

How to Approach a Retailer

Cultural Enterprise Office with Fiona Chautard – Retail, Fashion & Textiles

Selling your product and designs in a shop is thrilling. Of course you need to talk to a retailer to make it happen – but it doesn't have to be daunting. From what to consider to how to prepare, we'll help you understand what retailers want.

Do the research

Well-informed, planned pitches are much more likely to succeed. But before you contact a buyer, find out what they offer and whether their customers would buy your product.

See for yourself by visiting their shop or outlet and check:

- Are their customers people you want to be associated with and sell to?
- Does how they present stock fit with how you want your products displayed?
- Do you want to be associated with the other brands they sell?
- Does the feel of the store match your product image?
- How much do other products cost, and does that fit with your prices?
- Is the location right for your brand?
- If they offers discounts, is it damaging the image of the brands they sell?

Remember, if a retailer doesn't suit your brand, it's okay to say no. It's better to turn down a short-term opportunity to protect your brand's image. You can always find a more appropriate retailer.

Understand seasonal highs and lows

The popularity of certain products can change from season to season. For retailers it can vary depending on where they're located and what they're selling.

Generally the months leading up to Christmas from September to December are peak selling periods. Some retailers take up to 75% of their sales during this period. Alternatively summer, when tourist numbers are at their highest, may be peak season for shops in visitor centres or museums.

A sales assistant can give you a quick insight into peak selling periods for the retailer you're interested in – so feel free to ask. After you've done your research, set up a sales appointment.

Approach a buyer for a meeting

You've done the research, know how the retailer works and think they'd be a good fit for your product. Now you're ready to meet a buyer. Remember to:

- **Contact the right person** – find out the buyer's name, official title and contact details. The staff at the shop may be able to provide this information, or check the retailer's website
- **Present yourself as a business** – you're not an individual when you request a meeting, you're representing your brand
- **Make contact** – telephone or email the buyer to outline your product, its unique selling points and why it appeals to their target market
- **Follow up** – buyers are busy people, so you might not hear back from them immediately. If you don't hear back within a few weeks, follow up with a call or email.

Prepare for your sales meeting

After you've successfully set up a sales appointment with a buyer, it's time to prepare for it. When you meet the buyer, make sure you can provide information about:

Your product or brand

This is your opportunity to shine, and excite the buyer about your brand. So highlight your product's unique features and how it will appeal to their customers.

Bring along several high-quality samples to show them exactly what they'll be getting, and let them know if there are alternative options. Feel free to talk about your inspiration and future ambitions for your product. Also find out what the retailer wants in terms of packaging and labelling - supply samples if you have them. Some may prefer their own instead of your own branding.

Make sure you can answer any questions they have about where and how the product is made, including production methods, materials used and sustainability. They may also want to know if your product is sold elsewhere.

Pricing

You'll need to discuss an acceptable unit cost – the trade (wholesale) price you'll sell to them at and the retail price your product will be sold at in shops. Retailers will mark up your product to cover their own costs – this can be up to 250% or more.

Ordering

You've impressed the buyer and they're ready to stock your product in their shops. To ensure that everything runs smoothly, make sure you know how much they need, when they need it and that you can meet all of their expectations.

An order form or line sheet with all the product details will make ordering easier. Include reference numbers, thumbnail images, unit costs, quantities and design options along with all your contact details and delivery and payment terms.

You may also want to offer discounts for larger orders, or free delivery on orders over a certain amount of money.

Negotiate knowledgeably

There is always scope to negotiate so ensure you're completely satisfied with all the fine details before agreeing to do business. Remember to:

- **Know your bottom line in pricing** and don't go beneath it. Never agree to terms you're unsure about. And if you're not sure, ask to get back to the buyer.
- **Offer exclusivity only where appropriate.** But ask for the retailer to take a larger quantity of your product to offset any loss in additional sales you could gain elsewhere. As an alternative you can offer to modify the existing design – agree a unique finish or colour for your client.
- **Agree everything in writing** when the buyer places an order. This includes price, quantities, lead times, payment details, delivery charges (including in transit insurance and returns policies). It's always best to have a written signed contract.

Build and maintain good relationships

Quality products, quick shipping and efficient invoicing need to be complemented by a good relationship between you and your retailer.

Dealing with the same person allows you to develop a strong relationship with the buyer and meet their needs. Providing regular progress updates and confirming what you've agreed in writing is a good way to keep things organised.

Verify that your orders are correct in quality and quantity before they go out. Enclose a detailed delivery note and check in with your buyer to ensure everything arrived okay and on time. Always keep them informed and if you're not able to meet their timeframes, offer alternatives and solutions.

If the buyer doesn't place an order after your initial meeting, ask for feedback. Follow up to find out how you can modify your product or prices to suit them going forward.

What next?

Ready to set up an appointment? Before you do, take a look at our other resources to help you consider all your options, make informed decisions and impress a buyer.

Costing and Pricing Work Guide

An Introduction to Retail

Planning to Attend Trade Events

Planning to Sell at Trade Events

How do I protect my ideas?

Can you help with contracts?

Disclaimer: We want to keep you in the know, so we offer a wide selection of useful resources. But Cultural Enterprise Office isn't responsible for the advice and information of external organisations in this document. So if you have any questions, please contact the specific organisation directly.