

YOUR FUTURE IN FOOD

How to Make Buyers Notice Your Food Product



For the purposes of this fact sheet, the word **buyer** refers to all potential commercial food buyers, including grocers, category managers, department managers, store managers, wholesalers, and distributors. It does not include consumers.

Creating an effective sell sheet

You have a great food product. You've done the research – you know your food product fills an important niche in the marketplace. But given today's competitive retail environment, it's a challenge to get to the people who count – retailers, wholesalers, distributors, etc. – to choose your food product over recognized brands that have performed well in the past.

What's the secret to getting their attention? Create an effective sell sheet.

What is a sell sheet?

A sell sheet is an advertisement of your food product that you present to potential buyers. It should be short, simple and direct. Buyers shouldn't have to take a lot of time to search the page to find the information they're looking for. Ideally, your sell sheet should:

- provide buyers with the information they need to list your food product
- clearly identify the product – for example, if it's a package of cookies, display your package of cookies
- demonstrate who your target audience is – for example, if it's young children, make your packaging playful and fun
- tell consumers what makes your product special or unique. Why would someone choose your product over another brand?
- provide key selling points that clearly identify the product benefits to your customer, the buyer

How do I create a sell sheet?

Start with a desktop publishing program. When printing the sell sheet, be sure to use quality paper and a good colour printer. This will allow you to make any changes, additions or deletions and print smaller quantities, as needed. Consider taking your completed sell sheet to a graphic designer. Designers can add the finishing touches that will increase the professional look of your document.

What information should I include on a sell sheet?

Include everything that will help the reader make an informed buying decision. Include the following information – from top to bottom.

1. **Eye-catching headline**
A good headline grabs the reader's attention. It states – in a few well-chosen words – what you are offering customers, why you are telling them about your food product, and how it can benefit them. Your company logo should never be a headline.

2. Attractive product photo

A clear, colourful, high-resolution picture of your food product and packaging is a must. Buyers want to see exactly what they're purchasing. Photos of food products should look fresh and inviting and make the buyer eager to sample your product.

3. Three to four key benefits (not features) for buyers

The benefits important to consumers are very different than the benefits important to commercial buyers, who are purchasing your food product for resale. Each group has entirely different motivations for buying your product. When choosing your key benefits, make sure you are targeting the right group. See the difference between features and benefits on the next page.

4. Product detail chart

Your food product detail chart should include:

- product description - Include how you want the information to appear on the shelf label for your product. For example: Gluten-free Gourmet Chocolate Chip Cookies
 - pack/size – Include how many units are in a case and what is the measure of each unit.
 - Universal Product Code (UPC) number that is necessary to scan your product at a store's front end when it is purchased
 - case code – This refers to a unique code that is applied to the shipping case. Most retailers you will be working with will not require you to include this
 - case cost - The case cost for all items in a line does not have to be the same. For example: See the Example Product Details Chart case cost column below. Also, don't worry about the cost working out to an even number either for the case or the unit cost. In fact, numbers that are not even present as more credible
 - suggested selling price (SSP) - It's the law that manufacturers cannot tell buyers what price to sell their product at - you can only suggest
 - gross margins - This number is calculated by: $(SSP - \text{unit cost}) \div SSP$
5. Minimum order - if you intend to deliver your product yourself or have it delivered, you will likely want to specify a minimum number of cases you want to deliver in order to make it worth the trip
6. Turnaround time – tells the buyer how long they can expect to wait to receive the goods once they place an order with you. Five or seven days is not unreasonable.
7. Trade terms - trade terms - This is the number of days within which you would like to receive your payment, For example: net 30 days.
8. Your contact information – the best way for a buyer to reach you, which for the most part will be so they can place an order
9. Your logo

NOTE: Never use your logo as a heading. It can take away from the attention-grabbing information in the headline.

What does a sell sheet look like?

See below a sell sheet example for Gluten-free Gourmet Chocolate Chip Cookies



Example of Product Detail Chart

Product Description ¹	Pack/Size ²	Universal Product Code	Case Code	Case Cost ³	Unit Cost	Suggested Selling Price (SSP) ⁴	Gross Margin ⁵
Flavour 1	12/250ml	0 12345	1 00 12345	\$ 39.56	\$ 3.30	\$ 4.99	33.9%
		67860 1	67860 7				
Flavour 2	12/250ml	0 12345	1 00 12345	\$ 39.17	\$ 3.26	\$ 4.99	34.6%
		67870 5	67870 1				
Flavour 3	12/250ml	0 12345	1 00 12345	\$ 39.86	\$ 3.32	\$ 4.99	33.4%
		67880 3	67880 0				
Flavour 4	12/250ml	0 12345	1 00 12345	\$ 39.55	\$ 3.30	\$ 4.99	34.0%
		67890 7	67890 4				

Why should a company logo be at the bottom of a sell sheet?

Your company logo should be placed on the bottom right-hand side of the sell sheet as a closing to the document. There is no value in parading a brand that is relatively unknown at the top of the page – that will only take attention away from the heading and unique selling points of your food product.

What is the difference between features and benefits?

Features are about you and the physical attributes of your food product. They can include positive statements about your food product, like the taste, the type of ingredients, or the method of production – however, features do not sell your product as they have no connection to the customer.

Benefits are about the buyer. They represent the connection between the food product and its intended customer (the consumer), such as: Why does the product matter to them? What will it do to make life easier for them? How can the product fix their problems? These are the kinds of benefits that motivate customers to buy a product.

The two tables below demonstrate the difference between features and benefits. Table A is directed at the consumer, while Table B is directed at the commercial buyer.

TABLE A: Example of Potential Features vs. Benefits for a Consumer

Features	Benefits to the Consumer
Simple homemade recipe	make ingredient list easy to understand
Gluten-free ingredients	won't cause me digestive issues
Kosher ingredients	reinforces safety of ingredients because Kosher ingredients and foods must undergo an additional level of inspection
Local ingredients	allows me to support my local economy to create jobs and wealth here at home
Soft cookie	gives me a greater sense of freshness and the feeling of eating homemade cookies straight from the oven
Re-sealable package	makes the cookies stay fresher longer, so I don't waste anything or end up eating stale cookies
Packaging is recyclable	reinforces the fact that I am environmentally responsible person

Table B: Example of Potential Features vs. Benefits for a Buyer

Features	Benefits to the Buyer
Simple/ homemade recipe	fits clean label trend sought by X % of consumers today
Gluten-free ingredients	demanded by X % of consumers; as gluten-free trend continues to grow and an entire family may convert to gluten-free
Kosher ingredients	represents attention to food safety – demanded by X % of consumers across all demographics
Local ingredients	are popular with consumers – X % of Manitobans said they would purchase a local food if it was available to them where they regularly shop
Soft cookie	caters to a niche in the market, as there are a limited number of soft cookie alternatives, which makes this product unique and helps grow the category
Re-sealable package	is on par with industry trend in packaging
Packaging is recyclable	appeals to consumers’ desire to reduce their environmental footprint – X % of consumers demand products be recyclable

Should any additional information be included on a sell sheet?

Include all information that directly affects the order process. For example:

- delivery charges – it is easier for the buyer if you build-in any delivery costs to your selling price to grocers. If you live in or near Winnipeg you may offer: Free within the perimeter
- payment terms – you will be paid for the stock you deliver but may have to wait for it. Net 30 days is typical. Grocers typically do not pay on consignment as this is too much administration.
- turnaround time: The number of days between when you receive an order and when you will - ship or deliver it to the customer. For example: five or seven days (you may want to specify whether this means business days (Monday to Friday) or calendar days.
- minimum order: Set a reasonable minimum, in cases, that you would be willing to deliver or ship an order in accordance with the delivery charges you set. For example: two cases assorted (which means one case of flavour 1 and one case of flavour 2, for example)

Do I need to include a call to action?

All sell sheets should include a strong call to action. What do you want the buyer to do after reading your sell sheet? Do you want them to call you? Visit your website? Make an appointment? You need to spell it out so the buyer knows what to do next. For example: Order now, Call today, ask your representative, buy now at this low introductory price, or similar “instructions” or asks.

Make the contact information personal. It should always include the salesperson’s name, direct phone number and email address. All phone messages and emails should be checked on a daily basis and returned within one business day.

Additional information to consider when creating a sell sheet:

- While it is fine to have different costs, it is expected that the suggested selling price be the same for a line of products. This is called line pricing.
- Follow an AIDA (Attention/Interest/Desire/Action) format to attract, create interest and convince your buyer the product will fill their customers’ desires and satisfy their needs, which will lead to the customers’ purchasing the product.
- Remember to proofread your sell sheet for typos, blurry pictures, text that drops off the page, spelling, grammar, and anything else that could make you look unprofessional. It’s a good idea to use spell check, but don’t count on it to catch everything. You still need to proofread it closely.
- Keep the font simple.
- Keep the layout simple – create sections or blocks of information. Always try to balance the visuals.
- Consider printing it on quality paper (a little heavier than standard printing paper) with a glossy finish. It needs to be printed because the most effective way to introduce yourself and/or a new product to a buyer is to do it in person. If you emailed your sell sheet to a buyer there is a very strong chance it would go unanswered.
- Think about taking your completed sell sheet to a graphic designer. Designers can add the finishing touches that will increase the professional look of your document.
- If you are presenting to a corporate retailer, remove the case cost, suggested selling price and gross margin from your sell sheet. The case cost can be presented during the presentation. It is recommended to know your suggested selling price and gross margin but only discuss it with the buyer if they inquire about it.
- If you’re working with a wholesale distributor and providing them with sell sheets for their sales representatives to use, they may prefer that you do not include pricing information, because the price they choose to sell to their buyers may be different than what you think it should be. Be sure to check with them on this point before supplying them with a large batch of sell sheets.

For more information:

Go to manitoba.ca/agriculture/food-and-ag-processing/

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