

# MENU WISE

PRESENTATION CAN DEFLECT ATTENTION FROM LOWERED FOOD BUDGETS. BY REBECCA FELIX

WHETHER CREATIVELY STRETCHING food-and-beverage dollars to accomplish panache with little cash or adding flare to high-end fare, menu creation can make or break an event's success. And some planners are beefing up presentation in ways that make it less obvious that budgets are lower and portions often are smaller than in years past.

## KEVIN FOSTER

Presentation is key for any menu success. Kevin Foster, president of Conference & Catering Consultant Services outside Houston, advises keeping the event's theme in mind when planning menus, regardless of whether the menu is budget-wise or extravagant. "It's important to look at the theme and type of event and determine what type of food and menu can accomplish and accompany that vision," he says.

## NICKITTA NELSON

"You can still incorporate everything a client desires, but in smaller versions with less quantity," says Nickitta Nelson, owner of Dallas-based VK Events. She notes that some groups are willing to cut out a course, such as desserts or salads, in order to offer an array of choices in the courses that are offered. It's a solution that often means less waste as well as less cost.


Many planners are looking for menu alternatives to help keep prices down. For example, heavy hors d'oeuvres can take the place of a main course, perhaps followed by a dessert bar. "Within a tight budget, you may not be able to give tons of options, and you might not be able to have them sit down with a full-course

menu, but you can create other options and present them nicely," Nelson says.

"Add in fun elements," suggests Nelson. "Look for ways to present the food in a new way, to customize presentation for the group or event. The bigger an event is, and the more being spent on an extravagant menu, it means the client is paying you to come up with ideas to make things special."

## DEBORAH ELIAS

Presentation is always important, no matter the cost of an event, agrees Deborah Elias, owner of Elias Events in Houston, who starts with price limits per person and seeks options within that limit. "It doesn't cost anything to arrange something nicely on a platter or a plate. Work on presentation and take time to really make something look pulled together," she says.

"A dual entrée gives a menu more options and range within a budget," she suggests. Two entrée choices feel generous, and planners can save on cost by paring down portion size. "Don't be afraid to talk to the chef. Research, brainstorm and try to come up with something unique, something nobody's ever done, seen or tasted." 



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## MEET THE PROS



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