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## Tips to engage Independent retailers

- 1 Set criteria** to identify your ideal retailers based on location, current listings, customer demographics, marketing activity, store footprint and footfall. Defining criteria at the outset allows you to target retailers from a confident standpoint, understanding that your brand is a match to their needs. Be considerate of competitors in close proximity and select the ideal retailer to target first.
- 2 Visit stores** when selecting retail targets. Ongoing regular check-ins give valuable insight into how your brand is performing in the retail environment, opportunities to promote your products and demonstrates your commitment to the retailer.
- 3 Get busy on social media**, as the more traction you establish prior to your approach builds your credibility and exposure. Like and make positive and relevant comments on their posts to raise their awareness of your activity and begin engagement. Continue to do this throughout the relationship.
- 4 Ensure supply capacity** is aligned with the scale of the retailer before your approach as once your brand is listed on their shelves you become part of their plans, profits and cash flow. One of the biggest frustrations for retailers is a store full of customers and empty shelves. Always have a contingency capacity to draw on if required.
- 5 Consider regional distributors** as they will already have the logistics and relationships established. This can be a faster and easier route to growth but be mindful that using a distributor will impact your margins (typically between 10% and 20%).
- 6 Join relevant groups** as they are populated by your contemporaries who are often willing to guide you through challenges that they have encountered themselves. For example: The Food Hub on Facebook is a welcoming, respectful space populated by people who genuinely want to help and the Bread and Jam Fest is an inspiring experience offering useful connections. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/thefoodhubforum> and <https://www.breadandjamfest.com>
- 7 Create theatre:** A great way to kick-start a retailer relationship is to offer an in-store tasting/demonstration session. Create a branded, professional stand with a small footprint allowing you to launch on a busy day, distribute free samples and chat with customers. Know your product and be prepared to listen and learn as this one to one contact is invaluable and is an opportunity to encourage consumers to follow you on social media to create a more personal connection with them.
- 8 Explore relevant exhibitions and trade shows:** Visit in the first year and exhibit at the relevant shows in year 2. There are many to choose from, some sector specific. For example the Fine Food Show and the BBC Good Food Show offers opportunities to meet potential retailers and check out the competition.
- 9 Enter awards** to build credibility and exposure and the inclusion of an award on packaging is a great boost.
- 10 Listen to the retailers** and always respond to their feedback as they know their customers, what they want, and what could be done to improve sales. A key discussion is the rate of sales; the income you can mutually generate from their valuable shelf space.

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