

How to Choose the Best Restaurant Suppliers

The right suppliers can be a key to your success.

Your restaurant's suppliers are more than just product vendors. They're critical partners in making your business live up to its potential every single day. And building that relationship begins with making smart choices about who to work with — and

learning how to keep that relationship positive for years to come.

We have 10 tips on how to recognize the total value in a restaurant supplier, and how to make sure you keep getting that value over time.



1. It isn't all about price.

When considering a supplier, some things are more important than money. Overall value and reputation matter. Read reviews online. Ask similar businesses for recommendations.



2. Are they consistent and reliable?

For a supplier to be great, they need to be great every time. Ask about their delivery record and about timing between order and arrival. You don't want to be waiting around tapping your foot.



3. Are they innovative?

A great restaurant supplier should put products and ideas in front of you that feel new and fresh, not just what you ask for. They should know better than you what's possible and be willing to share.



4. Do they have connections?

Good suppliers bring with them connections to all kinds of other vendors and businesses that can help enhance your restaurant. US Foods, for example, has a "Value Added Services" program for their clients that connects them to other related industry services and products at a discounted price.



5. Can they help with marketing?

Most restaurant suppliers have discretionary marketing or promotional funds that they can use to benefit their clients. Even those that don't can usually offer promotional napkins or other free tchotchkes alongside purchases.



6. Are they trying to get to know YOU?

You never want to work with a supplier that doesn't bother to get to know your business. They should be invested in seeing you succeed. Just watch out that they don't try to sell you something you don't need.



7. It's OK to interview them.

Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions or require references. Hiring a restaurant supplier on a trial basis to test out how they'll do is also perfectly OK. Sometimes it's the only way you can know if they're right for you.



8. It's OK to challenge them.

Even after you've been working with a supplier for a while, it's normal to want them to do better for you. Sometimes relationships need a little push if they are starting to get stagnant. Restaurants and their vendors are no different!



9. It's even OK to fire them.

Just because a supplier or salesperson is great doesn't mean they're great for you. If they no longer have the product or service you need, you may need to say goodbye. A good relationship with a salesperson is important, but you are running a business.



10. And it's not always "all or nothing."

Maybe you only need one supplier for everything. Maybe you need many different suppliers. Your business needs should determine who you hire. Don't be afraid to divide or consolidate your business based on what works best for you.

(If you run a franchise, be careful that you follow all the rules and regulations required by your agreement. Some franchise contracts require ordering from particular vendors.)

“A business cannot grow unless it has strong partners. Having strong retail partners, financial partners, and vendors. That said, Rewards Network has been a very strong partner for me. Reward Network helps you grow your business at the same time of helping you financially.”

— Jeff Parrott, Owner
Farotto's, St. Louis, MO
Rewards Network client since 2010

Want to learn more about how Rewards Network can help your restaurant grow?

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