



Gusto Catering Company

GOOGLE'S GUSTO FOR FOOD

In 2003 former marketing and sales software professional Dominic Ellis took a huge leap. With a successful career in the technology field, he decided to toss everything aside to follow a greater passion: Food.

Dominic Ellis has fond memories of his youth in London, England. Every summer his parents packed up the kids for a camping holiday in France. "The motivation to camp wasn't to see the countryside," explains Dominic. "It was to keep things on the cheap. By saving on accommodations, we could spend more money eating glorious French food." Dominic's early exposure to fine gourmand created an insatiable passion for food that has yet to abate.

"Although I loved food I never considered cooking for a career. Instead, I went to business school in England, and when I finished I came to Canada. Upon arrival, I began a career in the technology industry. I loved and did well at it. But in my spare time I did what I loved even more, cooking. There came a point when I felt I wanted to create something of my own in something I really loved. It was obvious to me what that would be."

Dominic left his job in 2003 for chef school. Two years later he opened his catering company, appropriately named Gusto. Explains Dominic, "Food is my passion. When founding my business, I wanted the company name to reflect that feeling. Gusto means fun and zest in English, and in Portuguese it means good appetite. I approach every meal and every event with 'gusto' in mind."

Dominic approaches his work with the client as the star of the party. Understanding what they want to achieve and figuring out the

style of service that suits their goals sets the foundation. From there, he works on creative menus. Ethics and responsible sourcing of food are important elements to his business. Whenever possible, he sources from local farmers and establishments in the surrounding area.

Most of Dominic's business has come via word of mouth, and business has been growing at an incredible pace. After one expansion, Dominic is now turning his attention to establishing business systems and processes. Explains Dominic, "As Gusto continues to grow, I want to ensure it runs like clockwork. Analyzing how we are doing and how we can improve on things means I have to be able to track and measure."

Dominic's enthusiasm for food extends into the community. He is actively involved with Conestoga College's chef program and part of Waterloo Region Food Security Systems Committee. "I like to support and stay connected to the college. I speak to the Food & Beverage classes and we hire Conestoga co-op students." Last year Dominic also took part in the region's 100 Mile Diet and the local Taste Local, Taste Fresh initiative.

Next up? "Someday I'd like to open a shop, but that's a little way down the road." With Dominic's obvious zest for the world of food, it's likely the road to his next adventure will be a short one.

How did you start cooking for Google?

I got a phone call from Google, California. They wanted to come and have a sample of the food I prepare. They came. They ate. We talked. Shortly after that I was asked if I would like to prepare their café meals

How do you decide what to serve?

I work with my team to put a menu plan together each week. It's truly a collective job and usually takes about a day to get it just right. Once we have the menu ready, we send it to Google for review

Are there any special diet considerations for menus?

All our meals are health coded: Green, Red, Amber. As much as possible we work to ensure our menu is seasonal, local and healthy. We often put in some theme days to keep it interesting.

And?

It has been amazing. We have a bi-weekly meeting with the food staff in California and are continually challenged to come up with creative, imaginative food. The people at Google are wonderful and truly seem to appreciate our efforts. The experience has been hugely rewarding, not just for me, but for all of my staff.