



## CATERING SERVICES WITHIN GOLF CLUBS

While all Golf Clubs are different, one of the most frequent areas where we all experience some difficulties relates to the provision of Catering Services for Members, Guests, Societies and Visitors. From my experience it appears that Members generally expect to have an availability of a wide range of food throughout the day and well into the evening. In addition, there is often the expectation that the cost of such food should be cheaper than similar food served in local pubs or restaurants.

The Board of Management, or Committee of each Golf Club has to consider a number of things when deciding how to operate Catering Services:

- ➔ What do our Members want?
- ➔ What will our Members support?
- ➔ What hours are we prepared to offer Catering facilities?
- ➔ How wide a range of food can be offered?
- ➔ Price levels – Should the operation make a profit or at least break even, or should it be subsidised in some way?
- ➔ Do we provide this facility “in house” or do we employ a ‘Franchise catered’ or “contract caterer” to provide the facility?

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In considering the above matters, it is important to realise that not all Members will automatically support the Catering facilities, although special promotions, and price levels can obviously influence the level of take up. Equally important is the question of what hours the Catering facilities should be available. The hours of daylight available for golf vary dramatically throughout the year, and it follows that the Members expectations will also vary. It would normally be prudent to have somewhat restricted hours of availability during the Winter months, with extended hours in the Summer months. Having said this, further thought then needs to be given to the problems created in the Summer when in April, May August and September, golfers may come off the course at 6.00, 7.00 or 8.00 pm expecting to have some food, although in June and July they might not return to the Clubhouse until 9.30 or even 10.00 pm.


There is no one answer to the question of when catering should be made available. Each Club must consider its own situation and make its decision accordingly. However, one important aspect of making this decision will be to recognise that in practice there may well be a very limited demand from Members between the hours of say 3.00 and 7.00 or later is there justification in remaining open during these hours to satisfy the demand that may appear towards the latter end of the evening?

The main purpose of this paper is to consider the relevant merits of the two main ways by which a Catering Service can be provided, namely by way of a “franchise” caterer, or as an in house operation.

One perceived advantage of a franchise caterer is that such an operation will not be a cost to the Club. This is unlikely to be the case. Depending on the success of the franchisee it may well be necessary for the Club to pay him a fee to provide the services required, or to subsidise the food in some way. Having said this, there are some very successful franchise caterers who actually pay a franchise fee, or a percentage of profits to the Club.

It is frequently the case that an ‘expert’ caterer who may well be able to provide a wide range of food to meet all the varied demands of a Golf Club, proves to be less than expert in his general administrative and managerial functions. Proper bookkeeping, payroll and VAT records, amongst many others, are vital parts of his business, and any shortfalls in these areas can have serious implications on the Club itself.

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When one stops to consider the Catering function within a Golf Club it clearly has a very similar and linked function to the Bar, and in an ideal world it is probably best to integrate the two functions; thus providing a comprehensive Service Trading operation. For many good reasons, it is highly unusual for any Members Golf Club to franchise out the Bar operations, and as such the appointment of a franchise caterer can have a divisive effect on the two operations and their staff. Any such effect would require careful and ongoing monitoring and action from the Secretary/Manager to ensure that such problems were minimised.

I have said earlier, a well run franchise catering operation has many positive things to recommend it. In practice few such operations are really well run, and as such can lead to many unnecessary difficulties. Although it is not a decision to be taken lightly, there is much to be said for the appointment of an in house catering operation. The first essential is to find a caterer who you believe to be able to provide the specific varieties of food that you wish to make available to members, guests and societies. Frequently such a person is likely to be part of a husband and wife team, and often has contacts with other catering staff, waiters, and waitresses etc who will be required. At this stage it would be important to consider closely the full integration with the Bar and staff. Ideally one person acting as “Services Trading Manager” to fully coordinate and integrate the joint operations of both sections should be appointed. In practice this may not prove easy to achieve in the short term as full regard would have to be taken of all existing personnel and the full level of integration desired may require careful handling for some considerable period. Any vacancies created by existing staff leaving the Club would be perfect opportunities for developing even closer integration. The ultimate aim would be to create one “seamless” unit providing all bar and catering requirements for everybody who uses the Club.

within any Golf Club. What may work very successfully in one Club may not be ideal at another Club. At the end of the day we all have one basic objective, namely to provide an efficient and cost effective service to those Members and others who use our Golf Clubs.

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Given that the existing management structure of the Golf Club is efficient and has an effective and professional approach to all aspects of management, it may be of significant value to the Club to accept the very major increase in the administrative workload created by running an in house catering operation. By moving away from a franchise operation where the franchisee pays all suppliers, runs his own payroll, recruits his own staff etc, there would be a significant increase in the administrative process put upon the Secretary's department. Initially the increase in the Secretary's department is likely to be extremely intensive however after a few months when new routines have been developed, the additional workload should become more manageable. From my experience this increase in workload particularly by the bookkeeper, has been more than outweighed by the greater confidence that I have gained in knowing that the administrative side of the catering operations is being correctly and accurately handled.

The value of all Service Trading staff being employed directly by the Club and working together in one cohesive unit is of immense importance to the successful running of the Club. When considering an in house catering department, whether or not it is fully integrated with the bar, it is of course, essential that the terms and conditions of employment for the catering staff are closely related to those applying to the other staff. For example, overtime rates, the payment of gratuities, pensions and medical insurance need to be brought into line with comparable grades of bar staff.

In conclusion, I would remind the reader that there is no single way which can be chosen as the optimum way to carry out the Catering function