



How to work with a Food Broker or a Sales and Marketing Agency

Jeffrey Landsman
SPECIALTY FOOD SALES

Unless you have a large salesforce of your own, at some point you will need to hire a food broker. Working with a broker, successfully, is a skill, a talent and an ability that is important for your sales success. The better you work with a broker, the better your sales results will be. A lot of the success that a manufacturer will have working with the broker depends on their management's knowledge of working with brokers. Understanding what a broker doesn't do is imperative; as the saying goes, don't judge a man until you walk a mile in his moccasins! It is walking in those moccasins that will make you a better broker manager. Here are some basic rules or suggestions to having a successful broker relationship:

1. Visit the broker with your products. Introduce yourself and the products to the broker just as you would present your products to a purchasing customer. All things being equal, people do a better job when they know and, hopefully, like the person.
2. Try to make at least one Sales call with a broker when visiting them. No one sells your product better than you sell it. Teach your brokers the best way to sell your product!
3. Specifically ask the broker how you can help them. Find out about their management style. The more you know about them, the better you can work with them.
4. Provide the broker with sufficient collateral material including, a presentation, a brochure; double sided. A price list and any type of comparison to other products. Give them the tools they need to sell your items!
5. Understand or ask what the slotting requirements are in the market or tell the broker what your approach is to slotting. The more that is known upfront the better your relationship with the broker and with her marketplace! No one needs or wants surprises. You need to know about the market and the broker wants to know about what you can do.

6. Have all of your promotions worked out, depending upon when and how you like to promote do you promote for the best seasons, specials, specific holidays, times of year, etc.? When and why do you promote when you do? Have your act together but also be somewhat flexible.
7. Don't play games with your broker. They are on your team. Tell them how you feel about the requirements of the marketplace. Communication is paramount. Open communication and clarity of purpose will be mutually beneficial.
8. Familiarize your broker with your company requirements such as deliveries, information requests, who to speak with in your organization etc. Knowledge is power. As stated before, the broker is part of your team. The better that is understood by all parties, the better for all.
9. This may sound strange but show that you really care. Tell them you really want to participate in their success. Teamwork is an overused term unless it is a real philosophy! Be open and inclusive and make sure the broker feels at home with you and the company. The more you care, the more the broker will care.
10. Communicate with the broker, ongoing. Tell them how much you regard their services. Bring them on to your side. Compliment them and give them encouragement. Anticipate their needs to be successful. The better they do, the better for your company.
11. Pay them on time. Money Motivates!! You want us to sell, pay me on time. None of this is very profound. Some is obvious or common sense and you know what they say about common sense!

It has been determined over time that it is more efficient and economical to hire a professional sales organization rather than to employ your own company sales team. Food brokers have been a “thing” for over 100 years! A sales team costs money to maintain and manage. It takes time and practice to have a great sales team. The person or people you hire do not necessarily have the “tools” that a broker has. In the next article I’ll discuss how to select a brokerage firm.