

The Inc. Life



Recreation A summer fave gets saucy and strategic

BBQ With a View
Why Fridays at
Oneupweb aren't
always productive



COMPANY BARBECUES HAVE probably been around in some form since Caveman CEO threw a mastodon on the fire for his hard-working hunter-gatherers. But these days they're often elaborate affairs used as a tool for recruiting, marketing, retaining and rewarding employees, and enticing new customers. The company barbecue has been elevated from a recreational afterthought to a business strategy, so here are a few examples of how your company can start firing up the grill for more than a good meal. Just keep this in mind: As Mike Mills, president of the National Barbecue Association and CEO of two restaurant chains, says, "Barbecue isn't just meat and some sauce—that's a sloppy joe."

Cooking Up a Recruiting Scheme

"We have a short summer season up here," says Lisa Wehr, CEO of Oneupweb, a search engine marketing company in Lake Leelanau, Mich. Oneupweb takes advantage of those warm days by having lunchtime grilling every other Friday. Wehr uses the barbecues and Oneupweb's setting on the shore of Suttons Bay—off Lake Michigan—as a recruiting pitch in online postings. A recent managerial hire made note of the barbecues as one of his reasons for joining the company. There's at least one drawback to the barbecues, though. "We always have too much food," says Wehr, "and I can't expect much heavy lifting will get done on Friday afternoons."

Flavoring the Marketing Strategy

The Olympic Circle Sailing Club in Berkeley, Calif., does almost no formal advertising or marketing. Instead, president Anthony Sandberg prefers spending \$50,000 every year on some 30 barbecue parties that are open to the public. The chili, clam chowder, chicken, and veggie burgers have been a part of that approach since the club's inception 26 years ago, when the "office" was a metal dockside box built next to the town dump. "I recognized early on that barbecues were an easy way to build the business," says Sandberg, who is now comfortable in his 10,000-square-foot clubhouse alongside the San Francisco Bay, where the club gives lessons on its 50 yachts. The food is grilled post-sail on the first Wednesday and third Saturday afternoon of every month. Sandberg throws big ragers—with live music and up to 500 guests—for special occasions like opening day of the sail season, Fleet Week, and the summer solstice.

Meat and Greet
OCSC workers serve visitors barbecue, microbrewed beer, and wine.



APPLE CITY BARBECUE SAUCE

By Mike Mills
CEO, Memphis Championship BBQ, Las Vegas

- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 cup seasoned rice vinegar
- 1 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup apple juice (or cider)
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 cup soy sauce (or Worcestershire sauce)
- 2 tsp. prepared yellow mustard
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. ground white pepper
- 1 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 cup bacon bits, ground in a spice grinder
- 1 cup peeled, cored, and grated apple
- 1 cup grated onion
- 2 tsp. grated green bell pepper

Combine the ketchup, vinegars, apple juice, brown sugar, soy sauce, mustard, garlic powder, white pepper, cayenne pepper, and bacon bits in a large saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Stir in the apple, onion, and bell pepper. Reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, 10 to 15 minutes or until it thickens slightly, stirring often. Allow the mixture to cool, then pour it into a sterilized glass bottle. Can be refrigerated for up to two weeks.



hen loves throwing a great tailgate, but the planning and preparation needed to host 300 of his company's closest friends was getting to be too much. So he and CFO Clark Kothlow did with company money what any gridiron fanatics would do. They "invested" \$20,000 in a custom-made trailer of their design, complete with barbecue pit, bar, serving counters, and a big-screen television (which is currently being retrofitted with satellite). Customers know that on game day (*all day on game day*) they can stop by for a beer, a dog, and a ticket. "I don't know if it'll ever actually pay off," says Kothlow, "but we're just out there to have some fun." Even so, the all-day Longhorn soirees have helped the company hook 'em new customers.

Feeding Company Morale

Barbecues tend to follow a standard script: volleyball, a cheeseburger, three-legged races, another cheeseburger. But they can also provide the proper laid-back, familial atmosphere for delivering positive company news. The 2004 outing of Standing Partnership, a St. Louis public relations firm, was held at the home of CEO Cathy Dunkin, who surprised all of her then 18 employees with midyear bonuses for being so far ahead of company goals. It was a reward but also a way to "demystify bonuses," says account executive Kristin Saunders. And nothing goes better with demystified money than St. Louis favorites like barbecued pork steaks and toasted ravioli. —Patrick J. Sauer

FROM TOP: COURTESY OCSC; LEW ROBERTSON/FOODPICTURE ARTS

Serving New Customers

For TicketCity.com, tailgating at University of Texas home games is protocol. CEO Randy Cohen and many of his 23 employees are alumni, the company is based in Austin, and college football is one of TicketCity.com's strongest sellers. Co-