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FRIEND WITH BENEFITS

Tracking down that customer request for a unique gourmet product she saw on some cooking show has gotten a lot easier thanks to Buyer's Best Friend, a free online resource for buyers and sellers of wholesale specialty products.

Founded in September 2010 by food broker Joyce Guan and her boyfriend, former Google engineer Adam Sah, San Francisco-based BBF (www.bbfdirect.com) enables retailers to source more than 64,000 products



from 1,200 manufacturers.

According to BBF officials, BBF streamlines the buying and product discovery process, allowing buyers to order from numerous vendors, reorder products, research new products and order samples any time of the day or night.

"We're like Craigslist with a catalog model," Sah, BBF's CEO, tells *Grocery Headquarters*. "Our business is not replacing brokers, but helping them to spend their time working with major accounts, opening new accounts, and answering questions that you can't just read in some brochure, catalog or database."

Sah says five to 10 retailers are registering for an account daily. Once an application is approved they go into the catalog and can start ordering. "An order in BBF is really a qualified lead. We don't handle payments, take a percentage of the transaction or anything," Sah says. "It's just like Google. They click on the free listing and they work with the seller."

According to Sah, BBF isn't eliminating brokers. "If they have brokers or distributors the order is just turned over to them. We require as part of being on BBF that they respect those existing relationships and if we ever hear of anybody not then they will be thrown off the site instantly," he says.

Guan, who is vice president of sales, says she created BBF because she wanted to spend more time with her larger customers, like Whole Foods and Williams-Sonoma. "All of these smaller independents add up to a lot of work – and for the same amount of dollars," she says. "We're seeing that more and more buyers are starting online to find new items and we're helping them and brokers with that."

The majority of BBF's listings are food, although it also covers supplements, pet products, candles and housewares.