



# THE EVENT CATERING ACADEMY

Greg Gabriel set up Mixing Jug in 2014 with a simple mission to bring healthier drinks to festivals. The business has grown exponentially since then and The Mixing Jug now operates multiple outlets, has worked with over 100 major events across the UK including the F1 Grand Prix, BBC Proms in the Park, Latitude, Isle of Wight Festival, Goodwood, Countryfile and The London Marathon. They have also launched a new shop in Hampshire and worked alongside big brands; ASOS, Adidas, River Island and BMW on bespoke projects. We caught up with Greg to chat about the launch of his Event Catering Academy.



**Y**ou featured in our magazine pre-pandemic in early 2020, what's changed for your business since then?

Wow, yes a lot has changed. Pre-pandemic I simply couldn't have imagined one big event being cancelled, let alone most of them. We were steadily growing, with a brand new outlet on-order and a fully booked diary including Glasto. Almost overnight it all went away. It was heart-breaking, but what I quickly realised is that even when business changes, you don't lose the knowledge and learnings from the years before. I took responsibility for the situation instead of blaming the pandemic and decided that 2020 will have a long-term, bigger meaning for

us, calling it our 'slingshot year'. Eighteen months on, this is exactly what has happened. Through the pandemic, we negotiated a new shop lease which we opened in June this year in Prince Philip Park, we refurbished our older outlet, converting it into a slick vegan crepe outlet, and alongside this, we launched and ran the first Catering Academy pilot in August 2020. Our business is now a stronger place than I believe it would have been without the pandemic, which may seem like a crazy thing to say.

So, why did you start catering at large events, what was your break into the industry?

The events industry appealed as my first start-up as most events are over the weekend, so I could keep my day job (working in supply chain for a global co). I liked being able to pick and choose when and where we did or didn't work and that it was a business that I could open and close... unlike an online business for example that needs attention 24/7. I love the challenge and excitement of being part of huge events, building our portfolio each year and working behind the scenes at sold-out festivals is pretty cool! Victorious was probably our first 'big break' into festival, of course and we promoted this to

every other event until one by one our portfolio of headline events grew to where it is today.

When you were starting out where did you go for advice and where do you go now?

Like most starting out, I sought advice from friends and family and those around me, who weren't necessarily 'business people.' However well-intended, I now realise this is not usually the best place to go for business advice. Nowadays we have a strong network of experienced specialists who advise us on business matters, from our Business Coach to our HR consultant and accountants. This has helped us take on more new opportunities than before and propelled our growth further and faster than was previously possible.

What was the hardest thing about starting up?

Pretty much everything was hard. Constant decisions to make from choosing kit to choosing pitches and paying out thousands in fees many months ahead of an event. It took a lot of energy working on the business alongside a corporate day job and sacrificing so much social time was hard. Looking back, it was the lack of knowledge that made it harder than anything else.



What keeps you going?

Other than coffee... our wonderful team members who love the industry as much as I do, the feeling of completing another year at another huge event, the gratitude we receive from our lovely customers and just being a part of what I believe to be the world's best festival scene. We keep innovating, every year we make changes and improvements to make things simpler, faster and better for our customers and team.

What is most challenging when it comes to growing as a business?

Taking your time away from working in the business to work on the business is the biggest challenge I see. We only have so many hours and so much energy in a given day, even working 18-hour days will only get someone so far doing it all yourself... I tried. Growing only becomes possible through outsourcing areas of the business and then giving more responsibility to your team, which of course comes with its challenges at the start. I speak to many business owners who struggle to let go of the reins, but you can't book many new events or take time to innovate if you're running around collecting stock or working at the events you booked previously.

You set up the Event Catering Academy and are partnered with NCASS on this to support the event and festival catering sector, what made you set the academy up?

This has been an idea for a while, I see the same story every year, new and well-intentioned good people starting and making the same mistakes I did... it pains me to see. Many new starters think that learning through mistakes is the best way, which is fine if you have many years to spare and loads of cash to burn. Event catering has so many moving parts and is full of pitfalls. Enough mistakes early on will quickly see you out of business or working for literally years to recover from them.



I wish this existed when I started as our business would have been less painful and more successful. Being able to share knowledge with others who have a passion for food, events or business is exciting. The Academy is a way for all the late nights, sweat, tears, to have meaning and value for others. On top of this, I love to hear the success stories of people spending more time enjoying their businesses and life rather than being consumed by them, which is so often the case.

What's been most rewarding so far about the work you do in the ECA?

The look on someone's face when you know they have had a lightbulb

moment and it makes sense - this happens a lot when I share examples of how we grew and secured some great events and how we launched our crepe outlet to a fully booked year in its first season.

How do you see The ECA evolving through the partnership with NCASS?

NCASS and The Event Catering Academy have aligned values and ultimately want to see caterers and the industry, as a whole, succeed. This can only happen through collaborating and sharing knowledge.

We have worked closely with NCASS for the past eight years and I see this partnership strengthening with the unique perspectives we both have in the industry. I see us giving more value to more people and ultimately seeing greater success from caterer's points of view. The fact we have been hands-on, 'in the field' so to speak, gives us unique insights to help caterers succeed.

What's in it for NCASS members?

Members get 20% off the course along with all the other benefits, course content and follow up zoom calls.

How can people join the course and what should they expect?

Pre-sale tickets are now available by calling us on 0333 242 5135, emailing [hello@eventcateringacademy.co.uk](mailto:hello@eventcateringacademy.co.uk)

Expect a packed couple of days with myself, members of our team and other industry experts. We'll get stuck in talking about your business and you will learn from our many years of experience. We've broken everything down into simple modules and activities with a helpful handbook to take away.

Following the course, we have three fortnightly follow-up zoom calls to keep you going on your journey and to help with any new challenges you encounter. You will also meet other like-minded caterers who may well become part of your network.



A two-course lunch, tea & coffee is also included to keep you going and the venue is offering a discount on hotel bookings for attendees of the Event Catering Academy.

What advice do you wish you could have given yourself when you started in the events and festival industry?

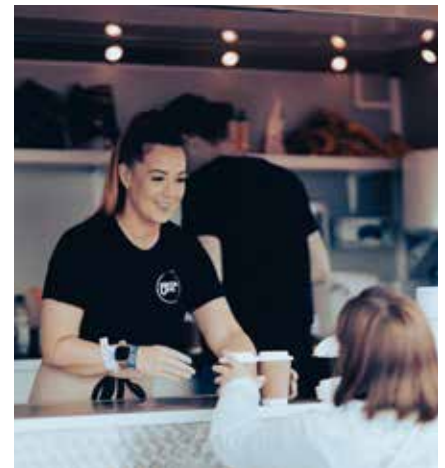
Wow, how to answer this... I could write a book for myself on this topic, but two tips I will share is 'less is more' when setting up a mobile food business and pricing products correctly from the start.

What do you love about the industry?

The people, we have met some incredible people over the years.

Where do you think the industry will be this time next year?

Strong but also different to where we left off in 2019. We have grown our business significantly this year, with 2021 looking to be our strongest year so far. 2022 with more certainty and now the insurance available for events, I believe things will be in full swing again, however, competition will also be strong for event pitches, with many caterers who held back in 2021, returning to full capacity. It's more important than ever for



those wanting to book quality, packed diary of events, to be ready for it and have the edge with the right systems and tools to do so. Events start to open for bookings from Autumn, so there couldn't be a better time.

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