

THE MONTH END

EPISODE 20

Food Biz Wiz



SHOW NOTES



SPEAKER BIO

Alli Ball is the founder and CEO of [Food Biz Wiz](#). Alli is a veteran grocery buyer and long time wholesale consultant, who offers expert coaching and a community for emerging CPG brands aiming to get on the shelf and sell, whether that's in person or virtually.

TAKEAWAYS

One thing that a brand owner/creator should know about grocery buyers:

This is really a lightbulb moment inside of Retail Ready. It is the understanding that a buyer doesn't actually care about your product attributes, they don't care about the taste, they don't care about your mission, they don't care that you are female or BIPOC owned, they don't care about your sustainability. I mean, sure, all of that is just like icing on the cake. But what they really care about is how you're going to perform on their shelf. And so often, we see brands who formulate their buyer pitches based on the fact that they're delicious, or they're sustainable, or we give that to XYZ nonprofit, but at the end of the day, that buyer wants to know that your product is going to come in and is going to outsell the products that they already have in your category. And so if you can shift your pitch as a producer where you're much more focused on what you're going to do to help that buyer hit their category goals, that is so much more of an appealing sales pitch, then I'm so delicious, or I've got this value.

TAKEAWAYS (Cont'd)

On being burnt out and starting her own business:

It was just this light bulb moment where I was like, I have got to start a business around helping emerging brands succeed here. It was just heartbreaking to see these really, really heartfelt producers and values oriented producers not succeed with their business dreams just because of lack of knowledge.

On working with Alli:

Retail Ready is the only way that you can work with me. That is it. And so once you are inside of Retail Ready it's that course, the coaching, the community, and you get lifetime access to all of it. So let me talk through the three things that we help brands with in Retail Ready, because that's really where our bread and butter is. So we formulate Retail Ready around three steps. So we organize our curriculum and our coaching around these three steps: attract, pitch, and grow. So attract is all about figuring out who your ideal customer is, and where and why they're purchasing your products because we want to sell where they already are shopping. So we've got to really, really dial that in. That pitch phase is all about understanding the brands of the wholesale buyer and why they would say yes or no to your product line. And how to change that no around right. In this step, we make sure that you have a really repeatable effective sales strategy. So you're not just winging it every single time you try to land a new account. And then lastly, we turn to that grow step, which is all about making sure that your product sells off the shelf. So whether that's in person or digital marketing, effective promotions, working with brokers or distributors, we want to make sure that that brands are making the right decisions for your own company. That's all on Retail Ready. And that is the only way as of now that we work with with clients.

On qualifying for the Retail Ready program:

So one of the qualifications for Retail Ready is that brands are already in production. I don't do anything around product development, nor do I want to. And so we say you have to be in production. Once you're in production, and you are ready to start selling wholesale come into Retail Ready.

TAKEAWAYS (Cont'd)

On how the industry has changed over 15 years:

I think the biggest thing that has changed is E-commerce. Like I would be remiss not to touch on that, especially over the past few years. What I think people don't realize, though, is that yes, direct to consumer has grown. Absolutely. But in the food industry, the E-commerce growth that we see is actually still wholesale. It is platforms like Thrive Market. Here in the Bay Area, one that I love is Good Eggs, it's platforms like that, where the consumer can go online, create a whole shopping basket, just like they would in the store and purchase in one click of a button and get a whole basket or a whole box delivered straight to their door. So we have certainly seen the rise of E-commerce. But in the food industry, it's a little bit different than what we think of in other industries. So that's a huge one. And the impact that it has on producers, it's a few things. One, it means that we've got to make sure that we've got an omni-channel strategy in place, that we are looking at all different channels, whether that is brick and mortar, E-commerce, food service, direct to consumer, and that we are really, really clear on our profitability in all channels, and that we are not being spread too thin, while we still are making sure to get in front of our target consumers. And I think that's likely where Accountfully comes in to make sure that people have the data to make smart decisions on channel strategy.

On the cost of getting into a store:

I am a huge, huge advocate for starting small, starting in independents, and really penetrating your own region before you expand. Go deep in your own region, it's so much easier to connect with your accounts, to support your accounts to market your products when it's local. And you know, local still might be a big region, right? We might be talking about all of Northern California, or all of Western Rockies, not just your backyard. Typically when you work with independents, there aren't slotting fees, there aren't free refills required, there aren't required quarterly promotions, there aren't those financial obligations that start to come into play, when you start going with larger chains like Kroger and Safeway, and Stop and Shop and things like that. What are the dollar amounts that it takes to get into the store, it can be zero besides of course, your startup costs and your time, it can be zero if you're targeting independents and small chains.

TAKEAWAYS (Cont'd)

On velocity:

So when we talk about velocity, we mean, how fast does your product sell? What's your velocity? And that can be as simple as, okay, I make potato chips. And I sell 36 units a week, per SKU per store. So 36 units is your velocity. When when we think about velocity in Retail Ready, we think about, we always emphasize how important it is to focus on velocity over accounts. So velocity over doors, something you'll hear me say a lot.

Because think about it, I'm sure we would all agree, you would rather be a potato chip company who has three dozen really fantastic accounts, who reorder twice a week, then 200 stores where your product just sits there. Right? So velocity is so important. I also think velocity is really important to realize, to think about when you think about sales projections, and you're doing analysis, or projections for the future, because you want to recognize what the average velocity in your category is, and do your projections based off that.

On Samples:

I want to talk to you about the sample box. And it is something that every single store has, and yet no one really talks about it. So often, samples don't end up on the buyer's desk anyways, they go home with that sweet person that you leave them with. Or if they do end up at the buyer's desk, they get put in the sample box. And this is really important to know. When you leave blind samples with a store, they just get collected in this box. I've never seen a sample box that is organized and beautifully arranged. It is like a lost and found box. And so what happens is that that buying team typically goes through that sample box, once a quarter or so. And by the time they go through that sample box, your samples are crushed or separated from your sell sheet or expired--they're certainly not in the condition that you expected them to be in when that buyer sees your product for the first time. And so one of the things that I really, really warn people about is blind shipping samples without connecting to that wholesale buyer beforehand. Or just swinging by with samples in an attempt to catch that buyer and hand them off face to face. Blind shipping of the samples is just a waste of money. And here's like a pro tip from the buyer side: I always encourage our Retail Ready brands to to require payment for samples.

CPG BUSINESS DO'S AND DON'TS

CPG Business Do:

Can I give some tough love? My do is that brands need to or they should take full responsibility for selling off the shelf once they land on those new wholesale accounts. So I always say that you are the person responsible for getting your product off the retail shelves and into the basket. It is not the store's responsibility to sell your product. It's not the category managers responsibility to make sure you're fast moving. It's not the stockers or the merchandisers touching your product. It's not even the brokers and distributors who have likely promised the world to these brands, it is on the producer. So the do is to take full responsibility of your sales once you're on the shelf.

CPG Business Don't:

I have so many don'ts, there's so many don'ts. Don't swing by, don't blind ship samples. And I'm going to reiterate a don't that I touched on earlier. And it is do not make the incorrect assumption that the buyer is going to bring in your product line because of your delicious taste, your company values, your mission, or your sustainability. So we have to recognize that the real reason why buyers bring in your product line, and it's to increase sales or margin in the category. So the faster you realize this, the faster you will start to create a pitch that's of any interest to that that retail buyer.

NOTABLE SHOW QUOTES

Alli on what she learned in her role as head of grocery and store manager:

"There's nothing more important than having financial literacy."

Alli on learning lessons:

"I'm gonna like raise my hand and say grocery buyers aren't always right."

Alli on what buyers are looking for:

"At the end of the day, that buyer wants to know that your product is going to come in and is going to outsell the products that they already have in your category."

Alli on shifting your sales pitch:

"If you can shift your pitch as a producer where you're much more focused on what you're going to do to help that buyer hit their category goals, that is so much more of an appealing sales pitch."

Alli on what the buyer cares about:

"Realize that at the end of the day, that buyer really cares about sales or margin."

Alli on the three steps of Retail Ready:

"We organize our curriculum and our coaching around these three steps: attract, pitch, and grow."

Brad on not spreading yourself too thin:

"I think focusing really helps people understanding that with the limited time and resources you have, how can we focus on what we need to do and plow forward in that way."

Alli on why Retail Ready is the only way to work with her:

"We have perfected a system with Retail Ready and can ensure that we are delivering the best possible experience for our brands."

Alli on starting small:

"I am a huge, huge advocate for starting small, starting in independents, and really penetrating your own region before you expand."

Alli on brokers:

"So I always advise brands to push back, certainly build in a broker and distributor margin at the beginning. But you don't have to jump to a broker and distributor unless it truly is the right choice for your brand."



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