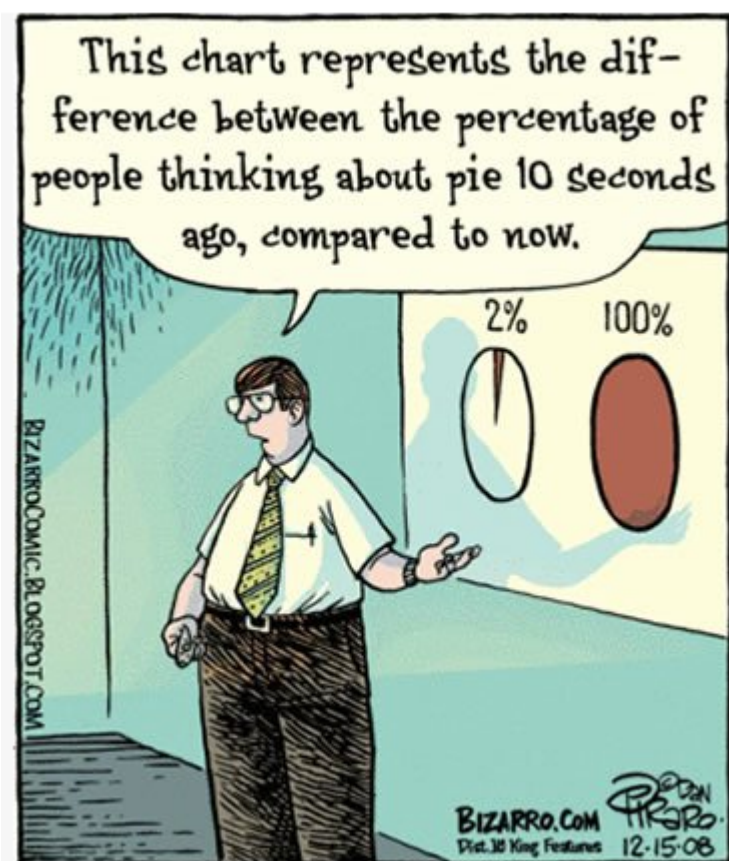


# Food biz coach offers 9-step process for edible startups

“Most food entrepreneurs suck at marketing and sales . . . and most don’t know how to launch their business,” says Mari-Lyn Harris, a food entrepreneur coach based in Silicon Valley. But if you get help from an expert, you increase your odds of succeeding. Here’s her 9-step recipe for success to help you launch your tasty idea:

## **1. Start where you are.**

So you’ve decided to start a food business? Maybe someone inspired you. Mari-Lyn wanted to start a pie business as a vehicle for social change. She explored the idea, but had to figure out how to get the product into the marketplace. Her neighbor was going to have a garage sale every weekend for a month, so she set up a little table at the garage sale. She got people to sample her pies.



Starting where you are means that you have to get people to sample your product. By starting where you are, you begin by figuring out how to get your product into the hands of customers. Find ways to get your product to more people so they can try it. Mari-Lyn calls it “the five-minute bite.” You can do home parties. Just like when you go to [Trader Joe’s](#) or [Whole Foods Market](#), you sample the food. They know if you like it, you’re more likely to buy it.

Mari-Lyn empowers food entrepreneurs to move forward. Your inner voice may be telling you that you can’t do it or you can’t afford it. But you have to challenge yourself.

“You may not know where to go or how to get started. You may not know where the money will come from, but if you have a great family recipe or great food idea, reach out for help. Don’t give up until the means and resources show up,” says Mari-Lyn.

## 2. Create your vision.

It's important that you create a vision for yourself and your business. It gives clarity, direction and buy-in from other people. If you don't begin with your vision, all your good intentions will be scattered and nonproductive.

A vision statement is more important than your mission. You need to know where you want to go with your idea. Make your vision statement the business you want to grow into. It's the dream you're going after. What does it look like? Can you clearly describe it to others?



Cultured Gourmet's Kraut Source

## 3. Test your product.

Give people free samples and ask for their feedback. Get feedback from people outside your friends and family. If you

have a product for weddings, for example, you can offer samples to people who are getting married and caterers to see if they like your product. If not, don't be offended. Just ask them why. It's useful feedback.

To test your product, you have to find a way to do it underground. Reach out to professionals to give you a review of your product, such as food bloggers or people who write about food products. Then you can know if your product may be well received.

Engage your customers. You have to deliver for them what they want. Let your customers be your advocates.

To get into a farmer's market, food truck or market, you have to be licensed. You don't want to do that right away until you know your product will be viable.

#### **4. Have an audience.**

You may have a great idea, but it doesn't mean it will work. You need to keep testing your product and get feedback from potential customers. Narrow in on your "tribe."

A lot of food entrepreneurs think that everyone is their audience, but it's not so. Mari-Lyn discovered that men like pies more than women, but women are the ones who buy pies for the men in their lives. Your research helps you discover who will buy your product. "This is your tribe."

#### **5. Set up a sales and marketing strategy.**

Marketing and sales are two different things. Marketing is the promotion and buzz of your product. Sales is when you actually sell a product or service.

Sales is not a negative or dirty word. It's about developing relationships with people to get sales. A sale won't happen until you speak to people. Technology can't do this for you.

You may have great pictures and descriptions on your website, but this isn't enough. You can use technology, but you also need to have someplace where they can buy and then taste it. It's all about relationships and getting to know your customers.

Marketing is the key component in any business. Mari-Lyn recalls working with a client who put together a flyer, but it didn't say how to get in touch with him. And when she checked his website, there was no email or way to contact him.

He had an ineffective marketing materials. When you don't have a thought-out marketing plan, it's easy to forget simple things like this.

A sales and marketing strategy will help you execute. The strategy is the layout of action steps you're going to take to get the marketing done that drives your sales.

## **6. Build a marketing map.**

You have to know your audience before you build your marketing map. This is a plan. Find some customers and build your plan at the same time. Your marketing map can be simple. It's your hub.

From your hub, you have different tactics or action steps to reach out to your tribe. You write out how you're going to do it. You develop content to help deliver the message about your product. You don't need a business plan unless you're going after funding.



Let's take, for example, a personal chef. You may not know how to get your services out in the market place, but the marketing map helps you to develop your business easily. You may want to blog, for example. The blog helps you educate your future customers on how to prepare food or get to know you better.

### [5 Essential appliances for easy healthy meals](#)

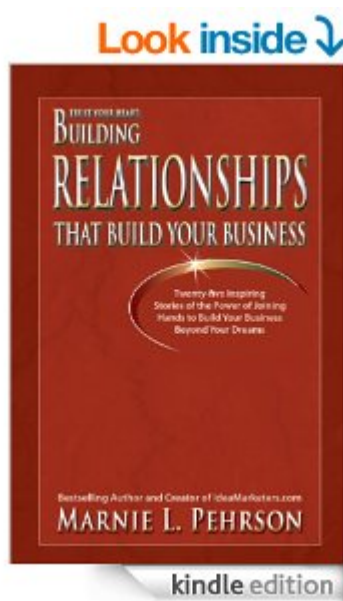
You can blog about how you help your customers. For example, one chef discovered that his client was lacking in magnesium so he prepared foods with more magnesium which helped her feel better. If you decide to blog, here are some things you need to consider:

- Who will participate in writing content?
- How will you get new content on a regular basis?
- How will you share the information?

Many people feel overwhelmed and don't know where to go. The marketing map gives you clarity in knowing your next step and how to effectively use your time.

## 7. Get sales.

Put your sales strategy to work. When someone eats your food, you want them to have a great experience when they taste it. You want it to be memorable. You want people to say, "this is incredible," or "I love this!" The sales part happens when people buy *that* taste and experience.



Once you have a small tribe, you can develop partners who can help you get more sales. As a startup you may not have a large budget, so the quickest way is to develop collaborative partnerships.

Building relationships with people will help you get sales. Mari-Lyn worked with Marnie Pherson and 23 other business builders. Each wrote a chapter in the book about leveraging relationships. It reached the Amazon Best Sellers list in March 2012.

Have you ever thought about writing a cookbook? Books help give you authority. When you collaborate with others toward a common goal, you often get there much faster than going solo.

Mari-Lyn offers workshops on "someone you ought to meet." She helps her clients develop partnerships who can help them get sales.

## 8. Get help if you need it.

If you don't have the resources or people in your community, then join other groups for support. If you live in the Silicon Valley area, you can join the Food Entrepreneur networking group hosted by [Food 4 Social Change](#), which is a cluster of food professionals such as manufacturers, chefs, suppliers and vendors. Everyone can help each other.

## 9. Execute your strategy.

Executing your marketing strategy is picking something that's a tool. Who will do what. How will I execute it? It's all about the who, what, when, where why, how. It's usually a series of tactics to get things done. Whether it's your marketing or sales strategy, the execution is all about the who, what when, where why how.

[Wally Amos](#), the legend behind [Famous Amos Cookies](#) and founder of the [Cookie Kahuna](#), was featured in the August 2014 issue of [Costco Connection](#) magazine. His and his partner came to a point where they had different ideas about how to execute their business plan. He decided to stick with his original plan and grow his company organically.



Mari-Lyn  
Harris, Food  
Entrepreneur  
Coach at Food  
4 Social



## Change

To him, focus means that you need to follow one course until you're successful.

Whether you're a caterer, a food-truck owner, a specialty food maker, or even Wally "Famous Amos," most food entrepreneurs lack the sales and marketing skills they need to succeed. But Mari-Lyn can help.

Mari-Lyn Harris is a business consultant who has been coaching entrepreneurs since 1996. She coaches food startups to build out customized plans for their future. Mari-Lyn is also the Founder and CEO of [Food 4 Social Change](#). The vision is *to create jobs by assisting food entrepreneurs to fulfill their dreams of a bold and vibrant business community*. One of the things [Food 4 Social Change](#) offers is a business networking group to help create a vibrant food community.

Call Mari-Lyn at **510-564-7880** to help you develop your customized marketing map.



**Food 4 Social Change**  
A BOLD and VIBRANT Food Community

---