

---

# DFMi: 30 years strong

By **Rachel Debling** on August, 7 2018 | Food & Beverage



The DFMi team with Graham Felton, center

Think back; way back. Thirty years back, to be precise.

What do you remember?

Perhaps you were in college, eagerly awaiting the moment you could throw your mortarboard triumphantly in the air. Perhaps you were a few years into your chosen career, or the first of many careers to come. Perhaps, to put it proverbially, you weren't even a glint in your parents' eyes.

Likewise, around that same time, [DFMi](#), a specialty sales and marketing company for the travel and transportation market, was just beginning its own personal and professional journey.

Back in 1988, DFMi was an eager young startup with a dream: to become one of the premier sales

and marketing companies in the onboard services industry. It was born of a friendship between founders Wolfgang Diehl and Graham Felton (the “DF” in “DFMi”) when the two recognized the value in their collective inflight management experience – Diehl as the Managing Director for Onboard Services at Eastern Airlines and Felton with his work on the airline business side of General Foods and Oscar Mayer – and they opened D&F Marketing, a business that (pardon the pun) catered to the airline food and passenger experience. The duo soon found success, leaning on Felton’s sales experience and Diehl’s breadth of knowledge gained as a European Executive Chef.

Over the years, the team expanded – worldwide, DFMi employs operational staff in their Tucker, Georgia headquarters office, and their sales and marketing team in Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas and Hamburg – but many of the faces among their ranks have remained the same as in their early years.

“I think we all stayed through good and bad times because of the leadership and appreciation for loyalty and being a team member [instilled in us] by Graham,” recalls Jody Jones, Vice President of Operations, who has been with the company since 1991. She added that Felton’s philosophy – God first, family second and business third – was what pushed the team to greatness while keeping them balanced, both personally and professionally. “We were all told, ‘We want to be successful and have fun doing it but keep [your] priorities in place,’” she notes.

That’s not to say there hasn’t been trouble along the way. Nearly 20 years ago, in 2001, DFMi was experiencing a 25% growth rate. Then, like most other companies in the airline and travel industry, things took a turn for the worse in the wake of 9/11, forcing them to downsize just to stay afloat.

For Felton, it was a professional setback that hit him and others at DFMi hard, but the tight-knit team banded together and stuck it out. “We learned to diversify and be flexible; to search for creative solutions that would meet the ever-changing world of the airlines,” he recalls. “All that we have experienced in the past 17 years has made us better and stronger. We are both a team and family. It’s been quite a ride!”

After 30 years in business, a celebration is in order. The company has been commemorating the occasion in a big way, welcoming VIP Customers to a special morning cafe and happy hour at the [World Travel Catering and Onboard Services Expo](#) in Hamburg this past April and paying homage to their roots with advertising designed in the bright, futuristic style of the late 1980s. They plan to continue their celebration at this year’s [IFSA Expo](#) with an '80s-themed pavilion featuring an interactive space that will showcase their key supplier partners and host giveaways for VIP customers who have both been a huge part of their success.

And with the industry expected to grow in passenger numbers by 4.8% compounded annually, according to Felton, the future is looking bright – new aircraft, galleys, products, packaging and programs will continue to drive the need for an enhanced passenger experience.

“Thirty years ago, there were 30 airlines in the industry,” he remembers. “As they consolidated, DFMi had to adjust and expand our products and services to meet the needs and requirement of our ever-changing industry.” But while that may be a scary thought for some, Felton recognizes resting on one’s laurels is no way to get ahead.

“What I love most about this industry is the opportunity to meet new people and work with companies from all over the world,” he says. “The heart of the company will always be to serve our customers, supplier partners and each other with integrity and honesty. At the end of the day, that’s what matters most.”



Image copyright DFMi