The DTC + Retail Guide

The CPG DTC Playbook | Prepared by Dumo Digital Strategies

For emerging CPG brands planning for retail

Why your own store is the most important channel an emerging brand has, and how to use it to get on shelf, stay on shelf, and walk into every buyer meeting with data instead of hope.

DTC Isn't the Alternative to Retail. It's the Reason Retail Says Yes.

No artist sells out an arena first. They build a fanbase one person at a time, in rooms they own, and the arena books them because the fans are already there. Retail works the same way. The shelf is the arena. Your Shopify store is the room you own.

A lot of brands chase retail first because it feels like the big win. Then they find out the hard way that getting on shelf is the easy part. Staying there is a volume game, and volume comes from shoppers who already know who you are.

Why Retail Is a Hard Place to Start

The reality	What it means for you
It is a volume game	Retailers keep products that move. Every store needs to sell a set number of units every week, and if you miss it, you lose the slot, usually within a few months.
It is expensive	Slotting fees, free fill, promotions, broker fees and deductions add up before you sell a single unit. Most of it is paid up front, before you know if the product will move.
The margins are the thinnest you will ever see	Retailers often take 30 to 40% margin, and a distributor can take another 15 to 30% on top. You sell at the worst margin of any channel, on the retailer's terms.
The shopper does not know you	On a shelf you get a second or two next to brands people already trust. Nobody grabs a brand they have never heard of.
You learn nothing about who bought	Retail tells you how many units sold, not who bought them, why, or whether they came back.

If you do not know who your customer is, how often they buy, where they live and why they choose you, getting into retail is a guessing game. And you are playing it at the worst margins you will ever have, at the hands of the retailer.

What DTC Gives You That Retail Never Will

	Why it matters
An audience you own	Everybody lives on their phones. Your store, your email and SMS list, your reviews and your social following are where people find you, fall in love with the product, and come back. Followers belong to the platform. A customer list belongs to you.
The best margins you will ever have	No retailer cut, no distributor cut, no slotting. Every dollar a customer spends on your site is a dollar you keep more of than anywhere else.
A business you can scale	More traffic into a store that converts means more revenue the next day. No reset calendar, no buyer approval, no waiting a year for a new shelf.
Knowing exactly who your customer is	Who buys, how often, which pack size, where they live, what they buy it with, and why they leave. This is the data that makes every retail decision smarter.

	Why it matters
A place to test everything	Try a new flavor, a new pack size, a new price or a new message on your site in a week. Take only what works into retail, where every change takes months.
Brand equity	Every person who knows you online is a person who recognizes you on a shelf. That recognition is what turns into velocity.

Retail Is a Volume Game

Velocity is the number that decides whether you stay on shelf. It means units sold per store, per week. A buyer will tell you what they expect for your category, and you have to hit it in every door, every week.

If you are in	At 2 units per store per week	That is
200 doors	400 units every week	20,800 units a year
1,000 doors	2,000 units every week	104,000 units a year
3,000 doors	6,000 units every week	312,000 units a year

Every one of those units is a shopper walking down an aisle and picking you over everything around you. They only reach for a brand they recognize. That recognition gets built online first: on your site, in their inbox, on their feed, and in their kitchen after the first order.

Run your own numbers with the Retail Velocity calculator at dumodigital.com/playbook.

Know Your Customer Before You Pitch

The brands that win at retail can answer every one of these questions with their own data. Your DTC store is where you get the answers.

Question	Where to find the answer
Who buys? Age, gender, life stage	A one-question post-purchase survey, your Meta audience insights, and your reviews.
How often do they buy?	Shopify returning customer rate and the time between first and second orders.
Where do they live?	Shopify customers by state and city. This tells you which regions and retailers to pitch first.
What do they buy?	Best-selling products and pack sizes, and what gets bought together.
Why do they buy?	The exact words customers use in reviews. That is your shelf message.
Why do they leave?	Subscription cancel reasons. Taste, price or too much product all mean different fixes.
When do they buy?	Seasonality and day-of-week patterns that tell you when to push promotions in store.

The Numbers a Buyer Wants to See

Number	What it proves to a buyer
Repeat purchase rate	The product earns a second purchase. That is exactly what a shelf needs.
Active subscribers and churn	Recurring demand, and that people stay once they start.
Revenue per visitor	How well the brand sells when nobody is doing the selling for it.
Reviews: rating and count	Social proof a buyer can see in ten seconds.
Branded search and direct traffic	People are typing your name, not just finding whatever is on the shelf.

Number	What it proves to a buyer
Customers in their region	Demand already exists near their stores before you ever ship a case.
Email, SMS and social audience	You can drive your own people into their stores on day one.

Build Your Buyer One-Pager

Bring one page to every buyer meeting. Keep it simple enough to read in a minute.

1. The brand in one line	What it is, who it is for, and why it is different.
2. Proof of demand	Your repeat rate, subscribers, reviews and branded traffic.
3. The shopper	Who buys, how often, and the habit your product fits into.
4. Demand in their region	How many of your customers already live near their stores.
5. How you will drive people to the shelf	Email and SMS to your list, a store locator on your site, social, sampling and local ads near new doors.
6. The ask	Which products, how many doors, and when.

Once You Are On Shelf: Use DTC to Drive Velocity

Move	How to do it
Tell your list	Send an email and text to customers who live near the new stores: "Now at Sprouts near you."
Add a store locator	A searchable map on your site, linked in the menu and on every product page. Every shopper who finds you nearby is a warm lead for the shelf.
Target ads near new doors	Run local ads around the stores that just picked you up, pointed at the store locator.
Turn in-store buyers into online customers	A QR code on the pack or a shelf talker that leads to your site, your story and a subscription.
Protect your pricing	Keep online pricing in line with the shelf. Undercutting your retailers is the fastest way to lose them.
Keep learning	Watch which regions grow online after you launch in store. That data is your case for the next retailer.

The Order of Operations

1	Build a store that converts a stranger on a phone.
2	Build an audience and repeat buyers with email, SMS and subscription.
3	Learn exactly who your customer is and where they live.
4	Test flavors, pack sizes, prices and messages online first.
5	Pitch the retailers where your customers already shop.
6	Walk in with data, not hope.
7	Use your audience to drive velocity, and keep the shelf.

Pull Your Numbers in Two Minutes

Paste this into Sidekick in your Shopify admin before your next buyer meeting:

Sidekick prompt	"For the last 12 months, give me: my returning customer rate, active subscribers, average orders per customer, average days between first and second order, my top 10 states and cities by customers and revenue, my best-selling products and pack sizes, and the share of revenue from returning customers."

Want help building the DTC side before you pitch? Book a strategy call at dumodigital.com. We will look at your store, your retail goals and what to build first.