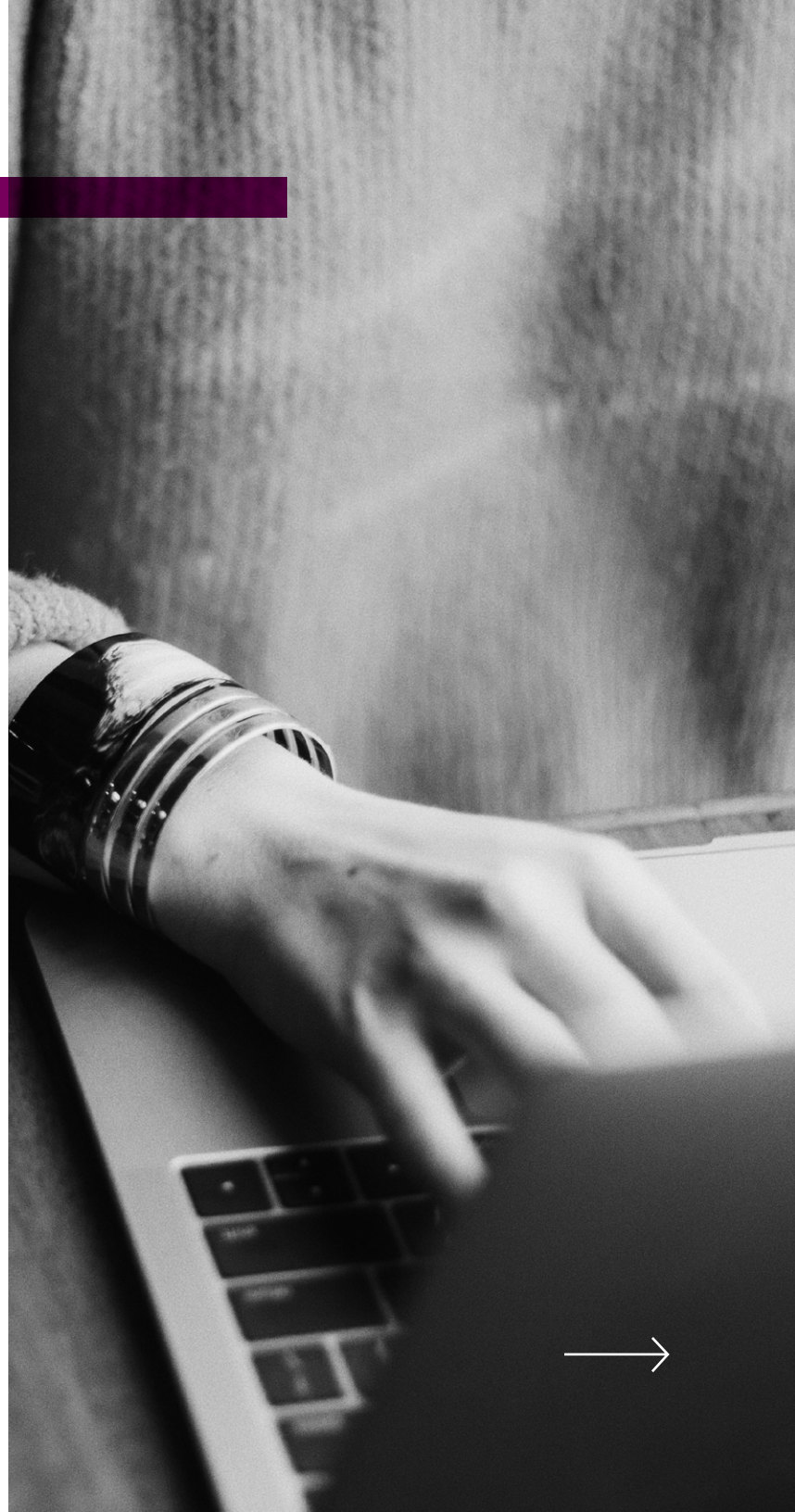


The Buyer Meeting Success Kit

HOW TO LAND (AND KEEP) YOUR
PRODUCT ON STORE SHELVES

- ✓ ADVICE FROM INDUSTRY INSIDERS
- ✓ BUYER MEETING CHECKLIST
- ✓ PRODUCT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS



A Make-or-Break Moment for Your Brand

Gulp. It's time...

You have an appointment to meet with the buyer for your category at a major retail chain. The topic of conversation: Whether they'll carry your product. Or, if you're already on shelves, whether they'll carry more, the same amount, or—perish the thought—fewer SKUs.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take before, during, and after a buyer meeting to improve your chances of success...and to make a lasting, positive impression on the buyer.

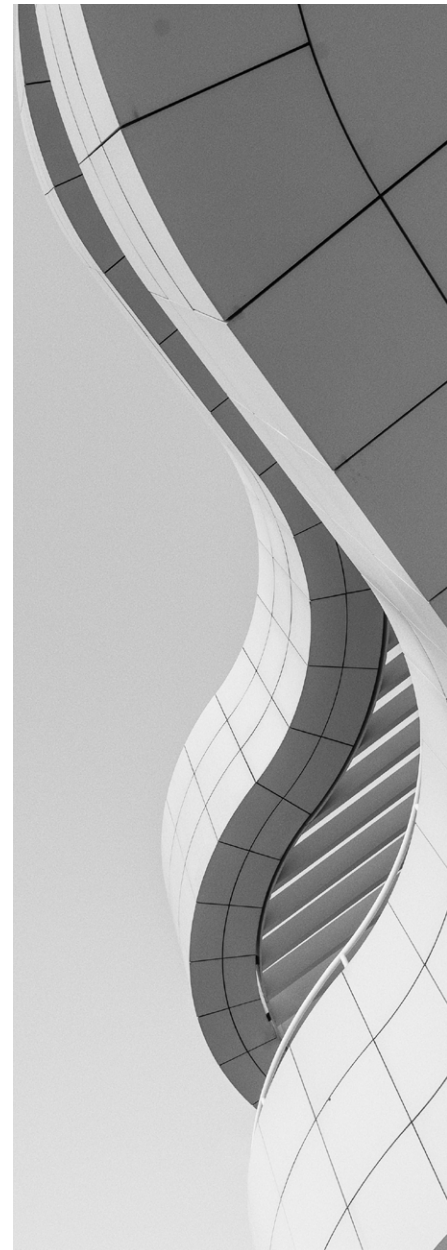
And that's the purpose of this “success kit”: to help you prep like a pro for your upcoming, all-important buyer meeting. Like you, we at Plum have retail in our DNA, and we want you to approach your meeting with confidence and enthusiasm—as an opportunity, not a threat.

On the following pages we provide:

- ✓ Advice from industry insiders about preparing for your line review or other buyer meeting
- ✓ A checklist of possible items to have for your buyer meeting
- ✓ A product guide describing innovative ways you can prepare for and follow-through on your buyer meeting

Even if you're a longtime pro at meetings with buyers, we believe you'll benefit from the observations and advice in this kit.

So, let's get started...



EXPERT PANEL

7 Industry Insiders Offer Advice for a Successful Buyer Meeting

We're privileged at Plum to have many friends in retail, including CPG professionals who regularly participate in meetings with buyers.

For this success kit, we surveyed seven brand representatives, including VPs, directors, and senior account executives, to understand their guiding principles for a successful buyer meeting.

The pages to come do not mention these insiders by name, in order to preserve their anonymity. We do, however, sprinkle in some additional guidance from CPG veterans, Henry Ho and Skip Stoelzing.

GET READY. HERE COME 12 TIPS FROM CPG PROFESSIONALS WHO HAVE NAVIGATED SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS WITH BUYERS—IN MANY CASES, MULTIPLE TIMES.



TIP NO. 1

Do Your Homework

Remember in school how easy it was to spot students who didn't do their homework?

This dynamic is even more pronounced in a buyer meeting, especially a line review.

Truly, in a buyer meeting, the spoils go to the prepared. But prepared in what ways?

First, know the retailer's stores—especially the aisles you're proposing to join. It can really irk buyers when suppliers enter the meeting without knowing the lay of the land in their stores. The buyer may even ask directly, "When's the last time you saw the inside of our stores?"

The Walmart supplier site, for its part, says one of "the most important things you can

do" is learn how Walmart and Sam's Club work by visiting their stores.

But one or two "store walks" may not be sufficient. Skip Stoelzing, Field Agent director of sales and president of SKS Sales & Marketing, has a long track record of selling to Target specifically.

"It's easy to think your local store is like all the rest," he said. "But really what you need is to understand the category inside a good cross-section of 50-100 stores across the country."

Imagine how risky it would be to base your presentation and proposals on a visit to just your local stores. Your hometown Kroger, for example, may merchandise your category

on 16-foot sections, and so you assume this to be true of all Kroger stores nationwide. During your meeting, however, the buyer informs you that eight-foot sections are commonplace in other regions. *Ouch.*

You should enter a buyer meeting, particularly a line review, with a solid understanding of the category, planogram, and prices in the retailer's stores.

Second, know the score...and how to improve it. This advice is particularly relevant for brands already on-shelf. As *8th & Walton* advises, never go into a buyer meeting asking, “How are my sales looking?” That’s something you should know. You should also be prepared with suggestions for how to improve those sales. “Walmart expects suppliers to bring ideas and innovation to the meetings,” wrote *8th & Walton*.

Third, know the answers to common buyer questions. What questions are “common,” you ask. For example...

Where is your product currently selling?

If you’re already helping one retailer grow the category, you make a strong case for growing another retailer’s category. The buyer may also be interested in knowing whether Amazon carries your product, if only because Amazon’s price-slashing has a way of squeezing their margins.

How much for your product? This isn’t a simple answer. Quantity pricing, shipping terms, and the retailer’s program (which might include slotting fees, defect allowances, etc.) should all be taken into account.

How will you promote your product and drive trial? The burden falls on you to convince the buyer you can get your product into shoppers’ hands. This is especially true for new products.

Do you currently have inventory? If you don’t, the retailer could be at the mercy of delays and quality issues.

What is the minimum order quantity (or smallest amount they can buy)? Major retailers often like to test new products in a limited number of stores before making a larger investment.

Of course, while you should enter the buyer meeting prepared, and you—the seller—should ultimately own the agenda, also leave plenty of room for the buyer to share their needs. Don’t let any amount of preparation make you (or your presentation) too rigid. More on this later.

TIP NO. 2

Know Thy Industry, Category, & Customer

Certainly this is related to “doing your homework,” but probably deserving of its own tip. After all, knowing your industry, category, and customer isn’t something you do in preparation for a meeting; it’s something you *are*—all the time. You’re the expert on your industry, category, and customer. If you aren’t, who is?

And your buyer will expect you to demonstrate this expertise. The buyer, who is aggressively focused on growing their category, may also be eager to learn from your expertise.

As one of our industry insiders advised, “Be able to provide industry and marketplace perspective along with the insights for how that impacts the buyer’s business.”

Do you know, for instance, which retailers

perform best in the category? Do you understand regional differences in the category? Do you know the top brands in the category?

As for customers, you should of course know your own customers (i.e., consumers) in verifiable ways, and you should also understand the retailer’s customers (i.e., shoppers).

“Make sure you understand our shoppers’ needs,” says the Walmart supplier site. “When we choose new items to stock, we select products customers want. How would your product or service improve our customers’ lives?”

But, for a line review in particular, telling and showing are different animals. Which leads us to...



“Be able to provide industry and marketplace perspective along with the insights for how that impacts the buyer’s business.”

INDUSTRY INSIDER, ON KNOWING YOUR INDUSTRY, CATEGORY, & CUSTOMER

TIP NO. 3

Be Data-Driven

Underlying every statement you make in a buyer meeting is a question on the retailer's mind: How do you *know*? Objective data, naturally, will answer this question more convincingly than personal observations and intuitions.

"Find data-based insights that help you tell your story," said one of our industry insiders. "You are always trying to answer the question 'why' they should buy," and verifiable data can help you make a convincing case.

Henry Ho, co-founder of Plum and a 20-year P&G veteran, put it this way: "Take your buyer a gift of data and insight," he said. "They're hungry for objective insights on how to grow their category."

What kinds of data exactly?

1. Category and sales data. There are common watering holes for such data, including syndicated data-providers (e.g., NielsenIQ, IRI) that provide aggregated category and sales data across brands and retailers. Byzzzer, a retail analytics platform powered by NielsenIQ, specializes in retail analytics for small and medium-sized brands.

Syndicated reports, however, cannot provide a store-level view of sales. For this, point-of-sale systems like Target's Partners Online or Walmart's Retail Link are crucial resources.

2. Consumer and shopper data. You, as the seller, need data on your customers and the

retailer's customers. Today, understanding consumers and shoppers is especially pressing in two areas:

- ✓ **Digital shopping:** E-commerce, pickup, delivery, and the like. The digital revolution has transformed retail—and everyone, including your buyer, is scurrying to make sense of this brave, new world.
- ✓ **Social trends:** Here, think sustainability, health concerns, socio-political causes, etc. These trends aren't just "out there." They impact shopping and consumption patterns "in here" and have major implications for brands and retailers.

3. Financial data. Your product has a role to play in the larger category. Maybe it's a profit-maker or maybe it's a volume-driver. Knowing its role is crucial because it helps you answer an important question: Will your product help the buyer achieve margin and volume goals?

Whatever the answer, be ready to prove it with hard, financial data.

4. Supporting data. As seen, buyers expect suppliers to offer ideas and recommendations. While suggestions will vary from one brand and category to another, one thing doesn't change: the need for objective data to back those ideas and recommendations.

**IF YOU SUGGEST IT,
BE READY TO SUPPORT
IT. WITH DATA.**





TIP NO. 4

Know What a “Win” Looks Like

To be clear, a buyer meeting is not really about winning and losing. Winning implies someone has to lose—and that’s not the case. Both parties, buyer and seller, can leave as winners.

However, you should enter the meeting knowing what a “win” looks like for your brand at least. The meeting itself is not the time to run calculations in your head.

As one industry insider said, “Have clear objectives about what is great, good, okay, and failure.”

But keep your expectations grounded, he added. “Great is rarely achieved,” so be willing to give up “great” to secure “good.” If good works for now, you can make efforts to secure great later.

Another insider said, “Know and balance your short-term and long-term views of winning.”

Of course, winning doesn’t happen all at once. Going from okay to good to great is more like growing a garden than microwaving a burrito. You have to plant, water, train, and—only then—harvest.

This much is certain though: internal stakeholders within your company need to be aligned on what winning (and losing) look like for your brand.

Even if you’re the only member of your team attending the meeting, you speak for your entire company.

TIP NO. 5

Expect the Unexpected

Call it scenario planning.

As one insider recommended, spend time imagining your meeting so you can identify weak points and blind spots in your presentation and proposals. “Handling objections before they’re stated helps to speed up decisions and helps you win with a buyer.”

Another said it’s helpful to imagine a few different ways the discussion might unfurl during the meeting. “What are the three or four paths this conversation can go [down], and how do I prepare to handle objections or change directions?”

Again, flexibility and adaptability are assets during any buyer meeting.

Skip Stoelzing suggests you can buffer against surprises by communicating upfront with the buyer and/or your colleagues who have worked with the buyer.

“It is very difficult when you’re thrown a curveball during the meeting,” Stoelzing said. “Seek out as much information as you can beforehand, maybe with a simple email to the buyer, and try to understand their objectives and overall program.”

At the end of the day, however, plan to be flexible. Expect the unexpected.



**“Seek out as much information as you can
beforehand...and try to understand their
objectives and overall program.”**

SKIP STOELZING, ON EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

TIP NO. 6

Keep it Simple

More isn't necessarily better. Not in a buyer meeting.

Too many proposals, too many slides, and too much data can all frustrate the buyer and undermine your objectives.

"Buyers have too much going on to go through a 50-slide presentation," said one of our insiders. "Make recommendations simple and actionable."

As a rule of thumb, imagine your buyer to be the busiest person you know. Busier than even you, which we know is hard to imagine. Why make their lives any more complicated?

So...keep. it. simple.

Of course, there's no one "right way" to keep it simple. For some buyers and sellers, simplicity means a "sales sheet" or two with key information (no slide presentation at all). For other buyers and sellers, simplicity is a short slide deck with concise bullet points and easy-to-understand graphics.

So maybe there is a "right way," after all? It comes down to the information and communication preferences of the buyer. More on this shortly.

See the checklist toward the end of the kit for additional information on what to take to your buyer meeting.



TIP NO. 7

Build Trust & Empathy

Up to this point, the tips have been mainly operational in nature. But a buyer is also—surprise, surprise—a person. So it's important to consider the personal dimension of any buyer meeting.

Other things equal, a buyer will generally decide to do business with someone they like. And few things go right to the core of “likeability” as trust and empathy.

There are plenty of ways to lose both, but there are also some ways to build trust and empathy. For instance...

- ✓ Consider the buyer's likes and dislikes in everything from slide decks to communication flow
- ✓ Speak the buyer's language—whether that's using industry terms like “velocity,” “OTIF,” or “minimum advertised price,” or the metrics the buyer is known to care about
- ✓ Cultivate a sincere, inquisitive, helpful demeanor

But, careful, don't be disingenuous. Rushing in with questions like “How many kids do you have?” often comes across as inauthentic, even manipulative.

“There is no instant trust,” said Henry Ho. “You earn it over time, and you start over with each new buyer.”

Ultimately, the best way to build trust is to deliver on what you say. Time after time. Let's consider some other principles with implications for trust and empathy...

TIP NO. 8

Listen Deeply

Talk less; listen more. That's the advice of more than one industry insider.

And when you listen...listen to understand, not as a mere token or pretense.

According to one of our experts, the buyer should talk two-thirds of the time. After all, it's by listening that you'll learn what's most important to the buyer...and how to satisfy their needs.

In other words, their needs first, your products second.

Skip Stoelzing said he always starts a buyer meeting by asking open-ended questions and taking plenty of time to listen attentively.

"If you just launch into your presentation," he said, "you may miss the chance to really understand the buyer's needs. You have a list of things, but they also have a list of things. The most important things are on their list."

But this raises a question: If you own the agenda, as stated earlier, why such emphasis on listening?

It's simple. You're driving, but you're driving where they need you to drive.

And you'll never arrive at the right destination if you don't listen. Deeply.





TIP NO. 9

Help the Buyer Win

Across the board, our insiders were more adamant about this point than possibly any other: Help the buyer win.

For any buyer meeting, this is the pinnacle of empathy.

The buyer, like you, has hopes of bonuses, promotions, and a better life. Can you help them move closer to these goals?

“Merchants need vendors... to make their lives easier,” said one of our experts. “[Those who] solve their problems are the vendors who get the call back.”

Ask right upfront about the buyer’s needs... then tailor your presentation and proposals to them. Of course, the buyer is ultimately

responsible for growing the category, as we’ll soon discuss.

Understand this as well: Unfounded optimism and overzealous recommendations don’t help a buyer win. It’s important to always be realistic.

Shelf space inside stores is extremely limited, so buyers will naturally look with skepticism at overly aggressive proposals. Stay grounded, and help the buyer win by recognizing the realities they’re up against.

“Merchants need vendors...to make their lives easier. [Those who] solve their problems are the vendors who get the call back.”

INDUSTRY INSIDER, ON HELPING THE BUYER WIN

TIP NO. 10

Have a “Category Mindset”

Your buyer is running a small business (the category) within a larger business (the store). Their livelihood revolves around their ability to grow this “small business,” so it’s essential you maintain a category mindset before, during, and after the line review or another buyer meeting.

Ultimately, for the buyer, it’s all about driving category sales and profit margins.

And not just sales, but incremental sales. The buyer doesn’t want to trade sales of one product in the category for another product in the category. They want fresh dollars.

Think of the category as the buyer’s “child,” said one of our industry insiders. It’s great that you have an amazing product with amaz-

ing features, but how will it help this child grow?

To this end, when you make a suggestion, state exactly how it will help grow the category in terms of defined metrics like sales, profit, share, and inventory.

One more time: Help the buyer win. And one way to do this is to get and keep a category mindset.



TIP NO. 11

Get Omni With It

The buyer role has changed dramatically in recent years. What happened? The omnichannel revolution, that's what.

E-commerce, pickup, delivery. These have all been gamechangers.

Today, chances are your buyer is not only responsible for growing their category in stores, but online as well.

According to Henry Ho, "Buyers today often have ownership of the full omnichannel."


That's why, in the words of one industry insider, "You need an equally robust plan for dotcom as you do for stores." Be ready, as another said, to "present a holistic omnichannel plan."

You can apply this tip retroactively to so much we've already discussed:

- ✓ In knowing your customer, know them online as well as in-store
- ✓ In knowing your category, know it online as well as in-store
- ✓ In familiarizing yourself with the retailer's operations, familiarize yourself with their online operations, too

And because omnichannel remains a new and formidable challenge for many retailers, bonus points to any brand that cultivates deep understanding of the space and can provide a buyer with fresh insights and perspectives.





None of this is to suggest that every brand and every category should emphasize in-store and online in equal measure. Given space constraints, shopping patterns, shipping considerations, and so on, some brands—especially in durable categories—should lead with e-commerce and supplement with stores. A sizable presence online; a modest presence in stores.

“Know the best channel for you,” said Skip Stoelzing. “Don’t necessarily go into your buyer meeting thinking we should put these 10 SKUs in-store, when two in-store and 100 online would be more realistic. Don’t underestimate online. It can be really good for some categories.”

To succeed online and win your buyer’s trust, however, you need to hone your digital game. Here are two increasingly important ways:

1. Online ratings and reviews. They’re not just nice-to-have any longer; they’re a must-have.

If you want to expand your online presence with major retailers, you must be able to furnish product pages with ratings and reviews from verified buyers of your products.

2. Quality photography/graphics. When shoppers can’t actually inspect and handle your products in-person, high-quality photos and graphics are the next best thing.

But inferior, poorly-lit product images probably won’t make it past the buyer’s notice... and they sure won’t do you any favors with online shoppers. Depending on your category, videos and/or CAD drawings may also be to the mutual advantage of brand and retailer.

TIP NO. 12

End With Purpose

First impressions might be everything, but final actions and next steps are crucial to a successful buyer meeting.

At the end, be certain to ask the buyer how they'd prefer you follow-up with them. Email, phone call...what? Different buyers have different preferences.

Also attempt to understand your buyer's timeline. It could be an immediate follow-up meeting won't make sense, as they may be planning purchases a year in advance.

In general, you simply want to make sure you're clear on the next steps and their delivery. After the meeting is a bad time to wonder, "I haven't heard from them, should I reach back out?"

Regardless, a pithy follow-up email immediately after the meeting is generally a good idea. This is a chance for you to detail—very concisely—what was discussed and decided in the meeting. It's also a good opportunity to provide digital PDF copies of sales sheets and the like.





CHECKLIST

What to Have at Your Buyer Meeting

What exactly do you need for your buyer meeting? What should you take?

Unfortunately, there's no ironclad or universal packing list for meetings with buyers. But, as you'll see, several items have proved beneficial to brands over the years in their meetings with big retailers.

For each item on the checklist to come, simply consider its appropriateness in the context of your proposals, your buyer's needs and preferences, and the nature of the meeting itself. Every meeting is unique.

Nor is this checklist meant to be all-inclusive. You may deem it necessary to prepare other items or materials for your approaching meeting.

While there are all sorts of "buyer meetings," this checklist is especially relevant for a line review, when the brand's objective is to get or grow on store shelves.

Ready. Set. Check. ✓



☐ **SALES SHEET(S)**

Some brands prefer one-page sales sheets over slide decks. A sales sheet can highlight key information about a product (e.g., UPC codes, ingredients, specs) all in one convenient place.



SLIDE DECK

A small slide deck is also a perfectly acceptable method of presenting key information to buyers.



BUSINESS CARDS

Old school? Perhaps. Completely necessary? No. Possibly a nice touch? Sure.



SAMPLES

If you're meeting in-person and your products are small enough for store shelves, take samples. They'll enhance your presentation and maybe help the buyer picture the items in their stores.



CATALOG/LINE SHEET(S)

Today, product catalogs and line sheets are generally hosted online. But be able to supply access information to your buyer.



PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Are there POS or other promotional materials the buyer would benefit from seeing in-person? Take them along.



Q&A SCRIPT

As seen, buyers ask some common questions. You might consider a one- or two-page Q&A script that you can rehearse before the meeting or quickly access if you forget a detail.



DATA

We previously discussed the importance of sales, customer, financial, and supporting data. Have it ready, not only to support your recommendations, but also to help the buyer better understand their category.



COMPANY OVERVIEW

Especially early in the relationship with a buyer, your presentation should include a brief overview about the company.



ACCOUNT LIST/ COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

The buyer will be interested to know which retailers are currently selling your product as well as the rate of sale these retailers are getting. Buyers are always eager to understand the category at competing retailers.



TECHNOLOGICAL DUE DILIGENCE

Many meetings with buyers today are virtual in nature. Work through issues with internet connection, screen-sharing, background noise, etc. prior to the meeting. Don't let inattention in this area sink your meeting.



WHAT THEY SAY THEY NEED

Ultimately, what the buyer says they need trumps anything and everything in this checklist.



PRICES

Your presentation, however it is rendered, should include pricing information. Often brands will tier prices for quantity pricing, dropshipping, etc.



LISTENING EARS

It's worth repeating, no slide deck or product sample will substitute for your ability to listen. Make a conscious decision beforehand to enter with listening ears.



PRODUCT GUIDE

Tools for a Successful Buyer Meeting

Prepping for a buyer meeting, particularly a line review, can be overwhelming. There's so much to research, explore, understand, and propose. Everything from in-store conditions to promotional strategies, shopper insights to marketing collateral.

Where does one even start?

Plum contains many fast, easy, and cost-effective tools to help CPG professionals prepare for a buyer meeting and grow their brands.

The marketplace contains auditing tools (e.g., Category Overview Photos, Price Checks),

trial tools (e.g., Digital Demos, Ratings & Reviews), and insights tools (e.g., Shopalongs, Concept Tests) that can help brands get, stay, and grow in-store and online.

You'll also find products fulfilled entirely by third-party solution providers, including professional brand photography, light merchandising, on-shelf analytics, and more.

On the next few pages we provide a product guide to help you quickly locate the right solutions for your next buyer meeting.

LEARN MORE ABOUT PLUM —→

**FOR MY BUYER MEETING,
I NEED TO...**

EXPLANATION

**PLUM PRODUCT
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Understand the category (e.g., planograms, prices) inside the retailer's stores or another retailer's stores

Buyers expect suppliers to come to meetings with a working knowledge of the category, both in their stores and their competitors' stores. This may encompass planograms, prices, promotions, and the like.

- ✓ [Price Check](#)
- ✓ [Category Overview Photos](#)
- ✓ [Planogram Visibility](#)

Determine if the retailer is pricing, positioning, and/or promoting my products correctly in their stores

If your brand is already on-shelf, could mistakes by the retailer be dragging down your sales? If so, the buyer meeting is a great opportunity to bring up incorrect prices, promotions, placements, etc. But you'll want photo proof.

- ✓ [Display Compliance](#)
- ✓ [Item Checkup](#)
- ✓ [On-Shelf Availability](#)
- ✓ [Price Check](#)
- ✓ [Signage Audit](#)

Drive purchases of my product

The ability to drive sales has a couple of implications for a buyer meeting. Maybe you need to boost sales prior to meeting with a buyer—even sales in specific markets or single stores/websites. Or maybe you need to demonstrate that you can drive purchases—including first purchase—of your products.

- ✓ [Digital Demo](#)
- ✓ [Buy & Try](#)
- ✓ [Ratings & Reviews](#)

Obtain professional brand photography

Unprofessional photos and marketing collateral are a rookie mistake, and buyers will notice (and negotiate harder).

- ✓ [Brand Photography Package](#)

**FOR MY BUYER MEETING,
I NEED TO...**

EXPLANATION

**PLUM PRODUCT
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Better understand the category shopper

Do you understand the behaviors and attitudes of the shoppers who shop your category? The buyer may test your knowledge, and, moreover, the buyer is always eager to learn more about these shoppers.

✓ [Shopalong](#)

Better understand consumer attitudes toward my products

It's one thing to say consumers love your product, but it's an entirely different thing to show the buyer they love your product. Verifiable proof of consumer attitudes will go farther than data-less appeals.

✓ [Concept Tests](#)
✓ [Net Promoter Score](#)
✓ [Buy & Try](#)

Accumulate more ratings and reviews for my product

In the digital age, many brands enter a buyer meeting at a disadvantage because they don't have enough online ratings and reviews.

✓ [Ratings & Reviews](#)
✓ [Ratings & Reviews – Online](#)

Prepare to meet with a Walmart buyer, specifically

Brands selling through Walmart have to navigate a unique set of opportunities and challenges. Wouldn't it be nice to have an all-in-one toolkit for Walmart success?

✓ [Win-at-Walmart Toolkit](#)



Buyer Meeting? You Got This.

A buyer meeting can be intimidating. We know.

But you've got an ally.

The Plum retail-solutions marketplace is optimally-designed for CPG professionals preparing for a buyer meeting. The marketplace puts stores, shoppers, and sales within arm's reach—with just a few clicks, in just a few minutes, for just a few dollars.

Click below to launch a project.

[LAUNCH A PROJECT →](#)