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A BUMBLEBAR COMPANY

The Ultimate Guide to Nutrition Bar Co-Packing





Working with a co-packer is a natural next step for many companies. From start-up bar companies that outgrow their home kitchens or small co-packers, to an existing company's private label brand's assortment of products, fast-growing companies can take advantage of the expertise of a co-packer, while they concentrate on continuing to build their brand.

No matter what the reason is for teaming up with a co-packer, knowing what to expect when choosing a co-packer is invaluable for any company. This guide was created to outline the phases you'll go through while developing your nutrition bar for scale, while understanding key aspects of the partnership.

In this guide you will learn:

- [How to choose the right nutrition bar co-packer for your business](#)
- [The development phases and timeline for creating a nutrition bar with a co-packer](#)
- [Certifications to consider when working with a co-packer](#)
- [Must-know co-packing terminology](#)
- [Answers to nutrition bar co-packing FAQs](#)



How to Choose a Nutrition Bar Co-Packer

Before diving in to working with a co-packer, it's essential to do your research during the selection process. Finding the right co-packing partner can save you time, money, and energy, which will be better spent on growing your brand and sales.

Having a firm grasp on your business basics and the questions you should be asking when considering working with a co-packer will help you understand what kind of co-packer you need in order to be successful.

Know Your Product

Some businesses may go to a co-packer with a nutrition bar formula already finalized, while some may only be at the beginning of this process. Either way, you need to know the details ahead of time.

If your recipe is decided, have your exact ingredient list and clear processing instructions available to share with your co-packer from the start. Alternatively, if you're planning to develop a product in conjunction with your co-packer, have an understanding of what your final product looks, feels, and tastes like to give your co-packer a solid direction.

Know Your Budget

Having a set budget may seem like a no-brainer, but this is an important point to consider when making this next step for your business. Working with a co-packer should help your business grow and thrive, but if you end up spending too much on the service, you could stunt your business in the long run.

Set a clear budget before starting conversations with co-packers to hone in on better-fit partners from the get-go.

Know Your Timeline

Even though it's likely that you will have to be flexible with your timeline, it's still important to determine what your ideal or expected timeline is. When do you want or need a finished product ready? New production setup takes time, so knowing your ideal window of opportunity from formulation to first run will help construct actionable conversations with potential co-packers. Make sure to communicate this ideal timeline to your co-packer before you sign any agreements to avoid miscommunication.

Know Your Values

Choosing a co-packer is like adding a new employee or department to your business. You wouldn't hire a candidate that didn't share the same values as your company, so why would selecting a co-packer be any different?

Have clear documentation of your company values as well as the specific qualities you're looking for in sourcing and ingredients. Ask your co-packer what their values are, as well. This can help with more than just building a harmonious relationship, especially when concerning aspects of your nutrition bar like only using vegan ingredients, prioritizing ethically sourced ingredients, or practicing sustainable manufacturing.

Choosing a Co-Packer

With these aspects in mind, you're ready to [start interviewing potential co-packing partners](#) to grow your business. These points should guide the questions you ask, and give the co-packer a clear understanding of what your business needs and wants in order to be successful.



Development Phases and Timelines

Once you've chosen the right co-packer, it's time to move on to the process of developing a new product together. Even with an existing formula, you should work with your co-packer to refine the formulation to match the production scale of their facility. The following steps outline the general phases a company will go through when creating a finalized nutrition bar recipe and ingredient list.

1. Ideation and Prototype Creation

The first step in the process is working with your co-packer to come up with a plan of what you would like your nutrition bar to look, feel, and taste like. The co-packer will then create a prototype of the product.

The co-packer should take care of such steps as assessing the formula's scalability, determining processing instructions, performing a supply chain analysis, and suggesting any changes that are necessary for manufacturing.

Estimated timeline: *4-12 weeks or longer depending on the product.*

2. Sensory Evaluation and Product Modifications

Once the prototype has been created, the nutrition bar company can evaluate the product for aspects such as mouthfeel, taste, texture, and so on to be sure that the product is in line with expectations.

During this time, the company and the co-packer can work together to figure out modifications that work both with the company's expected product and manufacturing capabilities and best practices.

Estimated timeline: 2-4 weeks

3. Plant Trial Preparation & Execution

With all the formulation details squared away, it's time to move on to preparing for the plant trial. The first step is to order all ingredients for the formula. Then, schedule time on the plant floor to produce the bars.

A plant trial will give your company a first look at what creating the product at full scale will be like, and therefore is usually required by co-packers for all formulas - both those created with the co-packer, and those being transferred from other facilities. Many co-packers will require a plant trial for formulas that are being revised, as well, even if working with an existing customer.

The overall goal of a plant trial is to be able to conclude that the formula is ready to be made at scale, on time, and will be profitable.

During a plant trial, you and your co-packer can expect to complete the following:

- Create product processes
- Determine throughput and pricing
- Generate product quality specifications
- Conduct product engineering and training
- Evaluate and decide on packing dimensions

With all this information, both the co-packer and nutrition bar company will be confident in producing their product and taking it to market.

Estimated timeline: *4-8 weeks depending the facility's production scheduling and ingredients sourcing timelines*

4. Post Plant Trial Modifications

A final evaluation of the product in production during the plant trial will take place to ensure the product scaled as expected. Necessary modifications and product specifications will be finalized at this time.

Estimated timeline: *2-4 weeks or longer depending on required modifications*

Co-Packing Food Certifications

Many popular consumer diets require products to comply with certain guidelines or, in some cases, obtain exact certifications. These certifications indicate to the consumer that they can trust the brand, and the product they are about to eat complies with strict regulations.

Here are some food certifications to consider when working with a co-packer.

Safe Quality Food

The [Safe Quality Food \(SQF\) certification](#) impacts every step in a manufacturer's process, from sourcing ingredients to creating a finished product. When a manufacturer is SQF certified, they are adhering to a worldwide food safety standard that is designed to produce consistent high-quality food products. For a nutrition bar co-packer, this means only the best raw ingredients are used, and trained food safety professionals monitor every stage of the process.



Gluten-Free

Working with a certified gluten-free co-packer ensures your product complies with intensive standards set out by the Gluten Intolerance Group (GIG). All machines must only produce gluten-free products to avoid cross contamination, and ingredients must be documented at every step. Once your product is approved as gluten-free, proper packaging with the "Certified Gluten-Free" logo is key to alerting consumers.



Non-GMO

Non-GMO products contain no ingredients that were genetically modified, which is also a requirement for organic certified products. The Non-GMO Project is the only highly-meaningful non-GMO label for consumers looking to avoid GMO ingredients.



Organic

USDA certified organic products reduce health risks to farm workers, their families, and consumers by minimizing their exposure to harmful chemicals, such as pesticides. Organic agriculture also strives to protect the natural habitats of their local environment, lessen nutrient depletion in the soil, keep water supplies clean, and reduce carbon footprint. A certified organic product tells consumers that your brand is helping to develop more sustainable supply chains and create a better future for our planet.



Kosher

For some, Kosher products are a dietary requirement of their religion, but for others, it's a way to satisfy health and morality-based lifestyle choices. Kosher food is prepared in accordance with Jewish dietary laws including the manufacturing process.



Nutrition Bar Co-Packing Terms You Should Know

Like in all industries, there's some terminology that is helpful to understand so you can make sure to communicate effectively with your co-packer. Here are some of the terms that are helpful to know.

Allergen

Any substance that causes an allergic reaction. Commonly, ingredients like tree nuts (almond, cashew, pistachio, walnut, pecan, hazelnut, macadamia nut, coconut, etc.), peanuts, soy, dairy, shellfish, or gluten are allergens.

Batch

A quantity or consignment of goods produced at one time.

Bench Testing

The initial test kitchen samples generated for taste, process, and consistency.

Formula

The approved list of ingredients used to make a batch, expressed in percentages.

Input

Any single component of a product.

Loose Pack

Individually wrapped product that is not packed into secondary packaging (cartons) before being placed in a master case.

Processing

The act of producing the client's product according to the Manufacturing Control Plan.

Raw Material

The starting materials, ingredients, and processing aids used for a project.

Rework

Correcting or replacing an ingredient or product that does not conform to standards or specifications to create an acceptable quality product.

Nutrition Bar Co-Packing FAQs

Q: Why do bars made in a facility look different than the bars I make in my kitchen?

A: More often than not, scaled bars have a homogenous look that occurs as a result of using industrial mixing machines followed by processing with pressure, as with extrusion and slabbing. Larger volume commercial mixers will break the ingredients down more than most people expect, especially when viewed next to a homemade version of the same bar. In moving to manufactured bars, some tradeoffs may need to be made to produce at scale, at a price that makes sense.

Q: Can I sell the bars from my pilot run?

A: Plant trials cannot be combined with a manufacturing run. It is usually recommended that customers use a transparent film for the plant trial products and wait to print the final packaging, and therefore plant trial products are not recommended for retail sale. In most cases the client or co-packer can provide the packaging for the plant trial, which should clearly be marked with any potential allergens and the lot code.

Q: What is the typical onboarding time frame?

A: There are many factors involved in onboarding your product with a co-packer. Sourcing ingredients and materials, analytic testing, test batch production, and more will impact the timeline to go from recipe to delivery. Though the fastest the process could take is four weeks, it is more likely to be closer to eight weeks, and will vary depending on the co-packer you're working with.

Q: Why do co-packers often require a minimum production guarantee?

A: In order for equipment to function correctly, there needs to be a specific volume present, which can only consist of one formula at a time. Additionally, co-packers need larger volumes for each production cycle to be economically sound, and make the most of their time and labor force, and use their equipment to the best of its ability. This is why many times, a co-packer's minimums will be based on the number of units produced efficiently in one shift. Switching out labeling, packaging, and making equipment changes for a new customer takes time, especially if the customer's volumes necessitate multiple changeovers in a single day. Producing the customer's product then becomes very inefficient, which will have a notable impact on the bottom line for both the manufacturer and the customer.

Working with a co-packer can be a big step...

It can be an opportunity to grow and develop your brand, add new skus to your product line, or bring your first product to market without investing in the necessary machinery and materials up front. Knowing how to choose an excellent co-packing partner, having a handle on development phases and timelines, understanding the certifications that could benefit your company, and being able to effectively communicate with your co-packer will set your nutrition bar company up for success.



Ready to get started on your nutrition bar idea?

Start a conversation with the Clean Copack team.

