

CATERER PROFILE:

Chapati Man

What better way to start off the year than an interview with one of the most innovative festival traders of the past seven years. The Chapati man has been an NCASS member since he started; working at Glastonbury in his first year, winning the best food award was just the beginning for this festival favourite.

From juggling an events business with a full time job, to Sandwich of the year and Dragon's Den, he's also got his food into the supermarkets and started a family. We caught up with Chris as he works on product and brand development and prepares for another busy year on the festival circuit.

Had you always wanted to be a caterer or did you fall into it?

I had always been on the lookout for a business idea over the years. I used to take left over curry in a chapati to work and colleagues always used to comment on how good it looked and smelt – Chapati Man all developed from this.

Why did you choose chapati's?

I'm not a qualified chef but my mother, Martha taught me how to cook quality curries from an early age, so I'm just passing on these booming delights to the masses! I was brought up eating chapatis for breakfast, lunch and dinner! [chapati's are an indian flatbread]

I overheard several people at Bestival talking on the phone saying 'I'll meet you by the chapati man' You've got an incredible looking trailer, what's the story behind it?

Me and Andrea designed the working kitchen inside and really wanted an eye catching exterior - hence the Indian Elephant design and the strong colours – my wife, Andrea (a textile designer by trade) has a great eye for colour. She along, with a Graphic Designer mate from our University days pulled the design of trailer together. We knew from the outset that we wanted to create a strong branding in terms of design, logo and identity – we soon found out that the trailer, the name of the business and overall branding really did catch the imagination of the masses!

We recommend to new traders to look at what you do as a case study of a well designed, organized and executed event catering business, were you aware of that & what advice would you give to new traders starting out?

I'm contacted quite frequently by those looking to start out in the business. I am always more than happy to help and answer any questions they may have. The way to get into any festival is to offer something different and a high quality product. Always keep your menu simple – Chapati Man has only ever had four curry fillings on our menu – festival goers want ease of choice not an endless list to



choose from! Your unit/stand should be unique and pleasing to the eye. More importantly organisers are also looking at environmental impact in terms of how you package your product and how energy efficient is your set up. Chapati Man only uses one sheet of wrapping to package our wraps at festivals!

We got into Glastonbury in our first year - we had something different and a quality looking unit, with a strong branding.

We often see you on the road with your young family, how does the chapati man lifestyle fit in with family life?

It's not easy juggling mobile catering and a three year old son but he is part of our life and has to do what we do. Chapati Man is our business and it's important he is a part of that. Me and Andrea thought that from the outset that we had to take our young son around the festivals, as we knew it would be great for his development and his interaction with others. He has done two Glastonbury's, Bestival's and Camp Bestival's – not bad for a three year old eh!

You're always smiling when we see you, what qualities do you believe make a successful event caterer?

I always had a smile on my face even before I started the business! Mobile catering is hard enough, so it's important to be positive and happy – this is what your customers want to see! Banter with our customers is key and they love us for it! The 'booming' never stops from the first day of the festival till the last. Creating a positive vibe helps you get through the long hours, adverse weather conditions and the festivals that sometimes don't go to plan.

You famously won best food at Glastonbury in your first year of trading, what was that like?

An outstanding achievement in our first year of trading – really happy considering the Glastonbury weather in 2007: endless rain and knee high mud! It really helped us believe that Chapati Man had a long term future in the mobile catering game. It also made me and Andrea think that we had a business/brand/product here,



which could really go places.

You were brave going for Glastonbury in your first year, how did you get on? Was it a baptism of fire?

It was hard – a steep learning curve but we came through it. We did not know what to expect (in terms of stock, the set up etc). We won that award, so must have been doing something right!

What are your favourite memories from your time in events, what events are the most fun to work at and why?

We love Glastonbury – we went there many times, as punters before we started Chapati Man and we love going back each year. Bestival and Camp Bestival are also great – booming, friendly crowds and great atmosphere. The whole festival scene is something we really love and being part of.

You've been a member for 7 years now, How has your NCASS membership helped you and your business?

Bob Fox was a great help in the early years, as I knew little about the mobile catering game. I used to contact him with a barrage of questions and he gave me his time and the benefit of his experience, which I appreciate to this day.

NCASS have been great each year with all the Food, Health and Safety aspects and legal requirements of the business – it really does help. It's also great to be affiliated to an organisation, which you can approach with any query/issue and they are always willing to help and point you in the right direction.

How has the industry changed over the past seven years? Is it getting more competitive out there?

The mobile catering industry has changed considerably over the past seven years. Costs are increasing each year, which is not easy. There are a lot more bespoke types of unit/caterers who have emerged. It keeps you on your toes!

There is a big drive on street and festival food at present, which is

great – let's bring it into the mainstream!

You won best sandwich at the national sandwich awards, how has that affected your business, has it opened doors for you?

Our Chicken Saag wrap won its National category at the British Sandwich Designer of Year Awards 2011 (The Sammies). It was a prestigious award to win, as I was competing against qualified chefs at the big food manufacturers. The awards are the biggest in the Sandwich industry, so all great exposure for the brand, Chapati Man.

Tell us about Dragons Den? Was it a worthwhile experience? What did you learn?

A quality experience. An achievement getting onto the show itself – had to go through numerous auditions and beat thousands of people to get on there. Although we did not get the investment it was once again all great exposure for our brand. It was tough experience – being grilled for 45 minutes by the Dragons is not easy but it's a challenge – always good to test yourself.

What are your plans for the new year? Is there anything new on the horizon for our favourite Chapati Man?

We are always looking at ways/ideas on how we can move forward – the whole nature of business is to keep moving forward and don't stand still.

As you can see from our website

www.chapatiman.co.uk/RetailPage.html

We have developed a range of Chapati Man products – not just wraps. So, fingers crossed! **Onwards, upwards and boom!**

