



The “Secret” Ingredients in the Recipe for Online Sales Success

How is buying a high ticket item—a car or leather sofa for instance—like buying a bar-b-q sandwich? Sensory experience plays a vital role. There’s a real need to see it and touch it—or smell and taste it, with regard to the bar-b-q. Thus, there are real, tangible advantages to the brick and mortar store front. You just can’t enjoy the experience of fresh, smoked bar-b-q without actually being there. It’s the smell of that savory, succulent smoked pork that gets an appetite growing.

However, just because something smells good doesn’t mean it is good. And just because many online shopping sites exist doesn’t mean every brick and mortar store needs an online presence. While everyone wants to be part of the Internet, simply jumping online does not equal success. Grocery sales make up less than one percent of online sales (according to a 2008 Jupiter Research forecast), yet specialty foods are a growing market. So what does it require to take a thriving brick and mortar restaurant franchise online—successfully?

The recipe for online success includes several staple ingredients any brick and mortar business should already have on hand. But it also requires a generous dash of common sense. Before going live with any Internet presence, there are some key guidelines to consider. The following provides the top three “rules” that Smithfield’s Chicken ‘N Bar-B-Q adhered to before launching their online sales of Eastern style North Carolina bar-b-q.

1. Know who your customer is and ensure your brand is established.

Smithfield’s Chicken ‘N Bar-B-Q has been dubbed by connoisseurs “as true to Eastern style as it gets.” The restaurant brand has been around for forty years and has developed quite a fan base of loyal customers. Each of the brand’s thirty-three stores prepares its own Bar-B-Q every day, and freshness is the key to success. Some customers make a point to stop in on their travels, because they are admittedly “addicted” to the Eastern barbecue style.



"We don't really market to 'everyone' as a whole," explains Richard Averitte, the marketing director at Smithfield's Chicken ‘N Bar-B-Q. "We market to barbecue lovers specifically, and then to other potential diners as a separate segment. Barbecue is a particular food, territorial if you will. You can't get true Eastern style BBQ in Memphis—you get Memphis style! We've built a lot of great relationships and fanbase. And that's our focus."

Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q has cultivated a culture online where customers can "chat" with the restaurant brand, with other customers, and provide valuable feedback that just a few years ago would have likely never made it in front of restaurant decisions makers. On facebook, fans regularly participate in fun "conversations" and find common interest in Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q among their neighbors and friends. On twitter and location-based mobile applications, they "check in" when they arrive at a Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q location and on flickr, they share images of their bar-b-q enjoyment!

2. Employee processes for performance (where packaging and shipping are critical!)

Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q has considered expansion outside North Carolina, but they realized there are many risk factors involved. Building new physical locations, along with logistics and other related factors, are just a few of the many costs. So what other option existed for growth? Averitte asked customers, brainstormed with colleagues, and a common idea grew. Rather than expand physically, Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q could grow virtually. But how? Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q is fresh, fresh, fresh! Setting up a distribution system, working with a manufacturing facility, and most likely having to send out a less than fresh product were not on the table for consideration.

Enter cold packs, Styrofoam, and priority mail. After a great deal of research and actual test mailing, the result was clear. Bar-b-q that was hand pulled and mixed on day one is subjected to a freeze blast to bring the product below 40 degrees. The bar-b-q is then separated into two pound or five pound vacuum-sealed packages and stored in the freezer. The next day, the bar-b-q is packaged and shipped in insulated coolers with cold packs. It is received within two days, well-chilled, and ready for immediate consumption.



Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q makes it to San Francisco, CA

"The packaging really was the largest hurdle," says Averitte. "We had to find a solution that was economical, shippable, and that also ensured the product stayed at a constant temperature. We tried dry ice and overnight shipping—too expensive! This cold pack cooler method allows for the most efficient and economical transport of an extremely fresh batch of bar-b-q!"

3. The website should be customer friendly and detail important information—customer service is a top priority!

A quick look at the Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q online bar-b-q sales site demonstrates commitment to these principles. Highlighted in yellow is the shipping policy. It is front and center, impossible to miss. Shipping only takes place one day per week. The handling fees are clearly explained. Shipping fees can be estimated after placing items in the "shopping cart," so there are no surprises when the customer goes to check out.

Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q even went beyond their own high standards to improve the online ordering process even more. The company has partnered with management students at North Carolina State University

with the goal of making the site more customer-centric. With this partnership the organization demonstrated real commitment to the customer experience. For the full story, be sure to check out the feature on Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q online at <http://scnbnc.com/blog/?p=1044>.

So what is the most important secret ingredient in the recipe for Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q online sales success?

Exclusivity is a large part of why Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q is succeeding.

Already an established brand, Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q embraced the use of online sales to grow. They understood the critical elements to succeed in the online arena with a perishable item: It must be unique, hard-to-imitate, and appealing to a specific demographic.

"Selling our signature product online is a new venture for our company and with any new venture, you work through the kinks," says Averitte. "But we have a unique product, a proven method, and an established, loyal customer base. Now if someone moves away from the area, they can still satisfy their craving for the best Eastern style bar-b-q available. And thanks to being able to bring an order home or have it shipped, they can also share it with those who've never had the experience, like John Coggins did with friends representing five continents at Harvard University (read more on the Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q blog at <http://scnbnc.com/blog/?p=1150>).

Marketing & Media Contact

Contact: Richard Averitte, Marketing Director – Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q
Phone: 919-852-1722 **Fax:** 919-852-5268
Email: RAveritte@SCNBNC.com
Web: <http://www.SCNBNC.com>
Mail: P.O. Box 979 - Cary, NC 27512
Blog: <http://www.SCNBNC.com/blog/>
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/scnbnc>
Twitter: <http://twitter.com/scnbnc>
Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/scnbnc/>