

# The Customer is King - Bakery Edition

**Marketing expert Ludger Schlautmann explains why it's never been easier for bakeries to set themselves apart from the competition.**

The coronavirus pandemic has been shaping everyday life in bakeries for months now. "Wait there", "have you reserved a table?" and "please pay by card" are just a few examples of how customers are being ordered around. While turnover is starting to pick up again, customers are being lost. Some businesses in the bakery market are reporting up to 20 percent fewer customers. But it's hardly surprising. Bakeries with a large dine-on focus have experienced the biggest slumps. Contact time with customers has reduced and customer waiting times have increased significantly – and this isn't just a subjective impression. Moreover, more customers are shopping selectively and forgoing trend products.

**So, is it a bad time to win over new customers?** Not at all, according to GA-Trendagentur: "It's never been easier to stand out from the competition and win new customers." Find out in this article how to both keep your existing customers happy and welcome new customers.

**Welcome back.** A big smiley and the words "welcome" or "welcome back" can occasionally be found in modern bakery stores. Such signs reflect how a company feels about its customers. At the same time, according to the results from GA-Trendagentur, it symbolizes the lost customer contact over the previous months. It was observed how quite a few customers smiled at some of the more creative examples before entering the

store. There's a chance here to touch on the current biggest customer desire – to feel they're welcome. Reconsider the warning and rules signs you have. Only one customer at a time! Keep your distance! Masks are compulsory! These have been everywhere since the end of March. They're seen as necessary to comply with official regulations. But it's still possible to signal customer proximity. Just a simple "please" or "thank you for your understanding" added to these signs are valuable and soften the tone of the demands being made. By now, most consumers are anyway well-versed in how they need to behave during the corona pandemic.



*Tip: Reduce the number of signs or posters to a maximum of one or two. Limit yourself to displaying only the essential rules from the local authorities. Include pictograms as most people can quickly and easily understand them. Don't forget to include courteous words like "please" and "thank you".*

**Avoid mood killers.** Below were typical stress situations observed by GA-Trendagentur in various bakeries and potential ways to resolve the issue:

- **Masks make it difficult to understand what people are saying:** Ask the other person to repeat themselves in a polite and friendly way.

- **Customers are reprimanded:** Try to avoid ordering customers around in the first place. Often, customers sort out alleged “misunderstandings” among themselves and, if not, you can intervene in a friendly and patient manner.
- **Excessive distance is left between customers:** Gently point it out with “there’s plenty of space for you to move up a little...”
- **Customers misunderstand the queueing system:** Try saying “sorry, we haven’t made the markings clear enough.”
- **Card payments fail:** Diffuse the situation with “that happens quite often, do you want to try it again or do you perhaps have cash instead?”.

**Make clear paths.** Most people are currently striving to behave appropriately. They’re already under a heightened level of stress when they enter a store. Help customers by marking out clear paths. Posts and arrows showing the direction to walk in can be helpful here. Think about where the waiting area is positioned. People will stop and wait at strips across the floor. If the first one is placed outside the store, people will form a queue outside the shop rather than going inside. And what happens when it’s raining? Potential customers see this queue and drive or walk on. GA-Trendagentur was able to observe this on several occasions. It’s winter already and we can expect many more rainy days over the coming months. Fortunately, most people are experienced in social distancing and keep the minimum distance away from other people. For that reason, and if the local legal situation allows it, you can do without the distance markers leading up to the counter and just have an X for waiting in front of the counter. Results have shown that

customers then queue up to the counter while still keeping the required distance between each other. The subsequent customers also follow this pattern in the queue.

*Tip: Place an X marker in front of the bakery goods counter and another one in front of the snack counter (if the minimum distance can be upheld). Bakery customers already know whether they want to buy baked goods or a sandwich so this is a good way to keep order in the queuing system.*

**Always have classic snacks available.** Significant drops in sales of up to 50 percent in snacks and especially hot drinks clearly indicate how consumers have changed their purchasing and consumption behavior during the pandemic. Customers are only buying the absolute essentials, trends and on-top purchases are not in demand. GA-Trendagentur describes the situation as: “Short contact times – in and out of the store as quickly as possible – only buying what’s on display on the counter”. Make sure you have the most popular snacks available already on the counter.

**Tip for takeaway orders:** Hand over sandwiches and similar with a napkin and a lid and stirrer for takeaway hot drinks. Ask customers whether they need milk or sugar.

**Classic products are in demand.** Consumer demand for trend products is at a particularly low level right now. Up until March this year, exciting new products, for example, matcha muffins, were enticing customers into bakeries. In crisis situations, however, classic products sell best. In individual treats, raisin buns, donuts, and the like are popular again. Crumble cakes, butter cakes and cheesecakes are among the popular tray bakes. Various fruit cakes are booming right now, including strawberry, plum, and apple cakes. The

messages of “healthy” and “Vitamin C” seem to be particularly welcome in times of corona.



Chocolate products are, of course, a must for keeping spirits up and nourishment for the soul. Retro products like rum truffles, Nussecken (triangular nut and chocolate slices), and almond biscuits come under this chocolate category.

**Protect your employees.** The personal restrictions in public life are having an effect on everyone. This has left people more on edge and they are dealing with the consequences of the crisis in different ways. Your employees are thus having to bear a double burden. On the one hand, they're affected by the challenges of everyday life themselves. What am I supposed to do with the kids? How will we manage the home office situation? When will we be able to visit our relatives again? Can we still go on our book holiday? Am I going to stay healthy and keep my job? On the other hand, employees meet a broad range of people through their work, they interact with enthusiastic customers but also with those people who take out their

frustration with the current situation on staff.

*Tip: Acknowledge the difficult working conditions. Wearing a mask all day is an additional burden. There are also many new processes to follow and more restrictions. Praise and recognition serve as a little consolation and, at the same time, as motivation.*

**Involve your employees.** Look for solutions together in team meetings, for example, on how to optimize existing processes and make them more comfortable. Train your employees to be able to deal with difficult situations with customers and agree on a consistent approach. Sharing one's own experiences is a proven way to reflect on previous events and to prepare for future scenarios. For example, how to remain cool and relaxed in critical situations to have a calm effect. Raising awareness among employees about welcoming customers more and more is one of the biggest challenges. But, as GA-Trendagentur's results have shown, it's currently the top competitive advantage you can have. Approach the subject in a team meeting as follows: go with the team on a tour through the store and check whether the paths and (still required) warning signs are clear and easy to understand. Ask your employees for ideas on how they can make customers feel more welcome when they enter the store, while they wait in the queue, and during the sales process.

*Customers - and colleagues - can still sense a smile in someone's eyes, even when it's covered by a mask.*



(where they can't be touched). These measures might sound banal but they pick up on the current desires, worries, and fears of customers and, ultimately, contribute to growth.

**For more tips and recent publications on the special German bakery market, check out the [GA-Trendagentur website](#).**

**Score with in-house dining.** The requirement to record customer details, uncertainty about how to behave, sterile and bare distanced tables, and limited menu choices are just some of the reasons why in-house dining remains relatively limited – that is, where it's permitted at all. You can score points with customers by creating a pleasant atmosphere. For example, at the counter where dine-in customers queue up. Give customers the required forms to fill in and remind them, in a friendly manner, to hand them in when they leave. Let customers choose where they want to sit. Mark the tables clearly with table numbers so customers can note the number down on their registration forms. Have music playing in the background. Make sure it's clear where the dine-in customers should go when they want another coffee or anything else. For reasons of hygiene, it's essential that tables are cleaned regularly. Moreover, everyone can see these hygiene measures. Increase the frequency of toilet checks.

**Advertise your strengths.** The weaknesses of your competition need to be your strengths. Take advantage of this potential, for example, and place umbrellas and parasols outside the store for waiting customers with the message "we won't leave you out in the rain!". Or "Come in and relax with a cup of coffee and a slice of cake!". You can have pleasant music playing and freshly cut flowers on display