

ENGAGING WITH CHEFS

(or modern day lessons in how to
soothe the savage beast)

Introduction – Hello everyone. My name is Westerly and I work in our family olive business, ALTO Olives, with my Dad, Robert Armstrong. I have been doing the sales & marketing full time for about Two and a half years and it is a job that I love very much but it is not without its great many challenges. Which brings me to the subject of my presentation today.

I would like to start off by saying that this little presentation is not going to give you all the answers. Rather my aim is to get you thinking and asking questions about your own approach to the sales & marketing of your products & your brand to the foodservice sector. I will outline a few general principles, specific to the olive & olive oil game, that I believe will be useful to you if you choose to take them on board.

So – Engaging with Chefs – Or modern day lessons in how to soothe the savage beast. Before you think ‘that’s a bit unfair calling chefs beasts’ I should disclose that once upon a time I actually was one, albeit briefly. It’s an unforgiving & exhausting job for the most part, and also generally tends to be a very male dominated arena.

Who are we dealing with?



So let's start by getting to know a bit about our typical chef. Who are we actually dealing with?

Well, here he is. Marco Pierre White. A chefs chef if there ever was one. A huge ego with a temper to match... Been known to chuck pots and pans at young chefs heads if they slightly overcooked a steak or left a greasy thumbprint on a plate of food. Thankfully, I never worked for anyone as scary as him in my time.

In all honesty though, most chefs are not like this these days, but there are still some common traits and behaviours that you are likely to come across with many of the chefs that you end up dealing with because of the nature of their job.

Let's look at what some of these are -

A Typical Chef

- Time poor
- Short Attention Span
- Plate/Food Cost
- Hungover

1) Chefs are time poor – If they do both lunch & dinner service then they will often work in that kitchen on their feet for 12-15 hour days.

If they also own or part-own the establishment, then they have the responsibilities of managing the business and staff as well as the food every single day. This takes a lot of time and leaves less time to deal with suppliers or potential suppliers like us. You are lucky if you get 10 minutes of their attention at any given time. They just have a lot of shit to do.

2) Short Attention Span – This is not because the chef in question has ADD. Although some of them definitely do! Working in a kitchen is stressful. There are so many things to check off your prep list each and every day & before each and every service. A chef will have a checklist going in his head at all times because there are so many elements to a menu, even a simple one. What prep still needs to be done, have all the orders arrived, menu changes when something is unavailable, separate menus for functions etc etc. They can only devote a small amount of time to you & your sales pitch before their mind starts heading elsewhere as they organize themselves for the impending service. You need to be short, sharp & to the point with the short amount of time that you might have with them.

3) Plate Cost – Costing out a menu is part of a head chefs job. The margins in restaurants are notoriously low (You thought growing & selling EVOO was tough!!!). The money that an establishment puts toward the food on the plate varies, but generally it has to come in at a maximum of 30% or under, if there is any chance for that business to survive. The pressure on chefs to keep food costs down is immense. Unfortunately for us, EVOO is still often seen as an ‘extra’ ingredient, rather than an important staple which needs to be of the best quality. It’s very frustrating so you have to make them see the value in your product.

The Fabulous Four



So now that we know a bit about our typical chef, I want to share with you four principles that I believe will help you to connect with these guys on another level.

The face to face sales stuff is important, but there are some other things you should think about doing too.

These are basic principles that you can apply in your own way to your own brand. Or don't. Whatever floats your boat. So here we go...

Communicate



First of the Four – COMMUNICATE - I am sorry to break it to all of you, but social media is here to stay. (cue groans from the audience) And many people in the foodservice industry are utilising it in some form or another. It is an important & increasingly accepted form of communication and like the saying goes – you have to be in it to win it.

Find a platform that works for you and get onto it. Whether it's facebook, twitter... Whatever. It's not easy and you do need to learn a bit about it before you get in there, but it is a widely accepted way of communicating these days. There are many dos & donts of social media. And as I am no social media guru, I am not going to go into details of all the different platforms & strategies, but I encourage you to do something. If you don't, then you are missing out on opportunities to engage with the chefs that you want to sell your products to.

Educate



Secondly – EDUCATE - Do tastings. Do them often. The more chefs that try your product, the more chance you have selling it. Educate people about EVOO in general. Educate them about Australian produced EVOO. Educate them about your product.

But make sure that you know your stuff! If you have a sales rep working for you, make sure that they know your stuff.

I think that we need to be more than growers and producers, these days. We need to be educators. We have to be educators about Extra Virgin Olive Oils and table olives. We have to know about our industry. We should know some EVOO history. The more correct information we have and are able to pass on to people in the foodservice industry, the better. For everyone.

Collaborate



Thirdly – COLLABORATE - There is power in the collective. Join forces with other producers & growers. Work as a group. It can be other EVOO producers to collectively promote Aussie EVOOs etc or it can be other food producers in your local area, which means you are promoting the food of your region.

We all have different networks, so coming together & working with more people will effectively put you in front of more people who are potential customers in the foodservice industry.

Participate



And the Final of the four – PARTICIPATE – What's happening in your region, on the food front? Get involved. Food festivals, regional shows, seasonal food markets...Book a stall & get on board.

Host events and dinners, Sponsor events with your products, bring people to your groves... It is important to have your finger on the pulse of what is going on in the world of food around you. Both locally and in a bigger sense.

Because you as a grower and producer of EVOO & olives are part of that world. But you need to actively participate in it.

PHEW.

WE

ARE

ALMOST

THERE

That wasn't too tricky, was it? Or maybe it sounded like a lot. And to be honest, it kind of is. All of that stuff needs to be done on top of all the work required in producing a great oil. The time, effort & costs involved aren't minimal. They are big.

Unfortunately though, I believe that it isn't enough to just produce a good oil anymore. That's only part of the equation. There is a lot more required to get your product to market & sell it in the foodservice or even retail sector. If it sounds like too much effort, then perhaps it's worth thinking about whether selling into the foodservice game is actually right for you. Are there other options? I don't know, but it's worth thinking about for yourselves.



Tell Your Story

If you do believe that targeting foodservice is the way forward & you have the energy & funds to do so, then the final part of my presentation is this – Tell your story.

Everyone, or every brand, has a story. You might not have thought about it up till now, but I urge you to do so.

People like stories. As humans, we are hard wired to want to hear stories. I believe it goes all the way back to our caveman days where people would gather around the fire to share their experiences, so others understood their journey and their unique story.

Think about your journey thus far, and what makes you and your brand unique, and tell that story. Because if you don't tell your story, then no one else will.

On that note, I want to share with all of you today a little bit of our story. The story of ALTO...

Do it your own way

- Be informed.
- Be authentic.
- Be honest.
- Be delightful.

Before I say goodbye, I just want to say that only you know your business & your capabilities. Regardless of what everyone tells you, you have to do it your own way. And hopefully, do it well. Whichever way you choose to move forward, this little mantra will hold you in good stead.

I thank you for your time and I wish you all the best with your journey in engaging with chefs.

Thank you again, and good luck.