



# How Berkeley Bowl Scored a Full Strike by Switching to eCommerce

Case Study

LOCAL  
EXPRESS



## A LONG-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY RESOURCE WITH DEEP ROOTS NEEDED TO GET ONLINE...

In the Bay Area of California, Berkeley Bowl is a grocer whose long-established brand is synonymous with independence, fierce community loyalty, healthy living, and incredible locally-grown produce. Established in 1977, a converted bowling alley provided both birthplace and namesake for its beginnings as a small neighborhood market.

Now established in Berkeley and Oakland, Berkeley Bowl specialize in organic and natural goods and are best known by Bay Area residents for their excellent and expansive selection of fresh, high-quality, locally-grown produce. The chain also boasts a vast selection of conventional and organic items for sale.

Berkeley Bowl knew they had to get online in order to continue serving their audience, but they didn't want to rush things and risk a sub-par experience for their loyal, local customers.

They needed a platform that would respect a realistic pace of transition to online sales and offer plenty of customization tools to suit the specifics of their brand.



## A SOLUTION TAILORED FOR AGILITY, OR NOTHING AT ALL

With many eCommerce solutions on the market, it's easy to assume the transition to online sales is a simple one. In some ways it is, but as a result, many platforms require grocers and store owners to fit the unique selling points of their business into a standard template model. For Berkeley Bowl – that strived to cultivate a unique, personal experience for 44 years – flexibility was a non-negotiable during their transition to online sales.

John Fukumoto, Director of IT at Berkeley Bowl, explained what motivated them to bank on Local Express as their eCommerce solution.

“We were originally looking for an eCommerce solution for our deli and kitchen areas – that was our original conception,” Fukumoto said.

But the onset of the pandemic soon broadened his search to include vendors that could handle both hot food delivery, and thousands of specialty grocery items. After vetting multiple vendors, Fukumoto realized that Berkeley Bowl needed a solution that was highly flexible, customizable, and fully integratable with their pre-existing IT systems in a homogenous way.

The big issue they faced from a technical standpoint was POS integration. In order to process orders from online purchase, to when customers received their goods, Berkeley Bowl needed an eCommerce platform that would integrate seamlessly with their pre-existing in-store ordering and inventory management systems.

“Having our own platform like Local Express gives us the ability to be agile and adapt to changing times and ensure our customers are getting the best quality service, the best produce, and the whole Berkeley Bowl experience,” Fukumoto added.

## WITH PATIENCE AND PLANNING: HOW BERKELEY BOWL CREATED A 20,000 ITEM ECOMMERCE STORE USING LOCAL EXPRESS

Dedication and Precision

Although the breakneck speed at which the pandemic played out caused many businesses to rapidly pivot into new sales, Berkeley Bowl was adamant that customers' experience shouldn't suffer due to a rushed execution during its transition to eCommerce.

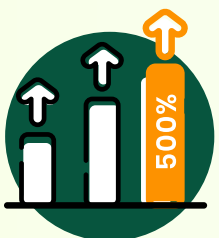
**“ We want to ensure that whenever you think of Berkeley Bowl, you’re going to get the kind of incredible service you receive whether you’re online or in-store. That’s why we prioritized a cadenced approach, and Local Express could offer us that.” Fukumoto said. ”**

Berkeley Bowl started with a Local Express Deli Module for their cafe in order to sell coffee, specialty sandwiches, bento boxes, and customizable hot food options to online shoppers. This quickly evolved into selling “produce boxes” and catering options too.

Fukumoto and his team are currently in the process of migrating the grocery side of the business online. Berkeley Bowl has an extremely large number of Stock Keeping Units (SKU), with approximately 50,000 different items for sale. Currently, they’ve been able to load 20,000 of the most popular products into their Local Express platform and are “live” with those items now.



Because of Berkeley Bowl’s extreme attention to the customer experience, and their focus on maintaining up-to-date inventory, they are able to achieve an extremely low “stock-out” rate of around 1%. Customers appreciate this level of online sophistication, demonstrated by a continuous increase in online orders and a growing customer base.



During the holidays, Berkeley Bowl report they were able to process a 500% increase in the number of orders without any problem using the Local Express platform.

Additionally, because of the high number of specialty items they sell, Berkeley Bowl needed to create unique photo imaging for their ecommerce store. Fukumoto was pleased to note that Local Express helped Berkeley Bowl with the process of getting images of generic items online by providing them access to an in-house database of high-quality stock images. These images were then used to supplement photos of specialty items taken by a professional photographer.



## OWN THE PROCESS: HOW BERKELEY BOWL CREATED THEIR END-TO-END FULFILLMENT STRATEGY USING LOCAL EXPRESS

Inventory visibility has always been a problem with eCommerce grocery stores. The best way to minimize this risk is to have the tools and processes available to resolve issues quickly. For example, the Local Express store module allows the order preparer to directly contact the shopper if problems arise. This allows Berkeley Bowl to keep their inventory accurate so shoppers won't experience the frustration of ordering an item that's out of stock.

"Nothing is more frustrating for shoppers than finding out something is out-of-stock when your eCommerce platform shows that the product is available," Fukumoto said.

Since Berkeley Bowl are well known for their produce, they were extremely concerned about delivery, the handling of produce, and the state of their perishables when they arrived on their customer's doorsteps.

"Costs are obviously important, but people are willing to pay for delivery if they know they're getting the same great quality," Fukumoto said.

He explained that Berkeley Bowl uses their own trained personnel to pick the produce for each order fulfillment, bag everything properly, and ensure each order is delivered to the right person.

"We're able to do that because of our highly customizable platform with Local Express. Everything is fulfilled by our own people. It gives us the ability to do what we're best at – selling fresh produce. They make it easy for the customers to purchase our product. Orders, delivery, problem handling if we need it – that's all handled through Local Express," Fukumoto said.

Issues with deliveries and drivers, Fukumoto noted, are handled by the Local Express support team, so Berkeley Bowl staff can focus on making sure each order goes out perfectly, and having an in-store coordinator for online ordering and pickup/delivery is crucial to this.



**65% to 80% of orders are bought online and picked up in-store (BOPIS).**

## ADAPTING IN THE FACE OF CRISIS TO GROW NEW BUSINESS TOMORROW

Covid accelerated the entire marketplace's digital transition, and Local Express helped Berkeley Bowl get online just when they needed to.

Even though they are continuously enhancing their eCommerce efforts and plans to grow their business online, Berkeley Bowl has taken a step with a great start.

After finding an eCommerce solution that made sense for their operations, Berkeley Bowl is now delivering quality products exactly the way their customers expect with attention to details they know and love.







[localexpress.io](http://localexpress.io)



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