

# A First Timer's Guide to the San Francisco Fancy Food Show

By Seth Bender, Partner



In talking with a new friend on Twitter (or in Twitter speak: tweeting with them), they asked the question, which I'm paraphrasing (and taking out the web abbreviations):

*I'm co-owner of a food manufacturing company. I have store accounts and a website. Is it possible to make connections at the Fancy Food Show without a booth? Specifically, I'd like to meet package suppliers, distributors, etc. Any advice or info you can offer is greatly appreciated.*

This question got me thinking. Then it got me writing...

## Learn, Explore, Chat, Discover

More than anything use your trip as a learning experience. In the same way, you can't be told what the Matrix is—you have to see it for yourself—the same is true for the whole trade show experience (though in that sense, the Fancy Food Show is not that different from other food shows).

First off, take a look at other companies' packaging, marketing materials, booths (because, I assume, you're hoping one day to have a booth of your own), etc. What's good? What's terrible? Look over the seminars. Anything interesting? Attend it. The level of helpfulness is a crapshoot (I've found they range from really interesting to really tedious). But, you never know whom you'll meet, which always the best part of any seminar anyway.

In the two to three days you're there, you could easily mosey through the conference center and see every booth. However, I recommend you go in with a list of those you ABSOLUTELY MUST see. Otherwise, you might miss a booth you really wanted to check out. Or, you could skip a busy booth, plan to return and then forget to come back.

So, who should be on your list? Definitely direct competitors. How you market your own product may need to be a direct response to how someone already in the marketplace is promoting theirs. But also, you can see what they're doing, pull the good and discard the bad. Also on the list? Put companies similar to yours. For instance, if you sell organic cookies, check out every organic company's booth. If they're not a direct competitor, they may be very willing to share with you how they've built their business. Don't forget to put companies you just straight out admire. There's probably a lot you can learn from them. And, it's a cool thrill.

## Making Connections

Connections ARE possible even without a booth. It's just going to take a lot of hustling (in place of the money, manpower and promotion that goes into a booth). Let's look at whom you might want to connect with:

**a) Packaging Suppliers** – A number of packaging suppliers actually have booths at the show. But, this may not be the right match for you. Depends what you're looking for. These suppliers tend to specialize in offering pre-made packages built in China. So, they're good for large bulk orders of standard pieces. If you're looking for custom, this may not be the best connection. There are some great standard boxes you can use. But, custom is always going to be more impressive and eye-catching to customers browsing the grocery shelf.

In actuality, you're probably better off looking for a packaging supplier that's located in your neck of the woods. You'll save on shipping and (ideally) you'll work with a rep who you can meet with you face-to-face, meaning he'll drop by with samples, proofs, etc.

**b) Distributors** – Again, some distributors will have booths. But, they're intent on selling not being sold to. Does that mean give up? No. It means be strategic. Keep an eye on the booth and wait until things are slow. Day 3 is a great day to approach people. It's slower as buyers have started to go home and people manning booths are physically and mentally exhausted—which is a good thing. They tend to be more talkative and receptive in this state.



Of course, there are a lot of people hanging out in distributor booths (including the manufacturers of the product who are just concerned with selling their product). Ideally, you should (again) do your research in advance. Call up the distributors and find out who the person you need to talk to is. Heck, even go as far as asking if they'll be at the show. Then, when you get to the show... stalk them.

Beyond the booths, there are tons of distributors wandering around the show trying to set up deals with exhibitors. When you get to the show, you'll notice there are different color badges. Each color denotes a different type of company. Figure out which color is for distributors and brokers (sorry, I don't remember what it is) and be very friendly with these people when you spot them. There's ample opportunity to meet people sitting on benches, chairs, in the outer lobby, at seminars, on the shuttle, in your hotel, etc.

**c) Buyers** – Obviously, most people attending the show are looking to stock their specialty food store with new products. Does it really matter if you have a booth or not? OK. Maybe a little. But, there are always ways around that if you're friendly, aggressive and keep an eye out for opportunity.

### Setting and Achieving Goals

If you're going in with the goal of selling, it's a very good idea to have your "elevator pitch" ready. You're really only going to have a few short minutes to sell your product before someone is pulled away. Be ready. Again, you don't have a booth, so, any materials you do have (biz card, flyers, etc.) should look super-duper professional.

But, for the most part, don't put too much pressure on yourself. In fact, have fun. It's a really fascinating experience for someone who loves food. Just think of the thrill of trying a product that's not even in stores yet. If you're in a more relaxed frame of mind, you're going to be more likely to achieve your "connection goals." Just remember that this first time is a toe-dipping experience. Try to learn as much as possible this time around to prime yourself for success at the next show. ■



## Who Is savor the food agency?

We are a full service marketing communications agency. Using our extensive experience in the food industry, we partner with companies like yours to develop fresh and effective marketing communications and design solutions.

### Top 5 Reasons To Trust Savor With Your Marketing:

#### #1 We Know Food

Food is a passion we've made into our specialty. We understand the intricacies of developing, manufacturing, selling and shipping products and use our experience to help make the process easier, and more profitable, for you.

#### #2 A History in the Food Industry

Several of our team members have been in exactly the same position you are now. They have worked within a manufacturing and distribution company and been a part of the daily challenge of building the business and increasing sales. With this unique expertise, we can provide special insight into how your marketing fits into your company's big picture.

#### #3 Solid Design + Copy

The key to design and copy is to instill consumer trust by creating materials that are visually appealing as well as easy to comprehend. This is a principle that carries through our work in both print and web. Take a look at portfolio samples. You'll see they look good and communicate the marketing message simply. In the case of our web work, the sites follow proper "usability" techniques and are easy to navigate.

#### #4 Smart Marketers

We are logical thinkers, skilled at determining how best to present information to your target customer. This efficient organization will particularly benefit your product, which whether through collateral materials, web, etc, only has a moment to catch someone's attention. We can help you determine the most important idea and then develop logical layouts and copy that get the idea across quickly.

#### #5 Customized Marketing Solutions

We work with you to learn about your business, services, customers, competitors, issues and criteria for success. Then we can develop a program that strategically markets your services and helps fulfill your marketing goals. In our minds, there's no "one fit" solution, just the solution that's right for your business.