



*Make it easy.
Encourage.
Delight.
Understand.*

Online Retail Contributors



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Experts' Advice: Getting Produce and Floral into the Online Cart

During the pandemic, consumers have increasingly turned to online shopping, and experts predict that trend will outlast the crisis period of the pandemic at some level. Over the last month, 40 million new households are ordering online and this is a tremendous opportunity for retailers to create a narrative and an engaging experience to drive produce and floral purchases online. A bad experience on the first order, a shopper may forgive and try again, but repeated bad experiences and the shopper will discontinue altogether.

We gathered comments from marketers on weekly PMA Retail Roundtables and consulted some of our member marketing agency experts for their thoughts on enhancing online produce and floral retail marketing.

What can retailers do now to enhance the produce and floral shopping experience and ensure those items make it into the online cart?

Make it easy.

Include handling/storage/usage ideas. Consider collaborating with the production side.

- Consumers are still looking for hardware produce due to less-frequent shopping trips. Help them learn how they can buy fresh, seasonal produce and provide tips on how to reduce waste – commodity groups and produce marketers can help with resources and information.
- Make it 'thinkless': Suggest meal-planning ideas to take away the 'thinking' at a time when energies are being spent on other pressing matters. Make it enjoyable so it is less of a chore and more of an experience.
- Don't view this trend as a competition by working against it. Partner within your supply chain to facilitate it. Give the customers what they want and give it to them how they want it.
- Remove intimidation and the barrier to entry at a time consumers need comfort and solace. Make them feel as comfortable with online shopping as possible – especially those who have been forced by 'stay at home' orders to shop online. Your site should be user-friendly, simple and easy to navigate – so simple a 5-year-old could do it.
- Leverage your online platform functionalities to drive produce sales.
- Consumers want help. Start with a welcoming, intuitive sales portal, then support it with robust content: photos, videos, product use ideas, and blog and social media posts.
- Those who develop strategies and tactics around the process so that it is user-friendly, fun, and expands the palates of the shoppers (educates) will win big.
- Maintain customer service. This is still your shopper visiting your stores, but virtually instead of in person. Keep up the personal service they expect from your brand. Have a face (produce manager, shopper assistant) on your platform that helps humanize the experience. Personalize the experience with a shopper proxy and interaction to help the process and build a cart full of ideas along with the items.
- Provide options if the customer's desired items are out of stock.
- Ensure photos/descriptions are beautiful (high-resolution) and accurate to entice shoppers.

Tell the story of the product.

- Shoppers learn more every day about where their food comes from. Be part of that narrative and highlight your grower partnerships.
- Consumers want trust. Use storytelling to introduce shoppers to the many faces behind the foods they eat.
- Take advantage of all the seasonal holidays and drive-by parties prompted by social distancing during the COVID-19 crisis. Remind shoppers about seasonal flowers, balloons, and fresh items to complement those celebrations.
- Enhance consumer confidence/trust about buying produce and floral online.
- Consumers want confidence. Buying apples, for example, is more complex than buying Tide. Partner with your suppliers to source the information needed to give shoppers clarity.
- Let your shopper see your produce department and seasonal items virtually (not just product shots). Include real stills or video of your produce and floral departments so shoppers can still experience the color. Even though they are shopping online, you still want to share that story, especially for new items coming into peak season.

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- Educate your shopping staff or third-party shoppers: To keep the customer service level high for online purchases, educate staff on the differences between broccolini and broccoli or cilantro and parsley – errors with delivery items can be a deterrent to future sales. And educate them on item selection: The majority of consumers are not going to want to receive an item that expires tomorrow. Teach staff in produce and floral on the optimum appearance and ripeness specific to the item.
- Tell the story of how flowers can add to a positive atmosphere at home.
- Indoor plants lift people's spirits and provide a healthy environment whether at home or in the office. Promote house plants or flowering plants. Merchandise them in the way you can envision them being utilized in your shoppers' homes, anywhere people have set up their home offices.
- Consider a quote of the day or week from the store-level produce managers – highlighting what's in season and how to prepare it at home. Encourage Q&A.
- Use your blog/newsletter to highlight nutritional value of featured seasonal items.

Encourage impulse buys.

- Cross-selling is key, just like you merchandise in your stores, suggest complementary products. Several retailers have great platforms that offer deals, for example \$5 Mondays.
- Use beautiful visuals with recipe ideas, storage tips and ways to freeze items in your ads or featured items. Helping the consumer extend shelf life will encourage repeat purchases.
- Feature weekly 'value' flower bouquets to entice impulse purchases.
- Feature items on the front page of the app or website.
- Give the shopper suggestions based on what has been placed in their cart.
- Incorporate time-saving or family-friendly shoppable recipes.
- Provide 'Don't Forget' reminders before checkout.

Delight, even surprise, the customer.

- Take the Harry and David approach to online merchandising. Provide an incentive centered around a healthy environment while they are working at home. For example, with stone fruit include a basket with their order so your shoppers can keep healthy snacks handy at home. While a basket is a small thing it shows a little appreciation and thoughtfulness. In the basket you could even include a coupon for X% off their next order of that fruit item. Make being healthy at home easy and fun. Your basket could be branded with your store name as well with the #JoyofFresh.
- Think about online 'sampling.' When a customer orders a particular item, offer a free 'sample' of something similar or complementary and include it in their order with handling and usage ideas.

Understand relevant consumer trends.

- The trend to buy online was growing before the crisis, and it accelerated during the crisis as many learned how to do it for the first time. Now that they know how, they will continue to shop online.
- Don't view this trend as a competition by working against it. Partner within your supply chain to facilitate it. Give the customers what they want and give it to them how they want it.
- Be clear on the difference between online and in-store trends, and everyday vs. pandemic-related trends.

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- While many are shopping online, be sure to cater to all your customers. Many still want that in-store experience, so keep displays full and fresh to capture those impulse sales.
- Even with reduced SKUs, customers are looking for value and larger packs as they shop less frequently. Be sure to offer a family pack option of your best-selling items.
- Consumers are willing to buy more. Look across borders for success stories. A major retailer reported at PMA Fresh Connections: Australia New Zealand that they sold more produce per customer online than in-store!
- As we move into recovery, we expect shoppers to continue to shop online for produce and floral, so retailers need to maintain and increase those sales.
- Think like a consumer rather than a retailer. Consumers want joy. Position fresh produce as delicious comfort foods the whole family can enjoy.
- Keeping the natural rhythm of online shopping behavior after the crisis period of the pandemic is key as we ease into a new normal. Don't be tempted to change the process, site or experience just because we are no longer in crisis mode. Consumers need to feel confident they have mastered a new way of shopping that can bring added benefits.
- Provide continuous valuable express options – same-day service can include hot meal solutions ready to eat for a family dinner or a date night complete with flowers.
- Consider a regular replenishment program with automatic re-orders and delivery schedule.
- Think about online-only specials.
- To build that farmworker connection that is growing now, consider partnering with produce and floral companies to showcase a weekly special with a company profile. This type of storytelling can be part of a long-term connection bringing consumers closer to where their produce or flowers come from and builds brand loyalty for both the product and the chain.
- Remember that not all consumers will come back to the store at the same rate. At-risk consumers in particular may extend their reluctance to be in crowded spaces beyond when their areas 'open.'
- Be aware and capitalize on commodity groups' promotional and advertising activity to support their members. Many are spending their budgets now to incentivize consumers to purchase peak-season items. Leverage that awareness and demand being built for increased sales.