

Events Unlimited.

Many small enterprises develop to become hugely successful businesses. This is exactly what has happened to Events Unlimited. The business began quite simply as a catering facility run from the home kitchen of Doreen Mc Allister a former assistant chef in a hotel. Doreen found that catering for small parties and group events fitted in much better with a more flexible lifestyle at a time when family commitments were most demanding. The business grew very steadily in the first two years and as her reputation spread, so did the demand for her services. Doreen had many plans for the future development of the business and was keen to implement new services one at a time ensuring that each had time to become well established.

Doreen rented suitable premises and employed staff to assist. Initially, the catering demand was greatest for family functions and parties. However it was not long before requests for business events and conferences started coming in.

BASIC CATERING SERVICES

The catering side of the business was very successful although Doreen soon realised that she had to make her administrative practices more efficient. In the beginning, when there was less demand, it was easy to record orders and buy in stock as necessary. Whichever member of staff was available would accept an order either by telephone or in person. Orders were recorded in a carbon copy order book so that customers could also have a copy. Any order in excess of £50 had to be accompanied by a £10 deposit with full payment on collection or delivery. Telephone orders were problematic in this regard as customers had to pay the deposit by card. The customer receipt from the card machine had to be stapled to the carbon copy book as evidence of payment. Sometimes this did not happen and customers were asked for the full amount when the order was collected or delivered.

Full details had to be recorded in the order book. These included name, address (delivery address if different), telephone number, items ordered and quantities. The date of collection/delivery was also noted as well as the cost of the order and any deposit paid. When the order was collected or delivered, 'Paid' was written in the order book. Any delivered orders had a standard delivery charge of £10 added.

Inevitably, at busy times, much of this information was hastily written with detail omitted. This often required Doreen going back to the customer to check details. There was also the fact that if 'Paid' was not recorded on an order then, when the order book was checked at the end of the week, Doreen might contact the customer for payment. Doreen knew that contacting customers to check orders or to ask for payment that had already been made projected an unprofessional image.

Perhaps one of the worst aspects of this system was that the bookings were not in date order so that apart from constantly checking, there was no easy way of knowing what bookings were required for any particular day. As the business grew, this became a real problem with a few episodes when multiple bookings were recorded for the same day and it was almost impossible to manage.

At this point Doreen invested in a computer and printer. She paid for a very basic database programme to try and manage the order system. It was an improvement in some ways but not in others. The program was poorly structured and validated. It was still possible to omit certain fields and create incomplete orders. As with the booking book system, there was no provision for the management of stock. With the business growing, Doreen acknowledged that this was beginning to present quite a problem.

In any catering business, it is essential to ensure that stock is regularly ordered and stored appropriately. Basic items that had to be stocked at all times were ordered once a month from wholesale suppliers. Fresh items such as vegetables, fruit, fish and meat were ordered on alternate days. It was important to keep stock to a minimum. Doreen tried to have a list of every possible item that she used and the average quantities that might be needed per person so that she could refer to it for events. She needed a proper, prioritised list of suppliers and their products along with information like delivery times and costs so that she could properly evaluate the best way to order stock. She maintained a supplier list and stock list but it was never adequately updated. Doreen also relied a lot on her own knowledge and bought everything locally. Some items could have been bought for less using the internet but she did not have the proper facilities to research this possibility fully.

The current system was haphazard to say the least and involved someone looking at the order book and estimating what had to be bought in that day to fulfil all orders. Sometimes, this resulted in either over or under stocking of produce. Sometimes stock orders were made without proper consideration of the customer order. There was no proper system in place and no single person responsible for this task. Invoices coming in from suppliers were difficult to track and were sometimes overlooked for payment.

Considering her future plans, Doreen realised that she would have to review this provision entirely. At present she was managing because she understood what was required but she was concerned at the sheer volume of work involved in all of the processes. However, Doreen had major development plans in mind and was quite determined to implement them.

ON SITE CATERING SERVICES

The next stage of development was to provide an on-site service to customers. This included the provision of all dishes, cutlery, glasses and waitress/waiter service so that customers would have virtually nothing to do except host events. This proved to be really suited to business customers who held conferences, business promotions and annual events. The service was also offered to private customers for large dinner parties or special birthdays and anniversaries where a large number of guests was involved.

Doreen employed part time staff as required, to serve and clear up on these occasions. Staff availability had to be ensured and the logistics of moving equipment and food had to be very carefully planned. Apart from the food and drink supplied, all equipment sent to the venue had to be recorded on a resource sheet completed before the event. This document had to be checked on return to make sure that everything came back. Damage and breakages were recorded on the resource sheet completed by the staff on duty.

On-site catering events were booked in a similar way to catering orders. However, additional information such as the number of guests and the venue and time of the event noted as well. Customers had to pay a 10% deposit at the time of booking. Doreen introduced a discount system for events / parties containing more than fifty guests allowing a 3% discount on the cost for each additional group of fifty guests.

Although this development was extremely successful from a customer perspective, it did place an additional strain on the business. There was increased difficulty in managing stock, supplying resources and scheduling staff. In addition this type of event had to have a different booking procedure that included exact detail of customer requirements. Quotations had to be created for customers and when agreement on cost was reached, a deposit had to be paid and a deposit receipt issued. After the event, invoices for the remaining payment had to be created and following payment, final receipts sent out to the customers.

Extra staff were employed and assigned to different aspects of the business.

There were now two full time secretaries. One of whom was responsible for all on site catering provision.

Although there were definite administrative issues, Doreen was very pleased at the success of her business. She knew she had the ability to organise events as well as cater for them and decided to forge ahead with a further development.

THEMED PARTIES

Doreen now wanted to develop a 'Themed Party' service for her customers. She decided to pilot this strand of the business with the organisation of children's parties. Doreen did detailed research on customer requirements and found that as well as catering requirements, many people wanted activity based entertainment for their children. This could include organised outdoor activities, bowling, swimming and adventure based parties as well as cake baking, clay modelling and painting. Others wanted entertainers such as clowns and magicians.

Managing the entertainment side of the parties was a bit more difficult than Doreen imagined. Initially, she kept a written list of all the entertainers she engaged. This list

was very important as sometimes she had to find a backup person if something went wrong. When a booking came in, she would identify an appropriate artist and request their services for a particular date. When a response was received, she would either send a booking confirmation with full details and the required 'artist booking deposit', or repeat the process with an alternative person. Artists were paid in full on receipt of the artist invoice. Organising this type of party meant that Doreen had to maintain records for a whole range of resources.

Work associated with the parties was variable and involved the use of part time staff. Each part time staff member had to complete a weekly time sheet. These were located at reception and collected weekly so that details could be transferred onto the computer and staff wages calculated.

Staff had to ensure that everyone attending a party completed a 'signing in sheet' for the group, identifying the name, age and party the child was attending. These sheets were located at the reception area and the files had to be properly maintained for inspection. This was a legal requirement and necessary for Fire and Health and Safety regulations. Doreen succeeded in satisfying customer requirements but struggled to manage the associated paper work.

Once this type of event was well established, Doreen progressed to adult Murder Mystery parties. These parties required considerable planning and advance organisation as well as close liaison with the customer. In order to provide this type of party, costumes and other items had to be sourced from suppliers and scripts had to be printed.

Each person had to come as a character, dressed in an appropriate costume which could be collected up to a week before the party. Individuals had to play the role that was given to them on the script before the party. This required detailed information on suppliers, contacts, sizes, delivery and availability.

Doreen had to thoroughly examine the booking details, identify suitable roles and send out role details to customers. In addition to the normal booking details, she required additional size information for participants. Customers had to collect their costumes and scripts the day before the party. Although this sounded

straightforward, the collection process was often confused and orders mixed up. Details of what had been collected had to be fully recorded. Following a party, staff had to ensure that costumes were returned and marked off accordingly. In the event of items not being returned, customers had to be notified and bills sent out.

Unfortunately Doreen knew that things were getting a bit out of control. Accounts were not always accurate and invoicing often late. Stock control was haphazard the costume management process was not effective.

Doreen knew that she needed professional advice on how to manage her systems bit decided to implement what she regarded as the final stage in the development of Events Unlimited.

WEDDINGS

For Doreen, the move into wedding planning was her ultimate goal. She spent a long time working out the practicalities of extending the business to offer this service and considered it to be the most important development. She went ahead and launched the service last year and while it has already exceeded her expectations, it has confirmed the fact that she needs professional help to assist in the management of her business.

This service is initiated by a customer enquiry which results in an appointment to discuss broad detail. These appointments are recorded in a diary and should depend on availability of suitable staff along with the customer, venue, date and time. This is not always well managed and there have been some complaints that are not good for business. Customers are given a wedding brochure which lists all the elements that can be arranged by Events Unlimited. Customers can identify the areas that they want managed. These can include areas such as:

Venue

Hotel

Invitations

Entertainment

Menus

Flowers
Music
Accommodation for guests
Wedding dress
Wedding party
Suits
Wedding cars
Travel arrangements

When an outline list of requirements is provided by the customer, a quotation is created and sent to the customer. This quotation forms the basis of a follow up meeting where terms are agreed and a contract for services is exchanged. An exact costing is provided that may contain options that can reduce the cost. Customers are required to pay a 10% deposit at this stage. Doreen has a discount system in place where customers booking up to two years in advance can get an 8% discount on the total cost if the number of guests is greater than fifty. Customers booking up to eighteen months in advance can get a 7% discount, while those booking up to a year in advance can get a 5% discount.

This aspect of the business is very demanding. It requires a considerable volume of information concerning hotels, services and a whole range of providers and costs

SUMMARY

Managing the entire provision is extremely difficult and Doreen needs a complete review of her administrative systems. She needs a system that can be built with separate strands and sub systems.

These include:

Catering;
On-site catering;
Themed Parties;
Weddings.

Implementation of any of these subsystems would be very welcome.

PROBLEM

Doreen recognises the administrative deficiencies in her business. She would ultimately like a computer system that could be built with elements of each different strand of the business managed separately but linked into an overall structure.

She believes this would allow her to add on new developments in a gradual way and lead to a comprehensive system that would enable the efficient management of Events Unlimited.

TASK

You must provide a solution presented on appropriate electronic media, such as CD to the specified problem that includes the following:

- A detailed project plan that reflects the actual project development;
- An explanation and justification of your approach to the development and design of your solution;
- A detailed User Requirements Specification;
- The design of your solution;
- An explanation of how you tested the design;
- An explanation of how you developed a desktop solution using a RDMS;
- The development and implementation of your solution using a selected software tool to connect the required database to the GUI for the specified problem;
- Documentation of the solution including the code to create and populate the supporting database; code to develop the solution; and an instructional user guide;
- A test plan;
- Sample documented test outcomes;
- An evaluation of your test procedures;
- A critical evaluation of your solution to the problem;