

The 5-step catering inquiry checklist

A 30-person catering request lands at 6:30 p.m. on Friday while the line is out the door, and nobody replies until Monday (an illustration). Run this check on your restaurant's email inbox in under five minutes using your own records.

Set these aside before you count

Before counting open requests, set aside food supplier invoices, linen or equipment vendor emails, spam, internal staff notes, and past catering orders that already closed. Scope this check to catering and private event inquiries only, leaving out phone takeout orders.

1. Search your inbox for the word "catering". Type catering into your restaurant email search bar and sort the matching threads from oldest to newest.
2. Record the date stamp on the oldest unanswered inquiry. Find the oldest catering or private event request that never received a quote back and write down the day and hour it arrived.
3. Verify the four quote inputs on each waiting thread. Check whether the guest stated the headcount, requested date and time, pickup or delivery address, and menu format or dietary notes.
4. Check the requested date against your event calendar. Confirm kitchen prep capacity and room or delivery availability on your event calendar before quoting a price or holding a date.
5. Draft the quote from your catering menu notes and hold for manager approval. Write the itemized quote reply with one clear next question, and require a manager to review and approve every word before the guest sees it.

Scope of this check

Checking your own email inbox shows the age of your oldest unanswered catering request and how many inquiries are waiting on a date check or menu price. A check on your own records never claims lost catering revenue, and it never claims what a guest did next.

Sample data. Made-up business. The two replies below are an example for a fictional restaurant.

Weak example

Subject: Re: Catering inquiry
Hi there,
We got your message about catering next month. Call the restaurant after 2 p.m. and ask for a manager so we can talk options.
Harbor Kitchen (Sample data. Made-up business.)

Strong example

Subject: Catering quote for your 30-guest dinner on Saturday, Nov. 14
Hi [guest first name],
We checked our event calendar for Saturday, November 14 at 6:30 p.m., and our kitchen has that evening open for a 30-guest drop-off buffet. Based on our catering menu pricing notes, the two-entree buffet package for 30 guests is [menu price from house notes] plus tax and delivery. Would you like us to send the itemized tray breakdown and deposit rule for those two entrees?
[manager name]
Harbor Kitchen (Sample data. Made-up business.)