Meeting platters vs individual snacks: which option works best for your office event?

Choosing the right food for workplace gatherings

When planning an office event, deciding what to serve can feel surprisingly complex. The choice often comes down to two approaches: ordering meeting platters that everyone shares, or providing individual snacks that each person can pick up as they wish. Both have their merits, and the right option depends on the nature of the event, the people attending, and the atmosphere you want to create. This article compares the two approaches and offers practical guidance on when each one suits best.

Understanding the basics of meeting platters

Meeting platters are large boards or trays of food designed for sharing. They typically contain a variety of items arranged together, such as fresh fruit slices, vegetable crudités with dip, cheese and crackers, or finger sandwiches. For office settings, a common choice is a fruit platter or a mixed platter that combines fruit, vegetables, and healthy snacks. The idea is that people help themselves, grazing over the course of a meeting or break.

Platters work well when you want to encourage conversation and a relaxed, communal feel. They also simplify logistics: one order can feed several people without needing individual packaging or portion control. However, they do require some forethought about serving utensils, plates, and napkins. And because everyone touches the same food, hygiene considerations matter, especially in a post-pandemic workplace.

The case for individual snacks

Individual snacks are pre-portioned items that each person can take and eat without sharing. Examples include wrapped fruit bars, small bags of nuts or dried fruit, single-serve pots of yogurt or hummus with vegetable sticks, and whole fruits like apples or bananas. For office events, these can be arranged on a table or handed out as people arrive.

The main advantage of individual snacks is convenience and hygiene. There is no need for serving utensils, and people can eat at their own pace without waiting for a communal platter to be passed around. This makes them ideal for short breaks, drop-in events, or meetings where attendees come and go at different times. Individual snacks also make it easier to accommodate dietary restrictions, since each person can choose what suits them without affecting others.

Comparing the two approaches for different events

To decide which option fits your event, consider the following factors:

Event duration and format

For a quick 15-minute coffee break or a stand-up huddle, individual snacks are usually the better choice. People can grab a piece of fruit or a snack bar and return to their desks without fuss. For a longer meeting, such as a two-hour strategy session or a half-day workshop, a shared platter offers more variety and keeps energy levels steady throughout. The platter can be replenished or refreshed at a natural break point.

Number of attendees

With a small group of up to ten people, a single large platter often works well. Everyone can see what is available and help themselves. For larger groups, individual snacks can be more practical because they reduce waiting times and eliminate the need for multiple platters and serving stations. That said, a combination of both can work: a couple of platters for the main meeting table plus a basket of individual snacks for latecomers or those who prefer something quick.

Dietary needs and preferences

Individual snacks shine when you have a group with varied dietary requirements. You can offer a mix of options labelled clearly, such as gluten-free crackers, nut-free bars, vegan fruit pots, and dairy-free yogurts. With a shared platter, it is harder to guarantee that every item is suitable for everyone, and cross-contamination can be a concern. If dietary information is important for your group, individual portions give each person control.

Formality of the event

Client hospitality events or formal board meetings often call for a more polished presentation. A well-arranged meeting platter with seasonal fruit and elegant accompaniments can create a professional impression. For internal team meetings or casual brainstorming sessions, individual snacks feel less formal and can help keep the atmosphere relaxed.

Practical considerations for office kitchens

Your office kitchen facilities also play a role. If you have limited fridge space, no access to hot water, or few serving dishes, individual snacks that require no preparation are the simplest choice. Platters, by contrast, need to be kept cool until serving and may require a clean surface for display. Think about what your kitchen can handle on the day.

Another practical point is waste. With individual snacks, you can buy exactly the number needed, and any leftovers can be stored easily for another day. Platters often produce more food than a group can eat, and leftover cut fruit or opened dips may not keep well. If minimising waste is a priority, individual snacks give you more control.

When to combine both approaches

Many successful office events use a hybrid model. A central fruit platter or vegetable platter serves as the visual centrepiece and encourages people to gather, while a selection of individual snacks caters to different tastes and dietary needs. This approach gives you the best of both worlds: the communal feel of shared refreshments for workplace events and the convenience of grab-and-go options for those who prefer them.

For example, you might order a large seasonal fruit platter for a team meeting and also provide small bags of mixed nuts and dried fruit for people to take back to their desks. Or, for a client visit, arrange a platter of fresh vegetable sticks with dip alongside individually wrapped oat bars and whole fruit. The key is to think about the flow of the event and what will make your guests feel comfortable and well-catered for.

Making the final decision

There is no single right answer. The best choice depends on your event goals, the number of people, and the atmosphere you want to create. If your priority is convenience, hygiene, and accommodating dietary needs, individual snacks are the safer bet. If you want to foster conversation, create a shared experience, and present something visually appealing, a meeting platter may be the way to go.

Whichever route you choose, the most important thing is to plan ahead. Check dietary information for your group, confirm break times so food arrives when people are ready to eat, and think about serving sizes. A little forethought ensures that everyone can enjoy the shared refreshments for workplace events without stress or last-minute scrambling.

Ultimately, the best office catering is the one that makes your colleagues and visitors feel valued and well looked after. Whether that means a beautiful platter of fresh fruit or a thoughtful selection of individual snacks, the effort you put into planning will be appreciated.