

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Food Trucks: Catering Alternative for Millennial Weddings

Tammie Kaufman¹, Denver Severt²

^{1,2}Associate Professor, University of Central Florida Rosen College, Orlando, Florida.

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Corresponding Author: Tammie Kaufman, Associate Professor, University of Central Florida Rosen College, Orlando, Florida

Abstract

This paper explores a suggestion of food trucks as a viable food supplier for weddings. The food truck industry continues to grow bringing many potentially explorable opportunities. Millennials represent a large wedding market segment and also seek unique and personalized experiences to experiences that are lavish for the sake of tradition. One such experience is using food trucks for the wedding rehearsal and/or reception. This brief communication paper ends with potential applied suggestions for food truck operators, wedding planners, and millennials, and by suggesting potential research questions for those wishing to research in this arena.

Keywords: food trucks, catering, millennials, weddings, experience

1. Introduction

The food truck industry has experienced rapid growth over recent years as consumers are drawn to the offerings of unique, culturally diverse, even gourmet cuisines at a lower price (Sundale Research, 2022). As the foodie generation, the Millennial Generation (27-44 years old in 2022) have bolstered food truck sales because liking the greater selection of food, convenience and unique experiences (Sundale Research, 2022). They have embraced offerings such as farm-to-table eating, avocado toast, multi-cultural and organic food (Turow, 2015). They show up for food truck malls which allow many friends to have different food choices conveniently and simultaneously. The Millennial generation (27-44 years old in 2022) is a major source of food truck revenue (Sundale Research, 2022), and represents additional opportunities for food truck operators.

With (47%) reporting they have patronized at least one food truck, there is much unrealized market potential available (Milbrath, 2018). Currently, millennials comprise 80% of couples getting married. They tend to choose unconventional venues desiring a novel and more personalized wedding experience (Myung & Smith, 2018). This desire matches a non-

traditional offering of food such as the use of food trucks for catering their weddings and/or receptions (Romero, 2023).

For the food truck operators, millennials represent large purchasing power and are a market worth pursuing (Viswanathan & Jain, 2013; Young, 2015). Millennials are described as independent and distinctive (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008) and are frequently looking for new experiences (Ogbeide et al., 2013). Millennials are creative and are drawn to non-traditional products and experiences and variety (Hume, 2010). When deciding whether to make a purchase, they want to determine whether the product/experience matches their personality (Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009). They are educated and practical desiring high levels of personalization with service offerings. As a result, venues that provide more personalized less formal weddings that are unique in location are growing in popularity among this generation (Fromm, 2018). This makes a nice market space for food trucks to occupy and may represent a major supplement to their existing market food.

Millennials spend within their means and are shying away from ostentatious displays of wealth at their

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weddings (Romero, 2023). Many are looking to incorporate hometown aspects into their wedding such as food (Adamson, 2023). Food trucks as an alternative to cater for a wedding can provide a more budget friendly distinctive menu while allowing a couple to display their personality and local cuisine preferences while also offering variety to guests.

2. Weddings Catering and Food Trucks

Weddings are the most widely recognized social event in the world representing a \$79 billion market in the United States. Annually, there are approximately 2.5 million weddings in the US, with an average cost of \$35,329 (Zlotnick, 2022).

Food truck catering costs can range from \$10 to \$100 per guest. A food truck catering an event like an evening wedding reception will be at the higher end of the range. At approximately \$35 per guest, food trucks are well under the average of \$70 per guest for traditional wedding catering. (Profitable Venture, 2023). The average number of guests at a wedding is 141 and food trucks can serve an average of 50-75 during a given time (Taylor, 2020). For larger weddings, food truck operators may look to create partners within their food truck community complementing their offerings. This enhances community cooperation and is a great marketing vehicle for the food truck operator to get new clients and gain referrals for new weddings during the event.

For the operator wishing to employee this market expansion, operators need to make certain that they are prepared to make fresh food prepared to order at a quick pace. Yet this is only one example of the many different setups possible with the flexible service offering of bringing a company or food truck operator to have the wedding. With the use of multiple food trucks, guests will be able to have alternatives and with today's increasingly special dietary needs this can be a selling point. Food trucks are a modern alternative to a traditional sit-down catered wedding that is more exciting and festive (Taylor, 2020).

3. Discussion

This paper discusses three distinct market opportunities by leveraging the buying power and desires for uniqueness and variety of millennials, the consistency of the wedding catering business, and emergence of the popularity of food trucks suggesting how each can benefit the other. Although research about millennials is constant and in depth on values and job preferences, wedding catering and food trucks experience studies are limited leaving a nice, focused

research arena for new food researchers. In carving practical and new research knowledge in this area, the following research questions are proposed:

What specifically are millennials looking for in a wedding catered for by food trucks?

How can food truck operator's best market to this generation?

What are the best practices for food truck caterers at weddings?

What are the most popular menu items that are derived from sustainable food sources?

What are innovative approaches that can be utilized by food truck operators and those seeking wedding food service?

What are unique partnerships that can be developed with other businesses to create unique and flexible weddings?

With such movements as Airbnb and Turo allowing for the development of markets in the most convenient of ways being any time, any place, any space and any pace, many other industries stand to take advantage of novel markets perhaps such as in this example of broadening the market basket of available wedding foodservice suppliers from catering venues and resorts to food truck operators. Finally, this serves to extend potential markets to food truck operators as well. As more experience is gained by food truck operators, more standards for this potentially giant market segment can be developed allowing for a more formalized service delivery system design. From this discussion, it is clear that there are research and applied opportunities.

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