

CASE STUDY

Optimizing the In-Person Sales Channel in Food & Beverage Distribution

How reps at leading foodservice distributor Paris Gourmet use Handshake to drive more revenue and play a more advisory, strategic role to customers.



The foodservice industry is one anchored by the in-person sales relationship.

With such a diverse set of customers—chefs, hotel operators, and restaurants large and small—the complex buyer landscape in the foodservice industry is one anchored by the in-person sales relationship. Reps are critical to sales operations, often serving an advisory role for buyers, offering important market intelligence and order recommendations based on purchase history.

One such foodservice distributor is Paris Gourmet, a leading importer and distributor of high quality savory foods and pastry ingredients, serving chefs and operators in fine dining restaurants, hotels, and pastry shops in the U.S. Tri-state area. Sales Manager John Duffy explains the important role sales reps play at Paris Gourmet:

“Our salespeople have to go into these businesses and get to know the physics of that universe. Chefs love the restaurant business, but they spend 14 hours a day in their own restaurant, so one of the best services we can provide is information on what’s going on in their world—information about new products and new trends in the business.”

Early adopters of Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) mobile order writing technology, Paris Gourmet were pioneers in recognizing the opportunity to support their reps with better access to data. Their field reps started using Handshake’s mobile ordering app back in 2013, elevating their in-person sales conversations and fundamentally changing the way they were able to serve their buyers.

The Search for a Vendor: Solution Requirements

As Paris Gourmet searched for a mobile order writing solution that would strengthen their field sales operation, they were looking for:

Real-time data access

Working in a commodities-based business, they needed an app that would accommodate constant fluctuations in pricing. Inventory was also key. Particularly in scenarios where chefs need to depend on time-sensitive deliveries to support their weekly menus, it was imperative that reps had access to accurate inventory data at all times.



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Sales Manager, Paris Gourmet

Handshake built a customized integration to Paris Gourmet's outdated ERP.

As Duffy explains, “When a chef needs vanilla beans for that night’s menu and you can’t tell them you definitely have that, they have to call someone else. That data is mission critical.”

iOS compatibility

It was important to the Paris Gourmet team that their order writing app was optimized for the devices they were using every day. With a sales team that was all iOS, the Handshake app for iPad and iPhone was a logical choice.

A simple user experience

The Paris Gourmet team knew that an intuitive, user-friendly interface was key to getting reps up and running quickly in the field. In fact, it’s now the case that the first day on the job, new reps are handed an iPhone by a seasoned counterpart, and they’re able to place an order with little to no training. This sets a productive tone for new reps, giving them confidence early on in their role.

Integration with an outdated ERP

Finally, it was critical to Paris Gourmet that their mobile order writing solution could be integrated to their ERP, an outdated, custom-built system that was developed, according to Duffy, “before the time of connectivity.”

They knew that the integration project would require a fair amount of customization, time, and dedication from their potential vendor, and they had been disappointed in the past with larger vendors unwilling to offer the personal attention the project would require.

In the end, the commitment to building this customized integration was why Paris Gourmet chose to move forward with Handshake.

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The Paris Gourmet rep has been transformed into the point-of-purchase for their business.

After Handshake: Easier Ordering & More Sales

According to Duffy, “Handshake has been a game changer for the rep,” allowing Paris Gourmet to realize the following benefits:

Easier, more seamless order writing

Before Paris Gourmet started using Handshake, sales reps would jot orders down on paper during in-person appointments and then call those orders in to the customer service team over the phone. Now, not only is their ordering process automated, it has also allowed them to transform the rep into the point-of-purchase for their business.

Reps have found specific success using Handshake’s order duplication and search features.

- **Order duplication.** Reps are able to duplicate, modify and submit past orders, saving a great deal of time previously wasted on this very common ordering workflow.
- **Search.** Distributing a product line of over 1500 SKUs, it was important for Paris Gourmet reps to be able to search the catalog in multiple ways. While an experienced rep might look up a product by item code, for example, a new rep might need to search by name, and Handshake allows for both.

A more visual buying experience

Images play an important role in foodservice distribution, an industry that tends to have a more sensory buyer.

A few of Paris Gourmet’s favorite Handshake features:



Order duplication. Reps can duplicate, modify and submit past orders, saving them valuable time.



Search. Reps use Handshake’s flexible search feature to quickly find items across over 1500 SKUs.

An image-rich ordering app helps overcome the language barrier in sales appointments.

Duffy explains:

“You don’t work in a kitchen because you like to read documents. When we can show them a picture of the things they’re thinking about buying, it’s a much stronger message than presenting them with a list, or just a name.”

An image-rich ordering app has also served to overcome the language barrier in some sales appointments, clarifying what historically could lead to miscommunication.

According to Duffy, “We deal with people who speak every language, but if they can see and recognize the product, it makes it very easy to order. It just makes it easier for us to ensure that they’re going to get what they want.”

Reduced order errors

Given their highly diverse buyer base, Paris Gourmet encounters purchasing operations of varying levels of sophistication. While some of their larger customers have inventory systems that automatically email Paris Gourmet when stock levels are running low, smaller buyers usually lack such resources and processes.

Often placing orders off-the-cuff instead of taking inventory, these buyers would sometimes submit orders for more or less product than needed. With Handshake, the burden of this inventory management has been passed along to the Paris Gourmet sales rep. They simply use access to their customers’ historical buying patterns in order to advise them and place orders in the right quantities.

Increased sales

The previous model of ordering in foodservice distribution was typically comprised of two parts. The sales rep visit consisted of product introduction and education, but the ordering happened



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Paris Gourmet's buyers want the option to place orders online.

separately through the customer service team. Now that the Paris Gourmet sales rep is the company's point of sale, the customer is able to learn about and buy products on the spot, a much more seamless and intuitive buyer experience.

In the previous model, buyers would tend to take inventory late at night, after their establishments had closed, and would then have to make calls to all their purveyors in the morning to place re-orders.

Paris Gourmet buyers no longer need to make those phone calls, and can instead simply place reorders during their sales rep visit. This more automated process helps Paris Gourmet stand out amongst their competitors as a more desirable vendor to order from.

Up Next for Paris Gourmet: eCommerce

According to Duffy, Paris Gourmet is committed to implementing eCommerce in the near future. In fact, knowing that Handshake's platform offered the ability to easily "switch on" online ordering later for their customers (pulling from the same product and order data as their sales rep app) was a big part of Handshake's initial draw.

Duffy acknowledges that while the in-person channel in foodservice distribution will always be critical, it is becoming increasingly important to his buyers to have the option to place orders online. Referencing the consumer eCommerce experience, he elaborates:

"Most of us place orders for things every day, whether it's on Amazon or via an app for our lunch. Think about how many businesses have become self-service. Our customers are going to expect that, not because they think it's better, but just because they are used to it."



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With online ordering, reps can focus on key accounts and smaller customers can order online.

Paris Gourmet also recognizes the fact that online ordering can provide an opportunity to focus reps on key accounts while directing smaller customers to an easy-to-use online ordering portal. Explains Duffy:

“We have a fair number of buyers who are happy to do a small amount of business, but no matter what we do, we aren’t going to turn them into large customers. How do we provide them with a great experience? It’s with a strong online ordering app.”

Implementing Omnichannel Selling

Like many suppliers across manufacturing and distribution who were once totally reliant on their in-person sales channel, Paris Gourmet is in the midst of implementing an omnichannel sales strategy. This strategy is one that optimizes for the human sales relationship, but also gives customers the option to order online.

Not only are manufacturers and distributors seeing more value from their omnichannel customers (according to Forrester, they **spend more** than single-channel customers), suppliers that have not yet implemented an omnichannel sales strategy are losing business to their competitors that have. In a world where the conveniences of consumer eCommerce have set a high bar, the B2B buyer wants to do business with suppliers who make it as easy as possible to order from them.

To optimize your in-person sales channel with an omnichannel Commerce platform that also includes online customer ordering, contact Handshake today.

Email: info@handshake.com
US Toll Free: +1 (855) 532-9044
International: +1 (646) 434-25533

For users of Handshake’s omnichannel B2B Commerce platform, turning on new sales channels in the future is as **easy as flipping a switch.**

