

The Cake Order Decision Guide

How to Choose the Right Cakes for Your Time, Skills & Business

Why This Guide Exists

You're staring at an enquiry that feels wrong.

The budget's tight, the design's ambitious, and you've got three other cakes that week. But they seem really nice. And you could use the money. And maybe it'll lead to more work...

Stop

That's how resentment starts. That's how you end up working harder for less, wondering why you're exhausted and your business still isn't where you want it.

Not every enquiry deserves a yes.

And saying no doesn't mean you're ungrateful, lazy, or "*not cut out for business.*"

It means you're making intentional decisions instead of emotional ones.

This guide is designed to help you:

- Assess cake orders quickly and objectively
- Protect your time, energy, and confidence
- Avoid underpricing "because it'll be good exposure"
- Choose cakes that actually move your business forward

This isn't about doing less work.

It's about doing the right work, at the right stage of your business.

You can use this guide whether you:

- Take occasional paid orders
- Run a part-time cake business
- Or are booked months in advance

Come back to it every time an enquiry lands in your inbox.

Step 1: The Non Negotiable Filter

Is This Even a Possibility?

Before thinking about design, price, or people pleasing, pause.

Ask yourself:

- Am I genuinely available on this date?
(Including prep time, delivery, recovery time, not just the event day)
- Does this cake fall within the type of work I offer?
(Not "could I technically make it" but "is this something I want to be known for")
- Is the lead time realistic for this cake?
(Not "could I pull an all-nighter" but "does this timeline respect my process")
- Do I want to take this order?
(Not because you feel bad. Not because they're nice. Because it fits.)

If any answer is a no, stop here.

That is your decision.

You do not owe explanations for declining work that doesn't suit your business.

Defending your no gives them an opening to negotiate. A simple "I'm not available" or "That's not something I offer" is complete.

Step 2: The Fit Check

Skills, Time & Stress

This is where you move from emotion to clarity.

1. Skill Level Required

Tick one *honestly*:

- Well within my current skills
- A stretch, but achievable with confidence
- Outside my comfort zone

How to interpret this:

- A stretch can be strategic growth
- Panic is a red flag
- Learning on the job is only okay when the risk is low and the reward is high

If this cake fails, ask yourself:

Will I lose sleep or just learn something?

Ask yourself: If this goes wrong, will it cost me a night's sleep, a refund, or a reputation hit? That's your real risk assessment.

▶ Red flag: You're Googling techniques the day before the cake is due.

2. Time Required

Consider total time, not just decorating.

- Fits comfortably into my schedule
- Will require tight planning and focus
- Will dominate my week

Ask yourself:

- Will this cake push other orders into late nights?
- Will I resent this cake halfway through?
- Does the price reflect the time it will actually take?

Protip: Take your honest time estimate and add 30%. Cakes always take longer than you think, especially when they matter.

A cake that dominates your week must do at least two of these three things:

- Pay significantly above your usual rate
- Build your portfolio in a direction you want to grow
- Come from a client/connection that opens doors

One out of three isn't enough.

3. Stress Factor

Be honest, stress is information.

- Low stress / familiar process
- Some pressure, but manageable
- Likely to cause anxiety or overwhelm

Stress has a cost:

- It affects confidence
- It affects creativity
- It affects how long you stay in business

If the stress level is high, the price or scope must compensate or the answer is no.

Common Traps That Override Good Judgment

Watch for these, they'll talk you into orders you should decline:

- "They're a friend of a friend"
- "It's for a good cause"
- "They promised to tag me"
- "Everyone starts somewhere"

None of these are business reasons to say yes.

Step 3: Value Alignment

This Is Where Most Cake Makers Get Stuck

Ask yourself:

- Does the budget match the complexity?
- Does this cake reflect the level of work I want more of?
- Would I be proud to share this cake publicly?

If the answer is no, the solution is not:

- "I'll just do it anyway"
- "It might lead to something else"
- "I don't want to disappoint them"

The solution is:

- Adjusting the design
- Adjusting the price
- Or declining the order

Doing work that doesn't align trains people how to treat your business.

And here's what nobody tells you: taking underpriced work doesn't just affect that one cake. It affects your confidence pricing the next one. It creates a psychological ceiling you'll struggle to break through.

Step 4: Choose Your Decision Path

Use the outcome below, no overthinking required.

✓ Path A: Accept as Quoted

Choose this when:

- The cake fits your current skills
- The time required feels reasonable
- The price reflects the work involved

➡ Proceed with confidence.

No justification. No second guessing.

✓ Path B: Adjust the Design or Scope

Choose this when:

- The idea is strong but too complex for the budget
- The client is open to guidance

Example response:

"To stay within your budget, I'd recommend simplifying the design while keeping a strong overall impact."

Offer a specific alternative:

"Instead of hand piping 50 roses, we could do 10 roses with smooth buttercream tiers, still beautiful, impactful, and within budget."

Give them something to say yes to, not just something taken away.

This isn't downgrading.

It's professional direction.

✓ Path C: Re-Quote

Choose this when:

- The client's expectations exceed the original scope
- The skill, time, or stress level has increased

Example response:

"Based on the level of detail involved, the revised price for this design would be €XXX."

Clear. Calm. No apology.

✓ Path D: Decline the Order

Choose this when:

- The cake doesn't suit your offering
- The stress outweighs the reward
- It pulls you away from the work you want more of

Example response:

"Thank you so much for thinking of me, I don't think I'm the right fit for this particular design, but I hope you find someone perfect for it."

Note: You don't need to explain why, suggest alternatives, or offer to find them someone else. A gracious no is enough. Saying no is not rejection. It's direction.

Step 5: Reflection (Optional, But Powerful)

After deciding, ask:

- Did I make this decision from clarity or fear?
- Would I make the same choice again next month?
- What does this order tell me about where I want my business to go?
- What would need to change for this to be an easy yes next time?

(More lead time? Different design? Higher budget? Different client communication?)

Patterns will emerge:

- The cakes you resent
- The cakes you love
- The cakes that actually grow your confidence

That's how confident pricing and confident decision making is built.

Keep a simple log, even just notes in your phone.

"Declined: 3 tier marble cake, €200 budget, 5 days notice."

In six months, you'll see exactly what you need to filter out earlier.

Final Reminder

You don't need to take every cake.

You don't need to please every enquiry.

You don't need to grow by saying yes to the wrong things.

A sustainable cake business is built on intentional choices, not exhaustion.

Print this guide.

Keep it near your laptop. Read it before replying to enquiries, not after you've already said yes and started to panic.

This isn't about being difficult.
It's about being deliberate.