

January 2009

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## Recipe for success

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Written by Ian Armitage and  
Produced by James Pepper

[www.harrisoncatering.co.uk](http://www.harrisoncatering.co.uk)



**HARRISON**  
food with thought





## Harrison Catering Services: Recipe for success

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*Written by Ian Armitage and Produced by James Pepper*

Harrison Catering Services operates in both state and private education sectors, as well as with a number of business and industry clients (most notably with Carphone Warehouse and the Health and Safety Executive). The company's activities are biased, at about 70 percent towards education, with state school meal provision making up about half of its total business. Including all business, company turnover is more than £40 million.

Before setting up Harrison Catering in 1994, Harrison was Managing Director of Fairfield Catering and before that, he worked at Sutcliffe Catering

where, in 1983, he was responsible for establishing and managing the first privatised school meals service for the London Borough of Merton.

"Since founding the company in 1994, I've always followed the same simple recipe," he says. "We serve fresh food, prepared on site. Now it isn't unique, but it certainly keeps our clients extremely satisfied."

From roast joints to home-baked biscuits, you name it, Harrison makes it, by employing real chefs and talented school cooks who set and achieve very high standards.

ITS 2,400 EMPLOYEES ARE KEY TO THE HIGH STANDARDS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE IT PROVIDES



“We tailor our services to each client’s own cultural needs; using Lambeth schools as an example, where we have a very diverse area with particular needs, a ‘one size fits all’ approach definitely wouldn’t work.”

Harrison Catering Services is proudly private and independent, providing catering services across the length and breadth of the UK, and never taking customer loyalty for granted. “Our focus is on freshly prepared food at affordable prices,” says Harrison. “We understand what customers want and offer it to them in an appealing package.”

With over 2,400 employees, Harrison Catering Services is big enough to operate a national contract serving 5,000 people a day, yet small enough to pay attention to details that matter. And it is this that really comes across when talking to the man himself, who personally signs 2,400 employee birthday cards each and every year. “That’s my way of telling people I care,” says Harrison. “As I say that, I have a whopping great pile of cards in front of me. But I don’t really mind!”

“I don’t mind because I recognise that without them we couldn’t provide a service, let alone a high value service.

We aren’t after cheap, quick or easy; that doesn’t work. We want the best, and that’s where our people come into it.”

“Good people are the key to achieving high standards of customer service.”

Given how important his own people and the quality they can deliver are, Harrison is concerned by what he calls a ‘de-skilling’ in the catering industry, something he says the famous campaign by Jamie Oliver has bought to the fore. It may no longer be ‘breaking news’, but Harrison is adamant that some contract caterers

have lost their way because they have considered food and labour costs separately. “Processed food may be expensive, but it is incredibly simple to prepare” he says. “It is almost idiot-proof.”

“But we don’t want that. We want quality, fresh and tasty food and that means investing in training and getting the right people.

And our focus on training and preparing fresh food has enabled menus to evolve and become increasingly localised.”

HARRISON CATERING WILL ONLY WORK WITH QUALITY, FRESH AND TASTY FOOD



ITS 2,600 EMPLOYEES ARE KEY TO THE HIGH STANDARDS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE IT PROVIDES



We're already very far down the road when it comes to balanced diets," he says. "We've reached a target of 98 percent of the food we serve being cooked from fresh."

Harrison's aim now is to see Harrison Catering Services become a nationally known name synonymous with great food and quality management. "We want to be seen by potential and existing employees as the company they most want to work with. That involves quality and freshness, so everything we do focuses on that. For instance, when sourcing ingredients, we use only quality suppliers who

really care about food and have a reputation to protect.

"And this won't change given the current economic uncertainty either as we are able to take a long term view on business, rather than worry about today's share price, which in the current climate is vital for long-term stable growth," continues Harrison.

So exactly how far is the credit crunch affecting the contract catering market? When asked about the current credit squeeze, Harrison had this to say: "I think it is the old maxim isn't it – three economists and four opinions. And the

latest information we are receiving is that food cost rises have peaked and are plateauing – whether they will yet go down remains to be seen."

Although the next few years may yet prove difficult, Harrison's long-term future is secured. Geoffrey's son and daughter are both heavily involved in the company's strategy and will one day inherit the business their father has built from the ground up.

"My son and daughter are now on the board of directors," says Harrison. "And, we won't be selling the company – they are as committed to

its long-term success as I am. And I think we will be carrying on business as usual. We will be growing steadily; we have got to deliver growth because our ability to attract and retain good people is conditional on them finding career opportunities. We can't stand still but will not diversify into anything too 'out there'. There may be development in areas of natural synergies, but nowhere else.

"We are doing okay. We have good growth and the future looks fairly encouraging. That being said, it is going to be very difficult for every-one in the next few years."



## COMPANY AT A GLANCE

### Company name

Harrison Catering Services Limited

### Operations

Catering services

### Established

1994

### Employees

2,400

### Revenue

£42 million+

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