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[Bakery Operations, Business Advice](#)

## Edible Education: Bakery Classes to Boost Business

Today’s consumers are increasingly likely to spend on experiences over things. Spending on experiences and events rose 70 percent in the past 30 years, according to registration service [Eventbrite](#). With millennials leading this trend—72 percent say they want to spend more money on experiences than possessions—it’s not fading any time soon.

Food experiences in particular are in high demand, and as a result, more bakeries have begun offering baking and decorating classes.

“Bakeries now see it as a marketing tool,” says Bernadette Shanahan-Haas, director of operations at the [Retail Bakers of America](#). “People think about bakeries during the holidays, but sometimes forget [about them] during the more quiet times of the year. It’s a great way to [get people in the door](#).”

### Bump Up Business

Classes have become a viable source of additional revenue and new customers for [Cornwall Bakery](#), says Chef-owner Freeman Gunnell. Each year, the Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan, bakery advertises 10 to 14 general registration classes through Facebook, email and other channels and holds roughly 25 private group events.

“There’s no question that you draw from a different clientele,” Gunnell says.

And, beyond profit and business growth, offering classes benefits Cornwall in other ways.

“It gives you the opportunity to embrace your community and customers—they want you to do classes,” he says. “You learn by teaching others. If you can take the chance to do that, it will pay you back in multiples.”

Ready to start offering classes? Take these steps to ensure edible education sessions go off without a hitch—and stay profitable.

### Be Smart About Scheduling

Avoid understaffing and overcrowding the bakery by scheduling classes outside of busy business hours.

Dobra Bielinski, owner of [Delightful Pastries](#) in Chicago, began holding classes in 2000. Today, she offers hands-on instruction on making savory tarts, candies and other items about once a month. These events are scheduled at night or during afternoon business hours.

“The production crew is usually done by noon, so we have the space all to ourselves,” she says. “It’s not an issue at all.”

She also suggests limiting the class duration to two hours and prepping some steps in advance to maintain excitement. “People get antsy,” she says. “In a pie class, I’d have a partially baked pie shell. If we need sauteed onions, I’ll have those ready.”

### Keep a Close Eye on Registration Numbers

Advertising bakery classes on social channels, via email and in stores can boost the bakery’s brand exposure and attract new customers. While the revenue earned from these events may not directly turn into profit, the PR alone can make them worthwhile.

However, bakeries do need to monitor sign-ups and attendance to make sure they’re not losing money. If fewer than five people register for a class at Delightful Pastries, Bielinski usually cancels. “For the time it takes to prep, it’s just not worth it,” she says. “I try to break even. If I can cover labor and food, I’m a happy camper.”

To determine how many people need to sign up to make the class worth the time and resources, as well as what to charge per student, tally costs of ingredients and wages for staff needed to plan, run and clean up after the event. In addition, if classes take place outside of the bakery’s regular business hours, factor in [the costs of keeping the building open](#). Free and low-cost event planning platforms like Facebook and Evite help control expenses.



### Make Classes Simple

While bakeries may want to fuel intrigue with unique or novel classes, it’s important to maintain realistic expectations. “People ask, ‘Can we do sourdough bread?’,” Bielinski says. “That would take two days; no one is willing to sit for two days in a class. I have to really whittle it down and just offer them what is doable.”

She devised a set list of class topics primarily based on items Delightful Pastries offers to prevent groups from submitting requests for baked goods that are overly complicated or expensive.

Focusing on core offerings also lets staff flaunt the bakery’s expertise and signature products.

### Make Time for Prep

Gunnell can source most ingredients needed for Cornwall’s classes from local farmers markets and suppliers he already partners with, like Dawn Foods. However, the time it takes to calculate supplies requirements, order and accomplish other class-related tasks, like managing registration and printing recipes, tends to lengthen his week.

To avoid stressful last-minute scrambling, set aside time weekly or monthly—depending on how frequently the bakery runs classes—to go over sourcing needs. This is also a good time to review classes’ profitability and make adjustments.

### Keep Them Coming Back

Turn attendees into repeat customers by handing out or sending thank-you coupons or other deals after classes, suggests Shanahan-Haas of the Retail Bakers of America.

“It’s a way to get them into the fold,” she says. “Most bakeries know the art of upselling.”

With the right approach and careful planning, memorable classes allow bakeries to capitalize on the demand for special experiences—and kick up profits.

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