

THE FOOD SUPPLIER'S GUIDE TO  
**SELLING  
ONLINE:**  
**CUSTOMER SERVICE**

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# CUSTOMER SERVICE

## *How to onboard new customers*

All that time you spent on marketing has paid off! The customers are flowing in. The hardest job might seem like getting them in the first place, but you need to have a proper method set in place when onboarding new customers to keep them long term.

The first step to great customer service is a memorable onboarding experience. You are setting the stage for what buying from you will look like in the future. The goal of onboarding new customers is to get them to believe they made the right choice purchasing from you. You already got them hooked – now it's time to convince them to stay.

*Be sure to remember these steps:*

### 1. SET EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS

You cannot create a process without having a goal. This is the first step to successful onboarding. The goal in the first one to two months of your relationship is to get the customer into a habit of ordering. You can establish the right frequency for them, and get the habit of ordering well into their minds so that it becomes clock-work.

*Then ask yourself:* What should your customers expect from the onboarding process? What steps need to be taken in order for this to be a reality? What do you need from the customers to make onboarding successful? Outlining what customers need and how to get that to them, will create a successful process.

### 2, MAP THE ONBOARDING EXPERIENCE

After setting goals and expectations, map the onboarding experience from start to finish. What is the first interaction and how does that transition to being a seasoned customer? This helps you track which stage your customers are at and what next steps need to be taken. We suggest starting with a welcome email along with a signup page – this is where customers add information such as: *name, email address, delivery address, and phone number.*

Follow this step with a list of inventory and ordering instructions. How you structure your onboarding experience is entirely up to you – however be sure to make it clear, simple and consistent.

One tip we've found helpful is to look at larger players in the industry who are experts at onboarding, and in your own way, copy what they do.

### 3, GETTING TO KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

You should be an expert on your customers. Know how often they need to reorder, their pain points, and products they would like to see in the future. Be sure to collect as much information on your customers as you can. This allows you to address these concerns before they occur. Each customer needs to have a profile on your system with this information, plus their order history.



#### 4. SEND THEM YOUR PRODUCT LIST

Send new customers a list of your inventory every week, ideally, right before they order. Let your customers know what they can buy from you. A current list of your inventory also eliminates any confusion about what's available and what's not.

**Note:** Make sure to continuously update and resend this list. Your customers might lose the original list or the list might change. Plus it's a reminder to your customers to place their orders.

#### 5. COMMUNICATION

Set this up right off the bat. Ask your customers how they prefer to be communicated with, and let them know how you like to communicate best. Perhaps you create a frequently asked questions section on your website. The more upfront you are at the beginning, the smaller chance that you will have issues in the future. Remember, this is not a single sale - it's an ongoing relationship.

#### 6. GET THE FIRST INTERACTION RIGHT

People remember bad experiences - don't let your business be one. Be organized, professional and friendly when interacting with new customers. A positive beginning will ensure a happy and profitable future. Share the philosophy of your brand and all that your brand offers. If your business uses sales representatives, be sure you have the right people that represent your brand the way you would. Unlike other industries, food is very personal. The first interaction, and every interaction, are extremely important.



# *How to keep your customers*

You've onboarded your customers, however this is where the hard work begins. Getting new customers is often the goal for many businesses, however keeping your existing customers promises continuous profit. These are our six tips that will help you ensure you're keeping that relationship strong:

## **COMMUNICATION**

This is key! Create a frequent line of communication between you and your customers, such as sending a weekly newsletter that includes specials. This will show your customers they're still important to you and informs them of all what's new!

## **INVENTORY**

Frequently send your customers an updated list of all you have in stock. This is a friendly reminder to customers of all the different products you produce and shows them anything new or in season. Showing a list of products will also encourage your repeat customers to order something else.

## **SIMPLE ORDERING PROCESS**

Making it easy for customers to order from you ensures happy and returning customers. If the first time ordering was straight forward and an enjoyable process, customers will want to stay with you. To make this process easier, consider implementing an online store, inventory management and customer database program. Here are some tips for making this process simpler:

- **Use only one method for incoming orders:** This will reduce any mixups from orders coming from all different places and will help you focus on a perfecting one process.
- **Record all incoming orders in one place:** Don't mess yourself up by having orders written down in multiple places!
- **Remind customers how to order:** Sometimes people forget! Don't hesitate to send your current customers a reminder on how to order. This influences customers to order again and where to go to do it.



## **PUT A FACE TO THE BRAND**

The food industry is personal, especially local food. People want to know who's growing their food. Posting occasional pictures of your farm and your family is super important to the customers buying. Go a step further. Shake their hand, host a "meet the farmer event", be the person they think of when they think of amazing food.

## **BE CURRENT**

Everyone loves trendy. Keep on track of trends that apply to your business and implement them where possible! For example if you source zucchini as a product, share and showcase recipes using zucchini noodles for people trying to go low carb.

## **MAKE IT WORTH IT TO BE A CUSTOMER**

Offer special deals to recurring customers:

- With the 10th purchase get an item free
- Holiday sales with free shipping
- Refer a friend and get 10% off your next purchase



# *How to increase your sales*

Now that you've got your customers and kept them, it's time to get the most out of them! Here are our ways to help you make the most of the customer base you have:

## REFERRALS

This is a big one. Word of mouth is extremely important in the food industry. Your customer base is bound to have friends that would love your products too. You should be tapping into your existing customer network to generate new leads. So how do you ensure that customers will refer you to friends on your behalf? Here are 6 steps for creating your own referral program:

### **1. SET YOUR GOALS**

Determine what you want to get out of your referral program. Are you looking to increase your customer base by a certain percentage? Maybe your goal is to have each customer refer at least one other potential customer you can go talk to. Setting your sights on a goal will help to map out your program.

### **2. CHOOSE YOUR REFERRALS**

Consumers are like goldfish, easily distracted and have short memories. Meet them halfway. Find out what platforms they frequently use and what are they looking for when ordering. What can make it the most convenient for them? If you match the needs of your customers to the services of your business, you are giving them fewer reasons not to order from you.

### **3. DEFINE THE PROGRAM**

There are couple of features to think about. First, now that you've chosen who the program is available to, consider what kind of deal would incentivize them the most.

Should the discount go towards select, higher end products, or should it apply to everything? Secondly, determine how the program will work. Ideally, the discount should only be activated once the referred friend has made their first purchase. Other aspects to consider is timing, such as when to implement the program and how long it should last.

### **4. ALERT YOUR CUSTOMERS**

Once you've created your referral program, it's time to spread the news. Emails and social media are one of the fastest ways to inform your customers of the special discount. Other strategies could be including flyers with your deliveries or adding a link to the referral program in your email signature. With any marketing plan, it's best to be persistent and consistent throughout the program's entire existence to ensure it becomes known to your customers.

### **5. TRACK THE PROGRAM**

Monitoring your program is necessary to see if it's working. You should be tracking who and when someone was referred, who referred them, and if the new referral made a purchase. Tracking these metrics can be helpful to improve the program if you plan on launching it again in the future.

### **6. SAY THANK YOU!**

At this stage in the game, it's time for some recognition. Follow up with your existing customers thanking them for their referral, and then thank your new customers for joining. Asking for customer feedback can be a nice touch, too. A little recognition goes a long way in keeping customers happy.



The end result of implementing a referral program means you'll have established credibility and trust with potential customers much faster. When you can get them to order faster, it's less time you'll spend on the research, samples, and follow-ups.

Referring a friend is a win-win for everyone. Your existing customer is rewarded for their loyalty by receiving a discounted price. Your new customer is learning about your business from the most trusted source of marketing: word of mouth. And, most importantly, your business just earned a new customer from an existing one!

## INCREASE AVERAGE ORDER VALUE (AOV)

An average order value (AOV) is the average order made by all of your current customers. To calculate your AOV, take the sum of all of your current orders and divide it by the number of orders received. To make this easier for you, you can calculate this value on an excel spreadsheet, or Local Line can do it for you.

### Example calculation:

Jenny's Bakery - **\$53**

Andrew's Grocery - **\$72**

Bob Smith - **\$57**

Andy McPherson - **\$81**

Your AOV is **\$65.75** ( $53 + 72 + 57 + 81 = 263 / 4 \text{ orders} = 65.75$ ).

It may seem intimidating to think of ways to increase your AOV. We found that these methods are effective:

### INVENTORY LISTS

Many returning customers order the same thing on a weekly basis. They know what they like and that they can get it from you. In order to encourage these customers to step out of their comfort zone, be sure to send an updated inventory list frequently to remind customers of other products you source as well. It could also be helpful to include phrases like "We know you love (product name), so you may also love (product name)." This can help push them into trying something new.

### SEASONAL RECIPES

Consider adding seasonal recipes (based on a holiday coming up or a time of year) that showcases a variety of your products. This will inspire your customers to recreate and buy all the ingredients from you. This can only be effective if you produce a variety of products.

### ORDER DISCOUNTING

This can be an impactful method for getting more from your current customers. Offer different discounting methods like orders over a certain threshold get free shipping. This gives a customer incentive to order a larger quantity to get the discount.



## PRICE INCREASING

If you increase your prices by slight increments, your AOV will automatically increase. You can play around with different values and see which works the best for your business and your customer base.

## INCREASE PRODUCT SIZING

To increase AOV, consider increasing the size of your products. For example, if you sell a weighted product, increasing this product by 1 lb per pack causes the customer to order more product from you per purchase. Due to the larger size of the product, the price of the product increases, therefore increasing the AOV.

## NOTE:

Price increasing can be intimidating, but it's the easiest way to increase your sales! If you haven't increased your pricing in over 2 years, you should consider trying it.







# *How to reduce order mixups*

Order mix-ups are missed, incorrect, or incomplete orders to customers as a result of a miscommunication between them and you. Mix-ups can result in wasted inventory, lost money and unhappy customers. Often, local food suppliers receive orders through many different means: email, phone call, text message, word of mouth; and often lack a system to be able to process orders without making any errors. Using these tips, you will be able to manage your orders, ensure customer satisfaction and reduce your order mix-ups.

## **HAVE A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM FOR ALL INCOMING ORDERS**

Say goodbye to scrap pieces of paper and a full email inbox. Reducing clutter from orders will give you a space for all incoming orders to be visible. Setting a clear protocol on how orders should be placed and where they should be placed will create a system where no orders will be lost or misunderstood. It is also essential that you have a clear system where incoming orders are recorded, otherwise, it's too easy to let something fall through the cracks.

## **DIRECT MESSAGING TO CUSTOMERS**

Ideally, you want to keep all communication from all customers on the same platform to be able to reference it in the future.



The use of the same platform also informs the customer on the best way to connect with you if they are encountering any problems. Even if the communications come in through various channels, you should have a dedicated, digital home for all customer notes and conversations. Notebooks are nice, but too easily lost or damaged (trust us, we've spilt one too many cups of coffee on our notebooks before)!

### **MANAGE YOUR DELIVERY AND PICKUP LOGISTICS**

Manage your delivery and pick up logistics by creating a clear, public schedule of when you are able to deliver products directly to the customer or to the predetermined pick up locations. This allows your customers to be aware of when they are to receive their products and reduces any possible conflict you could have when scheduling deliveries. You should also add any delivery fees, tracking information, contact information and any other items that are important about the delivery/pick up process along with your schedule.

### **AUTOMATE YOUR INVENTORY TRACKING**

It is essential to keep track of your inventory by recording what you have in stock and what you have sold. Without keeping track of what you have in your inventory, the chance of possible mix-ups increases exponentially. It is also beneficial to show your customers your inventory, so that they will not order items that are no longer in stock or no longer sold.





# *How to deal with returned orders*

## **Ways to avoid returned orders:**

### **ORGANIZATION**

The biggest key to reducing order mixups and minimizing the chance of a buyer receiving something they did not order, is to be organized. Having a centralized platform where you can see all incoming and outgoing orders, allows you to keep track of what needs to go where, when.

### **IMPLEMENT A PRE-SHIPMENT QUALITY CHECK**

The most common cause of returned orders is product quality. Product consistency is really important to customers, so if you're not checking each order as it's packed, it's possible you'll send out sub-par products that don't meet customers expectations.

### **PROVIDE DESCRIPTIONS AND PHOTOS OF YOUR PRODUCTS**

Often, customers order something thinking it will be one way, when it's actually something else. When selling online, it is important to remain transparent and provide sufficient description and photos of your products to eliminate confusion.

### **MINIMIZE QUALITY CHANGES DURING TRANSPORTATION**

Product temperature and time on the road are the two most important factors that ensure product consistency. There are strict health regulations in place so food stays safe during transport, which means poor temperature control can not only be dangerous, but aesthetically, it can lead to chemical reactions that alter the appearance or texture of a product.

## **How to manage returned orders:**

### **PROVIDE CONTACT INFORMATION**

Designate one contact person to deal with all returned orders. Delegating the position to one specific person, makes it easy for customers to know who to contact and reduces the chance of the email or message to be lost. Also, if one person is dealing with all returned orders, the methodology will be more consistent. Make sure this person loves making customers happy!!

### **EVEN IF IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, APOLOGIZE FOR THE ISSUE**

Even if it wasn't 100% your fault, let the customer know you hear their concerns and that you're going to help them. Fighting with a customer over a returned order will only lead to tension. Also, you don't want an unhappy customer posting about their negative experience on different platforms.

### **HAVE AN ACCEPTED RETURNS TIME-FRAME**

As food is different than other products people order online, in that it has an expiry date, only accept returns that are within a reasonable time frame. If a customer ordered lettuce from you a week ago and are complaining that the lettuce is expired, the complaint should not be your responsibility.

### **OFFER STORE CREDIT**

This method gives the consumer the freedom to get a new version of what they already ordered or order something else. You are putting the ball in their court, however still ensuring that sale remains in your business. If a customer is insisting for their money back, offer that. It is essential to keep the customer happy.



## **Streamline your farm's sales process.**

Local Line helps food suppliers doing direct marketing sell their products online, access new markets, and keep organized.

**Learn more at [localline.ca](http://localline.ca)**