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Want to cater to the Olympics? Think like an Athlete.

"In heaven, the police are British, the engineers German, the Chef's Italian, the lovers French and everything is organised by the Swiss. In hell, the police are German, the engineers French, the Chef's British, the lovers Swiss and the organisation is by the Italians" (Source unknown).

Hell is to be avoided at all costs where food is concerned for the 2012 Olympic Organising committee.

A 42 page document has recently been released detailing their vision for food at the games. Creatively titled Food Vision, it takes a considerable amount of time to get to the point – the first eight pages tells us how hard they have worked over the last eighteen months to prepare Food Vision. But get to the point it eventually does. Why am I writing about it and indeed Olympic food (no I don't mean a Little Chef breakfast)? To share our opinion on the food mix for the games, how to best position yourselves for the tender process and how to showcase the best of British food to an estimated 9 million visitors (if the sponsor restrictions permit).

Lets deal with the dichotomies first.

Food Vision stipulates that food for 2012 will be "tastier, healthier and greener". The three major sponsors are McDonalds, Coca Cola and Cadburys. McDonalds will be providing up to 20% of the total food mix. They will be the only permitted branded restaurant operation at the games.

Even in the venues where they have no presence Coca Cola have the exclusive on all hot and cold non-alcoholic beverages, whereas Cadbury have the exclusive on all confectionery and packaged ice cream.

In venues where there are incumbent caterers the LOCOG are under no obligation to work with them. However if they do, they will have to de-brand and stock sponsor products instead of competitor products.

Money talks

Food Vision bangs home the usual topics of food safety and hygiene, choice and balance, food sourcing and supply chains, environmental management, skills and education – in fact, it repeats these 5 "themes" 3 times in its 42 pages.

It also has a food charter, a sustainability sourcing code and a variety of references to traceability, diversity etc.

It is also as obsessed with carbon dioxide as everyone else in a public facing position.

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So the big question is “Is it worth competing for one of the 12 contracts available?” Yes.

Food Vision also promises to promote the variety and quality of British Regional Food, albeit in an unbranded fashion. It is also apparently the largest peace time category operation in the world – 14 million meals in 40 locations.

It is a superb opportunity to showcase how good food is in Britain and in London in particular. Admittedly the sponsor restrictions make it more difficult, but everyone loves a challenge.

So who is likely to do well in the bid for contracts? The document admits that the audience is totally internationally and largely captive. It strikes me therefore that business operating food in travel hubs under license will have some of the requisite skill sets. In addition they are well equipped to see past the unbranded handicap. In their world brands are only really relevant to the consumer, not to the operator.

Contract caterers will do well. Used to events, service peaks and short term contracts, gives them tactical advantage.

A further laudable aspiration of Food Vision is to “be inclusive to smaller caterers and suppliers”. This means that businesses capable of assembling food dream teams will have a better chance of success. It is unlikely that the smaller operators will be able to meet the benchmarks for waste and recycling, traceability, content management etc, or indeed consider it viable to do so. But as part of a larger consortium the help and incentive may be there.

The further question arises, is it possible to match the aspiration to showcase the Best of British food? I think it is but it will take a less prescriptive approach on the part of the LOCOG. A real challenge will be the graphical and visual communication of the food proposition to an International audience without the visual array of brand props. Having a successful strategy for communication the food offer will no doubt help in any bid. 40 locations and nine audience groups creates a challenging communications matrix.

Our experiences with the great and the good of the contract catering world says be prepared. Look beyond the 42 pages of Food Vision and ask what do the nine audience groups want to eat and drink in an English Summertime? Consider speed of service and peak traffic issues. The supply process and route to the point of service is also a serious issue.

Food Vision makes mention of an equipment plan. It is concerned that the market will be flooded with second hand gear after the games. Therefore having a CPU that has scalable capacity or rented space that has a legacy plan will tick bid boxes.

Inspiration can also come from the plethora of existing and traditional British Summer sporting events, Wimbledon being a perfect example.

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Memorable food will come from the combination of the traditional and the modern. Similarly, the LOCOG will be looking for what I am sure that they would call “ an integrated food strategy”.

They already know what pieces of the food jigsaw are being provided by the sponsors and will be looking to the twelve contractors to complete the picture in terms of offer, price point, service proposition and range.

With the bid process beginning in the spring of 2010, evaluations and presentations in the Summer and contracts being awarded by the end of 2010. Time is surprisingly tight for firstly deciding to bid and then doing the necessary background work.

If you decide to prepare a bid, here are some thoughts gleaned from our experience of tendering in food and our assessment of Food Vision.

- Make a decision sooner rather than later. Any bid is going to take a lot of internal resources. Decide to go for it and commit the necessary resource.
- Prepare the food mix. What are you going to sell, to whom and when? This will then inform the communications matrix.
- Whether you like it or not you need to be up to scratch on sustainability, packaging, traceability etc. Failure in these green areas will be disqualification criteria.
- If your food offers are strongly branded have a plan for an unbranded solution as soon as the food mix is resolved.
- Have a legacy or shrink back plan. The LOCOG will want to see that there is no residual waste in the process as well as the service through the games.
- Consider supply partners, particularly smaller growing company's. Again Food Vision is strong on partnering and education.
- Think British, and that doesn't mean luke warm Pimms and strawberries. London particularly has adopted food culture from all over the world and made it its own.
- Get the right professional team on board. A clear consistent and highly polished presentation well illustrated will gain a great deal more attention.
- The bid process is a race to be won. Think like an athlete. Prepare, train, perfect and think like a winner.

Good Luck!

-ENDS-

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Notes to editors

About CADA Design Group Ltd

- CADADESIGNGROUP is an international brand and retail design consultancy, specialising in British design excellence with an international outlook.
- The London based studios provide strategic consulting, fresh thinking and creative design expertise to a national and international portfolio of clients including Dean & DeLuca, SSP, ISS Eaton, Harrods food halls, Itsu restaurants, Kingfisher restaurants, Pret A Manger, BaxterStorey, Galeries Lafayette, and Harvey Nichols.
- CADA Design Group has over 60 years experience between the team and clients in 28 countries.

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