

Ten topics retailer decision makers like and dislike the most

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The supermarket industry is a “grind-it-out” business where no two days are alike and competition is mega-fierce. Only the sharpest operators manage to survive within this arena. A mere 1% on a dollar is the average net bottom line profit among supermarket retailers and it takes an enormous effort just to reach that number in today’s business world. Many operators are grateful just to break even.

Perhaps this is why so many executives are very cautious when dealing with suppliers. The number one priority among supermarket executives today more than anything else is to meet their budgeted profit requirements. The pressure is on at every food chain corporate office. As one major supermarket produce executive told me, “I’ve been instructed to concentrate on achieving our produce gross profit more than any other area of work. The most important priority of all is that we get that gross profit.”

Well, I’ve been there before and had to walk in those same shoes. There are many times when operating a supermarket becomes a stressful challenge to keep the company in the black, especially during economic struggles like we are now experiencing. The costs get tighter and tighter with no relief in sight. On top of it, the competition does not allow any retail increases, which makes it more difficult in reaching that budgeted gross profit number.

Many sales representatives are finding it tougher to keep current customers with the programs they present to produce buyers and top executive decision makers. Why? It’s probably because they just plain don’t know the difference in what their customers like and dislike.

Having once been in the position of that produce decision maker, here are ten topics that guys like me like and dislike on the retail end of the business:

Ten “Likes”

1. **Stocking Allowances** – fees to stock new items in the warehouse and stores

2. **Advertising Allowances** – deals on items for promotions
3. **High Quality Product** – expect the best, nothing less
4. **Lowest Costs** – will negotiate for rock bottom prices every time
5. **Prompt Delivery Service** – want product extra fast and on time
6. **Hot Periodic Deals** – expects lower costs on in-and-out quick deals
7. **Special Brand Labels** – want specific brand labels and nothing else
8. **Specific Produce Sizes** – usually has established company standards
9. **Product Equal To Or Exceeding Samples** – expects what was shown
10. **Product Safety** – food safety and security issues are a priority

Ten “Dislikes”

1. **Receiving Wrong Labels** – will not accept fill-in brands unknowingly
2. **Lesser Amounts Than Were Ordered** – surprise cut-backs will backfire
3. **Higher Costs Than Agreed Upon** – probably the worst scenario
4. **Poor Product Condition On Arrival** – better not happen too often
5. **Poor Quality, Shape, Color, Taste** – automatic reject
6. **Late Deliveries** – creates store complaints on out-of-stocks
7. **Truck Chasing** – could cause temper tantrums
8. **Broken Promises** – will lose trust in supplier
9. **Poor Product Information** – creates a communication barrier
10. **Embarrassment By Failed Product For Ad** – retailers’ worst nightmare

There you have it. Those are the “likes” and “dislikes” of the person responsible for the entire produce operation in a supermarket chain. If you’re a salesperson, I hope you will take these ten likes and dislikes serious before making your next call on the decision maker. Prior to stepping into his or her office, make sure you stay clear of making any promises you can’t keep. Produce executives have superior memories.

It’s really simple. The produce decision makers want only what they want, not what you may think they want. Now, go figure it all out and roll up your sleeves.