

Expanding “Bento” With A Meticulous Business Method

Today, many companies have cut corners to maintain business, but the quality of service has suffered as a result. **FUJI Catering**, a bento delivery company, has managed to reduce waste and increase profits while providing quality meals with excellent customer service.

UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMERS’ HABITS

In the food service industry, “leftovers” signify waste and profit loss. In four years, **FUJI Catering** reduced its daily leftover rate from 10-14% to 2%. Toru Furukawa, FUJI Catering’s president, says, “Knowing how much to produce reduces waste and increases profit margin, and understanding our customers’ habits is an important way to reduce leftovers. I am confident that we execute this better than any other company in the same industry.”

The first secret that he disclosed is simply to know the weather. If it’s raining or snowing, he can make extra bento and know they will sell. More people have bento delivered because they don’t want to go out for lunch when the weather is bad. Also, as payday approaches and people are running low on cash, they turn to FUJI Catering for a delicious and filling meal that won’t break the bank. Other high-production days usually come after Thanksgiving, New Year’s, and three-day weekends. By contrast, Furukawa knows Fridays aren’t as busy because sometimes people leave the office early.

In addition to controlling the number of bento they produce every day, Furukawa pays careful attention to his customers’ likes and dislikes and uses that

information to influence the menu. FUJI Catering’s website has a questionnaire that provides him with customer feedback, which he takes seriously. He has eliminated some dishes and added new items based on their suggestions, and ultimately he is able to provide a tasty meal that keeps customers coming back.

BEING EFFICIENT ENABLES THEM TO PROVIDE A QUALITY BENTO

Although the deadline for daily bento orders is 10am, their bento items often sell out around that time. In order to ensure they don’t miss the deadline, the customers are encouraged to place an order one day prior to the delivery, and this can contribute to the efficiency of the company as well.

Furukawa’s efficiency control is not only applied to the production numbers, but also to the production method; this magically corresponds to his constant exploration to provide a well-balanced meal. He organizes his menu so that in one bento, one item is broiled, one is fried, and one is braised. He believes the best meal has the balance of meat, fish, and vegetables as well as mixed cooking styles. The system of broiled, fried, and braised also streamlines the bento-making process and improves the efficiency of his kitchen both facility-wise and staff-wise.

Thus, FUJI Catering has achieved cost-effectiveness and produces a great profit margin; however, what they truly want is not to increase their profit margin, but to make their bento better and better. Making a profit ultimately hinges on one important factor: Providing a quality product.

BENTO’S FUTURE IN NEW YORK

Outside Japan, the concept of “boxed lunch” brings to mind a set meal from a fast food chain or a plain sandwich with chips and a cookie that are served at corporate meetings. Bento is an item that is made in Japan, and there isn’t an exact equivalent here in the States. Furukawa plans to make the nutritious

boxed lunch popular with New Yorkers by expanding his company’s customer base. He says, “It would be great if we could deliver bento to schools, hospitals, and even airlines as a way to educate New Yorkers about the healthy benefits of bento.” By doing customer research and organizing the daily workflow as described above, Furukawa is confident he will increase production to handle mass orders and accommodate greater demand from his target customers. “We are currently able to prepare 1,000 bento boxes in only four hours each morning, but we will be ready to make more than ten thousand in the near future!”



At \$6-7, a bento from FUJI Catering is one of the cheapest, yet most nutritious, meals in town.



With an assortment of items from well-balanced ingredients and cooking methods, FUJI Catering’s Kids Bento can provide a healthful lunch as well as food education.



FUJI Catering
27 Ludlow St.
New York, NY 10002
TEL: 212-219-9955
FAX: 212-941-1171
www.fuji-catering.com



Tokiko Kodama (left) is in charge of orders and deliveries and makes sure the kitchen staff doesn’t make more bento than they can sell in one day. “We can increase production to handle mass orders and accommodate greater demand from our target customers,” says Furukawa (right).