



How do I: Present to a retail buyer?

Ready to present to a buyer but not sure how to make the most of the opportunity? This is an important meeting and one you want to use to build your business. This guide outlines the key elements you should think about and what to prepare.

It is estimated that over 65% of Scottish food and drink output is supplied to the grocery sector. This sector has become increasingly powerful and sophisticated in the last few decades. The first potential entry point for a supplier is the buyer. The buyer fulfills a crucial role. Establishing and building your business relationship with key buyers should be a major area of focus for all successful food and drink companies (for more information on this area see the '**How do I manage the customer?**' guide). Within this on-going process, each opportunity you have to present to the buyer should be viewed as a valuable business opportunity. All major food and drink distribution channels will operate on a buying structure. While the trade environment and consumer may vary between channels, many key principles apply.

BENEFITS

Presenting to the buyer provides many business benefits, including:

- Quality time dedicated to developing your respective businesses.
- The opportunity to discuss new thinking and ideas.
- Opportunity to build your sales pitch through the use of visual aids and stimulus.
- Development of business opportunities.

GETTING STARTED

Be prepared. Every occasion in front of a buyer should be considered a business development opportunity. Securing enough time for a presentation is one of the most valuable opportunities you will get, so ensure you are fully and properly prepared. The practical elements that you should consider include:

Who: will you be meeting? The detail and level of preparation will depend on who it is you are presenting to. Is it a buyer with whom you already have a good working relationship or is it a new buyer (either new to the position or new to you as this is a first presentation)? Will there be anybody else present and if so, who? Whatever your relationship, you should aim to develop a good "on paper" understanding of them before you get to the presentation e.g. their position in the company, role within the buying/decision process, their past experience, etc. Don't get too infatuated by this but do have enough knowledge to know how to best communicate with your prospective audience.

What: will you be discussing? Often you will not have been given a formal agenda – this is your chance to manage the scope of the presentation. It is often up to you to clarify the meeting objectives, develop the agenda and make sure the buyer has agreed this. After securing the appointment, follow-up by letter, or e-mail, with a proposed agenda. Allow up to a week for response. If no response is forthcoming, ring the buyer to seek agreement of the agenda. Each of these contacts is a relationship building opportunity so use them to your advantage.

Where: will the presentation take place? A simple question but, if not addressed, it could let you down. You don't want to arrive at Head Office armed with your high-tech' presentation to find you are meeting at the buyer's desk, in the middle of a busy open office, which has no projection facilities. Tailor your presentation to the facilities you will be given. In general, comply with what the buyer offers in terms of facility (unless there is a very valid reason to ask for a change) and work efficiently within these. The way you prepare and manage a presentation will tell the buyer a lot about how you potentially do business, so you should strive to make the right impression throughout this process.

UNDERSTANDING THEIR BUSINESS

Whatever the point in your relationship (new or established), always have the customers' needs front of mind. In general, the better you understand their requirements and ambitions, the better you will service their business. There are some simple ways of keeping in touch with customer information and, if you are serious about distributing your products through the multiples, these should be built into your everyday business procedures. These include:

Sales audits: regular visits to stores or outlets to check out and gather key information. This includes pricing, promotion, competitive activity and merchandising. Look around the outlet to see what is happening in other sectors or areas that could have an impact on your business (now, or in the long-term). These audits should be carried out by members of the sales and management team. Their regularity really depends on the nature of the outlet.

Desk research: is an easy and quick way to keep in touch with what your customers are doing. This will include published data e.g. if you are serious about supplying the grocery trade, you should subscribe to key trade magazines such as *The Grocer*. Also, look out for any references in the consumer and financial press. The internet is also a goldmine of commercial information if you look and are creative about its application. All of the key players have a website. Many include company strategy statements and key achievements including their annual results. This type of information is valuable context for you to build your trading relationship.

Internal data: if you are a current supplier then you will probably be privy to useful account data. This data is supplied by the retailer to allow you to more efficiently service their account. Use this data to the full to make sure you are also building your sales potential within that account.

To effectively understand your customer, be clear about who in your company is responsible for gathering and circulating account intelligence. The access to such data could come from many points of the company including distribution, sales, planning and technical. Someone in the sales team should be nominated to gather this information to ensure you are using all of the potential sources in your business and that valuable information is not overlooked.

WHAT TO PRESENT

The objectives of the meeting should already have been agreed when finalising the agenda. Develop your presentation based on these objectives. As a guiding principle, remember buyers are very busy people, so you should be aiming to make the best use of their time within your appointment slot. You can achieve this in a number of ways, including:

- Re-state the objectives at the start and clearly address them within the presentation.
- Presenting new data that the buyer may not have e.g. market share information.
- Proposing achievable ideas e.g. promotional plans.
- Where new ideas are proposed, demonstrate how you propose to manage them.
- With new products, provide samples either beforehand or in the meeting.
- Provide pricing and margin information e.g. for product changes or promotions.
- Have a review of current business performance (even if this is not formally part of the presentation you should have it with you as the buyer may ask).
- End with a proposed action plan which clearly shows timing and responsibilities.
- Include timing/responsibilities for necessary internal procedures e.g. completion of new line forms.

Start outlining your presentation at the time the appointment is made. This should allow you enough time to send any necessary information or samples in advance of the meeting. In addition, ensure you have enough copies of the presentation to leave behind (remember this might include copies for people not in the meeting).

If more than one person will be attending from your company, make sure you are all briefed about your role in the presentation. Good use of people is a tactical tool e.g. you may want to have the Account Manager presenting to show his/her direct, hands-on approach to the business and leave the Sales Director to manage ad hoc comments when his level of seniority would be used to best effect. Whatever it is, agree your approach and strategy before getting into the room with the buyer as, thereafter, it is too late. An effective team approach in the presentation suggests an effective team approach when managing your business, so make the best impression you can (but don't leave it to chance and natural chemistry – plan for it)

Before leaving for the presentation, do your final "kerbside check" i.e. have you got all the presentations, necessary samples and equipment and are you (and any other team members that may be accompanying you) clear about what you are hoping to achieve in the presentation. Cover a top-line "dos and don'ts" as a final preparation.

FOLLOW-UP

No matter how successful the presentation has gone, the work is not over, it has just moved onto a different stage.

Prompt follow-up is critical to maintaining momentum and developing the business relationship. Firstly, circulate minutes within one, maximum two, days of the presentation. This should include a summary of discussions, agreed actions, timings and responsibilities. Circulate these to all those who need to know or have an action point to follow-up. Thereafter, ensure these minutes become a live and actionable document that is managed by the Account Manager. In the minutes, include all potential opportunities that your company is interested in pursuing (except where these were wholly dismissed or not discussed). As the author of the minutes, use this tool to keep business opportunities alive. In addition, you should aim to arrange a follow-up meeting at the end of your presentation. Ensure you secure this in the buyer's diary promptly, ideally in the presentation itself. Also be mindful of the potential value of developing the retail relationship across other functions of your/their business e.g. new product development.

HOW DO I? SUMMARY

1. Start the preparation by addressing Who, What and Where?
2. Understand your customer and build internal procedures to give you good, up-to-date customer information.
3. Develop and agree the presentation objectives and agenda.
4. Develop the presentation in plenty of time to ensure all necessary information and samples are sent in advance.
5. Agree your strategy for the presentation and ensure all those attending are clear about their role.
6. Always do your "kerbside check" before leaving for the meeting.
7. Remember that follow-up is a key part of the business development process.

OTHER USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Visit www.scotlandfoodanddrink.org

- INSIGHTS: you can access data on geographic markets, consumers, retailers, foodservice operators, specific product sectors and more
- There are many other How Do I? Guides which can help you grow your business

The Institute of Grocery Distributors: www.igd.com

Members of Scotland Food & Drink can access valuable IGD information as part of their member benefits package.

www.scotlandfoodanddrink.org - The information service tailored to the food and drink industry.
Contact the Scotland Food & Drink Helpline on **0845 601 3752**.