

# How to Be Successful in a Crowded Market

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**H**ow does one separate themselves from the competition? You have to come up with innovative ways to stand out, you have to change something, do something different, then turn that idea into valuable goods or services that customers are willing to pay for. Large companies typically operate on a large scale, making it difficult for them to adapt and personalize their products to

individual customer tastes. Startups can often use their agility to offer an appealing product or service that will generate more business.

Premier Meat Company started out as a small boutique, chef-friendly meat processor with only nine employees and two trucks. Most big companies are reluctant to risk tinkering with their core business model unless it is visibly under threat. When Premier Meat started, they were competing with companies many times their size and had to be inventive to gain customers. Premier Meat worked with the chefs at fine dining establishments, catering to their unconventional requests. The chefs would need to refresh their stock after the evening ended, so Premier Meat would take orders up until 1:00 AM and deliver them the next morning. They did this by re-arranging their employees' work schedules to start at 8:00 PM versus a 6:00 AM shift that most companies use. This gave them the advantage of offering last minute orders to be processed at night and then be on a truck first thing in the morning.

By changing when employees worked, Premier Meat created a unique business model that has several advantages. Employees could save one to two hours a day driving to and from work and delivery trucks would be on the road before the rush hour traffic kicked in, resulting in savings of time and money. Anyone who has dealt with Los Angeles traffic congestion knows this is a valid concern.

Today, Premier Meat is one of the leading Meat/Pork/Chicken/Fish processors on the west coast, growing from nine employees generating about \$1.2M to about 250 employees generating \$125M per year with an average inventory of \$5M. Part of their growth came from being able to provide their customers with all of the different protein products they need, along with ordering deadlines that are much more in-tune with the industry. Premier Meat built a processing facility that has four USDA/FDA inspected plants in it: a red meat processing area, a pork processing area, a chicken processing area, and they recently added a fish processing area. This is how they are able to provide the one-stop shopping for their customers.

Asking employees to work at night instead of during the day presented challenges that needed to be addressed. In line with their business philosophy, they looked for innovative solutions that would appeal to their employees. They realized they were asking their employees to re-arrange their life to work at night. Premier wanted to make it enjoyable and rewarding to come to work and make the employees feel respected for the tough jobs they do. They set up employee break areas with free coffee, large, well-maintained restrooms, and a clean environment to eat in. They also reduced the cost of the vending machines by underwriting a portion of the cost. Premier Meat was also one of the first meat processing

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**HARRY GREENBERG**  
*Owner & Chairman of Premier Meats*





facilities to hire female managers when the trend was toward hiring primarily men.

Other employee appreciation programs include offering a free catered meal for the entire plant every two weeks. This is an excellent way to get the employees engaged as a team and have everybody feel appreciated. They also set up a program for employees to get advances and loans interest free, which is helpful for employees living paycheck to paycheck. Additionally, employees are allowed to cash out any unused vacation at the end of the year. Providing employees with extra Christmas cash in December is always appreciated.

Another example of their penchant for trend setting is Premier recognized early on the importance of Social Media. In the digital age, things move at warp speed. Companies that get strategic, creative, and organizational factors right, are able to cash in on today's opportunities. They started an Instagram account and now have well over 100K followers. They are offering the same quality meats that top end restaurants provide to their retail customers with online ordering through their "Meat the Butchers" web portal where they share interesting stories and videos. They have developed an online ordering system with a flat overnight fee of \$40, and a FedEx 2-day fee of \$20, no matter where you are in the US. This is another clever approach that saves them from having to calculate the cost to send product.

Innovation never stops at Premier Meat; they are consistently looking for ways to make the company more efficient. Upon expanding the processing and storage areas, they realized that a lot of time was wasted moving product from Packing to QA to Shipping. They, like many protein-processing plants, have space limitations, so the idea of an overhead conveyor system was proposed and built. This alone saved at least several employees' salaries and allowed them to be more efficient in their goals.

Their future plans involve finding ways to further expand the company. They are considering opening up a shop in Florida, possibly Miami, and adding lamb/veal to their offerings. They are also looking into exporting to countries like Tahiti, Morocco, and the Bahamas.

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Companies in nearly every sector have acknowledged that successful innovation requires outside agents. In 2014, Premier joined the Aspen family to take advantage of creative solutions found in the Canopy suite of application modules that Aspen and its hundreds of Food Industry customers have developed over 30+ years. Aspen worked with Premier to incorporate these cutting-edge concepts into their operations. The kind of growth that Premier was experiencing required that processes and procedures needed to be updated. The filling of sales orders and inventory needed to be tightly controlled and more efficient. Aspen was brought in to aid in this restructuring. Utilizing the Data Capture module, they were able to control raw goods inventory, set up weigh/label stations, and transform the process of order filling. The number of weigh/label stations was reduced by having their best and highest paid employees (*i.e. the talented artisans who hand cut to order*) only cut and not have to weigh/label. This freed them up to concentrate on getting the product cut to the exact specifications of the order. An inventive concept that



the two companies collaborated on was creating a means to assign a specific order to the butcher that was best suited for a particular task. Premier helped design a custom order assignment screen, assigning orders and printing out a “cut ticket” that followed the product as it was cut and then weighed and labeled at a Terminal Input station. This allowed Premier to reduce the number of weigh/label stations and create an efficient flow of product. Filling orders at these stations saved time; items not assigned to an order were accurately inventoried and stored for future orders. The Data Capture module gave them the ability to have an accurate raw goods inventory, accurate finished goods inventory, and create a very efficient order filling method. After using Canopy, their inventory is generally off by less than \$10K (*which represents less than ¼ of a percent of their typical inventory*), so they are now doing only quarterly cycle counts with a “full” inventory just once a year. Harry Greenberg, owner and chairman of Premier Meats, summarized their success by saying, “Canopy allowed us to make many improvements to our operations so that we can easily increase our business thanks to our partnership with Aspen Systems.”

Aspen Systems takes pride in working with a multitude of companies that create, invent, aspire, evolve, and accelerate their business, and Premier Meat is a perfect example of this. They chose Aspen to partner with, wanting to take advantage of Aspen’s decades of experience working with leaders in the Food Industry inventing solutions that benefit all who call themselves part of the Aspen family. It is exciting to collaborate with customers that have great vision and it is an honor to provide solutions that make these concepts a reality.



## Congratulations to David Kubinski ON HIS RETIREMENT

Please join us in extending best wishes and gratitude to David Kubinski, who is retiring from Aspen this year. Dave has been an employee for 28 years; he is one of the pillars of Aspen and is one of the primary contributors to our success. His knowledge of the industry and ability to create solutions for our customers cannot be overstated. Our Data Capture, Scales, and Production modules are the best products in the industry and provide the greatest return on investment for our customers. Time and again the functionality of these products and the fact that they are fully integrated into Canopy is the primary reason we have won sales. All the bells and whistles of our other products, and the fact that they are also fully integrated, make Canopy the most feature-rich software in the industry. These however are the dessert; Data Capture, Scales, and Production, combined with Canopy Core, remain the main course. David’s leadership has guided these products through infancy to where they are today. He has the best team to work with and they have not slowed down in continuing to make these products even more powerful while taking advantage of latest technology. He leaves a great legacy behind.

