

Back to school
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Cast your mind back to when you were at school. Remember how you were taught the basics and encouraged to discover the rest. This is the perfect time of year for you to get back to basics by reviewing your bakery retail or coffee shop offer. Review each category in terms of sales and profitability: hot food and bakery; sandwiches and snacking; hot and cold beverages; and your all-important healthy range of food-on-the-go. Decide which are your best-selling products and look for ways to improve or support their sales. For instance, sausage rolls are always in the top three, so maybe try a twist: go for a product with provenance, high meat content, lower salt, Cumberland or Lincolnshire – your customers will always appreciate something different yet familiar. As with most businesses, we rely on the same customers returning again and again. Yet why should they if, when they visit, they find half-full displays and tired-looking products? In a recent *him!* survey Pret A Manger, Greggs and Subway scored well in terms of customer service. Why? The answer is simple: great products, served quickly with friendly service. Look to your local trading area and ask where your customers are coming from. If you are close to a school, you can easily identify one of your major customers as the 'school-run mums and dads'. In this case, your offer should be family-friendly, so why not offer a multi-bag with a sandwich, fruit, snack and a drink. And remember, school runs are twice a day! Other customer groups range from morning commuters, looking for a fresh coffee and breakfast snack, and builders and van drivers, looking for mid-morning top-ups. Cafés close to office buildings are a perfect destination for professionals looking for a place to hold their meeting outside the office and meeting room arena. A nice seating area, a small lunch menu, tea and coffee is all you need to accommodate these customers. So what's next? Take a look at the calendar and decide which events you should support in order to maximise customer spend. We start with Halloween, closely followed by our beloved Bonfire night on the 5 November and, if you haven't already planned your National Cupcake Week promotions, then now is the time to start. Finally, with your offer looking great, make sure your staff reflect your quality and standards by focusing on customer service training, food hygiene and safety, and up-selling. Your business is now perfectly prepared to satisfy customers and boost your sales in the weeks ahead.