



Feeding the Workplace in 2024

The winning recipe for restaurants to maximize revenue from business catering — and beyond.

Food for work drives even more opportunities for restaurants to grow

The latest ezCater data reveals that more than half of food for work buyers plan to increase food spend in 2024 — creating even more opportunities for restaurants to increase revenues from corporate customers.

But the food for work category itself is expanding. In addition to traditional business catering, ezCater research shows growing interest in additional offerings such as restaurant pop-ups, food trucks, grab-and-go opportunities and special events. This creates a huge opportunity for operators.

There are also new stakeholders to consider, as individuals eating the food take a bigger role in influencing what they eat, and where it comes from.

47%

of people who first tried a restaurant's food through an employer-provided meal have personally ordered from that restaurant later.

This creates more complexity, but also more opportunity for restaurants to capitalize on the “halo” effect of these customers, if they can effectively earn the business.

At ezCater, an average business catering order serves 23 eaters. That's 23 people who might eat a restaurant's food for the first time and potentially try that restaurant again, outside of the business setting.





ezCater surveyed more than 2,800 restaurant operators, corporate catering orderers, workplace experience leaders, and employees, and reviewed ezCater order data to look at the state of business catering, what's driving the continued growth, and where restaurant operators should focus their efforts to capitalize.

RESEARCH DATA SOURCES:

ORDERERS

A survey of 600 people who regularly order food for their workplaces

RESTAURANT OPERATORS

A survey of 630 restaurant operators with leadership roles at their brands

EMPLOYEES

A survey of 1,005 people who work onsite at least one day per week and whose employers provide free or subsidized food

DECISION MAKERS

A survey of 600 workplace experience leaders at companies that provide free or subsidized food to employees

EZCATER DATA

Proprietary ezCater data gathered over 17 years from millions of transactions across more than 100,000 restaurants and caterers

New use cases provide more opportunities for restaurants

Beyond the influence of individual eaters, another workplace trend that benefits restaurants is the expansion of food for work use cases. Today's organizations see the

value of food as a "work perk" and are using food to reward and engage their workforce — relying on restaurants to help fulfill their corporate food needs.

Emerging food for work opportunities

Percentage of orderers interested in these food concepts

SURVEY DATA



Capitalizing on the emerging opportunities

How can restaurants unlock the increasing revenue potential of food for work? Through a combination of mastering business catering basics and achieving operational excellence

at scale. Operators must prepare to meet these new use cases as they emerge, making strategic operational shifts to accommodate the new audiences and opportunities.



SECTION 1

Businesses are spending more on food for work

The expanding role of food in the workplace

While traditional business catering for meetings and events remains a massive opportunity for restaurants, employer-provided food has a new purpose. It's not just about feeding hungry workers — it's about

fueling business results. To HR, facilities, and operations leaders, food has become a highly valued work perk that increases collaboration, engagement, recruitment, and retention.

Food fuels the workplace

SURVEY DATA

Top occasions/events with employer-provided food:

Team bonding, collaboration, and connection



Daily or weekly employee meals



Training sessions



Customer or client meetings



After-hours meals



Holiday parties for employees



Appreciation, thanks, or office perks



Company events



Department or team meetings



Employee celebrations (e.g. birthdays, showers)



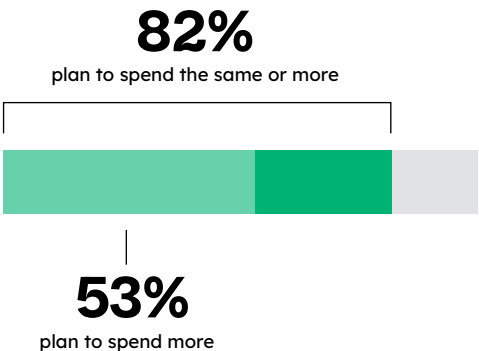
Recurring employee meals are on the rise

32%
YOY increase
of daily and
weekly meals

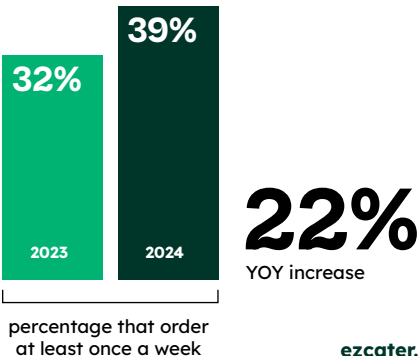
Business orderers are bringing in food for traditional events, but also report that daily or weekly meals are growing year-over-year. Overall, order frequency is expanding and more than half expect spending to increase in 2024.

SURVEY DATA

Orderers are spending more on food for work in 2024 than 2023



And they're ordering more frequently



Food helps attract and retain workers

Employees say that free or employer-subsidized food is their favorite work perk, and employers are paying attention. Organizations are using food to not only

attract and retain talent, but also to encourage and reward onsite attendance, as nearly one third of orderers say their offices use a hybrid work model.

Food is employees' most appreciated work perk

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Most appreciated perks

Free or subsidized food



Flexible work arrangements (e.g. remote/hybrid, flexible schedule)



Education benefits (e.g. tuition assistance, learning stipends)



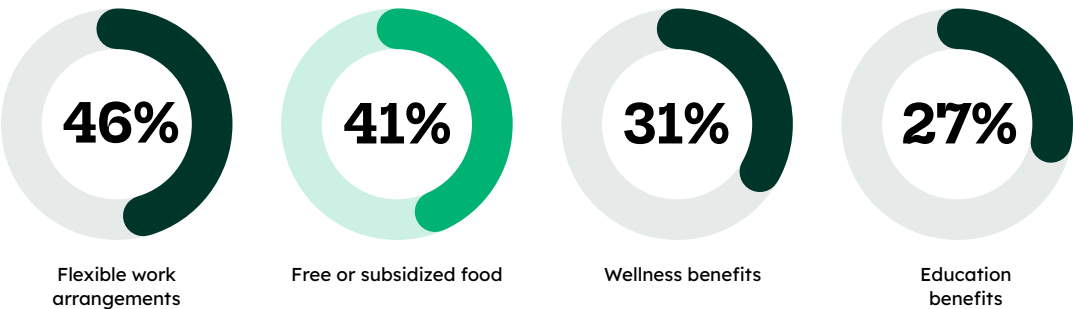
Wellness benefits (e.g. gym membership, mental health app)



Companies say food perks provide great return on investment

SURVEY DATA

How workplace experience leaders rank the value of workplace perks relative to cost



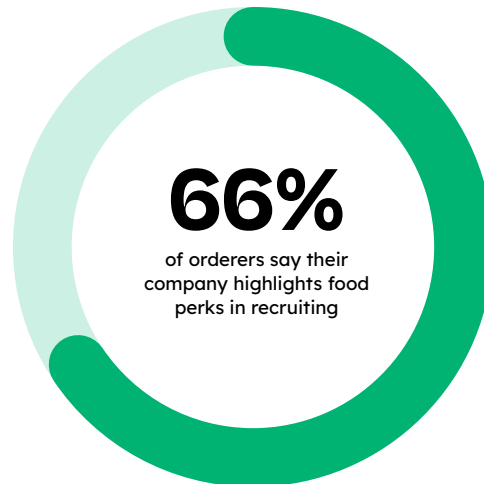
More companies are highlighting food as a work perk

SURVEY DATA

Food is being used to help recruit new hires

And show appreciation for on-site attendance

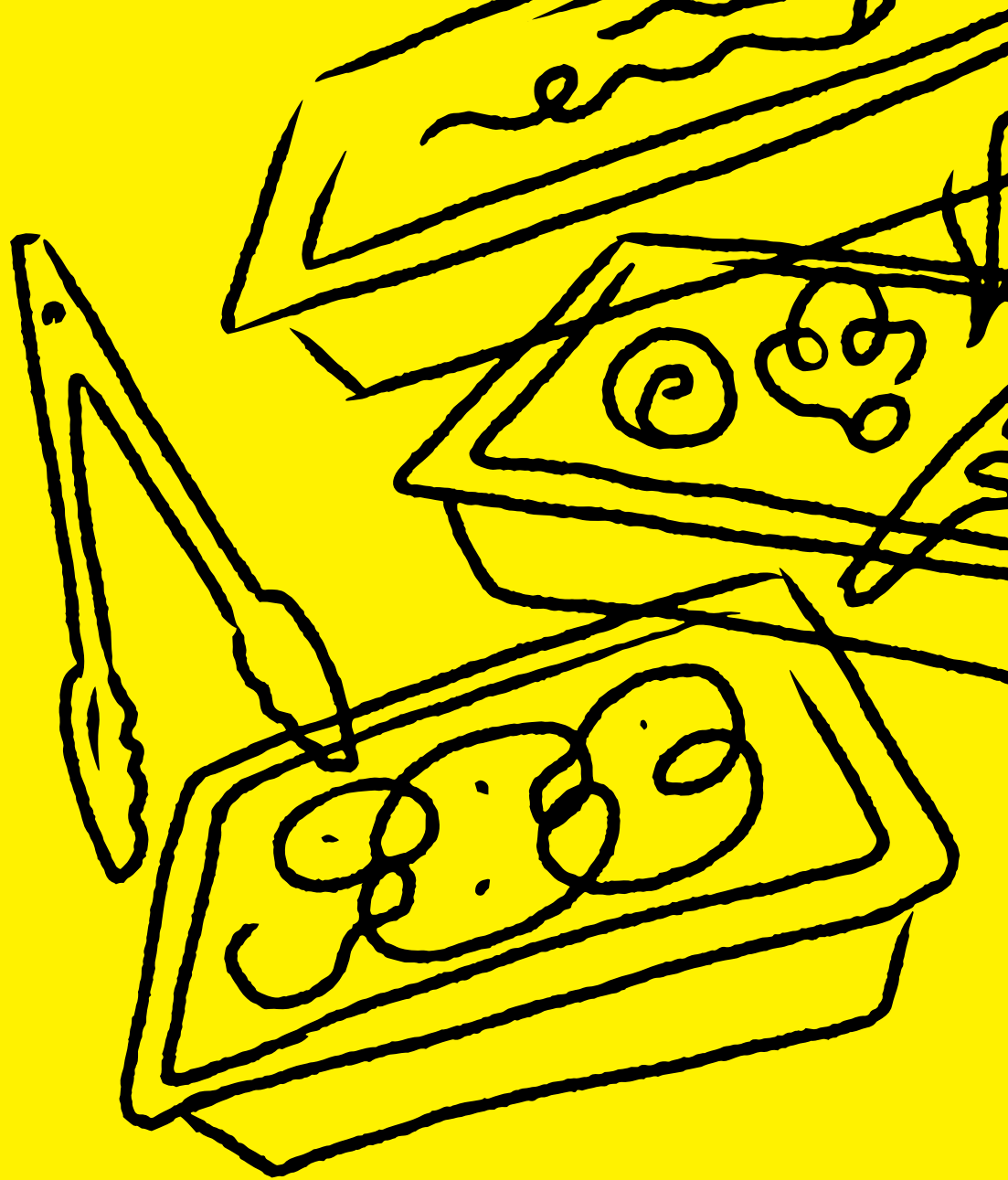
A 16%
increase
from 2023



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It's kind of a jaw drop when people hear that we get lunch five days a week — and it's paid for. It is probably one of our most exciting perks that we have because people love food around here.

Melissa Allinder
Office Operations Manager, NorthPoint Development



SECTION 2

**More stakeholders.
More complexity.
More opportunity
for growth.**

Unlock new food for work opportunities by meeting the needs of each stakeholder

As food becomes an increasingly desired work perk, employees and employers are taking more active roles in food for work. Restaurants need to build offerings that meet the needs of all key stakeholders.

Those offerings fall into three main categories: online ordering, delivery, and menus and packaging.

Orderers are looking for convenience and reliability above all else — which requires seamless online ordering, on-time arrival, and visibility from order to delivery.

Menus and packaging need to be flexible enough to support the unique needs of individuals eating the food — as well as the variety of use cases across industries and workplaces.



STAKEHOLDER NEED

Modern, frictionless online & mobile ordering

Business orderers want to use online and mobile menus that help them quickly find and order what they need — without the help of restaurant staff. Mobile ordering is on the rise, especially with younger orderers, so restaurants need to offer mobile responsive ordering.

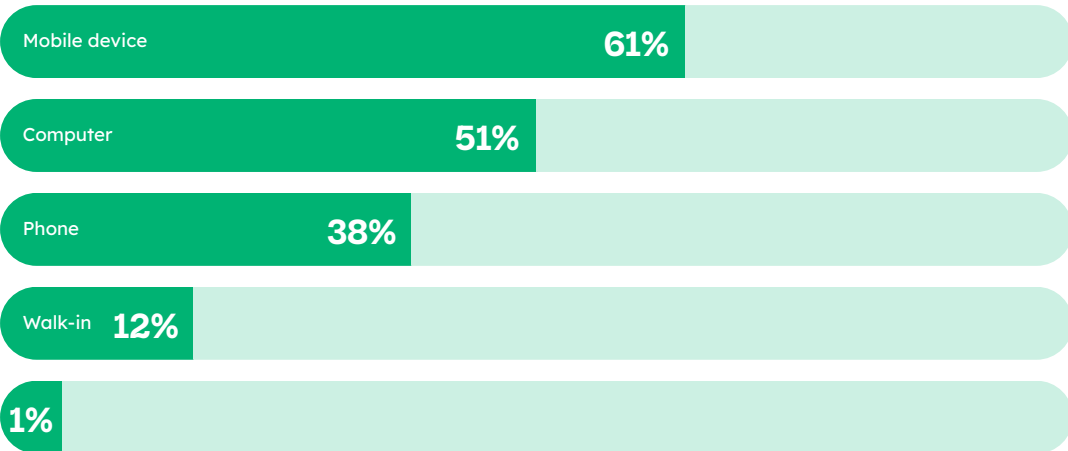
Current and future preferred ordering methods

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Used most often today* (actual)



Expect to use more often in the future** (expected)



None of the above

*Respondents were asked to provide one answer only (total = 100%)
**Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply (total = more than 100%)

Mobile ordering is on the rise, especially among younger users

SURVEY DATA

67%

more orderers are using mobile devices to place orders vs. a year ago.

Gen Z are 43% more likely to use their mobile device as their most frequent ordering method

The trends indicate that online ordering is only going to become more important. As younger generations enter the workforce, mobile and online ordering will increase — and restaurants need to respond to meet that need. While many restaurants have these capabilities already, another 30% of operators say they plan on adding online

ordering for catering to drive growth. ezCater's online ordering solutions are purpose-built for large orders, which make them an excellent choice for restaurants looking to add or upgrade online ordering that meets the needs of these highly valuable customers.



Customers want to be able to track their orders

Delivery tracking relieves orderers' stress trying to keep tabs on their food. It also keeps restaurant staff off the phones during the lunch rush, so they can focus on in-store customers.

Delivery tracking is in high demand

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Delivery tracking creates a path to more orders

SURVEY DATA

90%

are more likely to place an order from a restaurant that has delivery tracking



Delivery tracking is **second only to reliability** when it comes to what influences an orderer's restaurant choice



Delivery tracking helps keep restaurant staff off the phones

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77% of orderers say they don't need to contact a restaurant when the restaurant has delivery tracking

Fewer phone calls means more time for in-store guests

EZCATER DATA



More than **10%** of inbound food for work contacts are related to “where’s my order?”

Orders delivered by restaurants with tracking on ezCater receive:

24% fewer inbound customer service calls
66% less compensation paid per order



Delivery tracking is a feature customers love — and it can reduce time spent on the phone during peak lunch rushes for restaurants. However, only 25% of operators surveyed said they’re investing in providing delivery tracking for customers. Restaurants should consider adding tracking as often as possible through delivery management software. All

ezCater Marketplace orders allow restaurants who provide in-house delivery to assign a driver to an order who can send delivery updates directly to the customer. All orders fulfilled through ezDispatch, ezCater’s network of professional delivery providers, automatically send delivery updates to customers.

Offer flexible menus and packaging options that meet stakeholder needs

The ordering and delivery process can present challenges for orderers, but meeting the needs of internal stakeholders is also top of mind. Today, individual eaters have more opinions and requests when it comes to the food they eat, as well as a strong desire to order for themselves. In addition, food for work takes many shapes. There's no one-size-

fits-all system when it comes to budgets and packaging requirements, as each order is unique in some way. Restaurants that can effectively build menus that better meet the needs of different use cases, across all industries and order types, will be able to win more business in the food for work landscape.

Restaurants that adapt to meet the needs of new stakeholders can become the preferred food for work resource.

Top challenges for orderers

SURVEY DATA



STAKEHOLDER NEED

Individual preferences and packaging

Sixty-four percent of employees surveyed say they prefer individually packaged meals to tray catering, and almost a quarter of ezCater Marketplace orders today include individual packaging. Operators need to meet this need with individually packaged and labeled meals, like boxed lunches.



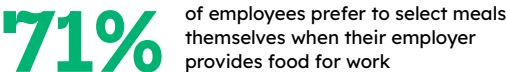
Restaurants that meet the needs of individual employees can profit from the growing spend on recurring meal programs.

Employees prefer individually packaged meals vs. tray catering

SURVEY DATA



And people want to choose their own food at work



Accommodating dietary preferences is essential

Almost a third of orderers say they need to accommodate dietary needs such as vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free, and over one-third grapple with finding food that everyone likes.

To address these individual needs and preferences, orderers need restaurants that can accommodate those requirements, as well as provide individual packaging with stickers and labels for allergens as needed.

Top dietary needs orderers take into consideration when choosing food for employees

SURVEY DATA



Group ordering and customization are key when it comes to accommodating individual orderers

In addition to being able to accommodate allergens and other dietary needs, restaurants should prepare to meet the needs of group orders. Group ordering is a feature many workplace food orderers love, because it

lets employees choose their own meals based on a pre-selected restaurant with a set per-person budget. Restaurants with flexible menus and pricing are best positioned to accept group orders.

25% of ezCater Marketplace orders include individually packaged items. ezCater’s Relish employee meal program serves 100% individually packaged meals.

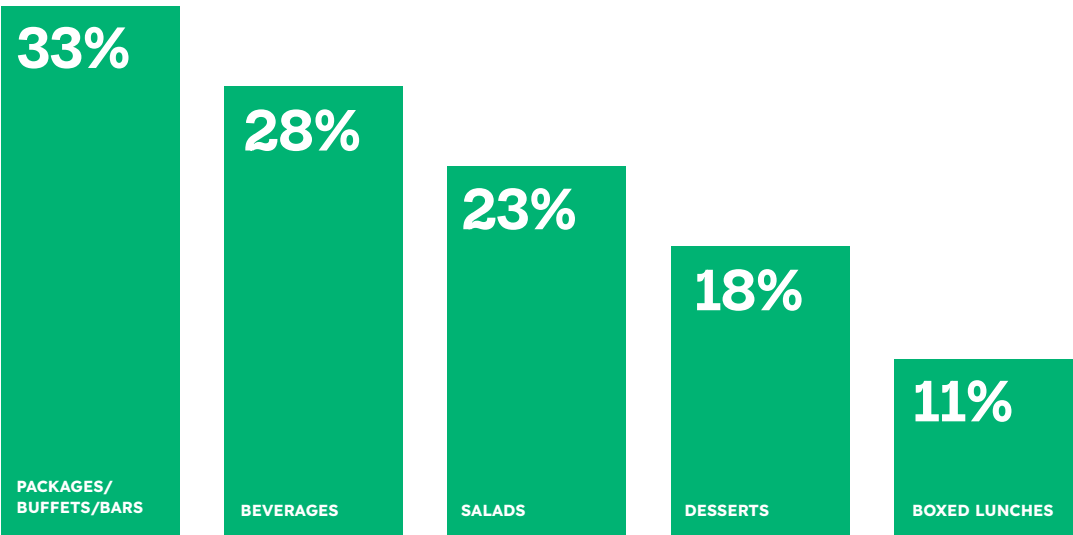
Menu characteristics that are most helpful when ordering

SURVEY DATA



The most popular categories of catering orders

EZCATER DATA



*based on percentage of orders where item type is included

STAKEHOLDER NEED

Reduced packaging and food waste

Sustainability and waste prevention are important requirements for many businesses today and orderers are looking for catering options that align with the goals of their organizations — as well as their own preferences.

Nearly **20%** of operators are making improvements for environmentally friendly packaging

Both businesses and individuals are interested in sustainable packaging and reducing food waste

SURVEY DATA

43%

of orderers prefer sustainable food packaging

37%

of orderers say their companies have made it a company requirement

49%

of orderers consider food waste reduction when ordering

28%

of companies have requirements around food waste reduction

Focus on sustainability to win key corporate business

The corporate decision makers who determine catering spend are mostly focused on waste: monetary waste as well as food/packaging waste.

To capitalize on these higher-volume, more profitable corporate catering customers, operators must focus on key areas, particularly around packaging and menu updates.

How restaurants can meet corporate sustainability needs



Add menu items that avoid single-use plastic like utensils



Research sustainable packaging options and be prepared to provide them



Offer more vegetarian or less meat-focused options

Be prepared to accommodate different types and sizes of organizations

The addressable market for corporate catering is vast — and varied. To capture as much of the market as possible, you need menus that meet a wide variety of ordering types and budgets. Additionally, many of the larger companies have specific packaging requirements and will even limit orders to the vendors that are able to meet these needs.

The size and scope of food for work orders can vary widely across organizations and industries, depending on the workplace,

group, and occasion. A single company may need to feed 300 employees in a warehouse for \$9 per person and 10 executives meeting at the corporate office for \$25 per person.

The key is to have the flexibility to meet these different needs. Diverse menus that allow for different meals or packages at different budgets can solve a major pain point for orderers, and open up the opportunity for more orders.

Offer menus that can serve multiple group sizes

Build a menu that accommodates individual and tray catering

Give options for trays and bundles to be ordered in smaller quantities

Update your menu to include both budget and premium options



We need variety, we need menus that cater to our athletes' dietary needs and preferences, and we also look for restaurants that offer multiple catering packages, from individual boxes for on-the-go lunches to tray-style catering bundles for a pre-game meal.

Lauren Tebsherany
Director of Basketball Operations, Northeastern University





SECTION 3

Invest in food for work to grow your business

Success requires highly reliable execution and scalable operations

The expanding food for work landscape presents new, even more profitable opportunities for restaurants, but in order to win the full value of those opportunities, restaurants must deliver flawless experiences — at scale.

Each touchpoint with individual employees is an opportunity to turn about half of them into customers for other channels. But that opportunity must be earned.

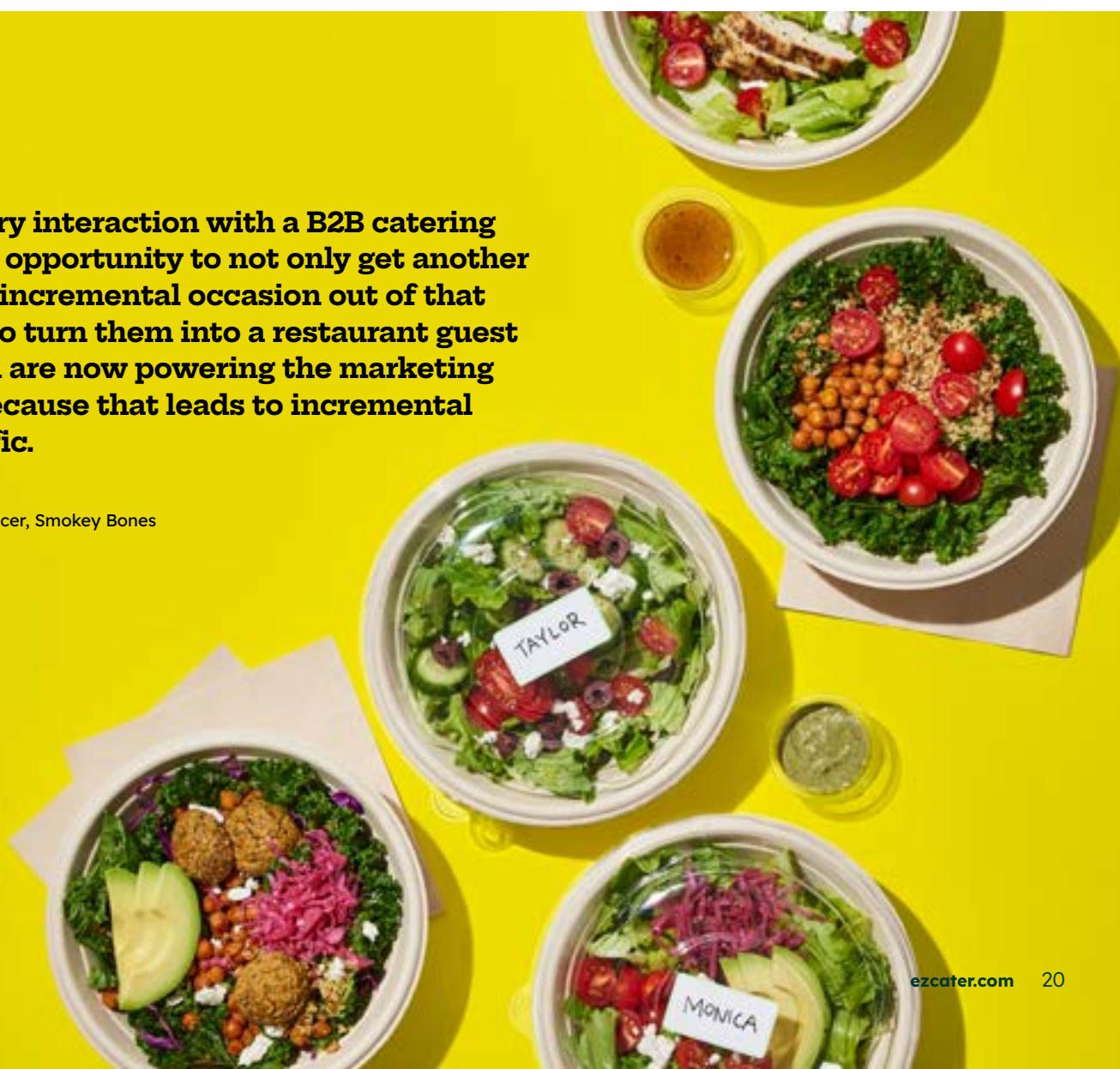
Capturing business from use cases beyond traditional business catering — like grab-and-go, pop-ups, recurring employee meals, and special events — requires a combination of feeding groups and individuals at scale, while adding the services and processes required to execute these types of events well.

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We see every interaction with a B2B catering guest as an opportunity to not only get another order or an incremental occasion out of that guest, but to turn them into a restaurant guest as well. You are now powering the marketing flywheel because that leads to incremental repeat traffic.

Cole Robillard

Chief Marketing Officer, Smokey Bones



Most operators anticipate double-digit growth from their catering business in 2024

Catering continues to be a significant growth driver for restaurants that offer it, with 97% of those surveyed saying they expect year-over-year growth. The top three areas operators say they're investing in are improving processes, improving delivery, and creating or improving menus. The previous section touched on delivery and menus, but improvements in processes will be key to winning in food for work.

Operators say they are most focused on improving catering processes like checklists and labeling. This helps individuals find the right food, relay important dietary or allergy information, and drive repeat business from individuals by helping them to connect their restaurant's logo with the individual employee's great experience. Make sure customers know your brand and how you accommodate them.

93% of operators agree that catering orders help market their business.

Employees usually remember the restaurant that provided food at work

SURVEY DATA

Percentage of employees who know where their workplace food comes from



47%

say they've ordered at or eaten from a restaurant after first trying the food through an employer-provided meal



Focus on expanding physical space, catering capacity, and technology

The ability to win more of the food for work market share starts within the four walls. Build the operational capabilities to support as many use cases as possible, then invest in technology, sales, and marketing to scale.

These investments can pay big dividends for operators

Expand or repurpose physical space:

Operators who increase capacity can address a variety of needs, whether the order is for five catering trays or 50 boxed lunches — or a mix of the two!

Add new capabilities to handle different business catering needs:

By making strategic decisions like adding individually packaged options that can accommodate employee meal programs as well as group ordering, operators can increase their share of corporate food spend and handle other use cases with similar requirements.

Choose the tech stack that fits your company's size and needs:

It's important to use technology (like catering management software) that will enable restaurants to grow and scale, without overwhelming the operational staff executing the orders.

The right technology can unlock huge growth potential

A scalable catering management software solution can set your restaurant up for faster, more efficient growth. Depending on the size of your operation, you could start with menu management, order prep sheets, and order execution. Then, you can add online ordering — within an existing solution or through an integration with your point of sale solution. Lastly, utilize a CRM feature for lead tracking, loyalty programs, marketing emails, and more.

“

4 Rivers is more profitable today because of the solutions ezCater provides. ezCater's MSI catering management software helped us to streamline our catering processes and procedures by providing menu management, delivery services, integration capabilities, and by supporting sales growth through its analytic and marketing reporting capabilities.

Bobbie Deverall

Catering Sales Director, 4 Rivers Catering





Three in four (74%)
restaurants anticipate
20%+ growth in their
catering business
in 2024

Operators who expect the most catering business growth are more focused on these key areas than other operators

SURVEY DATA

Investments that operators expecting 20%+ growth say they're focused on in 2024:

Expanding services

(e.g. event services, new markets, new dayparts)

Expanding or repurposing physical space

(e.g. secondary prep line, staging area for catering orders, centralized catering kitchen)

Adding human resources

(e.g. designated catering leaders or staff)



Of the 44% of operators expanding services:

58% are adding special events services

42% are adding group ordering capabilities

Achieving operational excellence at scale requires dedicated focus. The restaurants that are expecting the most growth say they are more focused on expanding services, physical space, and human resources.

When it comes to human resources, adding dedicated catering leaders will ensure consistency and quality that will ultimately provide excellent customer experiences to help win new business customers for all other consumer channels.

Creating more space to accommodate orders of all sizes (whether it's trays of food for 50 or 50 individually packaged meals) will enable expansion at scale.

About 20% of operators are expanding services like capabilities to prep and serve onsite at workplaces for events, and group ordering capabilities for online ordering. Investments in these areas will help them serve more food for work use cases and better meet the needs of both groups and individuals.



Reach new customers with the right marketing strategies

Once your menus and operations are optimized to meet the various needs of food for work, it's time to invest in sales and marketing to unlock the revenue potential.

One way to do that is to partner with specialized food for work providers like ezCater. Restaurants featured on ezCater can reach new business catering customers, gain business from lucrative corporate buyers, enjoy the halo effect of repeat business from

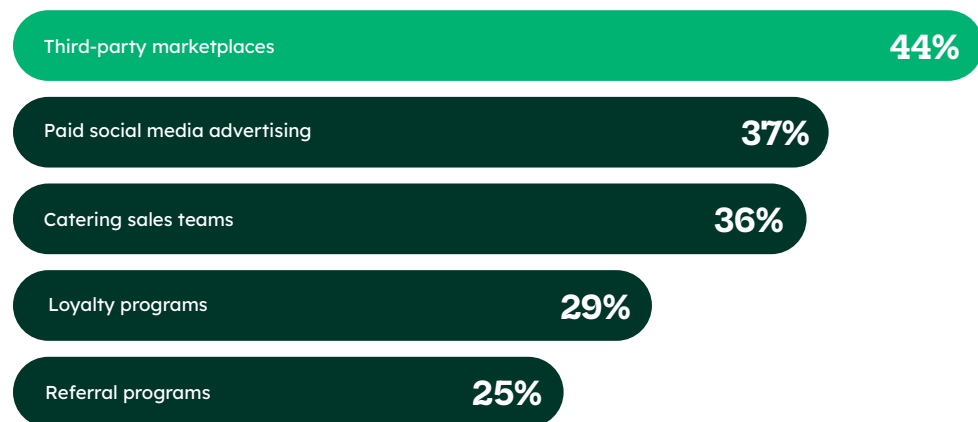
individual eaters, and unlock potential revenue from emerging food for work use cases.

Third-party marketplaces specializing in food for work, like ezCater, not only help restaurants reach new customers, but also help restaurants compete for new use cases that either did not exist, or were being managed by onsite cafeterias.

Operators rank marketplaces like ezCater above other marketing channels

SURVEY DATA

Channels or tactics with the most potential for driving incremental catering revenue



Now is the time to capitalize on the growing food for work opportunity

The future of food for work has immense potential for restaurants. Businesses are spending more, feeding more people, and engaging restaurants to support more and different types of events and occasions.



Restaurants who want to win in food for work need to build the right offering to meet the needs of all stakeholders and develop the operational excellence to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Restaurants who can do this effectively can accelerate growth through repeat business customers, new food for work use cases, and by driving individual eaters who are experiencing their brand at the workplace into their other channels like dine-in, takeout, and more.

Businesses are looking for operators that can:

- Deliver ease of use and reliability above all else
- Balance the needs of large groups and individual employees/eaters
- Align with corporate initiatives such as sustainability and waste prevention
- Provide efficiency at scale
- Address new use cases and food for work occasions

Many restaurants are responding to these opportunities by upgrading their catering operations, investing in technology to help accelerate their ability to scale, and partnering with third party marketplaces like ezCater that specialize in food for work.

[Connect with ezCater >](#)



About ezCater

ezCater is the leading food for work technology company in the US, connecting anyone who needs food for their workplace to over 100,000 restaurants nationwide. Our restaurant partners range from independent local favorites to national chains like Panera and Outback Steakhouse.

We bring restaurants large, valuable orders, and our partners tell us that a lot of these orders are incremental. In fact, the average value of an ezCater order is over \$375. Catering orders are also more profitable than other off-premise orders.

To learn more, visit ezcater.com/grow