

MBLM

FIELD NOTES



MEAL KIT BRANDS HEAD-TO-HEAD

GETTING A TASTE OF MEALS BY MAIL

Meal kit subscriptions have quickly become the next big thing in the foodie world. For people who love to cook, but have no time to plan or prepare, these e-commerce services deliver a new answer to the perennial question of “what’s for dinner?”

Blue Apron, the market leader, dominates the category by a long way. But as fans of the underdog, we were curious to see what other brands are doing to grab a place at the table.

Our challenge:

Compare four brands with a quick-fire cook off—one box and one chance to make us a repeat customer.

Our approach:

We scheduled boxes to be sent to our office and divided meals among our MBLM brand testers to try out at home. We then regrouped for heated debates (with snacks) about which brand experience, online and in the kitchen, left us wanting more.

OUR BRAND TESTERS



WHO WILL WIN THIS FOOD FIGHT?

Check out our brand reviews and then read on for our key insights and the final winner!



Pg. 6

Established:
2012, New York

Reach:
95% of U.S.

Revenue:
\$100m



Pg. 8

Established:
2012, Germany

Reach:
Nationwide
(and abroad)

Revenue:
\$500m



Pg. 10

Established:
2013, Chicago

Reach:
60% of U.S.

Revenue:
\$8m



Pg. 12

Established:
2013, Atlanta

Reach:
Nationwide

Revenue:
\$1m estimate

BRAND REVIEW

Feta-Stuffed Lamb Burgers with Cucumber and Mâche Salad

Prep time: 15-20 minutes Serves: 2 people

USDA recommends cooking ground beef to 160°F.

Burgers

In bowl, mix together 1 lb ground beef, 1 onion, 1 teaspoon kosher salt, and 1 egg. Mix by hand until fully blended. Form into 4 equal balls 5-inch thick. Divide feta evenly. Flatten 2 patties, leaving a thin space with remaining ground beef and feta. Press together to seal in feta.

3. Cook Burgers

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a medium pan over medium heat. When oil is shimmering, add burgers and cook until browned on bottom, 6-8 minutes. Flip and cook until browned on outside and medium, about 4 minutes more. Remove from pan and set aside to rest for 5 minutes.

6. Plate Burgers

Divide burgers between bun bottoms and finish with a small handful of salad, then bun tops. Serve with remaining salad alongside.

Salad

Scout, in a large bowl, whisk 1/2 cup olive vinegar, remaining 1/2 cup, and 1 tablespoon olive oil with salt and pepper. Add cucumber, sun-dried tomato, and rest to rest.

0-RECIPE TIPS

Be sure to read through the entire recipe before you begin cooking. Trust us—you'll be glad you did.

Try to make all the burger patties the same size for consistent cooking, including the edges together to seal well. For a more tender result, don't pack the meat too tightly.

0-INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup vinegar
- 1 cup rest
- 1 onion
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup cucumber
- 1 sun-dried tomato
- 1 ounce mâche
- 10 ounces ground beef and lamb
- 2 packets Dijon mustard, divided
- 1 ounce shredded feta cheese
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 ounces arugula

TH-YOU'LL NEED

medium pan

- 1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon olive oil
- kosher salt
- black pepper

Questions or comments? Please email help@plated.com or call 855-625-2399.

Join the Plated community—post your #platedgains this week! [#platedgains](#)

Plated delivers a premium brand expression with a vibrant and engaging social media presence that stood out more than its meals.

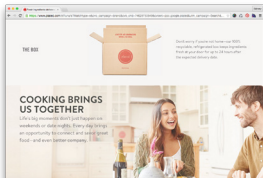
SECRET SAUCE

Food hacks for foodies

EXTRA BITES

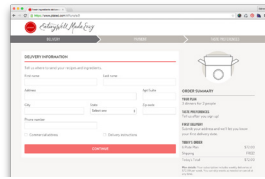


Every year, Americans throw away \$162 billion worth of food.¹ Meal kit services help reduce waste—a bit.



NARRATIVE

Plated's main messages speak to the mind-set of time-crunched foodies: Dinner is solved. Underscoring this category language, however, is an emotive narrative on the shared moments that meals create. We liked that.



CHECK OUT

Once we signed up with our taste preferences, the checkout brought us to our accounts page to review (for the first time) and change our order. This process felt a little weird (not seeing our meals first) but the directions were clear throughout the process.



BOX

When the Plated box arrived, it looked good. The ingredients were fresh and clearly labeled with Plated branding. But we thought they missed an opportunity to celebrate their brand narrative a little more—a simple message to enjoy the meal with loved ones would've been the icing on the cake.



SOCIAL

In social the brand builds on its narrative of “shared moments” and curates content that caters to its foodie audience, including a dedicated YouTube channel, with a cooking school and hip food hacks.



CREATIVITY + TASTE

While our expectations were high, we weren't particularly inspired by Plated's meals—a fairly subjective outcome, of course, as everybody has different tastes and skill levels. But we expected a little more creativity (difficulty) and sophistication (fancy ingredients).




MBLM SUGGESTIONS

We think Plated could turn up the heat by:

- Using stronger social calls to action on recipe cards
- Extending “shared moments” messages with each box
- Increasing the size of their portions!

BRAND REVIEW



Peruvian Shrimp Ceviche Tacos
with Pico de Gallo and Avocado

Ceviche has been declared a part of the Peruvian national heritage, and for good reason! Composed of "raw" seafood, fresh citrus, onions, chilies, and spices, this dish celebrates the fresh, delicate flavors of the sea. Believe it or not, tender shrimp are so delicate that mere lemon juice alone can cook it!

Ingredients:

- Shrimp (1 lb)
- Lemon (1)
- Onion (1)
- English Cucumber (1)
- Red Onion (1)
- Jalapeno (1)
- Avocado (1)
- Tomato (1)
- Chili (1)
- Salt (1)
- Pepper (1)

Instructions:

- Preheat oven to 400 degrees (if you have a microwave, you can skip this step). Juice the lemon and lime into a medium bowl. Chop the shrimp into 1/2-inch pieces. Toss the pieces of the shrimp into the bowl with the citrus zest and juice, making sure all of the shrimp is coated in juice. Let sit for 15-20 minutes to cook the shrimp in the citrus juice.
- Meanwhile, prep your vegetables: halve, peel, and dice the red onion. Core, seed, and finely dice the tomato. Mince the jalapeño, removing the ribs and seeds if you prefer less heat. Peel and dice the cucumber. Chop the cilantro, reserving a few small sprigs for garnish. Halve, pit, and peel the avocado, then thinly slice.
- Wrap the tortillas in tin foil and place in the oven to warm for 5 minutes. (If you're using a microwave, wrap them in a damp paper towel and microwave on high for 30 seconds).
- Meanwhile, finish the shrimp ceviche: toss half the cucumber, half the tomato, half the red onion, and half the jalapeño (or less, to taste) into the shrimp mixture. Season generously with salt and pepper.
- Make the pico de gallo: in a small bowl, combine the cilantro, remaining tomato, red onion, cucumber, 1 tablespoon olive oil, and half the jalapeño (or less, to taste). Season with salt and pepper.
- Assemble the tacos: fill each tortilla with shrimp ceviche, pico de gallo, and a few slices avocado. Finish each taco with a sprig of cilantro. Enjoy!

HelloFresh provides fresh ingredients for "delicious" meals, but overall it feels like the brand is only meeting category expectations—not redefining them.

SECRET SAUCE

Consistent brand messaging



France just made it illegal for supermarkets to throw away edible food.² Could the rest of the world catch on?



NARRATIVE

HelloFresh's brand is all about the taste of fresh ingredients. In photography, people and kitchens fade into the background to make way for ripe tomatoes and plump mushrooms. And brand messages repeat "fresh," "healthy" and "delicious" every chance they get—but so do competitors.



CHECK OUT

The checkout was a bit of a roadblock, requiring us to pay for a subscription without clearly being able to see what we would receive. The user flow seemed counterintuitive for customers signing up based largely on what comes in that first box.



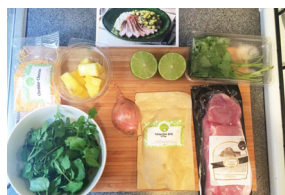
BOX

Our box arrived in good shape with some fun messages printed on the side. We were pleased to find the ingredients lived up to the HelloFresh name. Unfortunately, as with most brands, the packaging didn't give us confidence in the future of the environment—we received a large Styrofoam box without encouragement or suggestions for recycling.



SOCIAL

In social the brand does a great job reinforcing its narrative with #fresh hashtags, posts and blog articles. While certainly wholesome, the overall expression comes across as more "local grocer" than "top chef"—a purposeful approach, perhaps, to seem user-friendly rather than complicated.



CREATIVITY + TASTE

The cooking experience with HelloFresh was okay. Ingredients were certainly fresh, and the recipe was straightforward; however, we didn't feel particularly inspired. It was a simple cooking experience, but not enough to make us hungry for more



MBLM SUGGESTIONS

We think HelloFresh could sharpen its approach by:

- Improving the checkout process
- Leading new category innovations
- Making difficulty ratings customizable

BRAND REVIEW



HOME CHEF

SOUTHERN-STYLE SHRIMP AND GRITS
With Cheddar Jalapeño Cornmeal, Green Onions, and Smoked Paprika



Shrimp and Grits is from a very specific part of the South: Lowcountry in South Carolina and Georgia. Only recently did it become an "official" pan-Southern dish, but have just our taste and you won't need to question why! Our version combines the comfort of buttery Southern-style grits - laced with a little jalapeño heat - with juicy shrimp, creamy cheese, and zesty green onions to create a cozy and memorable dinner.



MEET THE CHEF
Justin Paraskiewicz
Innovative, resilient, avant-garde

HomeChef.com

SOUTHERN-STYLE SHRIMP AND GRITS
With Cheddar Jalapeño Cornmeal, Green Onions, and Smoked Paprika

INGREDIENTS

- Shredded Cheese Blend (4 Oz)

WHAT YOU NEED

- Kosher Salt
- Black Pepper
- Olive Oil

626 calories per serving
30 minutes to prepare

DRINK PAIRING

- Pinot Grigio
- Chardonnay
- Cold Beer
- Iced Tea

gluten-free
no five
nut-free
low-calorie

ETABLES

the parley
the jalapeño
red meat of the
the onions holding the
the heat
the green onion on a
just dry.

PREPARE THE GRITS

- Bring 3 cups water and 1/2 cup salt to a boil over high heat.
- Whisk in cornmeal and reduce heat to low.
- Cook slowly for about 5 minutes, whisking occasionally to prevent sticking or clumping.
- Remove grits from heat, whisk in half of the cheese (save the rest to garnish), butter, and salt and pepper to taste, and allow grits to rest covered until ready to serve.

COOK THE SHRIMP

- Season both sides of the shrimp with a pinch of salt, pepper, and smoked paprika (reserving a pinch for garnish if desired).
- Heat 1 tsp. olive oil in a skillet over medium heat.
- When pan and oil are hot, add half the green onion (reserving other half for garnish), half of the jalapeño (for more to taste), and all of the garlic.
- Sauté for 2-3 minutes, or until aromatic.
- Add the shrimp and cook on each side for 2-3 minutes, or until shrimp are bright pink and firm to the touch.

your cheddar blend contains less a cheese to help your meat & vegetables well

HomeChef.com

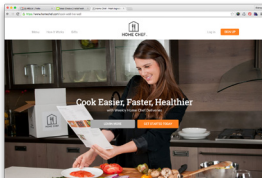
While the brand needs a little more spice and excitement, the cooking experience gave us enough to consider risking another (damaged) box.

SECRET SAUCE

Intuitive checkout

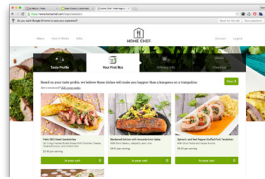
EXTRA BITES 

37% of foodies avoid buying food or beverage products if they dislike the packaging appearance—compared to 16% of non-foodie adults.³



NARRATIVE

The look and feel of the Home Chef website did not excite us. Expected language and rigid, studio photography made Home Chef feel like a corporate caterer. There are glimpses of what could be a compelling narrative (“cook like a pro”); however it wasn’t fully realized or consistently executed.



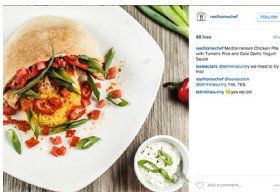
CHECK OUT

On the more positive side, the checkout experience was by far the best—an intuitive process that mirrored ordering dinner in real life. After setting your taste preferences, you could choose your meals before paying—so simple compared to other brands.



BOX

When our box arrived, it looked like something had clearly leaked and no doubt the shipping company had quickly bandaged it up. In our first impression of the off-line experience, we were pretty concerned and unsure if we should still eat—two of our meals were seafood. Luckily, ingredients were still fresh and cool.



SOCIAL

In social Home Chef relies on an effusive tone of voice and intricately (and impossibly) styled photography. This intense focus on food brings a great energy, but it feels out of touch with what we would be able to create in the kitchen. Authenticity is key!



CREATIVITY + TASTE

Despite the damaged box, we were surprised by the quality of the cooking experience. The recipes were creative and compelling, and we thought the profiles of the chefs who created them were a nice touch. From a rough-looking start, Home Chef served up a better-than-average dining experience.



MBLM SUGGESTIONS

We reckon Home Chef could spice things up by:

- **Making photography more believable**
- **Breaking out of expected messages**
- **Defining a stronger brand narrative**

BRAND REVIEW

CHICKEN BREASTS WITH FIELD PEAS & CORN BREAD

COOK: 30 minutes YIELD: 2 servings

Aminos (about 2 tsp.)
gar (about 1 tsp.)
divided

it*

less chicken breasts

eachDish box

METHOD

THE ENTIRE RECIPE CARD BEFORE BEGINNING

Peel and crush the garlic cloves, and place in a small saucepan. Add the water, Bragg's, sugar and 1 teaspoon PeachDish salt. Place over high heat to bring to a boil.

Prepare your mise en place: Cut the tomatoes in half lengthwise. Remove chicken breasts from packaging, pat dry, and season on all sides with remaining 1 teaspoon PeachDish salt. Let rest at room temperature.

3. When the water boils, add field peas. Return to the boil. Skim and discard any foam that forms, then reduce the heat to medium low. Set a timer for 15 minutes.

4. When the timer goes off, add the tomatoes and simmer 8-10 minutes more, or until the tomatoes and peas are tender. Taste and adjust seasoning as desired.

5. While the tomatoes cook, heat a sauté pan over medium heat. Coat with cooking oil, and add the chicken breasts. Cook without moving about 5 minutes, or until lightly browned on bottom and opaque at least 3/4 of the way up. Turn and cook 2-3 minutes more, or until flesh is opaque all the way through and juices run clear.

6. Serve chicken with the field peas (don't forget the potlikker!) and cornbread. Enjoy!

Chicken Breasts with Field Peas & Corn Bread

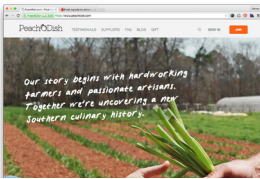
PeachDish (eventually) delivered on a compelling promise with adventurous food and a charming Southern brand.

SECRET SAUCE

Reusable packaging

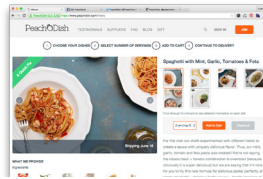


The meal kit market is expected to grow to \$10 billion within the next decade⁴. That's a lot of potatoes.



NARRATIVE

PeachDish stands out with the compelling promise of "Southern-inspired adventures in the kitchen." The website does a great job of bringing its Southern charm to life with in-the-moment photography and a heartfelt focus on the pleasure of cooking for loved ones.



CHECK OUT

We loved being able to see and select our meals for our first box—a simple, smart and mouthwatering process that finished with payment and delivery details.



BOX

PeachDish got a few demerit points because our box did not even show up. Twice. After back-and-forth rescheduling with customer service, we got the impression logistics is a problem area for the brand (uh-oh). When it finally arrived, we were delighted by reusable bags and surprise chocolate treats!



SOCIAL

Imagery and language all reinforce the brand's idyllic Southern roots. The brand places an emphasis on sustainability and partnership with local suppliers, supported by regular blog articles.



CREATIVITY + TASTE

PeachDish's ingredients were simple yet creatively applied, and the meals were excellent. The experience felt adventurous for our reasonably seasoned chefs. We also loved their secret ingredient: PeachDish Salt. Amazing.



MBLM SUGGESTIONS

We reckon PeachDish could bring more to the table by:

- **Sorting out its distribution vendor issues**
- **Adding more video storytelling to the mix—foodies love video**
- **Broaden appeal by collaborating with other state cuisines**

HOW THEY STACKED UP

Meal kit brands truly bridge the digital to the physical (and edible). So we assessed these two areas, the online and off-line, to identify which brand does the best job of creating a consistent and compelling overall experience.



Narrative: How does the brand differentiate and execute its story?

Checkout: What was the e-commerce experience like?

Social: How well do brands stand out in an endless stream of food pics?

Box: Do the box, packaging and collateral support the brand narrative?

Creativity: Do the recipes inspire and push our skills in the kitchen?

Taste: How satisfied were we with the overall dining experience?

COOKING WITH INSIGHTS

Our MBLM chefs agreed these are the key ingredients for a successful meal kit brand:

1. TELL A STORY

Cooking is a personal experience and so brands should have a personal story to match.

What we loved:

Peach Dish's authentic and consistently executed narrative.

2. CHECKING OUT MATTERS

As e-commerce brands, the checkout should be intuitive and flawless.

What we loved:

Home Chef's user-flow that felt like ordering food in real life.

3. EXTEND THE EXPERIENCE

Social engagement that goes beyond foodie pics won our attention.

What we loved:

Plated's life hacks and extra video content to sharpen your skills.

4. SURPRISE AND DELIGHT

The box delivers tangible opportunities to deepen relationships with extra fun and engagement.

What we loved:

HelloFresh's fun messaging printed on the side of its box.

5. BLEND WITH CREATIVITY

The right amount of challenge and creativity makes the service worth more than simply saving time.

What we loved:

Home Chef delivered recipes that push our skill set.

6. MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE

Brands that were clear about what to do with packaging made a positive impression.

What we loved:

PeachDish's minimal and reusable packaging.

OUR WINNER

Once we'd clicked, cooked and cleaned up the dishes, PeachDish squeaked through as our winner with the best overall online and off-line experience. This was an impressive comeback considering our box of food went missing. But the personal touches, thoughtful packaging, creative meals, and clear brand story helped PeachDish create a lasting connection with our chefs.



SOURCES

1. Elizabeth Royte, "One-Third of Food Is Lost or Wasted: What Can Be Done," National Geographic, 13 October 2014. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141013-food-waste-national-security-environment-science-ngfood/>
 2. "France is making it illegal for supermarkets to throw away edible food," The Washington Post, 22 May 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/05/22/france-is-making-it-illegal-for-supermarkets-to-throw-away-edible-food/>
 3. Washington, Ruth, and Dr. Robert Brown, "Foodies in the U.S.: Opportunities for Restaurants and Retail," Packaged Facts, 22 May 2015. Page 7.
 4. "No Time to Cook? Maybe a Cyber Chef Can Help," Inc.com, 17 October 2014. <http://www.inc.com/associated-press/no-time-to-cook-maybe-a-cyber-sous-chef-can-help.html>
-

CONNECT

Follow us for our next #MBLMFieldNotes and the latest in #BrandIntimacy



MBLM

The Brand Intimacy Agency

MBLM is the Brand Intimacy Agency, dedicated to creating greater bonds between people, brands and technology. With offices in seven countries, our multidisciplinary teams help clients deliver stronger marketing outcomes and returns for the long term. To learn more about how we can help you create and sustain ultimate brand relationships, visit mblm.com.

MBLM

@mblm | mblm.com