

Are you willing to expand your front-end product lines?

“When are you going to find something that we can sell that won’t be found in a dollar store, the big-box stores, the chains, or on the internet?”

That was the opening comment from a phone call that I recently received. The question or complaint — not sure what it was meant to be — has become part of a recurring theme. My reply: *“Sorry, unless you are interested in selling your neighbor’s baked goods, I will not be able to find you much.”* When I did find a few, they were on Amazon within five months after being shown to me, and one made it to the biggest of the box stores. I have many reps say to me with the most sincerity, *“We will never sell to the chains,”* and then I whisper, *“Until they ask.”* To be frank, many vendors have stayed away from the big-box and dollar stores because if they did sell to them, they would so be beaten up on cost of goods that there would be no profit left for the vendor.

Here are a few questions to ask vendor representatives when considering carrying a product line that your customers can easily find elsewhere.

Question 1: *What are the **MSRP** (manufacturer suggested retail price) and the **MAP** (minimum advertised price)?* **MAP** is a universal agreement of the lowest retail price for which a business can advertise a particular product. Most vendors, when seeing a price lower than the **MAP**, will stop selling to the entity that broke the pact.

Question 2: *What is the lowest cost of goods you offer, and how can I buy it at that price?*

Then there is this much forgotten Question 3: *What is your marketing budget on this line?* A high number is a double-edged sword; a product line with a substantial marketing budget will most likely be found in numerous classes of trade. But on the other side, a large budget for advertising, when done right, will send people looking for the product, and ideally, your store will be one of their choices. A low budget means that the marketing is going to be up to you. In-store promotions and digital sign messages will be a must.

Question 4 has two-parts: *Who sells the most of your product, and how do they do it?*

Finally, Question 5: *Will you put my store’s name and address on your website store locator?*

Then there is this: Your wholesaler’s private label, something that you could call your preferred brand, offers a ring of protection around it, keeping it from showing up in the stores mentioned previously. You may also want to consider finding a pharmaceutical-grade supplement vendor willing to allow you to put your own store’s private label on the line. You will want a professional name and logo on the label with only your website and contact information on it.

Keep your front end looking alive, stock more than one each on the shelf (yes, there are stores still doing this), and adjust your selection accordingly.