

Interview with AMI Group: The special meals solution specialists

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* [April 2024 Special Meals issue](#), on [page 10](#).



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Melissa used to dread flying. More specifically, Melissa used to dread explaining that her vegan diet is a deeply personal necessity, not just a preference. But today, she can not wait to fly. The idea of boarding her overnight flight from Dallas to London excites her because she is flying with the only airline she ever flies with anymore: yours. She loves your airline because you know her and respect her. She never has to ask if her meal is vegan. All she must do is board her flight, watch a movie or two, and enjoy a meal she loves; the kind made with her needs in mind, the kind she trusts because she trusts her airline, your airline.

Food is an unmistakable opportunity to foster loyalty and brand love with airline passengers. In this scenario, Melissa is likely to never fly another airline again because she knows she will never have to ₁

second-guess ingredients or explain her needs to you. Your airline celebrates her in a way that she is excited to share. Your services are attentive, bespoke and respectful. To a passenger, experiences like these feel rare and unique.

For [American Airlines](#), these experiences feel turnkey, thanks to its partnership with [AMI Group](#) and the Special Meals Kit Program.

Special Meals describe any custom-tailored meal that fulfills a dietary, medical, religious or lifestyle need.



George Horvat, Vice President - Innovative Solutions, AMI Group

“Where previously passengers requiring special meals would have to ‘make do,’ the AMI Group Special Meals Kit Program makes sure these passengers are fed and satisfied while alleviating pain points for airlines and caterers alike,” explains George Horvat, Vice President - Innovative Solutions at AMI Group.

For most airlines, special meals are a challenge to manage. Airlines are unable to forecast special meal needs and caterers often find themselves strained with the responsibility of managing inconsistent inventories, ensuring compliance and mitigating risks of supply shortages or waste.

Mishaps with special meals lead to disappointment making it challenging to satisfy loyal passengers and missed opportunities to develop new loyalty.

Horvat points to the most recent CDC ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov)) data from 2018 regarding special meals among U.S. citizens. The CDC reports that 17.4 percent of U.S. citizens, about one in six, adhered to a special diet between 2017 to 2018, compared to about 14 percent from 2007 to 2008.

As the need for special meals within air travel increases, the industry has struggled with new ways of managing the program, resulting in waste and unnecessary expenses. All of this distracts suppliers, caterers and airlines from their main objectives, forcing them to do their best with what they have, Horvat explains.

AMI Group and AA partner on special meals

As American Airlines contemplated a wide expansion of its special meals services in 2017, the carrier reached out to trusted partner AMI Group to develop a one-stop, fix-all solution that could be easily executed across its wide ranging U.S. catering station network. Countless hours of data collection, analytics and joint testing led to the birth of the industry's leading centrally produced, all-inclusive Special Meals Kit Program.

AMI Group orchestrates a seamless supply chain across various suppliers and logistics partners to ensure all products arrive on time and in full. This meticulous planning helps to ensure a well-run process, which minimizes waste, ensures consistency, guarantees quality and reduces costs. Tailored to address the gaps in existing processes, the Special Meals Kit Program instills confidence and assurance that permeates from the caterer, through the airline, to the passenger.



AMI Group coordinates development, management and production for the Special Meals Kit Program

“Ensuring a consistent special meal program for customers can be a complex task. Variability in supply chains and labor shortages makes this even more nuanced. Knowing that we can rely on the AMI Group Special Meal kits to deliver this important service to our passengers is key and allows us to have confidence in the growing needs of passengers’ dietary requirements. We also value how it makes it easier for our catering partners to manage this service offering for us,” says Sheri Whiteley, Senior Manager of Product Design and Service, American Airlines.

Precise supply chain management is the “magic” behind AMI Group’s Special Meals kit solution. When a customer orders a special meal during booking, the airline electronically communicates that request to the appropriate catering station, who readies and boards the meal for the flight crew to deliver to the intended passenger.

“Caterers receive specially curated kits, prepped for seamless integration with fresh produce that they simply need to load into carts and deliver to the aircraft. Everything they need is in one place,” says Horvat.

The burdens of ingredient logistics and compliance are lifted, allowing the caterers and airlines to focus on prep, distribution and delighting its passengers. Through rigorous planning, analytics and channel optimization, AMI Group removes supply chain hiccups and reduces the airline’s costs associated with the program.



AMI Group’s Special Meals Kits include detailed preparatory instructions, which ensure compliance with all airlines-specific requirements, reduce wasted products and increase productivity

AMI Group coordinates development, management and production with an eye toward simplifying production. The kits include detailed preparatory instructions, which ensure compliance with all airlines-specific requirements, reduce wasted products and increase productivity. All kit components

are verified by a registered dietitian to ensure accuracy and dietary compliance. All the airline needs to do is allow AMI Group to manage the Special Meals Kit Program and deliver exactly what is needed exactly when it is needed.

“AMI Group strives to be top of mind when our clients reach a roadblock. We are problem solvers, not just product brokers, creating custom solutions rather than one-size-fits-most patches. Despite our international reach, AMI Group consists of only about 70 people, which comes with advantages. We are able to pivot quickly, share information easily and become an extension of our client’s company. We’re doing big things, but in an intimate way,” Horvat explains.

In an industry characterized by rapid technological advancements and shifting consumer preferences, AMI Group describes itself as agile and responsive, innovating to help its clients stay ahead of the curve. From incorporating new dietary trends into meal offerings to leveraging data to optimize supply chains, AMI Group strives to be its client’s first call when a solution is needed, even if it requires inventing something completely new. By understanding the diverse needs of its airline clients and passengers, AMI Group goes beyond the conventional boundaries of travel food services, creating solutions that drive efficiency, reduce costs and waste, and enhance the travel experience for passengers, airlines, caterers and suppliers alike.

The AMI Group Special Meals Kit Program embodies a commitment to its airline partner’s processes and satisfaction, serving as a trusted partner. AMI Group exists behind the scenes, taking delight in knowing that its day-to-day hard work helps the airlines deliver thousands of little moments: celebrating a new adventure with a champagne toast, posting a photo of a delicious dessert, providing a special meal that travellers will want to share. These small but mighty moments foster connections and create memorable experiences that endure beyond the confines of the journey. AMI Group sets a new standard in travel hospitality, ensuring every special meal is an opportunity to build brand loyalty and fortify a reputation of creativity and innovation.