

*Research article*¹

Event Catering in Russia and Worldwide: Market Status and Development Prospects

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Abstract

This article examines the event catering market in Russia and abroad. The history of the emergence and development of this business is described. The main types and formats of event catering are considered. Information is provided on the leading companies in the global and Russian industries. The prospects for market development are assessed.

Keywords: event catering, event organization, foodservice, out-of-home food industry, catering market, off-premises service, catering formats.

Introduction

Event catering, or *event catering* (from the English *event* – “occasion” and *cater* – “to supply provisions”), refers to the organization of food service in locations without stationary foodservice facilities, including corporate or sporting events, private parties, weddings, exhibitions, and business conferences.

Catering provides not only delicious and high-quality food but also creates a unique atmosphere through professional service, décor, and often entertainment. Frequently, catering becomes not merely a component but a central element of the event, significantly enhancing the overall experience.

Event catering is inseparably linked to the type of event. The main categories include:

- **Official events** organized by government authorities at various levels. These contracts are complex, with strict security requirements and numerous inspections, where mistakes can be costly. Protocol service, restrained décor, and formal service are typical. Such orders are difficult to obtain, though not always highly profitable. Contractors value connections and potential opportunities.
- **Business events.** This large segment is particularly active in spring and autumn, covering presentations, exhibitions, team-building activities, company reports, partner conventions, and

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similar gatherings. Popular formats include buffets, coffee breaks, and banquets. Most catering companies operate in this segment, as it consistently generates revenue.

- **Sporting events.** This niche requires special expertise but can be highly rewarding once mastered. Catering is vital for the economic viability of stadiums. Providers must select optimal menus and ensure maximum accessibility for consumers. Peak demand occurs before games and during breaks. Serving international games entails major responsibility and prestige, requiring knowledge of global cuisines, ceremonial procedures, and specialized operational models.
- **Private events.** Here, creativity of both clients and catering companies is virtually limitless. Weddings and birthdays dominate, but any occasion may warrant a catering contract. Formats and budgets vary depending on client preferences and company agreements. Demand peaks before Christmas and New Year, as well as during the summer season.

History of Catering

Although the term *catering* is modern, the phenomenon itself has existed throughout human history. In Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, and China, people organized feasts away from home during hunts or competitions, and someone had to take responsibility for provisioning.

A notable figure in catering history is François Vatel, maître d'hôtel and cook during the reign of Louis XIV in the 17th century. He organized lavish feasts of the era and, according to accounts, took his life after fish failed to arrive on time for a banquet in honor of King Louis XIV.

As a business, event catering emerged in the 19th century. In the United States, Philadelphia became a center for catering, particularly among the African American community. Robert Bogle, who opened his office in 1812, became widely recognized as a founder of the catering business in Philadelphia, serving major social events from christenings to funerals.

In France, the renowned company **Potel et Chabot**, still operating today, was founded in 1820 by pastry chef Jean-François Potel and chef Étienne Chabot. Initially a delicatessen, their first major event was a dinner for 450 guests in 1845 at the Paris Stock Exchange, marking the beginning of large-scale official receptions in Paris. Later, Potel et Chabot also served banquets for Russian Emperor Nicholas II.

Specific Features of Event Catering

Catering differs significantly from restaurant business operations. Successful catering companies are not always founded by restaurateurs, though some chefs and entrepreneurs—such as Alain Ducasse, Wolfgang Puck, Andrey Dello, and Arkady Novikov—have expanded from restaurants into catering.

Distinctive features include:

- **Cooking and serving technologies** adapted for field conditions.
- **Logistics**, as major events require transporting food, equipment, furniture, and décor to remote venues.
- **Seasonality**, with peak periods in December, summer months, and business seasons (spring and autumn).
- **Personnel management**, often involving freelance waitstaff for large events.
- **Project management** with designated project offices, external experts, and integration of best practices.

Compared to restaurants, catering companies face greater logistical and staffing challenges, particularly for state-level or international events. However, successful catering often generates higher revenues due to large contracts.

Main Formats of Catering

- **Buffet** – informal communication, light snacks, and drinks.
- **Banquet** – formal dining with sequential service.
- **Coffee break** – snacks and beverages during business or educational events.
- **Buffet table** (*smorgasbord*) – self-service for large gatherings.
- **Cocktail** – beverage-focused social events.
- **Barbecue and picnic** – outdoor events with food grilled over coals.

Global Event Catering Market

The global catering market is vast and highly competitive but difficult to measure precisely, especially for the event catering segment.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the industry, but recovery is underway.

- **Business Research Insights (2024):** USD 118.38 billion in 2023; projected USD 178.39 billion by 2032 (CAGR 4.7%).
- **IMARC Group (2024):** USD 148.1 billion in 2023; projected USD 220 billion by 2032 (CAGR 4.5%).

Leading companies include:

- **Compass Group (UK)** – revenue GBP 31.028 billion in 2023.
- **Sodexo (France)** – revenue EUR 22.6 billion in 2023, catering at the 2024 Paris Olympics.
- **Aramark (USA)** – revenue USD 18.854 billion in 2023, with Olympic catering experience since 1968.

Other significant players: Bartlett Mitchell (UK), Do & Co (Austria), SATS (Singapore), AVI Foodsystems (USA), Gastronomy (Australia), and Potel et Chabot (France).

Event Catering in Russia

The first catering company in Russia was Potel et Chabot, which opened in Moscow in 1986. Russian operators emerged in the early 1990s. The market now includes more than 700 companies.

Key milestones included large-scale events such as the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, Universiades, Confederations Cup (2017), and FIFA World Cup (2018).

The pandemic and geopolitical events negatively impacted demand, but recovery followed:

- **NeoAnalytics (2024):** market volume fell by 5.9% in 2022, but grew 9.3% in 2023 (to over RUB 800 billion).
- **Association of Catering and Banquet Services (AKBS, 2024):** 30% growth in event catering in 2023; 96% of operators reported revenue increases, with half exceeding 50%.

Leading Russian companies:

- **IFSM Group** (successor to Sodexo Russia).
- **Fusion Management** (“Shakespeare” mobile restaurant, experience at international sporting events).
- **Korpus Group** (“Figaro” catering, Sochi 2014, APEC Summit, Eastern Economic Forum).

- **Novikov Catering** (established by Arkady Novikov, >1000 banquets).
- **Dellos Catering** (part of Andrey Dellos's restaurant group, service at Sochi 2014, FIFA 2017, FIFA 2018).

Development Prospects

The industry is adapting to global and local trends, with key prospects including:

1. **Eco-catering** (zero waste, sustainable products).
2. **Personalized solutions** (individualized menus and event design).
3. **Technological integration** (digital platforms, automation, robotics).
4. **Remote-location catering** (linked to tourism and outdoor events).
5. **Growth of corporate demand** (health-oriented corporate meals, business events).
6. **Entry of retail companies** (e.g., Vkusvill, Azbuka Vkusa, and Yandex as service aggregator).

Event catering is thus a rapidly developing industry, reflecting contemporary consumption and technological trends, with strong growth potential in Russia and globally.

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