

Finding Suppliers for Your Bar or Restaurant

By Rieva Lesonsky



Whether you're starting a new bar or restaurant, or running an existing business, finding good, reliable suppliers is a key factor in your business's success. Where do you start?

Begin by making a list of the supplies you need. That can include equipment (such as deep fryers or ovens), furnishings (tables, chairs, lighting),

dinnerware (plates, silverware) on down to the details (napkins, coffee stirrers). Of course, you'll also need ongoing food and beverage suppliers.

Be as detailed as you can. The list may seem overwhelming when you find yourself getting down to nitty-gritty items like "swizzle sticks" and "cocktail napkin holders," but it's important not to forget any crucial element. A comprehensive list will also help you determine your budget for each category, which is an essential step in your search.

Once you have your wish list and budget in hand, the next step is looking for supply sources. The best place to begin is with your industry association. Each state has its own restaurant association; the National Restaurant Association has a list of them [here](#). Also read trade publications like [Nation's Restaurant News](#), [Restaurant Business](#) and [Restaurants & Institutions](#). Bar and restaurant industry websites and trade publications will give you leads on suppliers in your area. If possible, seek referrals from other bar or restaurant owners in your area.

There are many companies that offer discounted restaurant supplies online. [FoodService Central](#) has a comprehensive marketplace of restaurant suppliers. The National Restaurant Association has directories of [food](#) and [beverage](#) distributors. Online auction sites such as [EBay](#) and [Overstock.com](#) can also be good sources of discounted equipment and furnishings.

When dealing with an online vendor that you aren't familiar with, be extra cautious to make sure the company is legitimate. The business's website should list a physical address and phone number, and the company should request your tax ID number before doing business with you.

Questions you'll want to answer before dealing with a new supplier include:

- How long has the company been in business?
- Can you see samples of products before you buy?
- What are their payment terms and return policy?
- Is their online shopping cart simple to use?
- What is the minimum order?
- What discounts are available (volume, early payment, cash)?

At the same time you're checking out suppliers, they're also checking you out. They want to make sure you're legitimate before doing business with you. If you're a startup, be sure to have your business licenses, other necessary licenses and permits, and tax ID number in hand before you contact any suppliers.

The mentors at [SCORE](#) can help you determine your needs and find potential suppliers. Do your homework, be prepared and you'll be able to establish lasting supplier relationships that benefit both parties.

Rieva Lesonsky is CEO of GrowBiz Media, a media company that helps entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses. Follow Rieva at [Twitter.com/Rieva](https://twitter.com/Rieva) and visit her blog at SmallBizDaily.com. Visit her website [SmallBizTrendCast](#) to get the scoop on business trends and sign up for Rieva's free TrendCast reports.