

Mobile Catering Starter Guide

Why going mobile beats traditional catering — and how to start today

Page 1: What is Mobile Catering?

Mobile catering means you bring the food to your customers instead of serving them in a fixed location. It can be as simple as cooking in a commercial kitchen and transporting food in insulated carriers, or as big as operating out of a food truck or trailer that’s equipped like a small restaurant.

The key difference from traditional catering is flexibility. Traditional caterers often rely on banquet halls or permanent kitchens. Mobile caterers design their businesses around travel — weddings, office lunches, outdoor festivals, and backyard parties.

Comparison Chart: Mobile Catering vs Traditional Catering

Feature	Mobile Catering	Traditional Catering
Startup Costs	Lower (commissary kitchen + small gear)	Higher (dedicated kitchen + staff)
Flexibility	High (any event, any location)	Limited (venues, banquet halls)
Licenses Needed	Similar (food permits, insurance)	Similar (food permits, insurance)
Growth Potential	Wide (food trucks, festivals, weddings)	Narrower, more tied to specific venues

Page 2: Top 5 Reasons to Choose Mobile Catering

- 1. Lower Startup Investment**
Building a permanent kitchen can cost \$50k–\$100k+. With mobile catering, you can rent a shared commissary for \$15–\$30/hour and buy basic equipment like chafing dishes and food carriers for a few hundred dollars. That lets you test the waters without draining your bank account.
- 2. Easier to Get Started**
Most states allow you to start catering as long as you use a licensed commercial

kitchen, have the right permits, and get food safety training. You don't need a giant building or a long-term lease to start booking events.

3. **More Event Opportunities**

Mobile caterers can say yes to a wide variety of gigs: weddings, corporate lunches, backyard birthdays, food truck festivals, church events, and community fairs. Traditional catering is often locked into formal events, but mobile lets you cover both casual and upscale jobs.

4. **Better Branding Opportunities**

With a mobile setup, you can brand your van, trailer, or food truck with your logo, colors, and menu. Every time you show up at an event, you're also advertising to everyone there. That's free marketing traditional catering rarely gets.

5. **Guests Love the Experience**

There's something exciting about seeing food prepared and served on-site. Whether it's tacos coming fresh off the grill or BBQ carved right in front of guests, mobile catering feels interactive and memorable. That's an edge when competing with other caterers.

Page 3: Quick Startup Checklist (California & Texas Example)

- **Register Your Business** – File an LLC to protect yourself legally. In California, filing is \$70 plus an \$800 annual fee. In Texas, the fee is \$300.
- **Apply for Sales Tax Permit** – California requires a Seller's Permit, Texas requires a Sales & Use Tax Permit. Both are free.
- **Find a Commissary Kitchen** – Look for licensed shared kitchens that rent hourly. Many also provide storage and delivery services.
- **Food Safety Certifications** – One Certified Food Protection Manager is required; all workers need Food Handler Cards. Training costs about \$10–\$15 per person.
- **Equipment Essentials** – Insulated food carriers, chafing dishes, folding tables, disposable servingware, gloves, and sanitizing supplies. A starter kit might cost \$500–\$1,500.
- **Insurance** – General liability and product liability are a must. Expect \$500–\$1,200 per year.

- **Marketing Basics** – Build a simple website, claim your Google Business Profile, and get listed on WeddingWire, Thumbtack, or The Knot.
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Page 4: Profit Snapshot Example

Here's how the math works for a **100-person wedding (Mobile Catering)**:

- Food + disposables: **\$1,200**
- Staff: 5 people × 6 hours × \$20/hour = **\$600**
- Kitchen rental: **\$150**
- Transportation: **\$100**
- Overhead (insurance, admin, supplies): **\$200**
Total Costs = \$2,250

If you add 25% profit, you'd charge about **\$3,000 total**, or **\$30 per guest**. That gives you a **profit of \$750**.

This model is why so many people choose mobile catering — you can keep costs lower and still charge premium rates for convenience and service.

Page 5: Final Call-to-Action

Mobile catering is one of the fastest-growing food businesses because it's flexible, profitable, and exciting for both the business owner and the guests. Whether you want to serve weddings, corporate events, or festivals, going mobile gives you the freedom to grow on your terms.

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