



Doing  
Business with  
retail  
**What food  
entrepreneurs  
need to know**

June 11, 2025

# Introduction to the Session



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I am the the founder of Think Flavour, a food company launching innovative products into the SA market. I also run a consultancy focused on helping food businesses with product strategy and to develop innovative, market-ready products. With a background in culinary science and years in product development for major retail chains, I combine creativity with commercial insight. I am passionate about product innovation and disrupting the market while adding to the bottom line.



Bianca Stals

Bianca Stals is the financial manager of Think Flavour and has financial management experience in many sectors in South Africa, e.g. retail, hospitality, farming, service industry and manufacturing. I prefer to work with small- to medium sized businesses as I feel you then become part of the family which can make a real difference.



**"Owning a business is easy. It's like riding a bike. Except the bike is on fire. And you're on fire. Everything is on fire."**

# Dealing with Retail

**Retail success is built on resilience, relationships, and unwavering belief in your value.**

Great products alone don't guarantee success. Persistence through delays, building genuine buyer connections, and maintaining confidence in your unique value are essential. Stay motivated, keep showing up, and never give up on your vision.

# Find a Name. Follow Up. Build a Relationship

## **Personal Connections Matter**

Retail buyers receive hundreds of pitches monthly; establishing a human connection helps your product stand out and builds trust beyond just the product itself.

## **Example: SPAR listing**

My first contact with Spar WC was in October 2024. I have had 3 face to face meetings. Sent over 80 emails. Phoned, on a weekly basis, been kind, grumpy, enthusiastic. I have been promised that this week I will get a supplier number!

## **Use Professional Networks**

Leverage LinkedIn, trade expos, and supplier development programs like Pick n Pay, Spar and Checker's SME to identify and connect with category buyers effectively.

## **Consistent Follow-Up**

Regular, respectful follow-ups keep you on the buyer's radar and demonstrate your commitment without overwhelming them.



# Visualizing, Creating and Launching Ranges



## Defining Your Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

Define your USP by identifying what makes your product different and valuable to your target audience.

Consider the unique taste that sets your product apart, the sourcing of ingredients that may emphasize local or ethical production, a mission that connects emotionally with consumers, or cultural heritage that adds authenticity and story to your brand.

Your USP should be clear and compelling to help customers understand why they should choose your product over competitors’.

This differentiation is key to building brand loyalty and standing out on retail shelves.

# Know Your Customer

How do you get customers to buy your product?

Identify who buys your product and why.

Understand **everything** there is to know about your customer's demographics, preferences, and motivation.

Tailor your marketing efforts to speak directly to their needs and desires.

Packaging and price should reflect the target customer's values and buying habits.

Finally, it is all about the taste, the actual experience of the product to drive re purchase



# Food Safety & Compliance Essentials

## Food Safety Standards

Understand local and international food safety standards including HACCP and ISO to ensure product safety and regulatory compliance.

## Labeling Requirements

Comply with labeling laws including allergen declarations, nutrition panels, shelf-life information, and barcode registration for consumer transparency.

## Allergen Management

Clearly identify allergens on packaging to protect consumers and meet legal standards, reducing risk of allergic reactions.

## Shelf-life & Traceability

Accurately define product shelf-life and maintain traceability to manage quality and safety throughout the supply chain.

# Retail Payment Terms & Cash Flow

- Retail payment terms typically range from 30 to 90 days with big rebates, requiring businesses to plan for delayed payments.
- Effective cash flow management is essential to bridge the gap between invoicing and payment receipt.
- Tracking debtor payments are essential for cash flow and a good accounting package can help with that.
- Maintaining buffer capital helps to cover operational costs during payment delays.
- Accurate cash forecasting supports strategic financial decisions and helps avoid cash shortages.
- Never be afraid to ask for discounts or negotiated better terms.



# Whenever possible do Tastings

## Value of Tastings

Buyers prefer tasting products directly to assess texture, flavor, and packaging quality beyond written specifications. Tastings can turn hesitant buyers into advocates.

## Effective Tasting Tips

Provide well-labelled samples including a concise product story, shelf-life details, suggested retail price, and packaging specs to support buyer decision-making. If you can then go in and do the tasting yourself.



# Quality & Consistency in Product Development

- Key to repeat purchase and brand trust.
- Successful food businesses often fail not due to taste, but lack of consistency, inadequate planning, or poor product-market fit.
- Ask: “Can your product deliver the same experience every time?”



# Scaling Production for Retail



## **Maintain Quality While Increasing Output**

Ensure that as production volume grows, the quality and consistency of the product remain unchanged to retain customer trust and brand reputation.

## **Partner with Reliable Co-Packers**

Collaborate with experienced co-packers who can scale production efficiently while adhering to your quality standards and timelines.

## **Invest in Scalable Systems**

Implement scalable production systems and technology that allow flexible increases in output without sacrificing product integrity or efficiency.

# Pricing & Negotiation Strategies



## **Pricing Considerations**

Account for margins, promotions, distributor fees, and marketing support when setting your product prices to ensure profitability.



## **Category Pricing Understanding**

Analyze category pricing to position your product competitively within the market while maintaining margin targets.



## **Interactive Role-Play Activity**

Engage in role-play scenarios such as presenting to a buyer and defending your margin to build negotiation skills and confidence.

# Packaging & Shelf Impact



## 01 Role of Packaging

Packaging is your silent salesperson. It must capture attention on crowded shelves and communicate essential product information quickly and clearly.

## 02 Design that Reflects Brand

Packaging should be eye-catching, informative, and reflect your brand values such as sustainability, quality, or cultural heritage to build trust and loyalty.

## 03 Packaging Functionality

Packaging needs to retain shelf life, be easy to use, easy to ship and put on shelf. It is a major cost; make it work as best as possible.

# Starting Small to Grow Smart

- Begin with specialty stores or farmer's markets to refine your product based on direct customer feedback.
- Use these smaller, controlled environments to test and improve your product offering.
- Once you have proof of demand and refined your product, scale up by entering regional retail chains.
- Starting small minimizes risk and provides valuable insights for sustainable growth.

**Accept the  
Long Game**

**Accept it is a  
tough game**

**Accept the  
complexities  
and risks**

**Find partners  
you trust**

**Extended  
Timelines**

Retail supply chain approvals can take years due to range reviews, strategic changes, and shelf space freezes beyond your control.

**Build Your Brand**

Use the waiting time to grow through local markets and online sales, increasing brand recognition and customer loyalty.

**Collect  
Testimonials**

Gather customer reviews and repeat purchase data to strengthen your credibility and appeal to retailers.

**Strengthen  
Compliance &  
Packaging**

Improve your B-BBEE profile, update compliance documents, refine packaging, and optimize cost structures during the wait.

THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR TIME

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