

The Cake Delivery Survival Kit

A Complete System for Safe,
Professional Cake Transport

Why This Guide Exists

After 15+ years in the cake business, I can tell you with certainty, delivery is more stressful than making the cake.

You can spend days perfecting a design, getting every detail right, achieving flawless finish and then delivery day arrives and suddenly you're responsible for getting that cake safely to its destination.

Delivery isn't an afterthought. It's a core business skill.

And it starts way before you load the car.

Delivery Thinking Starts at Design Stage:

When a client shows you their dream cake, you need to be thinking:

- Can this be delivered stacked, or does it need to go in separate tiers?
- Does the decoration mean it has to be fully assembled before transport?
- Can decorations be applied at the venue instead?
- Does this design increase delivery risk significantly?
- Will my vehicle accommodate this cake (height, depth, boot space)?
- Does my boot have a lip that makes lifting difficult?
- Is the boot floor stable and level, or does it have a ledge?
- What does this delivery method mean for my pricing?

These questions affect:

Your quote

Your timeline

Your stress levels

Your profit

You can guide clients toward designs that are practical to deliver without compromising on impact. But if they're set on something complex, you need to price accordingly and plan meticulously.

The Reality of Delivery:

Most cake makers only deliver high value cakes tiered cakes, wedding cakes, celebration cakes where the stakes are high and accidents aren't an option.

These aren't cakes you want problems with.

That's why your structure, your preparation, and your systems need to be 100% before you even think about loading the car.

This guide exists to give you:

- A repeatable system that works every time
- Professional standards that protect your business
- The confidence to charge appropriately
- Peace of mind that you've done everything within your control

Because delivery success doesn't come from luck. It comes from preparation, structure, and systems.

Part 1: Before You Even Think About Delivery

Get the Structure Right First

Delivery problems start in the kitchen, not the car.

Non Negotiable Structural Requirements:

For ALL Tiered Cakes:

Dowels in every tier (except the top)

Dowels cut to exact height (level with cake surface, not protruding)

Minimum 4 dowels per tier (6+ for larger tiers)

Dowels positioned in a circle, evenly spaced

Center of each tier supported

For Stacked Tiered Cakes:

Central dowel through all tiers (sharpened tip, hammered through from top)

Ganache or royal icing between tiers (creates grip, prevents sliding)

Each tier on its own cake board

Bottom tier on sturdy drum (12mm minimum thickness)

All boards/drums sized correctly (same size as cake, not larger)

For Buttercream Cakes:

- Room stable buttercream (American buttercream works well for this)
- Crumb coat (I use ganache) fully set before final coat
- Sharp edges and clean finish (reduces risk of damage showing)
- If delivering stacked, structurally sound construction is essential (many professionals don't deliver stacked buttercream cakes due to risk)

For Fondant Cakes:

- Fondant applied to ganached cake (provides stability)
- Fondant fully dry before boxing (12 hours minimum for best results)
- No wet areas, especially around base

The Truth About Structure:

If your cake isn't stable in your kitchen, it won't survive the car. If dowels shift when you press gently on tiers, add more dowels. If the cake wobbles on its board, fix it before boxing. Most delivery disasters happen because the cake wasn't ready to travel.

Part 2: The Pre-Departure Checklist

- Structural check — Press gently on all tiers. Nothing should move, sink, or feel unstable.
- Temperature assessment — Buttercream cakes can be delivered at room temperature if using American buttercream (this avoids condensation issues from temperature changes). If you do chill cakes, allow acclimatization time before loading to prevent sweating.
- Box assessment — Open and close the box. Is there 1-2cm clearance around the cake? Can you see the cake moving inside when you tilt the box slightly? If yes, add support or change boxes.
- Decoration security — Gently tilt the box. If anything moves, wobbles, or shifts — secure it now.
- Protection for delicate items:
 - Sugar flowers: Wrap stems/delicate areas with tissue paper to prevent contact between pieces
 - Sugar flowers: flowers: Wrap in cling film (tight to cake) to prevent movement
 - Any protruding decorations: Pack with tissue, cotton wool, or packaging beads/nuggets between elements
 - Secure packaging with cling film if needed to minimize movement

- Vehicle prep — Non slip mat positioned. Surface level checked (use your phone's level app if needed). Climate control considered.
- Venue contact made — Hotel, venue, or wedding planner contacted in advance to confirm:
 - Delivery time window
 - Setup location and access
 - Any timing restrictions (ceremony/reception changeover, other deliveries)
 - Contact person on the day

If you're running late at this point, you're already at risk.
Build buffer time into every delivery.

Rush = mistakes.

Part 3: The Core Delivery Kit

What Goes In Every Delivery (No Exceptions)

Keep this kit in a clearly labeled container that lives in your vehicle.

Repair & Touch-Up Tools:

- Palette knife (two sizes matter)
- Offset spatula (small, for precise work)
- Sharp knife (for trimming, cutting, emergency fixes)
- Scissors (for ribbon, packaging, decorations)
- Small paintbrush (for dusting, removing crumbs)
- Fondant smoother (useful for all cake types)
- Pliers (small, for wire work on florals)
- Posy picks (spares for fresh or sugar flowers)
- Floral tape (for repairs or adjustments)

Cleaning & Hygiene:

- Paper towel (at least 6 sheets)
- Cotton buds (minimum 10)
- Wet wipes (for hands, surfaces, emergency cleans)
- Disposable gloves (2 pairs minimum)
- Hand sanitizer

Documentation & Client Materials:

- Customer's phone number (written down, not just saved in phone)
- Venue address AND contact number
- Venue contact person name
- Delivery instructions from client
- Photo of completed cake before boxing
- Business cards
- Cake care instruction sheets (printed)

For Wedding Cakes/Formal Events — Essential Extras:

- Envelope with venue information pack (see Part 9)
- Cutting guide (printed, showing portion sizes and cutting pattern)
- Allergen information sheet
- Cake flavor details
- Contact details for venue staff
- Spare cake box (for leftover cake or requested keepsakes)

Why you need photos: Insurance claims, client disputes, and your own records. Take multiple angles. Every single time.

Part 4: Buttercream Delivery Additions

Know Your Buttercream Type

Different buttercreams behave differently:

American Buttercream:

- Room stable (no chilling required)
- Can be delivered at room temperature even in warm weather
- Actually performs BETTER at room temperature (chilling and rewarming causes condensation and softening issues)
- Less prone to temperature shock problems

Swiss/Italian/French Buttercream:

- More temperature sensitive
- May require chilling in hot weather
- More prone to softening
- Plan delivery timing around temperature

Know which buttercream you're using and plan accordingly

Additional Items for Buttercream Cakes:

- Matching buttercream (50–100g in sealed container)
Must be the EXACT shade. Make it at the same time as the cake.
- Pre filled piping bag — Same tip used on original cake.
Ready to use, no prep needed.
- Small offset spatula — For blending repairs invisibly.
- Cake scraper — For emergency re-smoothing.

Buttercream Transport Notes:

For American Buttercream:

- Leave at room temperature
- Avoid temperature fluctuations
- Box when cake is at stable room temperature (crusting)
- Don't overthink it — it's designed to be stable

For European-Style Buttercreams (if you use them):

- May need light chilling in very hot weather (25°C+)
- Allow acclimatization time before unboxing
- Watch for condensation if moving from cold to warm

The Biggest Buttercream Mistake:

Chilling American buttercream unnecessarily, then moving it to a warm environment. The temperature change causes condensation, sweating, and can actually make the buttercream softer than it would be at stable room temperature.

Important Note on Stacked Buttercream Cakes: Many professional cake makers (myself included) don't deliver stacked buttercream cakes due to movement risk. The softer texture means more potential for shifting during transport.

If you do deliver stacked buttercream cakes:

- Structure is EVERYTHING (proper doweling, central dowel, secure construction)
- Consider whether the risk is worth it
- Charge appropriately for that risk
- Have backup plans for repairs
- Always use a ganache as crumb coat (higher ratios can be used, or second coats)
- Some venues might accommodate an early delivery and keep it in fridge until just before reception.

Part 5: Fondant Delivery Additions

Fondant Problems Are Different Problems

Additional Items for Fondant Cakes:

- Cornflour/icing sugar (small shaker or container) — For removing finger marks
- Fondant smoother — Two if possible (one for each hand when working on tiers)
- Spare fondant (neutral colour plus colour of cake) — 50g minimum, wrapped tightly
- Edible glue (small bottle or piping bag)
- Modelling tools (the ones you used for details on the original cake)
- Spare decorations (especially fragile toppers, bows, or anything hand-modeled)
- Soft brush (for removing dust, not applying moisture)

Fondant's Worst Enemy:

Moisture

You cannot wipe condensation off fondant. You cannot fix it with a damp cloth. You can only wait for it to air dry.

I never refrigerate a fondant cake

Preventing Condensation:

1. Fondant cakes should be at room temperature before boxing
2. Allow 12 hours for fondant to fully dry before delivery
3. Avoid temperature shocks (cold to warm, warm to cold)
4. Keep boxes closed during temperature transitions

If Condensation Happens:

- Do NOT touch the fondant
- Open the box slightly for airflow
- Position away from direct air conditioning or heaters
- Wait (yes, this means arriving earlier than planned)
- Brief the client if significant: "The surface will dry completely within 30 minutes"

Finger Marks on Fondant:

- Dust with cornflour using a soft brush
- Rub VERY gently in circular motions
- Brush excess away
- If deep: apply matching fondant, smooth, and blend edges with cornflour

Part 6: Tiered & Structured Cakes

This Is Where Delivery Gets Serious
For Any Cake Over Two Tiers:

Essential Structural Items:

- Spare dowels (same diameter as originals — bring 6)
- Hammer or mallet (rubber-headed preferred)
- Central dowel (if your design uses one — bring a spare)
- Spirit level (download app or bring physical one)
- Non-slip mats/wedges (for leveling uneven surfaces)
- Cake lifter or board gripper (for moving heavy tiers safely)

The Setup Sequence at Venue:

Assess the surface — Use spirit level. If not level, stop. Negotiate placement or create level surface.

Unbox carefully — Open away from cake first. Lift box UP, not cake out.

Unwrap protection — Remove cling film, tissue, cotton wool from decorations carefully.

Check structure before final touches — Press gently on all tiers. Everything must be stable.

Position final decorations — Florals, toppers, and loose items LAST.

Step back and check — View from all angles. Take final photo.

Brief the venue — "Please don't move this. If you need to, call me first." (Give them your number.)

Hand over documentation — Envelope with cutting guide, allergen info, care instructions, your contact details.

What to Do If a Tier Moves During Transport:

Don't panic. Most shifts are fixable.

1. Stop the vehicle safely
2. Assess before opening the box (listen for movement)
3. Open carefully (top first, slowly)
4. Photograph the damage (for records)
5. If the tier has shifted sideways: Remove it, level the base, check dowels, ensure central dowel is secure, replace tier
6. If dowels have moved: Remove tier, check all dowel positions are correct, re insert if needed, replace tier
7. If buttercream/ganache is damaged: Use your repair kit
8. If fondant is damaged: Assess if client needs to know vs. if you can repair invisibly

Part 7: Weather-Specific Protocols

Because Irish Weather Is Never On Your Side

Hot Weather (20°C+)

For American Buttercream:

- Room temperature delivery is fine
- Avoid direct sunlight on boxes during transport
- Keep vehicle cool but not cold
- Brief venue on keeping cake away from windows/heaters

For Fondant:

- Room temperature delivery
- Watch for any softening of modeling chocolate or delicate sugar work
- Ensure venue isn't excessively hot

At Venue:

- Assess room temperature immediately
- If venue is hot, set up quickly and position cake appropriately
- Brief client/venue on cake placement

Cold Weather (Under 10°C)

The Problem: Not the cold itself — it's the temperature change.

Cold cake → Warm venue = Condensation

Before Loading:

- All cakes at room temperature
- Don't transport cold cakes into warm venues

During Transport:

- Don't blast heating directly at cake
- Keep boxes closed

At Venue:

- Set up away from heaters/radiators
- Allow fondant cakes time to settle if there's any temperature difference
- Expect potential condensation on fondant (it will air-dry)

Rain

Loading/Unloading Protection:

- Large umbrella (or two)
- Waterproof cover for boxes
- Plastic sheeting for vehicle floor
- Towels for drying hands before touching cake

Venue Considerations:

- Wet floors are slippery floors
- Muddy venues = dirty boxes (bring wipes)
- Protect boxes during entire journey from car to setup location

Wind

High Risk Items:

- Tall toppers
- Fresh flowers with long stems
- Sugar flowers on wires
- Anything lightweight and vertical

Solutions:

- Secure all toppers with dowels or wires
- Transport tall/delicate items separately, attach at venue
- Use posy picks for fresh flowers, insert at venue
- Have spares for anything fragile

All cakes should be boxed and completely covered for deliveries.

Part 8: When Things Go Wrong

Real Problems, Real Solutions

Scenario 1: Buttercream Smudge/Damage

What Happened: Edge caught on box, scraper mark, finger print

Fix:

1. Assess size of damage
2. If small: Use offset spatula with matching buttercream, blend edges, smooth with scraper
3. If large: Remove damaged section entirely, re-pipe or re-smooth
4. Touch up with piping if original design allows

Scenario 2: Fondant Tear

What Happened: Movement during transport, box damage, handling mistake

Fix:

1. Cut a small piece of matching fondant
2. Apply edible glue to tear
3. Press fondant piece over tear
4. Smooth edges with fondant smoother
5. Dust with cornflour to blend
6. If texture is visible, consider adding decoration over repair

Scenario 3: Decoration Falls Off

What Happened: Insufficient support, movement, packaging shift

Fix:

1. Check if decoration is intact
2. If broken: use spare (this is why you bring spares)
3. If intact: reattach with royal icing, edible glue, or buttercream (depending on weight)
4. Support if needed (cocktail stick, dowel, wire in posy pick)
5. Don't rush — let adhesive set

Scenario 4: Tier Has Shifted

What Happened: Movement during transport, insufficient doweling

Fix:

1. Remove top tier(s) carefully
2. Check dowels are vertical, secure, and correctly positioned
3. Check central dowel hasn't moved
4. Check base tier is level
5. If dowels have moved: reposition or replace
6. Replace tier slowly, ensuring it's centered
7. Check stability before adding next tier
8. Repair any buttercream/fondant damage

Scenario 5: Sugar Flower Breakage

What Happened: Movement despite packaging, pressure during transport

Fix:

1. Assess damage (clean break vs. crush)
2. If clean break: edible glue and support with wire/tape
3. If crushed: use spare
4. If minor petal damage: position damaged side toward back
5. Add extra flowers if needed to disguise repairs

Scenario 6: Condensation on Fondant

What Happened: Temperature change (any fondant cake moving between temperatures)

Fix:

- There is no quick fix
- DO NOT TOUCH the fondant
- Open box slightly for airflow
- Position away from heat sources
- Wait for it to air-dry
- Brief venue contact if timing is tight

Part 9: Wedding Cake & Formal Event Deliveries

Professional Standards for High Stakes Deliveries

Before Delivery Day:

Contact the Venue (3/4 Days Before):

- Introduce yourself as the cake maker
- Confirm delivery time window
- Ask about:
 - Setup location and table availability
 - Access (loading bay, lifts, stairs)
 - Any timing restrictions
 - Other deliveries happening at same time
 - Ceremony/reception room changeover timing (if applicable)
- Get name and number of contact person for day of delivery

Why This Matters: Some venues have multiple events. You may need to deliver earlier or later than planned.

Ceremony and reception in the same room means a changeover period, sometimes you can ONLY set up during this window.

The Venue Information Pack:

Prepare an envelope containing:

1. Cutting Guide

- Clear diagram showing cutting pattern
- Portion sizes per tier
- Total portions
- Instructions for removing dowels and boards between tiers

2. Cake Information Sheet

- Flavors per tier
- Allergen information (clearly marked)
- Any inedible elements:
 - Central dowel (MUST BE REMOVED)
 - Dowels in tiers (MUST BE REMOVED)
 - Cake boards between tiers
 - Wires in sugar flowers
 - Posy picks if used
 - Any non-edible decorations

3. Storage & Care Instructions

- Temperature guidance (if cake needs refrigeration — though most don't)
- "Do not move cake once positioned"
- Timeframe for best presentation (if relevant)

4. Special Client Requests

- If top tier is to be saved for the couple
- If sugar flowers/toppers are to be kept as keepsakes
- Any other specific instructions from the couple

5. Your Contact Details

- Business name
- Phone number
- "Contact me immediately if there are any concerns"

Label envelope clearly: "IMPORTANT: Cake Information for [Venue Name] — [Couple Names] — [Event Date]"

Hand this to:

- Wedding coordinator/planner (if present)
- Venue manager
- Front of house manager
- Anyone responsible for the event

Get their name. Confirm they'll pass it to catering staff.

3. The Spare Cake Box:

Always bring a spare box (clean, appropriate size) for:

- Leftover cake (venues appreciate this — makes cleanup easier)
- Top tier if couple wants to keep it
- Sugar flowers or decorations if requested

This small gesture is professional and thoughtful.

At Setup:

Your Responsibilities:

1. Deliver the cake safely
2. Set up on appropriate surface
3. Position final decorations
4. Ensure stability
5. Provide all documentation
6. Brief venue staff
7. Take final photos

You Are NOT Responsible For: (unless previously arranged with client)

- Event styling or venue decoration
- Other suppliers' timelines
- Moving furniture or equipment
- Staying for the entire event
- Cutting the cake (unless contracted and charged for this service)

What to Say at Handover:

"The cake is set up and stable. Here's all the information your catering team will need, cutting guide, allergens, and details on inedible parts that need to be removed before serving. My contact number is on here if any questions come up. Please don't move the cake once it's positioned. If you absolutely need to move it, call me first to advise."

Then leave.

You've done your job. Staying longer doesn't add value and takes you away from other work.

Timing Restrictions & Extra Charges:

Charge More For:

- Deliveries requiring you to wait for venue access (changeover periods, restricted time windows)
- Multiple deliveries on the same day requiring tight scheduling
- Deliveries during unsociable hours (early morning, late evening)
- Venues with difficult access (stairs, no lift, long distance from parking)
- Setups requiring extra time due to venue restrictions

Part 10: Professional Boundaries & Liability

Protect Your Business, Not Just Your Cake

Include in Your Booking Terms:

Delivery Terms:

- Delivery fee structure (mileage-based, time-based, or flat rate)
- What delivery includes (transport, setup, decoration placement, documentation)
- What happens if venue surface is unsuitable
- Weather contingencies
- Timing restrictions and associated charges
- Client responsibilities (venue access, surface provision, notification of special requirements)

Example Delivery Clause:

"Delivery includes transport and professional setup on a flat, stable surface provided by the venue. Setup includes positioning the cake, placing final decorations, and providing all necessary documentation (cutting guide, allergen information, care instructions). If the venue surface is unsuitable (uneven, unstable, or unsafe), the client will be contacted immediately and alternative arrangements discussed. [Your Business Name] is not responsible for damage occurring after professional handover and documentation to venue staff."

For Collection Orders:

Provide Clear Written Guidance:

"Transport your cake safely:

- Transport in vehicle boot/floor, never on a lap
- Use non slip mat on flat surface
- Keep air conditioning moderate (not freezing)
- Drive carefully, no sudden stops or sharp turns
- Do not open the box during transport
- Avoid direct sunlight on the box
- If the journey is over 30 minutes, plan your route to minimize time"

Have clients acknowledge receipt of this guidance.

Simple email confirmation: "I have received and understand the cake transport guidance provided" protects you if something goes wrong during their transport.

Document Everything:

For Every Delivery, Record:

- Date and time of delivery
- Client name and event type
- Venue name and address
- Contact person at venue (name and role)
- Photos: before boxing, in vehicle, final setup
- Any venue issues noted (uneven surface, temperature concerns, access difficulties)
- Time of handover
- Who received the documentation pack

Why: Insurance claims, client disputes, continuous improvement of your systems.

Keep a simple delivery log. Digital or physical. Date, client, venue, notes.

You'll thank yourself when you need it.

Part II: What to Charge for Delivery

Stop Undervaluing This Service

Delivery is not a favor.

It's a skilled service requiring:

- Time (prep, travel, setup, return journey)
- Fuel and vehicle maintenance
- Insurance (business use coverage)
- Specialist equipment (non-slip mats, tools, packaging)
- Expertise (years of experience doing this safely)
- Risk (your professional reputation)
- Documentation and professional standards

Minimum Delivery Fee Structure:

Base Rate: €25–35 (covers first 10km, standard setup)

Additional Distance: €1–3 per km after first 10km

Tiered/Structured Cakes: Add €20–30 (higher risk, more setup time, structural expertise)

Complex Setup: Add €25–40 (detailed decoration placement, multiple elements, extended setup time)

Wedding Cakes/Formal Events: Add €15–25 (professional documentation, venue liaison, higher stakes, always delays)

Timing Restrictions: Add €20–50 (limited delivery windows, changeover periods, waiting time)

Unsociable Hours: Add €20–50 (early morning, late evening, weekends, bank holidays)

Difficult Access: Add €15–30 (stairs, no parking, long distance from vehicle to setup location)

Don't apologize for these numbers.

You're providing professional service that requires skill, experience, and carries significant responsibility.

If someone questions your delivery fee, they don't understand the value you're providing.

Your delivery fee should cover:

- Your time (door-to-door, including prep and return)
- Fuel and vehicle costs
- Insurance premium for business use
- Equipment investment and maintenance
- Your expertise and professional standards
- The risk you're carrying

And still leave you with profit.

Delivery confidence comes from systems, not luck.
Every cake maker has had a delivery problem.

The professionals are the ones who:

- Built systems to prevent repeated mistakes
- Invested in proper equipment
- Charge appropriately for their expertise
- Document everything
- Maintain professional boundaries
- Keep learning and adapting

This guide is your system. Use it. Print it. Keep it in your delivery kit. Reference it before every delivery until these practices become automatic. Adapt it to your specific business, your cakes, your market. Add to it as you gain experience. And remember: You're not being overcautious by following these guidelines. You're being professional. There's a massive difference.

When someone asks why you charge for delivery, show them this guide.

When a venue questions your setup requirements, show them your professional standards.

Your knowledge, systems, and professionalism have value. Charge for them.