

# Cracking Community Cafés

## Promoting your café

These fact sheets are produced by Ethical Eats and Making Local Food Work to help new and existing community cafés get to grips with the basics of running a successful enterprise.

This fact sheet looks at marketing and promotion. It suggests some simple things you can do to attract new customers and keep them coming back, and recommends further reading if you want to go into an issue in more detail.



If you have any questions about this fact sheet or would like any support with your community café, contact Charlotte Jarman on [charlotte@sustainweb.org](mailto:charlotte@sustainweb.org) or all 020 7837 1228

Filling the Gap Café, Tottenham  
Photo: Victor Diaz



# Your café

## What makes you special?

➔ Make sure that everyone involved in running your café agrees about what you're trying to do, and what it is that makes you different.

### What do you want the world to know about your café?

What is it that makes your café unique and worth visiting regularly, and can you communicate it in 30 words or less? For example you might want people to know that you:

- serve great food at affordable prices, and have welcoming and friendly staff
- run a training scheme to help local people get back to work
- use profits to support good causes, such as local social or environmental projects

### What sets you apart from other cafés nearby?

- Get to know the local competition – check out other local cafés, and note down what you find appealing or off-putting. Then go back to your own café and try to see it through a customer's eyes. How do your menu choices and prices compare? Could you make your café more attractive or more welcoming? How should your staff greet and serve customers? Could you provide better information?
- Having other cafés nearby may be a good thing. Maybe you can work together with them in some way, for example by:
  - running joint promotions or competitions
  - sharing details of good suppliers – perhaps exploring joint buying of some items
  - sharing or exchanging skills or expertise
  - joining forces on staff training
  - offering discounts to each others' employees

### What else do you have to offer?

As well as selling food and drink in the café, you may be able to make money and reach people in other ways – such as:

- Event catering for local organisations, sandwich delivery to local businesses, street food, market stalls
- One-off or regular evening events such as pop-up restaurants or supper clubs – run either by you or by other chefs
- Hiring out all or part of your premises as a venue for meetings, training sessions, parties...
- Renting your kitchen out to a small-scale food business during your down time
- Running or hosting activities such as cookery clubs, craft groups or art classes

Check your insurance covers you for any additional activities.

Grub Club can help you to explore these possibilities. You'll need a licence if you want to sell alcohol.

At Lumen Café we...

- \* Use almost entirely organic ingredients
- \* Buy as locally and seasonally as we can
- \* Support small farmers
- \* Serve Fairtrade coffee, tea & bananas, and use Fairtrade chocolate in our brownies
- \* Make everything<sup>⊗</sup> from scratch, right here
- \* Will be growing our own herbs & salad soon (have you seen our sunny courtyard garden? →)

⊗ Except our lovely sourdough bread, which comes from le Vain in South London

# Your customers

## Finding them and keeping them

➔ Try to understand what your potential customers are looking for and why they would come into your café.

### Get to know them

Think about who your existing and potential customers are:

- Put yourself in their shoes, describe their lifestyle (age, gender, work, leisure...)
- What do you think matters most to them? Price / quality / range / special diets / fast and professional service / a welcoming atmosphere / ethics and values...?
- Ask people what they think – design an online questionnaire; or survey people walking past the café

See [Trading for Success](#), p. 7

Try [Survey Monkey](#)

Find an example of a survey from [The Palmers Greenery café here](#).

Think about how your café is designed to meet their needs:

- Is the food and drink on offer appealing to your customers? (e.g. local, healthy, ethnic, eat in and/or take-away...?)
- Is the design, layout, comfort and style of furnishing suitable?
- Does the way your staff serve and talk to people make people feel welcome and valued?
- Have you catered for expectations such as WiFi, disabled access, meeting rooms...?

Fact sheet 2 will cover menu development

See notes about branding in [Trading for Success](#), p. 8

Think about your prices, and whether you can offer discounts or incentives:

- If you understand **all** your costs, you will be in a good position to decide whether you can afford to offer discounts to certain groups and returning customers – perhaps through a membership or loyalty scheme

Finances and pricing will be covered in fact sheets 4 and 5

### Invite them in

Once you know what sort of customers you're trying to attract, how can you get their attention?

What's the best way of reaching your target market?

- Make sure your menu is attractive and visible – it's your most important marketing tool
- Ask local shops, libraries and community centres to display your posters
- Get flyers distributed to local homes and businesses, ideally for free

See notes about promotions on p.9 and building a customer community on p. 11, of [Trading for Success](#)

Volunteers might deliver leaflets to local houses. A local newsagent or free newspaper might also distribute your leaflets for free.

- Build your mailing list: have a sign-up sheet by the till, collect business cards, see if other local networks and forums will promote you...
- Give out flyers and talk to people at stalls at community events such as local fairs
- Share news about your menu, social activities and other services through your website and social media such as [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

Ask people to put their business card in the box for the chance to win a prize – such as a free lunch for two.

Sports clubs, environmental groups and community groups may promote you via newsletters (maybe you can do the same for them later), or your local authority may mention you in local newspapers or magazines.

Can you offer incentives to draw people in? Such as:

- Samples of your homemade cakes
- Introductory offers – e.g. a muffin for 50p with each coffee
- Make sure you know what these offers are costing you – perhaps offer for a limited period

At [Filling the Gap Café](#), one child eats for free with every adult main course and each child after that eats for £1.

### Keep them coming back

Once a customer has visited, you want to do all you can to get them back again. How can you find out what was good and what was not so good?

See notes about keeping customers on p. 5 of [Trading for Success](#)

First, get feedback when people come in:

- Ask them – but use your judgement to avoid intruding on people's conversations or quiet time
- Give them a simple, postcard-sized form to fill in (including an option to give you their email address)
- Run a feedback survey online, linked to a prize draw

Then when they become a regular, give them loyalty incentives and get them involved:

- Send out news, special offers and stories by email – keep it short and fun, and always give the opportunity for people to opt out
- Loyalty cards – e.g. buy five coffees and get the sixth free
- Offer incentives for customers to bring their friends and colleagues
- Hold parties, or special fundraising events

#### Reading this on a computer?

Click on the underlined links to find out more.

#### Reading a printout?

Check out the 'useful links' box over the page.

# Your profile

## Keeping in the public eye

➔ Keep stressing what's different about you – tell a compelling or heart-warming story, and use all media to keep plugging away at it! Be consistent in your style and tone. Does everything you say reflect who you are and what you do? Try some of these ideas:

### Create stories:

- What makes you different from the mainstream café chains? Your food, your suppliers, your ethics, your people?
- Collect personal success stories from the people you support, and (with their permission) send these to the local media
- Make displays in the café, for example staff story of the week, information about your suppliers, stories of the good causes you support, or artwork on the walls by workers or customers

### Make social media work for you:

- Establish a [Twitter](#) identity and [Facebook](#) business page
- Engage with popular local bloggers (particularly those who write about food)
- Ask questions and get a conversation going, don't just try to sell stuff – and respond quickly (easiest by smartphone)
- Take photos (again, easiest on a smartphone) and upload them instantly – try photo sharing apps such as [Instagram](#)
- Run promotions for new customers and to encourage more people to 'follow' or 'like' you
- Get into the habit of checking and updating Twitter and Facebook regularly – set aside 5 or 10 minutes each day – or use a tool like [Tweetdeck](#) to plan your tweets ahead of time

Get tips from people who already use social media – or check out the guides in the 'useful links' section below

### Create a simple but attractive website:

- You can build a simple DIY site for no or low cost
- Make sure your contact details and a location map are clear and easy to find
- You should also include:
  - some information about your menu, sourcing and story
  - a 'sign up' box for your email news
  - links to your Twitter feed and Facebook page
- If you do list information about events, keep it up-to-date – or use social media instead
- Ask someone who's not involved with the café to look over your website to check that it gives the impression you want it to and you haven't missed anything obvious

Try [Wordpress](#) (free) or [Squarespace](#) (low cost)



Unpackaged shop, café & bar, Hackney

## Useful links

**Ethical Eats** – a network of restaurants, cafés and caterers interested in sustainability: [www.ethicaleats.org](http://www.ethicaleats.org)

**Making Local Food Work** – a project supporting community food enterprises, with a range of how-to guides: [www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk](http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk)

**Trading for Success** – a practical guide to running a community food enterprise. Download from the Making Local Food Work website – go to 'How we can help' > 'Enterprise support' > 'Social Enterprise Toolbox' (or go to <http://po.st/BtumAD>)

**GrubClub** – a network connecting diners, pop-up restaurants and community food enterprises: [www.grubclub.com](http://www.grubclub.com)

**SurveyMonkey** – a useful way to set up simple surveys for free: [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)

**Twitter** – a social networking service that allows you to stay in touch with customers, keep track of interesting stories and promote your café through 140-character 'Tweets' and photos: [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com). Find guides on getting started with Twitter here: <http://po.st/LqLxNs> and here: <http://po.st/xK20hY> and tips on using it for business here: <http://po.st/SeOQiZ>

**Facebook** – the well-established social networking site, on which you can set up a page for your business: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com). Find advice on using Facebook for business here: <http://po.st/HzvmGg> and: <http://po.st/3Q8LxX>

**Wordpress** – a blogging site that you can also use to set up a more business-like website: [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)

**Squarespace** – a low-cost and simple way of building a professional-looking website for your business: [www.squarespace.com](http://www.squarespace.com)