

HOW TO RUN YOUR BUSINESS IN 2021

Natasha Spencer-Jolliffe explores how partnerships and a fresh mindset are key parts of ensuring business success

At times of great challenge often come times of great questioning, exploration and innovation. Together, players in the fine food retail space, including producers, restaurants, local shops and farmers are examining how they can work together to lift the success of their individual businesses and the entire sector. The answer lies in collaboration.

After a year that has arguably pushed the fine food industry to its limits, independent fine food retailers are leveraging the evolving landscape and the opportunities it brings to improve and future-proof their businesses.

Far from an individual pursuit though, the entire industry is collaborating to explore how this is possible while striving for a better future for food – both in the short-term amid Covid-19 and the longer term to reflect our global sustainability goals.

Disrupted supply chains, limited innovation, changing consumer attitudes and financial loss have dominated much of 2020, and 2021 to date. Independent fine food retailers have had to respond to these shifts in behaviour, despite knowing their shoppers may have lower (or non-existent) disposable incomes. While foodservice outlets have spent the past year shuttered into lockdown, indie retailers have been the mainstay brick-and-mortar outlets we have come to depend on – more so than ever before.

With this heightened reliance comes appreciation and loyalty. But it also reveals what more needs to be done to secure fine food businesses and the future of our food systems so that both remain robust and consistent for consumers, especially during times of instability and uncertainty.

Collaborate to create change

Throughout the fine food industry, retailers and the wider supply chain are uniting to solve the big issues facing our food system. Collaboration is vital to grow and shape the success of individual businesses, other fine food retailers and do good for the planet.

“Due to the looming pressures of both climate change and resource shortages, there really is no other way to think about running a business,” Catherine Conway, founder of Unpackaged, relays.

“Doing good means making your business resilient for a changing marketplace so everyone should be thinking about sustainability in the same way they think about sales or operations,” adds Conway.

Collaboration plays a vital role in meeting consumer demand, too. By teaming up throughout the landscape, individual retailers are best prepared to respond to collective consumer needs. In 2021, consumer demands revolve around generating transparency and traceability, utilising technology to provide accurate and complete datasets, and building trust and confidence among fine food shoppers.

Research findings highlight how consumer interest in transparency and responsible production appears to have risen amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Innova Market Insights



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reveals. And its ongoing importance is set to persist moving forward, too. Creating a consistent flow of information, an open forum for discussion and setting shared goals fosters a strong collaborative environment.

How can indie retailers achieve success?

Generating trust, creating transparency and encouraging the better use of technology is essential. It is what fine food consumers want. It is increasingly what they expect from their indie retailers of choice. And they will actively search for those that provide this transparency and trust, with the support, reliability and reassurance that comes from technology.

“UK business leaders are increasingly turning their backs

on suppliers who fail to align with their social values,” says Maria Castroviejo, consumer foods analyst, Rabobank at the FoodBytes! forum. “Events of last year have made it more important to consider environmental and diversity policies when selecting suppliers,” Castroviejo adds.

Transparency is a leading trend in food and drink in 2021, food trends specialist Innova Market Intelligence reveals. From sustainable sourcing, clean living strategies and meaningful storytelling, the industry is leveraging these opportunities to meet evolving consumers’ demands. For independent fine food retailers, selecting suppliers, understanding the supply chain and showcasing transparency is crucial.

Describing transparency, traceability and trust as going

“hand in hand”, Castroviejo emphasises that this relationship has grown during Covid-19. “Without transparency, without traceability, it is impossible to ensure these are actual facts and not just nice words,” Castroviejo adds.

In the Innova Nutrition & Health Survey 2020, 85% of European consumers agreed with the statement: “To me, product information is of major importance”.

A further 35% of European consumers say they are interested in learning more about where their food comes from and how it is made, the Innova Lifestyle & Attitude Survey 2020 revealed. Indie fine food retailers need to align themselves with suppliers that provide information that they can then communicate directly to shoppers in-store.

“Without information, consumers cannot be empowered to make decisions in the way they want,” says Ben Fishman, managing director, CGC Ventures, at a recent forum by innovation platform, FoodBytes! By Rabobank. “I do believe this is a consumer-driven trend and the consumers are demanding transparency,” adds Fishman.

Strengthening collaboration with technology

Digital solutions are helping to provide transparency in an efficient and flexible way. Technology supports transparency by making it easier for players to contribute and collaborate throughout the supply chain. Data and the better understanding it creates gives retail customers confidence, control and trust over their fine food brand and product choices.

“The onus is on being smarter, better, quicker and more agile,” *An Appetite for Change: Food Trends On the Menu* report by Ayming found.

Today, 50% of consumers say they are at least somewhat likely to scan a QR code if it appears on pack, which is encouraging more suppliers to deliver farm-to-fork traceability via technology, Innova Market Insights reveals.

“Innovation in the food sector is rapid, and digital technology is accelerating the pace of change and increasing its scale,” the food trends report shares. “The onus is on the food and beverage industry to innovate furiously and provide this new breed of customer with the products they are looking for,” it adds.

“We’re finding that the new way of working post-Covid allows for much greater collaboration as we can use digital tools for sharing information and getting together,” notes Conway.

Securing success in fine food through collaboration

Sharing the biggest opportunities for fine food retailers when it comes to collaboration, Conway emphasises: “Most fine food retailers are not in competition with each other which leads to a collaborative atmosphere across the sector—whether it is sharing best practice or promoting great new producers which fine food retailers are brilliant at.”

“The fine food sector is different to the mass retail market. It is a lot more experimental and experiential,” says Valia Christidou, founder of The Food Launchpad. “The answer really lies with the consumer. What are consumers that shop the fine food sector looking for? The answer is to treat themselves to something different and new, to impress someone, to show they care or that they know their stuff,” Christidou adds.

Indie retailers can create transparency with the support of technology to enhance trust. It is a formula that can help businesses bounce back in the current tough climate and ultimately prepare them for growth and success by answering consumers’ needs more swiftly and accurately. But, only if as an industry we collaborate, learn from each other and lean in for support.