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FINE  
FOOD  
& DRINK  
STAFFORD BOROUGH

## GOING ONLINE TO ATTRACT FOOD & DRINK CUSTOMERS

E-commerce is booming in the food and drink industry. Gift items are perennial favourites online, but as e-commerce sales become more normalized, people are increasingly turning to the internet to buy groceries and specialised foods that they would have trouble finding elsewhere. Socially and ecologically conscious shoppers are driving a trend toward foods like plant-based proteins and non-dairy milks while customers are also flocking to foods with added health benefits. Whatever you offer, you can build your audience online. Here are the strategies that will get you there.



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### 01 WHAT MAKES YOUR BUSINESS UNIQUE?

In any market, you need to have a unique selling proposition. Your business should stand out from the competition, and it's up to you to decide how. Your first decision is what kinds of food and drink to sell. Specialty items, like gourmet coffees and teas, make good online business models. So do beer, wine, soft drinks and juices. Research and find out if people are buying similar products. If there's a market demand, then you've found your business niche.

### 02 ESTABLISH YOUR PRODUCT PORTFOLIO

New businesses should typically start small—perhaps offer only a few items at first. As the business grows, track what products are the most popular and get the most positive reviews. Once you begin getting feedback, you can start building a more standard inventory. Growing your business this way lets you make sure that you're meeting customers' needs.

### 03 INVENTORY AND PRICING STRATEGY

Keep in mind that the type of storage you choose can increase your business costs. If you're selling grocery items, will you need to have your own stock and storage? One alternative is to ship directly from a distributor or supplier without having an inventory of your own. If you're selling fresh to order items you'll need a space to prepare, pack, and ship your products.

### 04 CREATE A PLAN TO DRIVE EXCITEMENT

Start by setting up a "coming soon" landing page on your website and be sure to include an email list signup form. Email any contacts you already have with a link to your new site and invite them to follow you on social media. Your social media accounts will be particularly important as you build anticipation. Post regularly and include links to your page so people can sign up for updates.

### 05 PREPARE FOR LAUNCH

Connect your online store and marketing platform to get the full picture of your customer analytics. Once that connection is in place, you can set up appropriate e-commerce integrations, anything from accounting software and payment processing technology to shipping logistics. Make sure you have a way for customers to review your products – reviews increase consumer confidence in your product, which increases your likelihood of gaining new buyers.

### 06 ANNOUNCE!

Create an email campaign to invite people to check out your newly opened store. Perhaps include a coupon as a way of saying thanks to those followers for jumping on board early. You'll want to announce the website launch on social media too. Schedule a series of social posts, maybe including a countdown leading up to your grand opening day. Continue to announce that you're now open for business, highlighting different products and showcasing what makes your business unique.

### 07 PROMOTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Momentum is important. Keep the excitement going. Announce new products with email announcements and social media posts. Show customers which of your products are best sellers. People feel good buying things that a lot of other people have bought and loved. Promo codes are also a great way of encouraging people to make that first purchase, or to branch out and try a different product.

### 08 KEEP GROWING

To keep your business thriving, you need to build loyalty among early adopters and continue to find new customers. Use personalisation and automation to minimise manual work. Send out product recommendations. When up-selling, suggest a more expensive product to complement or replace an existing purchase. Set up an abandoned cart automation to remind users that their cart is still there. Take advantage of people have just bought from you by sending out follow-up emails after a purchase. Thank the person for shopping, ask them to leave you a review, and recommend other products you think they might like.

If you keep your marketing going consistently, your online food and drink business can maintain customer interest and excitement long after your first day.



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