

Develop a two-way partnership with your suppliers

Reynolds sandwich bar and café has benefited hugely from working closely with its suppliers, including running trials and offering its store as a sampling facility

Opening your sandwich shop when you have no bread or milk is a huge problem, so ensuring suppliers are on your side is vital. On a daily basis we all rely on them to deliver the correct products at the right time.

Not being a large chain (yet!) we can't simply depend on our huge spend to prioritise us as a customer. The only way we have been able to ensure a dependable supplier base has been to hand-pick the suppliers most suitable for our business needs and develop a long-term relationship with them.

Regular contact is obviously important, but it has to be in an appropriate way. There is no point in contacting someone just to say hello when they are likely to be busy or have other priorities. However, if you have a genuine reason for contacting a favoured supplier then make the effort to do it in a professional and friendly manner. Even if you have a problem with a supplier don't be tempted to be rude or aggressive as this will only make you a low priority next time you need an emergency delivery.

We have always tried to attend the industry trade shows to source new products and suppliers and find this a very useful way of meeting suppliers face to face. Email is impersonal; the phone is better but you can't beat meeting people face-to-face to improve your business relationship.

When we were first looking to open our shop we visited Sally Stainton at Leathams, who spent time with us going through their range and helping us spot food and recipe trends. Over the past year we have met Sally many times and Leathams have

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become a key supplier. Knowing the person at the end of the phone is hugely important.

Having already built a good relationship with our cake supplier, Honeyrose Organic Bakery, we contacted the sales director to see if there was any more we could do to help increase our sales of their lovely organic cakes. After a short conversation with the sales director we arranged for one of their representatives to come to our shop and spend time sampling their products with our customers. This had two main benefits, our customers got to try some of our cakes and we spent a day with our supplier. This has meant an improved relationship with Honeyrose and a better understanding of their business. Just as importantly, we saw an increase in sales of Honeyrose products.

We also use Flour Power City Bakery who are famous for their artisan bread sold at farmer's markets such as London's Borough Market. As their products are hand made they do not have the same processed, machine made consistency that some consumers mistake for quality. We occasionally have to explain this to customers. So to get a better understanding of the bakery we



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arranged a visit. Aside from being a very enjoyable experience, we learnt about their processes and more about the products we were selling. Having spent a day with the bakers and management team we now have a much better understanding of each other's business. We hope to be working with Flour Power on a long-term basis.

Aside from our core food offering of sandwiches, salads and wraps, we are able to offer excellent alternatives to our customers with bought in products. Tanpopo deliver Sushi and other Japanese food products to retailers all over London. We offer a range of their sushi and sashimi boxes, as well as tempura rice and edamame beans. This allows us to offer high quality products that we do not have the skill or time to produce ourselves.

As the range of Sushi and Sashimi boxes were selling well we wanted to expand our range of Japanese food to include other products. We discussed the possibility of new product development with Peter Bigmore at Tanpopo. Over the course of a couple of months Peter developed a range of Japanese salads and bento boxes (pictured). We then had a member of Tanpopo's team spend a lunchtime in store with us to trial the new products and get direct feedback from the consumer. This meant that we were confident of taking on new products and Tanpopo were

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were confident that the products were commercially viable.

This has helped build a mutually beneficial relationship where Tanpopo can trial products in our store and our customers feel like they get special treatment. These products have fitted very well into our range as they are tasty and healthy and we are able to offer them at a reasonable price but still at a good margin.

One of the great things about being a foodie and owning your own food company is that there are often 'left overs.' When I find myself drawn repeatedly to the same product I know I am onto a winner. Tanpopos' fried tofu on tempura rice box has been my first choice since we started stocking it. It's almost a shame it sells out so regularly!

By working closely with our suppliers and spending time and effort building relationships we now have a supplier base that supports us. However, we also work hard at being a good customer. This may sound odd but a good business relationship is a two-way partnership. We work with our suppliers and support them by running trials and offering our store as a sampling facility. Our company also believes that everyone must get paid, in full and on time. We believe that if you don't pay in full and on time you can't complain. Look after your suppliers and it's only fair to expect them to look after you