



**Communication.
Research. Trust.**



Members Helping Members™

Best Practices for Approaching New Retail Customers

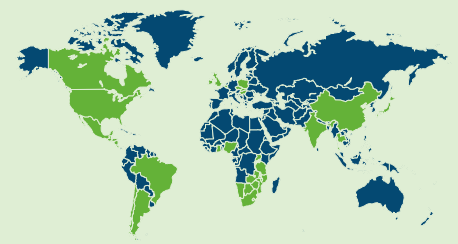
The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the produce supply chain – from increased retail demand to diminished foodservice demand. Suppliers – from grower-shippers to wholesalers and distributors – are looking for new customers. PMA asked a variety of retail produce buyers for their advice on approaching new contacts. Of course every customer is different, but this guidance may help you as you look for new accounts.

Communication

- The first 10 seconds in an email or call will determine whether the prospect goes any further.
- If you are getting communication in any specific way (mail, call or virtual meetings) don't push to change the communication channel, leave it open and agree on next steps. Different generations prefer different communication methods.
- Be concise, don't flood them with everything you have.
- Try to understand the customer's process for follow-up.

Retail Contributors:

- 2 Multinational retailers
- 3 National retailers
- 2 Regional retailers
- 1 Local retailer
- 1 Service wholesaler



PMA retail contacts operate stores in 37 countries:

- Argentina
- Botswana
- Brazil
- Canada
- Chile
- Costa Rica
- Czech Republic
- El Salvador
- Ghana
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Hungary
- India
- Ireland
- Japan
- Lesotho
- Malawi
- Mauritius
- Mexico
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Nicaragua
- Nigeria
- People's Republic of China
- Poland
- Slovak Republic
- South Africa
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Thailand
- The Netherlands
- Uganda
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

Best Practices for Approaching New Retail Customers

- Recognize the current crisis and show empathy for the health and safety of their employees and families.
- Don't tell them what you think they want to hear—most buyers see right through that.
- Don't offer negative comments about your competitors.
- Don't tease in an effort to get a response for more information.
- Don't come across as desperate.
- Don't call or email repeatedly. Give them some time to respond before you send a reminder. If sending emails, set a read receipt to ensure your email was delivered before sending another email.

Your information

- Provide complete and accurate information—products, specs, geographic parameters, contact information, etc.
- Let them know what differentiates your company and your product.
- Importance of fill rate, what it means and how to measure it.
- Have all your information for insurance, W9 (government documents), credit needs, as well as any specific requirements from the customer conveniently available so the set-up process is streamlined.
- Explain the key risks to your business and how you manage/mitigate the risk.
- Be clear on sizing and grades, especially if you are offering products originally destined for foodservice. Think about offering a spec sheet with the pertinent information.
- Explain the production window and markets served.
- Let the customer know whether the items are retail-ready, like wrapped lettuce, celery, banded product etc. Though some may, not all retailers have the labor to prep product for their displays, so do check.
- Briefly explain additional services (merchandising, promotion, etc.) In the case of branded goods, explain how you market the brand, to support sales for the retailer.

Do your homework on the prospective customer

- Understand who at the company is the best contact for you and your products.
- Understand how they operate: Central or regional buying? Geographic reach of the stores? Chain-owned distribution center(s)? Third-party supplier, DSD, combination?
- What is their business model: hi-low or everyday low pricing (EDLP)?
- Understand that normal SOPs may be different during COVID-19, so gain clarity if possible.
- Don't assume every company is the same.
- Don't blanket every contact with a mass offer.
- Understand the demographics they cater to and make sure it aligns with your offering.
- Understand the channel. Foodservice is different from retail. And within retail, supermarkets are different from c-stores, which are different from dollar stores, which are different from club stores.

Build trust

- Don't overpromise. Service can be more important than cost. If you can't fill an order you took, you may be sidelined. Don't talk about capabilities you don't have.
- Follow up and follow through on your commitments.
- Be clear on your capacity. For many retailers, especially larger ones, year-round supply is important. That said, retailers can have shorts to fill, perhaps you can fill their gaps.
- Show how you assure quality and availability to build confidence.
- Don't surprise them – be sure everything is clear up front: specs, costs, fees, etc.
- List the certifications, including food safety certifications/information owned by the suppliers/ credentials.
- Explain your traceability procedures and implementation through the supply chain.
- Longer-term relationships: The more you know the retailer's practices the better chance you have in developing a relationship. This is important longer term, so that you may have a sustainable relationship post COVID-19.

→ As you look to build your customer base, you can use PMA resources, including the [membership directory](#), [iTradeMarketplace](#), [COVID-19 retail updates](#), and [retail insights articles](#).