

Food and beverage in a stadium*

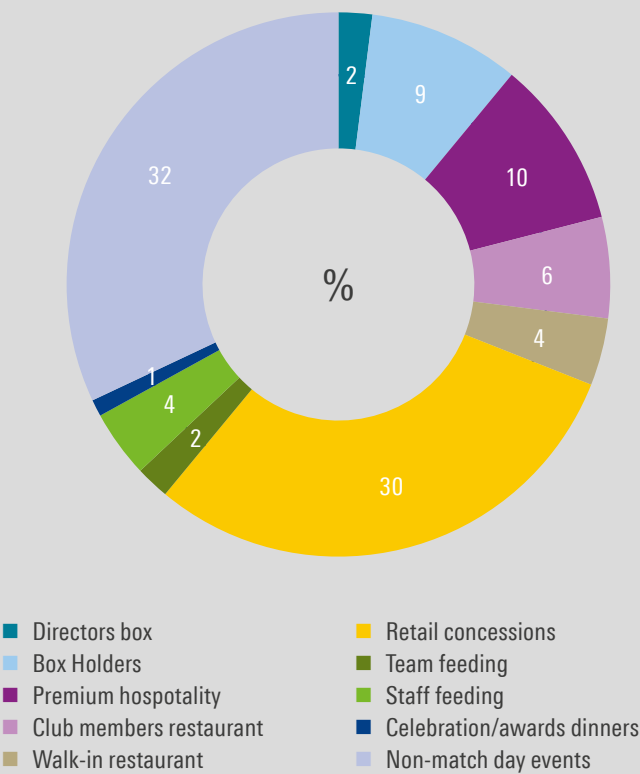
Stadium owners and operators are placing more and more importance on the maximisation of the fan and guest experience. Delivering an engaging environment for all supporter segments is crucial in driving the performance of a stadium. Food & Beverage (F&B) is a key element of this.

F&B is at the heart of the (off-field) match and non-match day experience. It is not just the food product itself, but the F&B experience as a whole which is of paramount importance. The serving staff have a large level of exposure to the customers in the stadium, and in this, become the ‘face’ of the football club across numerous areas of the ground.

The premise that F&B is an integral element to the fan experience must be embraced in an early stage of the planning process, to ensure revenue maximisation as well as efficiency of operation within the F&B function. It is therefore important to ensure that the best resources or partner(s) are involved at the initial planning stages of a new stadium development. Successfully delivering F&B is a highly complex task, where not only is there a need to understand different customer demands to be met, but also to align the infrastructure and guest spaces with the requirements of the customer. This is critical when deploying hundreds, sometimes thousands, of temporary staff on an event day. At times, and in some markets more than others, one of the major challenges can be the part-time staff who work for a relatively low wage will be serving people who have often paid high prices for their tickets and who expect professional service.



Share of F&B sales at a typical football stadium



Source: Compass Group

While some of the many aspects in the F&B function in a stadium may be small in revenue terms, such as the Directors Box and Team Feeding, they often have a disproportionately large influence and so must be a focus of excellence.

A successful F&B operation can be a key driver of success for a stadium, not just in terms of revenues generated but also in terms of the quality perception of the stadium users. Throughout different leagues and regions there is a wide range in operational performance, however, in the UK, F&B can turn over up to, and in some cases exceed, EUR 10 million per annum.

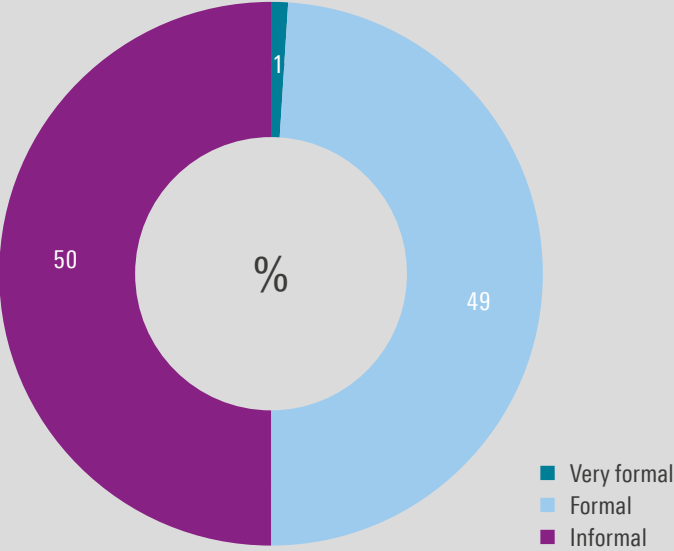
The involvement of specialists at the design and planning stages will enable the right spaces to be allocated for the F&B function to maximise customer flows, and the efficiency of the logistical aspects within the stadium.

* contributed by Compass Group

The main issues include:

- Customer understanding leading to segmentation and tiering (as this drives space usage and design), for both match day and non-match day attendees;
- Creating the right customer journeys for each group of customers;
- Central kitchen and distribution infrastructure aligned to customer segmentation;
- Building in space flexibility – there is a clear trend towards informal versus formal hospitality and entertaining, leading to more flexible/open space rather than fixed boxes. This also helps with the delivery of non-match day business;
- Allowing for the right amount of counter space - this differs by country, however benchmarks suggest that 10 metres per thousand persons is adequate for a new stadium; and
- Creating the right space for the F&B staff to check-in, change and leave their personal belongings.

What is the preferred type of hospitality?



Source: Keith Prowse Survey of Corporate Hospitality Bookers & Compass Group

What are the trends?

- Today's customers have more experience of eating out with an expectation of higher service.
- Customers are more discerning, especially in a challenging economy, and demand value for money.
- At premium levels customers increasingly prefer informal to formal hospitality.

- Attendance at football matches can often be expensive compared to other leisure pursuits, thereby elevating expectation, especially in relation to F&B.
- Treating fans as captive customers is no longer acceptable.
- At the general admission and concession levels people expect a higher quality ‘dining’ experience, following market trends such as ‘gourmet’ street food vendors who are now leading the way.

Past and future

In the past the F&B service has been focused on delivering volume based on speed and efficiency:

- Hold hot ovens instead of real char-grills;
- Cheaper ingredients; and
- Minimal labour.

In the future, trends suggest the F&B experience should deliver volume through experience and quality:

- Food cooked in front of customer (smaller central kitchen, but more equipment around stadium), with chefs on show;
- Differentiated and varied offers;
- Bars designed to increase customer flows; and
- Better use of technology to increase speed of service such as remote ordering and cashless systems. A debit card where fans buy credit before entering the ground can serve as their ticket and way of purchasing food and beverage products quicker and easier, which in turn can lead to more sales.

The customer's F&B experience is critical to the overall perception of the quality of a stadium. Optimising this requires solid relationships with the right partners with the right expertise. If this is achieved and the ‘guest experience’ and ‘space flexibility’ is planned from the outset, then satisfied customers, both on match and non-match days, will drive the F&B business forward.

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