

User guide summary to www.foodcolumns.com

What is a food column? As defined per this website, it is a recipe, complete with an introduction and a print-quality photograph.

What service does www.foodcolumns.com provide?

1 – Non-members may search through and use our food column database for free. They can view search results, display recipes and their web photos (but not the introduction that is part of the column), and print them off for their own personal use. However, functionalities are limited in that most of the menu and information are only accessible to logged-in members (who either have buyer or seller accounts).

2 – Selected contributors, who have had their free **contributor account** approved, may start contributing their own food columns immediately. The reason why we assess contributor account requests individually is that FoodColumns.com is used by professionals and therefore it is imperative that we maintain the high quality of our food column database. Contributors receive an email notification as soon as their application has been processed to let them know the outcome. Approved contributors must then have five of their food columns consecutively reviewed and accepted by us before their status changes from “New” to “Self-testing” and their work is automatically included into our database. Even once a contributor has a self-testing status, we conduct random testing in order to ensure that the high standard required of our database is maintained.

Contributors earn a specified royalty for each download of their food column. The default royalty rate is 20%. Note that any contributor with 100 columns in our database by the end of 2011 will receive 35% royalties and the first 5 contributors with 50 columns in our database will receive 40% royalties. We will also review royalty rates as the site grows and will put in place a profit sharing scheme for our Top 10 contributors (this will take into account the number of contributions made by a contributor, the number of sales achieved and their average column ranking).

Every time a food column is downloaded, a sale notification email is automatically sent to its author, along with their new FoodColumns.com account balance. As soon as a contributor's FoodColumns.com account reaches US\$100, a payment is immediately and automatically sent to them via Paypal.

Every food column submitted by our contributors is automatically packaged as a zip file containing the food column itself (as a pdf file) and the corresponding print quality and web images. We generate the pdf file from the information entered by the contributor into the submission form.

3 – Anyone who wishes to be able to download food columns may create a **buyer account** for free in less than a minute. They can then search the database and the results for their search are displayed on the page (or over several pages). Each result shows a summary of the food column including its title, web-size photo, rating, size of print-quality photo, word count, cost and an “add/remove from favourites” link.

Once buyers click on one of the results, they will be able to view the text for the recipe and a short excerpt from the introduction as well as the author's name (linking to information about him/her). Logged-in members are also able to view any comments previously made about the column by other buyers and its publishing history (where, when and by whom). They may then proceed to purchase the column or return to the search results. Our food columns are

very competitively priced, from as little as US\$25 for columns under 300 words to a maximum of US\$45 for columns over 1000 words (see our full price structure in the FAQ on our website).

Once a purchase is confirmed, the buyer is redirected to Paypal for secure online payment. Almost immediately after the payment is processed, the buyer receives an email receipt from Paypal as well as an email from us containing an encrypted link to the zip file for the food column they have just purchased. Note that the introduction for a food column and its high-resolution image file are only provided to buyers as part of the zip file. The whole buying process only takes a few minutes. Depending on various criteria, buyers may be given a discount (this is taken into account in the column cost that is shown on the search result page and column details page). We may also give special discounts from time to time for promotional purposes.

NB:

- Signing up for a buyer or seller account is free and takes just a few minutes.
- Benefits of having a buyer or seller accounts: both buyers and sellers have access to a full menu. Among other things, they can add and remove columns from their favourites, view the publishing history for any column (when, where, by whom) and any comment that was made about it. This information is only available to logged-in members.
- Buyer and sellers also have access to "My Page", which allows them to update their details as well as view various pieces of information. Buyers can view a list of the columns they previously purchased within the specified timeframe, along with the purchase date and cost. They may also rate (and are encouraged to rate) every column they have previously purchased and leave a comment about each one. This information will then be viewable by other logged-in members.
- Sellers (contributors) can for their part view a list of all the columns they have submitted within a specified timeframe, the status of each column (pending/accepted/rejected), any comment left about a column by the website manager, the publishing history of each column, the number of downloads and royalties earned (broken down for each column), the details of every download of one of their columns and of every payment we made to them within a specified time frame, their contributor status, their FoodColumns.com account balance and more.

Sellers may also enter their website and biography on My Page. Any column they have created will have a note "By <their contributor name>" under the title, linking to a page showing their website and biography as well as a list of all the columns they have contributed to FoodColumns.com. This page is accessible to all users, and makes each contributor's work easily available to anyone who has previously purchased one of their columns and would like to download more. The contributor's name is also printed under the recipe title in the pdf file sent to buyer, and links directly to the contributor's page on FoodColumns.com, again making their work easily accessible to buyers.

Our goal is to grow a high quality database of competitively priced food columns, to the point where www.foodcolumns.com becomes the first port of call for professionals who need a high-quality food column on short notice as well as for publications on a limited budget that just can't afford a regular professional food writer.

Background

So, why FoodColumns.com? Here's the little story. I am a software engineer as well as a cookbook author, food writer and mother of four young children. At the end of 2008 and after publishing my 4th book, I told my husband, also a software engineer, that I would like to provide a free database of my recipes that anyone would be able to search through and browse on my website www.christelle-leru.com. He agreed and suggested that I should allow other people to add their own recipes to the database, as an interactive tool would be more valuable for all.

At the time, I had also been providing food columns to various media for about a year and I received regular requests from people who needed a food column within the hour, for example if their regular food writer had failed to send in their column or if they had simply realized too late that they needed a specific recipe to suit a particular topic or just to fill up a space. Sometimes I'd be able to accommodate such requests, sometimes not.

This is when the idea evolved from simply making all my recipes available online to providing not only this, but also a service that I hoped would prove useful for professionals such as magazines, newspapers, and even broadcasters (I'd been providing regular columns for a local radio station). In order to meet these professionals' needs, our contributors must include an introduction for their recipe (this is what turns a recipe into a "food column"!) as well as provide a print-quality photograph of the dish.

Because of the standard required by such professionals, we need to select our contributors carefully in order to maintain the reputation of the site. This does not mean that contributors are required to have formal qualifications however a talent and some passion both for creating beautiful recipes and taking photographs are expected. Respected food bloggers are but one of the types of people who can contribute successfully to FoodColumns.com.

FoodColumns.com not only allows customers to purchase high-quality food columns, complete with print-quality photographs, in a matter of minutes and for a fraction of the cost charged by a professional food writer, but also allows people who most likely are not and would not be published (not for lack of talent but for lack of professional credentials or notoriety) to both be published and earn money from the sale of their work. Consequently, FoodColumns.com can be a great way for talented but currently unpublished food writers to get started and gain credibility in an industry that can seem inaccessible at times.

There is plenty of detailed information for buyers and sellers on the site however any question that you can't find an answer for may be directed to me at christelle@foodcolumns.com. Also please note that although I have included as many of the features that I believe to be useful for buyers and sellers, I welcome any suggestion you might have and feature you might like to see implemented. Whatever it is, we can do it! Enjoy the site...

Christelle Le Ru, founder of www.foodcolumns.com