

Safe and reliable

Tevin Tobun of **Gate Ventures** writes about the professional solutions for your school meal delivery services

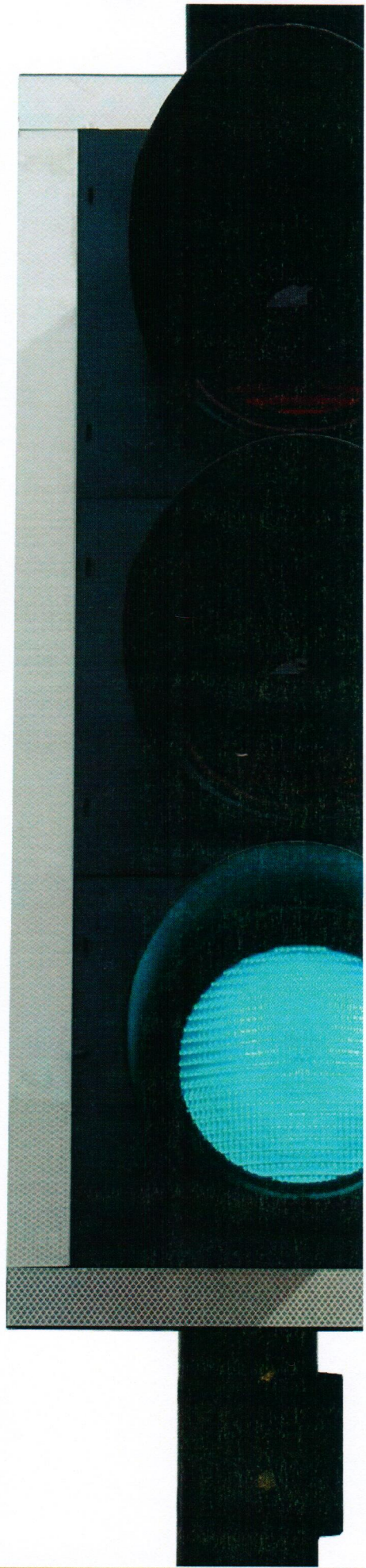
In the tough economic times that have hit all industries hard, school catering has been no exception. With local authority budgets receiving significant cuts, catering managers have struggled to find new ways to cut back on spend without compromising on the quality of the end product. But for those educational establishments that don't have adequate onsite facilities to prepare meals within the school premises, a novel approach to cost saving has been sought – local taxi services bringing in meals from nearby production kitchens. While some may enjoy the level of savings this produces, what are the implications of outsourcing such a vital service in this way?

It is thought that a number of schools in the UK do not have adequate cooking facilities, but with the government's commitment to offer a nutritious meal to every child of school age, it means that many rely on offsite kitchens or other schools' kitchens to serve schools within a set radius to produce meals that are

later transported in. For local taxi companies, more used to carrying passengers from A to B, this can mean lucrative, regular contracts. However, the potential consequences for such a low-cost, low-maintenance service can be dear – from health and safety concerns, to the reliability of service and accountability.

Gate Ventures, the Facilities Services Company whose meal transportation division specialises in hot and chilled meal delivery to the education sector, was set up with these considerations in mind. Delivering over 1m meals a year to schools that do not have sufficient facilities to produce meals onsite, and with over 10 years experience of working with schools and educational establishments, they are aiming to become the go-to service provider of school meal delivery services.

Working alongside a network of the UK's leading contract caterers, we serve some of the UK's largest boroughs, including Westminster Council, Brent, Harrow, Lambeth, Waltham Forest, East Sussex and many more. The company works with clients to service often complex requirements across numerous sites



with tight time constraints – a job that its experienced and highly-trained staff are well used to.

With the level of regulation that comes with the school meals sector, it is important that the responsibility is taken very seriously and stringent measures are put in place. From quality and reliability of service, health and safety and hygiene through to time management, we know from the clients that we work with that a seamless, high quality service, day in, day out, is paramount.

Whilst some believe that a regular taxi or courier service will suffice, we know that this is a specialist service that requires a bespoke approach with highly-trained staff and well-equipped vehicles. We pride ourselves on not only taking away the day-to-day operational logistics from our clients, but also allowing them to operate more efficiently and cost-effectively too.

Experience and established infrastructure is central to a company's commitment to helping clients place more of every pound into the mouths of the children they feed. With a dedicated workforce of over 100 CRB-approved staff and a fleet of 70, clean, tracker-equipped vehicles within its meal transportation division, we are able to absorb such costs by creating finely timed, efficient multi-drop routes, as opposed to numerous individual drops. ▣

HOT TO TROT

CAMBRO CAMCART

Caterers have less need to worry about how to maintain the temperature of their carefully prepared dishes with products such as the portable food transporter, now available in the UK from Imperial Catering Equipment.

The Cambro Camcart, showcased at Hotelympia earlier this year, can accommodate 720 servings, making it suited for large volume off-premise and satellite events and locations that demand durability.

The Cambro Camcart UPCH-Series is designed and built by Cambro Manufacturing Company. It provides a 45 minute preheat time from room temperature and the gentle, 150°-165°F (65°-74°C) heat will not cook food, but will maintain food moisture. After reaching temperature, caterers can rest assured that in unplugging the unit the temperature will be maintained for up to four hours in transportation. What's more, in opening the door for 30 seconds, the temperature of the unit will recover in three minutes.

THERMOBOX

For school caterers working in high-pressure environments where food and pre-prepared meals need to be regularly transported straight from the kitchen directly to their final destination, the Thermobox could prove a handy resource, making a notable difference to the state in which food arrives.

Whether transporting hot or cold food, the range offers a solution for a range of food transport requirements, including meals-on-wheels insulated boxes, front-loading boxes, plated-meal boxes, electrically heated boxes, gastronorm insulated boxes and ultra light-weight boxes. Heat pads and cooling pads are available depending on the individual requirements of the end-user, meaning that food can be safely transported.

Thermobox products are made from strong and durable polypropylene and have a lifespan of eight years when used daily. The light-weight insulated box systems can be used for both hot or cold meal delivery.



Tevin Tobun of Gate Ventures



Gate Ventures loading

Typically, by mapping out the routes in this way, transportation businesses are able to reduce the number of vehicles and staff required to service a contract by up to half. The result being not only a financial saving, but with less vehicles being used, there is a significant reduction in the carbon emission and environmental impact too - something that is further supported by Gate Ventures' current project to convert all of its vehicles to LPG.

At the start of any contract, Gate Ventures maps out the sites and timings by using bespoke software. The routes are then regimentally road-tested in real time to identify potential issues. After a series of test-runs, improvements are made and a final route is agreed. This level of precision mapping is a meticulous task that we take very seriously. So much so that the company has invested heavily in a tracking monitoring system across all of its vehicles. With the ability to monitor progress and estimated arrival time of any vehicle in real time, potential issues or delays can be identified and a recovery strategy can be put in place within minutes.

"It is important that the routes run like clockwork to meet target times at each school," says Neil Robbins, operations manager for

Transport. "Even a few minutes late has the potential to significantly impact on the school day, compromising pupils' routine. Financially the implications can also be considerable - it isn't unheard of for catering contractors to be fined by local authorities for repeated lateness."

Wise investment in technology is a significant part of what allows us to maintain quality checking and monitoring on a day-to-day basis. Most recently it has added a bespoke monitoring tool to its repertoire. The unique piece of software, which is accessible to each driver through a smartphone or



PDA device, is used at collection kitchens to log the number of crates received, types of food, collection time and food temperature, which is co-signed by the kitchen manager. The same is repeated at the delivery location, ensuring

real-time tracking and reporting back to HQ. The result is a stringent monitoring system to ensure Gate Ventures' local authority and contract caterers KPIs are met and

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any issues can be resolved without delay.

It's time that the industry considered the safe, hygienic and reliable delivery of school meals in the same way that we now view the content of the plate. With taxi services, contamination is a real, potential risk, so in my view how meals arrive is equally as important as the content of the meal itself. We are committed to setting a new quality-standard across the industry that is competitive on price at the same time. 📞

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