



By Kari Derryberry

## The COVID Impact on Catering & Special Events

There is no surprise that Covid-19 has caused a shake up in the catering and events industry. Companies are scrambling to rehire and rearrange operations to fit this “new normal”. However, event planners, designers and caterers already understand resiliency, forward thinking, and creativity. Using these skills, many came up with ideas like online ordering, use of DoorDash, personalized events, and contact free pick-up and delivery.

Even though we are seeing light at the end of this dark tunnel, we should expect to see some of these trends stick around. During lock down, we wanted to see family, enjoy holidays together and celebrate special occasions. The introduction of virtual events through Zoom became our lifelines. Even with health orders lifting, we will still see popularity in this online craze. Understanding the technology and finding a way to add energy and excitement to the experience is key to staying relevant for our industry professionals. Some popular ideas have been to send themed boxes or DIY kits to clients/guests houses ahead of their event, to create an interactive experience. There have also been virtual tours, virtual trips to countries with cooking classes, and mixology classes. The focus has been about adding value and entertainment to a very ridge and mundane thing.

We will also see micro weddings continue to rise. With travel and accommodations being restricted many couples are choosing to celebrate at home, in parks, or a significant place that is meaningful to them. The key for these smaller weddings is not so much about budget, as it is about personalization, details, and an intimate atmosphere. Keeping the guest count small also helps the couples enjoy their time with family and friends and provide elements that stand out. These smaller guest counts help to make the event feel inclusive but also safe.

Eco-friendly and sustainable events began their popularity climb just before the pandemic and have continued to be an influential component for clients, vendors and venues. With this need to reduce our carbon footprint, there have been a significant number of “greener” options available. We have utensils made of vegetable starch, sugar cane and compostable paper. Bamboo straws and plates are not only eco-friendly but add texture and design to your buffet. Event planners are supporting this effort as well, by creating greener take-away options, like plants with personalized tags or phrases on them, packets of seeds to “make the memories last”, and recyclable tote bags and tumblers.

2021 will be the year of recovery and re-set. There will be focus on company culture, inclusion, and family reunions. It is in our nature to connect and celebrate. While we’re ready to move into live settings again, it will be important for the industry to stay knowledgeable about the safety guidelines and anticipate the unexpected. One thing we can all be certain on; we are eager to get back together and better than ever.

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