

We know that it does not come naturally to most, but do not be afraid to try and negotiate a pitch fee or percentage, If you do not ask or try, you'll never know. **Traders generally prefer a percentage rather than a set fee because it shares the risk between caterer and the organiser** and, when arranged fairly and if the percentage is not too high, (i.e., not 30% plus), this approach can lead to higher revenues for both parties.

If after negotiating, you still feel the pitch fee is too high then we advise you walk away. If an organiser is withholding information from you and not giving you the answers you need, we also advise you walk away. As is so often the case, trust your gut – if something doesn't feel right, it most likely isn't. If something looks too good to be true, it likely is.

Finally, always make sure you get a signed contract from the organiser. Not having a contract means very little comeback if something goes wrong or if things were not as

they were stipulated. If an organiser refuses to provide a contract outlining what has been agreed, then alarm bells should be ringing and, somewhat unsurprisingly, we would advise you walk away from this situation as well.

Ask for a Site Plan

Your location on a site should be outlined, agreed and documented before you have paid your pitch fee, and you should be provided with a site plan by the event organiser to enable you to plan for the event.

Ask yourself the following:

- Is the plan or sitemap clearly marked out with the pitch you are applying for?
- Is it right at the heart of the event or hidden round the corner by the toilets?
- Are you in the arena or the campsite?
- Does your food match your pitch location? For example, breakfast traders would be better suited to campsites rather than late night arenas.
- How busy will your location likely be? If you are in the wrong location, you might spend the whole event watching people walk past who have already eaten.

You must use the sitemap to plan how you will transport your mobile business across the site, and to help you estimate how many visitors will see you and potentially buy your food. You should check where the onsite facilities are located such as trader toilets and find (if applicable) where power is provided. You should also find out where the water access is located and how many and where the other food/drink vendors are on site – specifically the distance from their unit to yours on the plan.

The location of your pitch can be the difference between a successful event and a completely disastrous one, so make sure these details are outlined and that you are happy before agreeing to a pitch, signing any contract and paying any fee.

Evidence your Compliance

As part of the application process, you will need to provide all of your documentation to an organiser to demonstrate your compliance. Make sure all of your documents, including risk assessments, certification, allergen management processes and training, are up to date and uploaded to your NCASS Member Dashboard so that you can easily share them.

It is vital that you carry out your risk assessments and method statements carefully and that they accurately reflect what you do and how you operate as a business. **Remember: when you are trading you must ensure that you are following what is set out in your risk assessments in your business activities.**

If an event organiser has asked you for additional paperwork that you don't normally complete then ask for an example or a template. Don't be afraid to ask a question if you don't know, this will save you time and ensure that you are working with what the event organiser needs.

When you are trading at the event, make sure you have a safety management system

on every unit that you operate and that you are carrying out all essential checks and temperature recordings.

Remember, your paperwork is more than just a paper exercise, it is a legal requirement and when used correctly acts as evidence that you are doing everything you can to ensure the safety of you, your staff, and customers.

Fail to Prepare, Prepare to Fail

Safety and the law are non-negotiable and if you have not got the right systems, processes, and documentation in place, then events can be tough going and you will be putting yourself and your business at risk.

Being prepared for anything to go wrong means things are less likely to take you by surprise. Try and reduce the risk of things going wrong by being as prepared for an event as you can be and asking yourself the following questions:

- Can you serve your product quickly and maximise potential?
- Have you tested all your equipment and is it all certified? This includes your cooking



equipment, fridges, freezers, tills/card machines, firefighting equipment, first aid etc.

- Do you have a nearby supplier should something turn out to be faulty?
- Have you got enough LPG?
- Will you be able to cope with difficult weather conditions such as heavy rain and high winds? British weather n all.
- Have you estimated your portion/sales (based upon the research you did earlier) and stocked up ingredients and supplies accordingly?
- Have you got another local supplier available should you run low on stock or will you be able to source stock elsewhere?
- Are your staff all trained up? Do you have copies of their certificates?
- Is everyone comfortable with your menu, processes and your systems?
- If staff are absent, can you source help, or

adapt your working procedures to cover the shortfall?

- Are all your insurances and certifications in date and to hand?

Remember things do and will go wrong. It is all part of the game. You will learn to react and adapt: after all, this is one of the things that our industry does best!

If you have any questions or would like to talk through anything outlined in this guide, remember that the NCASS team is happy to advise you on how to trade safely and legally all year round. **If you are thinking of getting into events and want more help or advice or if you simply want to discuss anything, please contact our team by emailing info@ncass.org.uk or calling 0300 124 6866.**

For more information on tendering and doing the sums take a look at the Resources area of our website.'

www.ncass.org.uk/resources/how-to-start-a-catering-business/running-your-business/rules-for-tendering-at-shows-events/



Get in touch with our team and we'd love to have a chat.

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