



International Caterers Association

International Caterers Association - 3601 East Joppa Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21234 - (410) 931-8100



Peer to Peer Learning – ICA Roundtable

What qualifies you for a tasting?

Cory Gosik – June 20, 2015

Q: How do you qualify who gets a tasting before they book? In our market, that had become the norm. We require a full proposal and that the client has booked their venue already. What does everyone else do because tastings aren't cheap.

A: Jon Brown- All depends on the client and the circumstance. Some are like yours, others we take a chance based on what we know. Yet others we charge if they haven't booked.

Fernando Asencio- Well like Jon Jon Brown said all Events are different. but we try to stick to \$25 per person up to four and if they book we apply that to the balance once they book

Julia Kendrick Conway- We strongly recommend that the client be under contract and in menu development before scheduling a tasting. The exception is one of our prominent wedding coordinators, who schedules blind tastings as part of her "design day" for the client, we are given a minimal preferences sheet, first names only, wedding date, and have to design an menu and present it at a 45-minute "try-out" at her office. We began charging a nominal \$60/couple for up to six tasters to cover our costs, and were dropped from her list for two years! She now allows us back, and we cover the cost issue directly with the client. Of course it is credited back if they book, and up to two menu development tastings are allowed per wedding over \$4K, especially if we are working with ethnic flavor profiles.

Jeremy Bronson- We try to do tastings for booked clients but will do a prospective tasting if: (1) they have a full proposal from us and have confirmed the fit from a menu standpoint and budget; (2) they are down to a max of 2 other caterers under consideration. We do lots and lots of tastings under this second scenario and have been booking close to 80% of them. We occasionally charge for second tastings when they want to try new options we didn't present at the initial tasting.

Fausto Pifferrer- We require that they are booked at a venue and that they are booked with us then they can have a tasting and any changes can be made to it

Vijay Goel- Is this different for your outbound sales? We do custom tastings after they book, but have put together a standard set of things our sales team can do for high priority prospects (if they bring them in vs we drop off to them)

Cynthia Creighton-Jones- We charge \$250 for a full menu tasting (no big roasts), for up to four people. You must have received a proposal from us, which means we have qualified you as a client. We just this year, instituted a Chef's Tasting for \$25pp, non refundable, that consists of 5 hors d's that we have in house for those that insist on a tasting. Sometimes they are only making one trip to town before their wedding and want to taste. The \$25 has helped us a lot. Does not take much effort and allows us to accommodate the client.

Nicole Marie- We receive a ton of clients who want tastings before they book. It's annoying because 60-70% of our business are direct referrals. It's not enough anymore.

Ken Barrett- We do two types of tastings. In today's internet based world, there are a few exceptions to our normal course with our couples. The initial contact is made and our event planner usually begins with a phone conversation followed by an in person consult (usually involving some type of snack or pastries). At that consult we offer a "Save the Date" agreement for \$500. This gives the couple a commitment of our services and their date for 30 days, allowing the couple the ability to "shop around" and it includes a chef's choice tasting. If they sign with us, this \$\$ goes to their event plant, if they don't their refund is \$400 (in essence the cost of the tasting). Our closure rate with this step is about 80%. We offer a secondary (less formal) tasting of their menu later in the process after signing. Some couples forgo the second tasting, others simply taste a few things from their menu. This process of secondary tasting, although we are with them twice, cuts down the varieties and the back and forth of "sampling" so many things. By the time they sign with us after the "Save the Date", the couple is very well qualified and we have a better understanding of their food wishes. For us, it has kept us from doing random tastings to unqualified clients, spending valuable labor and product to no avail.