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How to Host a Live Cooking Demo at Your Event

By Dawn Reiss

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When Kim Orlando, founder of [travelingmom.com](#), began co-hosting a tech and travel road show in cities across the United States, she quickly realized the benefits of having live cooking demonstrations at her events.

"It's a great tool that helps bring people back into an event or keeps your audience there longer if you need that," says Orlando, who co-hosts her event series with Techlicious, a tech and lifestyle website. Plus, "everybody loves a chef demo."

For example, at [InterContinental Chicago Magnificent Mile](#), Orlando asked the hotel's executive chef, Randy Reed, to show technology experts and mom bloggers how to make guacamole; while the chef at [Sheraton Fort Worth Downtown Hotel](#) in Texas, she had the sous chef, Anna Wyatt, show attendees how to make English toffee and then gave away grab bags to guests.

"Hosting a great event is not always about finding the perfect price point, it's about wowing your audience," Orlando says, "and what better way to do it than with a great chef?"

Follow these tips from Orlando and others to get a celebrity chef at your next event.

1. Vet the chef. Orlando recommends talking with the chef prior to the demonstration to see what his or her personality is like. If he or she is monotone and lacks enthusiasm, find someone else; if he or she is a superstar, consider getting a master of ceremonies to carry the crowd, she says.

2. Play to his or her strengths. After choosing InterContinental Chicago Magnificent Mile because of its historic location on Michigan Avenue, Orlando says she had a frank conversation with the hotel to find the chef and dish that fit both of their needs and the chef's strengths. (For example, don't ask a chef who specializes in Asian cuisine to cook something Italian.)

3. Keep demos short. If you want to hold your audience's attention span, demos shouldn't be longer than 10 to 15 minutes, says Orlando.

4. Have a backup plan. Orlando picks locations six months ahead of time, but the details of the chef demo aren't typically planned until a month before the event. "If [the hotel] books a huge banquet, the chef could be busy, so find out who is going to take over if that happens," she says.

5. Cross-promote. The chef and/or hosting location will have often have Twitter or Instagram. Send out their handle information to attendees ahead of time and promote a specific hashtag to make it easy for them to publicize your event with food pictures and live-action shots. This is bonus publicity for the host venue, and will also allow you to track how successful the demo was based on engagement levels.

Dawn Reiss is a Chicago-based journalist who has written for Travel and Leisure, USA Today and Reuters. Find her on Twitter, @dawnreiss.