

The ACA Corner: November insights from io



THE ACA CORNER

The ACA Corner presented in partnership with Official Media Partner PAX International is a column dedicated to voicing expertise directly from ACA members. ACA represents more than 65 percent of the worldwide airline catering market. ACA invites all members to share their views in future editions of the ACA Corner by contacting Mercedes Dieguez.

Consultant's perspective: Arne Brieze, Inflight Catering Analyst, io

Building Upwards: Making Smart Capacity Decisions for the Next Decades

As inflight catering operations continue to grow, many facilities are facing a common challenge: demand is increasing, available land is limited and expanding outward is often no longer an option. In these situations, building upward can appear to be the obvious answer.

However, height alone does not create capacity. In fact, vertical facilities can amplify existing operational constraints if processes, material flows and capacities are not carefully designed before additional floors are introduced.

A recent project experience on planning a multi-level inflight catering concept illustrates this challenge. The objective was to accommodate approximately 70,000 meals per day within a constrained site footprint while maintaining efficient, uninterrupted operations across six levels. The key question was not how many floors could be added, but which activities would genuinely benefit from being placed vertically.

The resulting solution was highly selective. High-density pallet storage, central bin storage and selected operational buffers were moved upwards, benefitting from compact, vertical storage. At the same time, critical operational flows such as hot production to chilling, time-sensitive food movements and tray assembly to dispatch remained as direct as possible. The project team deliberately avoided transferring operational risk to lifts, buffers or recovery processes.

The analysis also challenged several initial assumptions. Rather than maximizing vertical transport, the original concept was redesigned to reduce lift dependency and better match transport capacity to actual process requirements. Buffer areas were retained for operational value, while building height in selected areas was reduced after capacity and lifecycle assessments showed it was not required.

This highlights an important principle for future inflight catering facilities: height should be used strategically, not universally. Vertical space creates value when it improves storage density, releases premium production space or supports operational flexibility. It creates risk when it becomes part of a critical production path.

For operators planning facilities that must remain competitive for decades to come, the objective should therefore be clear: store high, connect carefully and keep critical flows direct.

These principles, decision criteria and other real-world catering examples will be explored in greater detail during the upcoming webinar ["Smart Moves in Inflight Catering"](#), presented by io on November

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