

MARKETING 101 MANUAL

AN INTRODUCTION TO BASIC MARKETING PRACTICES

Contact: Claire Morenon, Program Coordinator
One Sugarloaf Street, South Deerfield MA, 01373
413.665.7100
www.buylocalfood.org





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INTRODUCTION

What do your roadside sign, flower beds, radio ads, and email newsletter have in common? They are all a part of your marketing effort. These elements should work together to draw people in and connect them to your business. Don't be intimidated – a marketing plan can be simple, but it should be well thought out.

The development of an effective marketing plan is a challenging but necessary component of running a successful farm business. This guide is based on CISA's Marketing Workshops, held during the winter of 2008-2009 and again in 2011-2012, and is geared towards helping farmers develop and implement a marketing plan that will work for them, for their farm, and for their products.

In this manual, we'll walk through how to create a brand for your business, identify your target audience, and choose the marketing strategies that match your farm, products, and resources.

Case Studies

Each section of the manual contains real-life examples from two farms, both of which have developed successful brands and marketing.

Robin Hollow Farm

Polly and Mike Hutchison of Robin Hollow Farm grow cut flowers and plants on five acres in Saunderstown, Rhode Island. They sell their flowers at farmers' markets and through a flower CSA, and they function as a full-service florist for special events. They founded the farm in 2006, after fourteen years of running a vegetable CSA. Robin Hollow Farm's marketing is sophisticated, polished, and elegant.



Crow Farm

Crow Farm, in Sandwich, MA, is a fifty acre fruit and vegetable farm run by Paul Crowell, along with his father, Howard, and his son, Jason. Of the forty acres in production, the farm grows four acres of apples and peaches, 10 acres of sweet corn, 1/3rd of an acre of greenhouse crops, and the rest in mixed vegetables. They sell the vast majority of their fruits and vegetables through their on-farm stand and through two farmers' markets, and about half of their greenhouse plants are sold wholesale. Crow Farm effectively communicates their family-oriented, wholesome values through their farm stand and interactions with the public.



CREATING A BRAND

In this section, we'll walk through the basic practice of creating a brand by identifying your audience and the messages you want them to receive about your farm.

See the Creating a Brand Worksheet, page 6, for a space to jot down your notes.

What is a brand?

The most elemental component of a marketing effort is a brand. Your brand is the story that you tell about your farm, the values that you communicate, and the sense that customers have of your business. Ask yourself: "When someone thinks of my farm, what comes to mind?" The answer defines your current brand: your brand is what your customers think of your farm business. If your current brand does not align with your self-perception, your values, or your goals, then it is not as strong a brand as it could be. Public perception should align with your vision of your business.

Solidify your values and vision

Step 1:

Think about your business and why you run the farm that you do. What about your farm is most exciting to you? What values drive your decision-making the most? What makes you unique? Write down the adjectives and descriptive phrases that come to mind. They don't have to be clever or form a coherent tagline – a brainstorm is fine.

Step 2:

Write down your "elevator speech," the 20-second spiel you would give if you have only an elevator ride to introduce yourself and your business to someone new. Think carefully about the core identity that you want to communicate; this shouldn't just be a laundry list of what you grow.

Identifying your audience

Step 1:

Begin by identifying your core customers. These are the top ten customers who, if you work to understand and target them better, will help you refine your brand identity. Think about the people who show up as soon as you open for the season, the people who call to ask when their favorite crop is coming into season, or the people who respond to any communications you release.

Step 2:

Talk to your core customers one-on-one about what they like about your business. Why do they choose to purchase your products? These customers have identified something that appeals to them in your existing self-presentation, so they can offer great insight into your strengths and into any areas that your current brand may not align with your goals. They can also help you to identify other services, products, or markets that might be appropriate for you.

Step 3:

Once you have a sense of what drives your core customers and what they think about your business, it's time to identify your target audience. This is the larger group of people whose attention you want to catch through your branding. Identifying the people you want to reach and beginning to strategize about how to reach them is how you begin to develop a marketing strategy.

Look at the big picture

Now that you know how you want to be perceived and how well you're conveying that message to your core customers, take a step back to begin thinking about how your brand will fit into in the marketplace.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are your customers buying? What are the most popular products?
- Who are your competitors? What other businesses are attracting your target customers?
- What are you offering customers? Think broadly about this question: not only the particular products you sell, but any additional benefits you offer, such as convenience, cooking tips, great deals, beauty, etc.

Case Study #1: Robin Hollow Farm

When Polly Hutchison started her business in 2006, she was able to develop her product line, business name, logo, and tagline from scratch. Polly and her husband Mike had fourteen years' experience running a vegetable CSA, so they had plenty of experience with marketing and had developed related skills. Because events are a large component of the business and the aesthetics of events are highly personal, Polly notes the importance of communicating that she is capable of creating any look with flowers, be it rustic, modern, or romantic. She must balance communicating her versatility against maintaining her own brand, which she does by being consistent in her use of her own logo, colors, and other pieces of her branding work, while also making available many photographs of the work she has done for events.

Products

Cut flowers are a relatively high-value crop, so they enabled Polly to build a financially stable business on a small piece of land. In addition to growing flowers for sale at markets and through their flower CSA, Robin Hollow is a full-service florist, so they work with other farms and florists to provide a wide range of flowers and to do events year-round. Polly is a serious grower, her flowers are long-lasting, and her bouquets are lush and professional. She creates a high-value crop, and the sophistication of her marketing materials reinforces that with shoppers.

Farm name and taglines

Polly and Mike wanted to establish a sense of place with their farm name. Robin Hollow describes a geographic characteristic of their land, so it conjures a pleasant image and communicates the connection between the business and the land it's on. The name works, says Polly, but "sometimes I

wish we'd been a little more specific about what we do." A farm name can't communicate everything about your business, so think an advance about what is most important and accept that you will have to use other methods to tell your whole story.

Robin Hollow Farm uses two taglines: "outstanding cut flowers and events" is the more literal descriptor printed on business cards, in Polly's email signature, and on the website. They also use "Fresh - Local - Sustainable," a tagline that is a direct description of their values. "Fresh - Local - Sustainable" is effective because it is straightforward and strong. Neither tagline is used on every single piece of their marketing materials, but both are consistently deployed.

Logo

Polly worked with a designer to develop the logo for Robin Hollow Farm. She said that they must have gone through twenty drafts before settling on their current logo. The logo, like their website and print materials, is modern and clean. Polly said, "People tend to think of farmers as old-fashioned, but that's not us." The logo reflects their modern sensibilities.



Case Study #2: Crow Farm

Paul Crowell is the third generation at Crow Farm. His father Howard still works on the farm, and his son Jason is currently moving into a management role. The farm is truly a family business, with Paul's mother Judy managing the website, and Paul's wife Ellen selling baked goods at the farm stand. The product line and farm brand has changed quite a bit over the years as each generation puts its own stamp on the business.

Products

Today, a significant portion of the farm's income comes from greenhouse crops, and the rest comes from the four acres of orchard, ten acres of sweet corn, and fifteen or so acres of mixed vegetables. Paul says that the product mix is a balancing act between focusing on the most profitable crops (the greenhouse crops) and growing the diversity of crops that enables them to draw people to their stand throughout the growing season. Selling their own peaches, apples, and sweet corn helps Crow Farm stand out, but they need to grow a full complement of vegetables to flesh out their offerings. In recent years, Paul has added strawberry and raspberry plants, which are high-value crops that fit well with the rest of their offerings. Strawberries are especially promising, because they are a food crop that is in season when the greenhouse crops are in full swing.

Image

Crow Farm's wholesome, honest, family-based ethos is clear at the stand and in the farm's marketing. When asked to describe the farm's image, Paul says, "Well, we've always been focused on 'eating the seasons,' because that's how we grew up. The business is wholesome and Cape Cod-y because that's what we are."

Pricing

Because many of the greenhouse plants are sold wholesale, you can find Crow Farm flowers in color boxes and hanging baskets at garden centers around Cape Cod. Paul has noticed that shoppers are willing to pay more for those luxury items at garden centers than they are at the Crow Farm stand. He suspects that this is a marketing issue: people pour in to buy plants for their gardens and corn for their cookouts, but they don't associate Crow Farm with high-end, expensive products. Therefore, the garden centers can sell color boxes made from Crow Farm flowers at higher prices than Crow Farm can command. Crow Farm is not moving towards establishing a more luxury-based image, so it's just an unfortunate truth, but it is an interesting example of how deeply your farm brand can affect the ways that customers interact with you and your products.

Your Offerings

These questions focus on the tangible offerings (the products and services) that you will highlight in order to bring customers to your business.

1. What products, services, or conveniences do you offer customers? How do customers benefit from your offerings?

2. List the products, services, or conveniences that customers and the public are currently most aware of.

3. What are the most popular products among your target audience?

4. What products or services do you want to highlight? Think about the products that are or could be the most popular with your target audience.

Review: Compare the lists and note where they do and do not align. Ideally, most of the products that you offer (question #1) would be well-known (question #2), popular among your target audience (question #3), and points of pride for you (question #4).

DEVELOPING A MARKET STRATEGY

Once you've done the work of shaping your brand in your head, you need to begin projecting your brand through all of your outreach. Your brand personality should be seen in everything you do, the places you go, and in the aesthetic design of your materials.

See the Developing a Marketing Strategy Worksheet, page 9, for a space to jot down your notes.

Evaluate consistency in points of customer contact

Every business has multiple points of audience contact, including brochures, business cards, road signs, paid advertising, direct mail, websites, speaking opportunities, point of purchase displays, and packaging.

List all your existing points of audience contact, and then evaluate each for messaging consistency. You can't rely on just your packaging or your advertisements – the idea of the brand should be consistent on all materials including press releases, workshops, ads, interviews, signs, packaging, blogs, websites, speaking engagements, etc.

The answers can help you decide if there are some points of audience contact you currently use that can be dropped, or if you need to invest in new outreach tools.

Develop a timeline, budget, and choose marketing tools

It's time to evaluate marketing tools, identify your targets and goals, and develop a plan.

- Identify the geographic range you expect your customers to come from, so you can target your marketing strategically. Consider areas surrounding farmers' markets that you attend, or retailers that carry your products.
- Consider your target customers, as identified on the previous worksheet. How can you reach that population?
- Take your competition into account.
- Set your total marketing budget.
- Decide which marketing tools you will use to spread the word about your business. Create a prioritized list: do you need to start with the basics, like a website and a farm sign? Are you ready to move into paid advertising, or try to generate some press interest? You don't have to do it all, but move forward by writing down a plan.
- Develop a timeline for marketing tool development. Be realistic about how much you can accomplish, and set deadlines that you will keep.
- Decide how you will evaluate the effectiveness of your marketing strategies. Some one-time investments don't require evaluation, like farm signage, but if you are making continual investments in advertising or printing flyers, you should evaluate the return on that investment.

WORKSHEET: DEVELOPING A MARKETING STRATEGY

Points of Audience Contact

1. List the ways that you currently communicate with customers or potential customers, such as: packaging, print advertising, events, newsletters, flyers, your farm stand or farmers' market booth, radio advertising, or your website.

Marketing Strategy

2. Are there points of audience contact listed above that aren't reaching your target audience?

3. Are there points of audience contact that fit your brand's personality better than others? List both existing and potential points of audience contact.

4. Is your message clear on all of your points of audience contact?

Review: The answers can help you decide if there are some points of audience contact that you currently use that can be dropped, or if you need to invest in new outreach tools.

MARKETING TOOL: MERCHANDISING

Marketing your business and your products doesn't end once you get customers to come to your farm or stand. When merchandise is displayed neatly, creatively, and attractively, sales increase and customers have positive associations that will bring them back. Research done by Point-of-Purchase Advertising International found that 75% of purchasing decisions are made in the store. You have a lot of control over what people buy if your merchandising is effective!

Curb appeal

Make your site appealing from the moment customers arrive. Hang a visible sign and clearly mark the entrance. Make sure there is ample parking and keep the parking area free of mud and snow. As people approach your stand, home, or tent, the general appearance should be neat and clean. Keep the grass mowed, and put in some plantings or flowers.

Make shopping easy

Think about the accessibility of your space and the ease with which customers can shop. Remove any obstructions to traffic flow and make sure your products are easy to see and reach. People are more likely to purchase items that are placed 30-38" off the ground, and to pass over items they have to bend to reach. Have boxes or baskets available – customers will buy more if they can carry more! Make sure you have the tools to sell the product based on your pricing structure. If you're selling by the pound, have a scale. If you're selling by volume, have pint boxes or bags available. Make sure your system is convenient for customers.

Grouping, contrast, and abundance

Display related products together: greens on one table, root veggies on another, and herbs near the register. Pairing commonly-associated products, such as tomatoes and basil, can also be effective. Think about contrasting the color, texture, and shape of products that are displayed together to increase visual impact. If you have several varieties of brown-skinned potatoes, display them interspersed with colored potato varieties to create a real sense of choice and variation.

Keep your display looking abundant and promote items when they are bountiful. People appreciate choice and are more inclined to buy when they are surrounded by abundance. Remove empty bins and tables as products sell. Put false bottoms in containers once supplies get low, so that they still appear full. Supermarkets use red cloth under tomatoes and green under lettuce, which creates the illusion of fullness. It's also important to continually freshen displays so they don't look picked over– in addition to refilling boxes, straighten stacks of vegetables and keep the display tidy. If you sell fresh produce, spray vegetables with water to keep them fresh and remove anything wilted.

Signage

Your products must be labeled legibly with a clearly marked price. Put signs above produce so that they are visible even if another shopper is standing in front of a bin. Signs with information about the product can be a useful tool for shoppers. For example, label apples as best for cooking or eating, or indicate which plants grow well in shade and which need full sun. Sign materials should be consistent.

Regardless of what medium you use (blackboards, card stock and markers, or computer generated text), make sure they are consistent throughout the store or stand. If you are a member of the Local Hero program, use CISA's Local Hero materials! Our market research shows that 82% of consumers in Franklin and Hampshire County recognize and trust the Local Hero logo.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Be real and honest, but put the customer first

Phoniness is an immediate turnoff, so be yourself and be straightforward with your customers. People often choose local because they want to feel connected to local farms, so be honest and clear about your production techniques, pricing structure, policies, etc. At the same time, remember that the interactions you have with customers should really be about them, not you. People don't want to hear a sob story, so be authentic but positive.

Create a customer service policy

Provide your staff with written customer service policies. It sets the standard for all your staff to follow, and ensures that customers have a consistently positive experience, regardless of which staff member serves them. Ensuring that all staff can provide excellent customer service will free you up to do other work.

Be responsive

You will enable a good shopping experience when you greet and make eye contact with every customer. This opens up the lines of communication. Always take feedback to heart. If you hear anything negative about your business or any of your employees, immediately take measures to correct the problem. People are far more likely to pass along a negative experience to friends than a positive one.

Case Study #1: Robin Hollow Farm

"We sell beauty," says Polly when asked about the importance of merchandising. Flowers, with their inherently alluring qualities, are a great starting point, but they don't sell themselves. Polly sells plants, individual cut flowers, and pre-made bouquets at various farmers' markets in Rhode Island. Robin Hollow Farm has the benefit of being the only farm of that exclusively sells flowers in their marketing region. On the other hand, flowers are a specialty item, so Polly estimates that one in ten people at any given farmers' market are potential



customers. She says that her customers tend not to be too concerned about price: people tend to have already decided whether or not to spend money on the luxury of a bouquet. Her task is to make her offerings as irresistible and easy to select as possible to the people who are potential customers.

Signage

Because flower varieties are often unfamiliar to customers, Polly makes a point of labeling each bucket of flowers, and then the price of each stem is on a large blackboard. The prices of individual stems do not vary much, but it is important to give customers pricing information, rather than forcing them to ask.



Case Study #2: Crow Farm

Most of Crow Farm's marketing happens at their farm stand, and they have many years of experience with selling through that medium.

Customer service

Almost everyone that works at the Crow Farm stand has been with the farm for over a decade. The women that interact with the customers are very familiar with the farm's products and growing practices, and they are more than able to answer any questions that come up at the stand. They all have plenty of cooking tips for the vegetables and can give advice about gardening and which plants to select. Many of the long-term employees contribute their own stamp to the stand: one sells handmade Crow Farm tote bags, while another has a special skill with making bouquets and will make one to your specifications.

Merchandising

The Crow Farm stand leads with whatever is the strongest aesthetic offering of the season. When you pull up to the stand, there is always a bounty of colorful products to pull you in. In the spring, the benches out front are loaded with a riot of colorful plants. As the season progresses, mums, pumpkins, and corn stalks take the place of the greenhouse plants.

Another savvy merchandising decision is actually related to the crop plan. The cut flower beds are always placed behind the farm stand, creating a stunning backdrop to the stand scene.



MARKETING TOOL: A WEBSITE FOR YOUR FARM

Any farm with any marketing goals at all should have a website. Modern customers, when exposed to your business through any other marketing efforts (paid advertisements, press releases, brochures) are far more inclined to look to a website for more information than to make a phone call or stop by your farm. If you are promoting your business through any other medium but do not have a website for the people you attract to visit, you are missing a big opportunity to pull people in.

Elements of a good website

Good content

- **Readable and concise:** Some customers may be interested in reading in great detail about your growing practices, history, and passions, but the most effective websites are focused on making information as accessible as possible. Be sure that the site provides the answers to the questions you are asked most often: what you grow, where a customer can purchase it, how to contact you, etc. Readers should not have to scroll to find important information, unless you are purposely providing a lengthy narrative.
- **Subdivided:** Breaking up chunks of text improves readability. Create separate pages for separate topics, use headers and bulleted or numbered lists to make the pages easier to absorb.
- **Illustrated:** Photographs are an excellent way to draw people into a site, and farmers are usually fortunate to have beautiful settings and products to photograph!
- **Up to date:** Especially for businesses selling seasonal products, it is of vital importance that customers can trust that the information on your site is timely. Posting that you grow strawberries is useful, but posting that you have pick-your-own strawberries and you are open daily starting on June 1st is information that leads directly to a sale.



Graphic by Anne Campbell Designs

Layout

Using standard layout norms for your site will make it useable and tidy. The standard website has a logo and business name at the top, navigation across the top or down the left side of the page, content in the center, and the footer is often used for contact information. The right side of the site can be used for a search box or a sidebar.

Navigation

Many small farms will have relatively small websites, so navigation shouldn't be a major challenge for your users. Make sure that as readers click through your website, there are "breadcrumbs" that make it possible to navigate back through the pages. Redundancy, or giving people multiple ways to access a page, can be a useful tool. Don't build any "orphaned" pages, or pages that can only be reached by

following one hidden path. Pages should be visible on the menus and accessible through a number of paths. For a local business with a small website, there is no reason that customers should have to click more than three times to access any page from your homepage.

Search engine optimization is a complex field, but there are simple things you can do to make sure that your site comes up easily when people search for it. Search engines prioritize headers on your site, so don't use only bold or italics to highlight pages or sections. Page names are prioritized by search engines, so give each page on your site a unique name to provide more keywords that will lead search engines to your site.

Design

- **Contrast:** If you have distinct elements on your page, make them visibly different enough that they stand apart. Links should be clearly visible, headers should be visibly larger than the body of the text, etc.
- **Repetition:** Be consistent! Use the same font, headers, photo size, etc throughout the site. The brain has to work to process lots of variation, so make it easy for your site visitors to scan your pages and find the information they are seeking.
- **Alignment:** Line up elements with a grid. Don't place elements at random. If you have a menu box on top of a search box, make both of those elements the same width. Keep photo sizes consistent.
- **Proximity:** Group things together to imply a relationship. Adding bullets to a page menu can help people navigate the site must more easily.

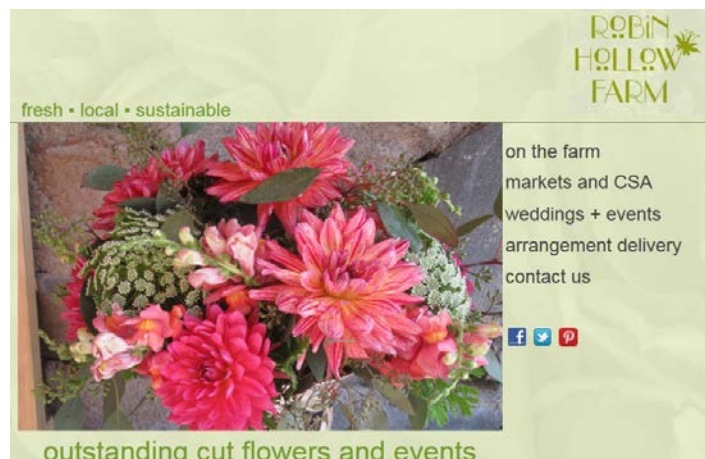
Websites cannot, themselves, reach out and grab customers the way that paid advertising or flyering can. If you have the capacity to manage any social media efforts or a newsletter, your website will be a central piece of building an ongoing online relationship with customers (see page 14 for more details).

Include the web address on your packaging, business cards, and in all forms of advertising.

Let customers know you exist through other forms of communication, and point them towards your website as their initial welcome to the farm.

Case Study #1: Robin Hollow Farm

Polly designed the Robin Hollow website herself with IWeb, saying, "I had some web skills, and I watched a LOT of tutorials on YouTube." The site, to your right, is modern, simple, and easy to navigate. It is consistent with Robin Hollow Farm's other materials in general appearance and color choice, and is consistent in its use of the taglines and the logo. Visit on the web at www.robinhollowfarm.com.



STRATEGY: PRINT MATERIALS

Most businesses will find a need for some sort of printed materials, such as business cards, brochures, flyers, or even print advertising. Familiarize yourself with some design basics that can help you lay out your own professional-looking materials, or evaluate designs created for you by a professional.

Consider your needs

As with all the marketing strategies contained in this manual, you must begin by considering your marketing goals, opportunities, and resources. Printed materials can be expensive to produce, so consider how you can get the most value out of whatever you choose to print. If you have a CSA, it probably makes sense to print a flyer that has space for some detail about what your shares look like and how people can sign up. If you do events and your business depends on networking, you need a business card.

Design basics

These are general tips that can help you to ensure that your print materials are based on solid design concepts. Not every single concept is necessary for a successful print piece.

Layout

The eye follows a “z” pattern when looking at a page by moving across the top, scanning to the lower left, and then finishing in the lower right. People scan a page and only read more closely if something of interest draws them in. Place important components on the page so that your audience can quickly grasp your primary messages. The CISA ad to the right utilizes this layout: our logo and the headline across the top, an image where the eye sweeps down and towards the right, and then our website information across the bottom, ending with a specific call to action at the bottom right.

Alignment

Everything on the page should align with something else. Use a grid as a guide, and break alignment only for emphasis. Note that the CISA logo at the bottom of the ad aligns with the headline at the top, and each section has text oriented to the left, rather than centered.

Rule of thirds

Pages can be divided horizontally or vertically into thirds for an appealing layout. The CISA ad to the right uses this rule to good effect. This rule also applies to photographs: see page



This CISA ad exhibits many of the basic design principles to good effect.

17 for more information about images.

One strong visual

A simple way to ensure a pleasing layout is to rely on one strong visual element. Pairing one strong image with a large headline and some explanatory text is a classic arrangement for print materials. People also like seeing images of people, so include a person if it makes sense to do so and make sure their eyes are visible. The CISA ad on the previous page uses one primary image of a person to catch readers' eyes.

A bad example

This draft poster is an example of a design that does not adhere to the design principles, so the result is visually confusing.

- **Layout:** The most important information is the name of the event, what it is, and the date and time. This information is arrayed in two bars across the top. Less important information, such as the save the date alerts for upcoming events, runs across the bottom. This is an example of how not using the “Z” layout can obscure the message. It is difficult to absorb the primary message of the poster at a glance.
- **Alignment:** The separate bubbles of color segregate each piece of information and create confusion. It obscures the hierarchy of information; the eye doesn't know where to start or focus.
- **One strong visual:** Each bubble contains a close-up of a vegetable, which makes the images difficult to discern. The array of colors and textures competes with the information – we don't want viewers trying to figure out what they are seeing instead of reading the text!



This CISA poster draft was never printed and is a good example of a design that does not adhere to the basic design principles.

Design components

Color

All of the colors in your print materials should be consistent with any other outreach materials. The color of the green bands in the CISA ad on page 15 is consistent with the green that CISA consistently uses in its logo, mailings, website, signage, and so on.

When selecting colors, it is important to understand the subtle messages that the public receives from each color. Consider the emotional response you want to trigger in your audience and choose colors that sync with your brand.

Red: Excitement, strength, power, passion.

Yellow: Happiness and energy.

Green: Growth, freshness, safety.

Blue: Stability, calmness.

White: Light, goodness, purity.

Black: Power, elegance, mystery, evil.

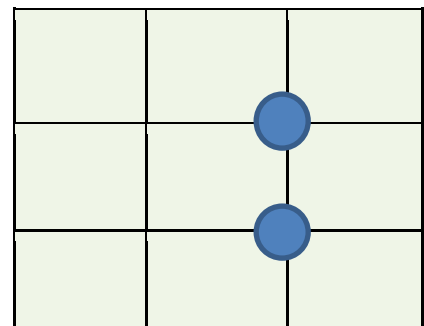
Typeface and typography

- Typefaces are either serif, or sans serif. Serif typefaces have details on the upper and lowercase letters. Times New Roman is an example of a serif typeface. Sans serif typefaces have no details on the letters. Calibri is a sans serif typeface. Sans serif typefaces are easier to read from a distance when the letters are large, so are typically used for headlines or displays. Serif typefaces are easier to read in blocks of text, so are typically used in the copy. You may use a sans serif headline and a serif text body, but only if the typefaces are the same font.
- People read lowercase letters about 13% faster than upper case, so do not use upper case letters for blocks of text.
- Dark letters on a light background are easier to read than the reverse.
- Fonts may be mixed to shift the audience's attention, but you must be careful not to create a visually confusing mixture. This technique can look very unprofessional.
- In most cases, do not center the text. Compare the CISA ad on page 15 to the poster on page 16: the ad has left-justified text, and the poster uses centered text.
- If you are printing brochures, be careful not to put text on the fold.

Images

Use images that tell a story. Photographs are powerful, and readers respond well to images of people. Think before you print about the size of the piece and the print quality you are able to afford. Very small pieces (like “mini-ads”) or materials that you will be printing at home in black and white may not benefit from the use of photographs.

Images, like page layout, are more visually interesting when you apply the “Rule of Thirds.” Imagine that your image is divided into thirds along the horizontal and vertical axes, and place the focal point at the intersections of those lines. A focal point may be the eyes of the person in the image, for example.

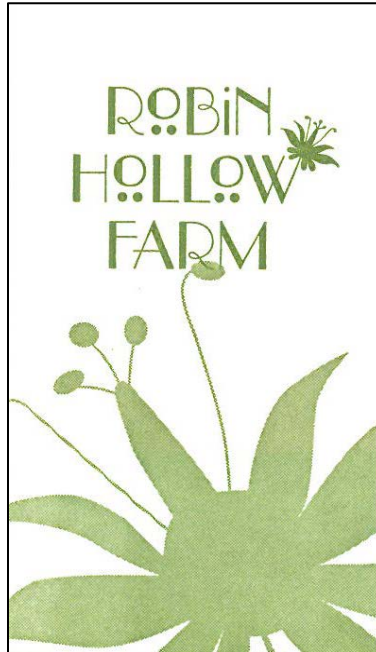


Case Study #1: Robin Hollow Farm

Because events are a significant component of their business, it is important that Robin Hollow Farm have compelling and professional printed materials. Polly says, “Farmers’ markets are, in and of

themselves, good marketing.” Polly has two business cards: one is a sophisticated letter-press card, and the other is a small, colorful mini Moo Card (half the size of a regular business card, moo.com). She also has a glossy, half-sheet postcard that is geared specifically towards marketing Robin Hollow Farm’s event services. The postcard and the Moo cards are out at the farmers’ markets, and she hands out any of the three pieces during networking opportunities.

The elegant letterpress business card uses a major design element from the Robin Hollow Farm logo in fresh ways. The colors mimic the colors on the website, and the “Fresh – Local – Sustainable” tagline is used.



Polly has several different versions of the mini Moo card – this is just one example. Here, too, the floral design from the logo is in black and white on the back, and both taglines are used.

The postcard that advertises events makes excellent use of professional photographs of the beautiful flowers and arrangements that Polly creates.



ROBIN HOLLOW FARM: EVENT DESIGN

From a backyard party to a glorious affair, Robin Hollow Farm will make your event outstanding.

"I cannot adequately express our gratitude and awe at the amazing flowers you arranged for the ceremony and for the girls bouquets. Just spectacular. We knew they would be beautiful, but your skill at designing and putting together the various elements was perfect for the setting of The Meeting House and fulfilled Kristen's dreams! - Barbara



CALL OR EMAIL FOR A CONSULTATION:
401.294.2868
ROBINHOLLOWFARM.COM



MARKETING TOOL: PUBLICITY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

There are many ways to spread the word about your business using alternative, free methods of getting publicity. The possibilities for drawing people in are endless, but here are some ideas to get you started.

First, look back at your earlier work and think about your brand. If the brand that you are working to communicate is based on sophistication and luxury, then having a presence at the county fair may not be the best way to further your brand. If your brand is homey and family-oriented, then the county fair is probably a great opportunity. Think about your target audience and the sorts of outreach that is likely to reach them. And, finally, think about your own skills and resources.

See the matrix on pages 22 and 23 for the inputs and outputs you can expect from each event.

Events and festivals

- Participate in community events to introduce yourself to new customers. Have a booth at town fairs or have a float in the town parade.
- Use a film to get people talking and as a jumping-off point to tell your farm's story. Hold a screening at your local library of a film like *King Corn* or *The Real Dirt on Farmer John*.
- Work with the schools to reach kids through school visits or field trips.
- Large harvest festivals can be a great way to get people to the farm and to build goodwill. They can be quite draining, so focus your efforts on one or two a year. See CISA's guide, *Creating Successful Agritourism Activities for Your Farm*, at www.buylocalfood.org/page.php?id=43.
- Some farms have had success by partnering with other local businesses, such as renting out the farm to a local restaurant for a farm dinner or hosting a local wine and cheese tasting.
- Offering classes on the farm can help build relationships with customers and position you as a local farming expert. Topics such as chicken care, composting, and food preservation, have been very successful on farms. See Appendix 4, page 39, for more detailed tips on offering a successful class.
- Day-to-day events, like chicks hatching, can mean a lot to people who don't live on farms. Invite them to participate!

Spreading the word

- If you have kids in school, you can send postcards home with their fellow students.
- If you're selling to a local restaurant or retailer, talk to them about how you can work together to spread the word about your partnership.
- Be available to local news sources. Especially in an agricultural area like the Pioneer Valley, media outlets run stories throughout the year about how the weather is affecting local farms, how the harvest looks, and so on. If you get a call from a reporter, respond right away and do your best to be available for an interview. Once reporters know that they can count on you to be available, you're likely to be the first farmer they call, and this mutually beneficial relationship can mean some great free publicity for your business.

- Send a letter to the editor on a topic that is relevant to your business. See Appendix 1, page 35, for a sample.

Case Study #1: Robin Hollow Farm

With a crop as sensitive as cut flowers, harvesting and doing sales at the farm every day would lead to a lot of lost product and would require expensive staff time, so Robin Hollow Farm doesn't have a farm stand. This means that many of their customers never see the farm, but having an open-door policy can create real distractions on the farm. In order to create an opportunity for customers to connect with the farm in a way that works for her, Polly organizes several on-farm events each year, including an annual plant sale and a few holiday events. They are also available by appointment for garden club tours. Polly notes, "this way, we get to choose the terms under which we're open to the public."

Case Study #2: Crow Farm

Crow Farm is known locally for hosting school field trips. Each fall, groups of kids pour into the farm for a tour, and they all leave with an apple they picked themselves. The walls of one of the storage buildings are papered with thank you notes in childlike print. The schools pay a couple of bucks per child, but Paul says that this offering is more about positioning the farm in the community. Parents come in, curious about the farm that their child just visited, and, Paul says, "a lot of our customers remember coming here as kids."

Paul is moving towards doing more on the farm to attract publicity and shoppers. He planted a Pick-Your-Own orchard, which is a feature that many customers have asked about. It would be a unique offering in the area, and would serve to extend the feeling of connection that the community has with the farm. He is also interested in the possibility of hosting a farm to table event with a local restaurant. There are a few potential restaurant partners in the area, and Paul has the perfect field to host a party (in fact, his wedding was in that field in 2005!).

REQUIREMENTS OF THE FARM AND FARMER FOR FREE ADVERTISING METHODS

| | Heavy time requirement | Strong community connections | Strong existing customer connections | Some technological skills | Writing or communication skills | Strong people skills | Comfort in a leadership role | Comfort with people visiting the farm |
|---|------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Community events, such as tabling at fairs | X | | | | | X | | |
| Host a film screening with Q&A | | | | | X | X | X | |
| School field trips | X | X | | | | X | X | X |
| Big harvest festival | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| Partner with local businesses for events | X | X | | | | | | X |
| On-farm classes | X | | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Invite people to participate in basic farm happenings | | X | X | | | X | X | X |
| Send postcards home with kids | | X | | | X | | | |
| Work with your wholesale customers to promote your farm | | X | X | | | | | |
| Be available for local news sources | | X | | | X | X | X | |
| Maintain a website or online profile | | | | X | X | | | |
| Send out an newsletter | X | | X | X | X | | | |
| Write a letter to the editor | | | | | X | | X | |

BENEFITS TO THE FARM FOR FREE ADVERTISING METHODS

| | Reaches potential new customers | Targets your core audience specifically | Develops relationship with existing customers | Brings people to the farm | Fosters new community connections | Positions you as an expert in your field | Educates consumers about issues that are important to your business |
|---|---------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Community events, such as tabling at fairs | X | | | | X | | |
| Host a film screening with Q&A | X | X | X | | | X | X |
| School field trips | X | | X | X | | X | X |
| Big harvest festival | X | X | X | X | X | | |
| Partner with local businesses for events | X | | | X | X | | |
| On-farm classes | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Invite people to participate in basic farm happenings | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Send postcards home with kids | X | | | | | | X |
| Work with your wholesale customers to promote your farm | X | | X | | X | | |
| Be available for local news sources | X | | | | X | X | X |
| Maintain a website or online profile | X | X | X | | | | X |
| Send out an newsletter | X | X | X | | | X | X |
| Write a letter to the editor | X | | | | | X | X |

MARKETING TOOL: SOCIAL MEDIA

There are many ways in which businesses can successfully use web-based tools to promote their businesses. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and email newsletters allow you to actively reach out to and engage with customers. As with any other marketing tool, you must evaluate each of those options by thinking about what they can do for you and what they require of you to be used effectively.

See the Choosing Social Media Worksheet, page 27, for a place to brainstorm and write notes.

Website

Websites are not technically social media; they are static and passive. However, if you intend to have an online presence, you should have a website as a home base. Websites are flexible and expandable, and can provide a permanent home for all your content (such as newsletters, recipes, photos, etc). Having an attractive website also provides more credibility than just having a Facebook page, for example. See the section on website design, page 13, for more information.

Blog

Blog software has gotten sophisticated enough that a blog could function as your website, if it was laid out in a traditional website format and used like a website. A blog can also exist in addition to a more traditional website and be used for timely updates or musings. If you are thinking about using a blog in this way, consider:

Pros

- Appropriate for small, timely updates. You may not want to change the home page of your home page very often, but a blog can be updated whenever a new crop comes in or a lamb is born.
- Blog structure is useful if you have a lot of content. A large recipe library can be easily navigated on a blog.
- Blogs can be used for informal content that may not otherwise be important enough to dominate your home page. If you want to share your thoughts on the season, a link to an interesting video, or a funny picture, using a blog is a good format.
- Readers can opt to get automatic updates through a blog aggregator.

Cons

- Blogs should be regularly updated. Traffic will drop off if you do not update often.
- Requires a certain skill level with writing or photography. You must be able to develop quality content on a regular basis in order to maintain interest.
- If you fixate on creating a successful blog rather than thinking about how a good blog can serve your farm, you can waste a lot of time on this. Are your marketing goals going to be served by what you can do on a blog? Will it help you reach your target audience?

Email newsletter

Email newsletters can be used for updates throughout the seasons about new products and markets, and to give existing customers some insight into you and your business. Note: do not buy an email list or add people without their consent. You MUST have an opt-out option on every email.

Pros

- Email newsletters are often referred to as permission or consent marketing, meaning that customers have given you permission to contact them about your offerings. This means that you have a direct line to people who you know are interested in you and your product.
- Enewsletters can either contain content themselves, or just lead customers to your blog or website.

Cons

- Content is encapsulated in email unless you also post it somewhere else. So if you are sharing recipes through your email newsletter but not maintaining a recipe section on your website, there is no way for new customers to find them, and even your email recipients will have to dig through their emails for them.
- Not useful for extremely regular updates. Do not send an email more than once a week.
- One-way communication. Unlike Facebook or even the comment section of a blog, email newsletters don't engage customers in dialogue. That may not be a drawback, depending on your goals.

Facebook

Facebook is free, intuitive to use, and can be an excellent way to build a rapport with customers.

Pros

- Appropriate for short, timely updates. Unlike an email newsletter, you can post updates to Facebook daily.
- Enables dialogue with customers. This can build a sense of connection with customers. It's worth noting that the commenting features potentially open you up to public critique, so you should consider in advance how you will respond to any difficult comments.
- Proactive. Like an email newsletter, Facebook reaches people through media that they commonly use.
- Allows customers and other businesses to share your information with their networks. Many customers "like" pages casually and easily.
- Informal and personal. You can be quirky and casual on Facebook – it's a way to show the people behind the business.

Cons

- Don't start it if you can't maintain it. People will not see your page if you do not regularly post content.
- Requires regular attention: you need to check it often enough to respond to customers in a timely way.
- Not a good host for complex or lengthy content. If you plan to share lots of recipes or want to post nuanced thoughts, consider one of the long-form outreach tools, like an email newsletter or blog.

Twitter

Twitter is relatively new, and has not been adopted by small businesses in the way that Facebook has.

Like Facebook, Twitter is appropriate for short, timely updates. It is much faster-paced than Facebook—multiple daily tweets is fine, and possibly even necessary if you want your page to be noticed. One feature that distinguishes Twitter from Facebook is that it allows topic-based interactions, so people can find you either through personal networks, or through discussions about specific topics. The challenges of Twitter are that it is fast-paced and dense, making it easy to get lost in the stream of information. It requires active use to yield results, and real effort to build a following. If you already use Twitter, there is no harm in using it for your business. But if you are interested in experimenting with social media, we recommend using Facebook.

Case Study #1: Robin Hollow Farm

Robin Hollow Farm uses Facebook and Twitter, and they have an email newsletter and recently added a blog. Polly says, “Facebook and Twitter are so satisfying – you just snap a picture of whatever you’re doing, and you don’t even have to come up with anything brilliant to say. The picture does it all!” Facebook, Twitter, and the blog are all used as showcases for whatever flowers are coming into season, as a way to draw people to the markets. The new blog is specifically devoted to listing the crops that will be available that week, while Twitter and Facebook are used more for one-off photos of flowers in the field, links to wedding photos, and the occasional musing. The newsletter goes out regularly, but not on a set schedule. It is used to promote specific events or purchasing opportunities. For example, the switch from summer markets to winter markets, the enrollment period for the flower CSA, or the plant sale.

WORKSHEET: CHOOSING SOCIAL MEDIA

1) List your specific marketing goals. What do you want people to do in response to your outreach?

For example: do you want more people to shop at your farm stand, or look for your products in grocery stores? Do you have specials or short-season crops you need to promote? Events?

2) Write down the values and descriptive words you have developed for your brand.

3) List your strengths and weaknesses as they relate to online marketing.

Strengths can include: having a lot of recipes to share, photography skills, high comfort level with new technology, or even just owning an iPhone.

Weaknesses can include: dial-up internet, a lack of clarity around your farm story, or a lack of interest or skill in writing.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

4) Write down your online marketing action steps.

MARKETING TOOL: PRESS RELEASES

As newspapers reduce staff time in response to pressures on their business, it's easier than ever to get a well-written press release published in your local paper. Newspaper coverage is free, doesn't put you in direct competition with other businesses that advertise in the paper, and being featured in the newspaper carries with it an aura of legitimacy. What follows are tips on writing an effective press release that will get your business noticed.

First steps

Develop a list of contacts

You'll need a consolidated list of press contacts. Look for reporters that cover the agricultural, environmental, or rural beat. You can also include any marketing staff at the paper that has been in touch with you about advertising. If you are using software for an email newsletter, you can create a separate list of press contacts in that software. Otherwise, Bcc the list through your regular email account.

- You can call newspapers to ask for a contact, or pull email addresses from newspaper websites or bylines.
- Online resources: American Journalism Review (www.ajr.org) and Direct Contact PR ([www/directcontactpr.com/jumpstation](http://www.directcontactpr.com/jumpstation)) both offer searchable directories.
- Bacon's Newspaper Directory is a comprehensive list of newspaper outlets and contact information that is available at public libraries.
- CISA has a list of Pioneer Valley media contacts that is available to Local Hero members. Contact CISA at 413-665-7100 to access it.

Position your business

Send an introductory letter to media outlets introducing yourself and outlining your professional expertise. Journalists often rely on more than one source for their stories, so providing them with some background information can help them choose you as a contact for stories. If you hope to be seen as a reliable contact for journalists, be sure to return calls promptly. Journalists are working on tight deadlines, and if you don't return phone calls, they'll stop coming. Make sure journalists know how you can help them!

Identify your story

Sometimes, you may have big news to share, like starting a new venture on the farm or winning an award. Businesses that are savvy about press releases, though, can spin much smaller events to make them newsworthy. Media outlets always run stories around the holidays, so use that to your advantage by announcing photo opportunities at your holiday events.

Write your release

Format of a good press release

- Make headlines bold instead of all caps.
- List a contact person and their information in the upper right-hand corner of the page.
- Write “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” or “FOR RELEASE (date, time)” in the upper left-hand corner of the page.
- For releases issued in advance of breaking news, write “EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE (date, time)” in the upper left-hand corner of the page.
- If the release is longer than one page, type “-more-” at the bottom of every page.
- Type “30” or “###” at the end of the final page.
- Put shortened title and page number in the upper right-hand corner of the second page and on.

Classic press release writing style:

The “inverted pyramid” writing style, stating facts in descending order of importance, is the classic format for a press release.

- The first paragraph addresses the who, what, where, when, and why of the story, hooks the reporter into reading the rest of the release by isolating the most interesting aspect of the story, and is direct and short.
- The second paragraph amplifies the lead, expanding on information provided in the first paragraph. It answers anticipated questions that you hint at in the lead and reveals the name of the business or organization issuing the release.
- The third paragraph includes a quote from a business representative or third party. This quote endorses the news release message. The final paragraphs provide more detail to the reader in descending order of importance. Don’t put vital information in the last paragraphs, as they will be first to get cut.

Modern press release writing style:

The current state of newspaper staffing makes it more likely than ever that your press release will get published in full. This is an opportunity to write press releases that are more like newspaper stories – less factual and more engaging. Appendix 2, on page 36, is a sample press release written in this style.

Writing tips:

- Write in the active voice and use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Try to keep it to one page. If possible, follow Associated Press Stylebook rules. Every time you start a new topic, start a new paragraph.
- Proofread your release.
- Don’t include information that is overly controversial or opinionated, unless that is your goal.

- Refine quotes so that they are grammatically correct. Quote source should be placed in a natural break or at the end of a sentence. Don't put one quote directly after a quote from another source unless one is responding to the other.

Release your story

Distribution

- Indicate if the event is a press release, photo opportunity, or calendar listing.
- Email is preferred, since it saves retyping time. If you must mail a press release, use letterhead.
- If you are emailing the press release, do not send it as an attachment. Cut and paste it into the body of an email. Type email addresses into the "BCC" line.
- Do not email photos with the press release, but do let the journalist know if you have photographs available.
- Put a copy of the release on your website to make it more widely available.

After the release

- You must be available if a reporter calls or wants to come to the farm for photos and an interview. Return any calls immediately and be accommodating.
- When you are being interviewed, be sure to reinforce the primary message of your press release. Stay on topic.
- Send thank you notes to journalists for good stories!

Case Studies: Robin Hollow Farm and Crow Farm

Robin Hollow Farm and Crow Farm both get good press, although neither sends out many press releases. Polly sends out press releases in advance of special events, and has felt that they are hit or miss, depending on the news cycle. The magazine piece to the right, which is from the May 2011 issue of Rhode Island Monthly, is a feature on Polly that focuses on tips for arranging and growing your own flowers. In this case, the reporter knew



Mike and Polly and approached them about doing a story, and they came to the idea of framing it as a tutorial together. Polly says, "I do lots of tours and lectures, so I'm known as an expert." She is

positioned extremely well, as reporters know that they can get a great story with an expert opinion, plus beautiful photos, by talking to her, and her press coverage is excellent as a result.

Paul noted that having a good relationship with a photographer for the local paper can be effective. If the photographer is sent out to bring back a summer farm scene and they know that your farm is lovely and you are open to being photographed, they are likely to visit again.

Both Polly and Paul are well-known enough in their communities that they are sought out by reporters and photographers for stories, despite neither relying heavily on press releases. If you are aiming to position yourself in that way, you have to do the legwork to make yourself known to reporters through press releases.

MARKETING TOOL: PAID ADVERTISING

A good ad, run often enough, will succeed in print, on the radio, and TV. It can be surprisingly easy to miss the mark with your advertising, though, so in this section we will cover tips for creating customer-focused advertising and debunk some common myths about advertising.

Customer-focused advertising

Too many businesses focus their advertising on what the business thinks of itself, and not enough on what the customer wants to know. Here are some ways to build your message around your customers.

Skip the canned ad-speak

Give specific, credible examples that lead the customer to the conclusion you want them to make. Here is a good example:

“A lot of mechanics try to do it all. And that’s ok ... until you have a transmission problem. Do you want a guy who spends most of the day changing oil working on your transmission? Come to Greenfield Transmission. We won’t change your oil. We will fix your transmission.”

Don’t try to change peoples’ minds

A good message does not try to change someone’s mind. It shows them how your product intersects with their values. Good advertising is based on finding out what the customer wants and showing them how your product satisfies that desire. This is where focusing on your brand is of vital importance – be consistent about your brand, and your target audience will be drawn to you.

Use emotions to create a compelling mental image

Craft a story that your customers want to experience. Think, for example, about strawberries. What gets people excited about them is that they are sweet, juicy, and you can pick them yourself. Here are two examples, the first of which is a more traditional advertisement, and the second of which uses emotions to get the message across.

“Bob’s Berry Patch. Open daily 8-4. At Bob’s we grow the widest variety of strawberries and we have since 1952. Pick your own or picked available. Bob’s Berry Patch is on Route 107, across from Mayberry Town Hall.”

Or:

“It’s a sunny June afternoon. Your daughter has just picked the biggest berry in the patch. She takes a bite and the warm juice drips down her chin. Her smile is priceless. You’re so glad you remembered your camera. Bob’s Berry Patch. Open daily, across from town hall. Creating juicy strawberries – and family memories – since 1952.”

Provide new information

Show the customer that you are a resource for them by offering a specific, credible piece of new information, rather than a hollow-sounding assertion (such as, “your berry experts since 1952.”) Sticking with Bob’s Berry Patch for the moment:

“Not all berries are created equal. You can freeze some in June and they’ll taste just as fragrant and sweet in December. Some make spectacular jam. Others taste best fresh. Tell us what you’re going to do with your berries. We’ll put you in the right row. Bob’s Berry Patch ...”

Beware: customers are lying!

Customers, when asked, will insist that the two factors they care most about with regards to locally grown foods are price and health. However, purchasing trends show that customers come to local farms for an experience. They want authentic food from local farmers that allows them to feel virtuous and indulgent at the same time, and they are willing to pay for it. Don’t make the mistake of making an ad that speaks to what people say they are looking for, rather than what they actually want.

Common myths about advertising

Much of the “common knowledge” about advertising is out of date or just plain wrong. Here are some common myths and ways to avoid falling into their traps.

Myth #1: Bigger is better.

It’s commonly believed that if you are doing a print ad, you should do a half page or a full page ad, and that radio spots should be a full 60 seconds. In fact, smaller, more frequent messages are more efficient and effective than larger, less frequent ads.

Myth #2: Spread your marketing budget around to various media.

The problem with the approach of running ads in the paper, on the radio, and on television is that few farmers actually have the budget to do so effectively. Don’t split a limited budget into fragments. Put it all in one form of media and stick with it as long as you can- this is called frequency.

Myth #3: You can trust your customers to tell you how they heard of you.

Customers, while they can be a good source of information about the impression your business makes, cannot be trusted to recall specifics on where they heard about you. If you rely on their feedback, you run the risk of skipping from one media to another and becoming inefficient and wasteful with your budget.

Myth #4: Coupons will prove if my ad is working.

Putting a coupon in the newspaper with your advertisement does not test the effectiveness of your ad – it tests the attractiveness of your offer. A 50% off coupon will return to you at a much higher rate than a 10% coupon, although the same number of people will have seen the coupon. When you offer a high

coupon rate, people will use them and spread the word, which is not about the ad – it's about the offer.

Myth #5: I should try it for a few weeks and evaluate.

Unless you are advertising for a specific event, you cannot tell if your advertising is working after only a few weeks. It takes time to build momentum. Unfortunately, many businesses expect door-busting results after just a few ads, which is very unlikely. Be patient and stick to your program for at least three months before beginning to evaluate. This is called consistency.

Myth #6: Everything is online now- traditional forms of media are dead.

Radio and TV are intrusive. They reach customers that your website alone never will. Use them to bring new customers to your business, and use your website and email newsletter to retain them.

Myth #7: You need to segment your audience OR your advertising should be broad enough to include everyone.

Most farmers and small business owners don't have the time or money to engage in detailed segmentation of their audience, and highly targeted advertising isn't necessary for small, local businesses. Having a strong message is the important part – identify your strongest supporters and choose a consistent message that resonates with them, and your ad will succeed.

Myth #8: Advertising is expendable.

Economists have studied companies that stop marketing during economic downturns and those that continue, and the research shows that those that continue are much more likely to survive and grow. When competitors withdraw their advertising, there is an opportunity to increase your market share. Furthermore, consistent advertising reassures your customers that you are still in business, helps you maintain your brand identity, and prevents you from losing customers to your competitors.

Case Study #1: Robin Hollow Farm

Robin Hollow Farm does some paid advertising, and this year is experimenting with a web-based ad on a website devoted to weddings. This is savvy thinking about your audience: rather than advertising broadly and hoping to catch anyone that might be interested in any part of her farm, Polly is focusing on a particular component of her business and promoting it to people who are potential clients.

APPENDIX 1: LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The following is a sample letter to the editor, which can be an effective way to create awareness of timely issues that are relevant to your business and to spread the word about your farm.

Dear Editor,

I'd like to encourage all residents of Hamilton and Wenham to patronize local businesses as they shop for holiday gifts for their families and friends. I realize it is not always possible to buy what you want locally, but I encourage local residents to think local first when considering a holiday purchase.

Hamilton and Wenham have a large assortment of independently owned shops, offering everything from toys to gourmet foods and wines. It's easy to search for the best deal online or from a "big-box" retailer, but supporting local businesses benefits our community in a variety of ways. Local businesses:

Keep dollars in the local economy: Compared to chain stores, locally owned businesses recycle a much larger share of their revenue back into the local economy, enriching the whole community.

Care about your community: They will donate to your school athletic team, buy an ad in the program of the local community theater, and work with activists on community improvement campaigns-- because the owners of these stores live and work next to you.

Reduce environmental impact: An endless sea of big-box stores is bad for the environment, for road congestion, for development patterns, and a lot more. The open spaces are being eaten up and the downtowns are being drained of their vitality.

Offer unique goods and better service: Local businesses often hire people with a better understanding of the products they are selling and take more time to get to know customers. You're also more able to find items that are unavailable at a big box retailer.

Put your taxes to good use: Local businesses in town centers require comparatively little infrastructure investment and make more efficient use of public services as compared to nationally owned stores entering the community.

Create great places to work: Local businesses have human-scale workplaces that value and involve their employees, and are flexible and fun places to work.

Thinking local first + buying local when you can = being a local!

Thank you,

Susan Johnson

Johnson Farm

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

The following is a sample press release, written in an engaging style while using the traditional press release conventions.

STORY IDEA AND CALENDAR LISTING

For immediate release

CONTACT:

Susan Johnson

250 Main Street

Hamilton, MA

413-555-5555

sjohnson@johnsonfarm.com

Johnson Farm reopens farm stand

Five years of progress allows for expanded offerings of grass-fed beef, eggs, produce, local groceries

HAMILTON, MA (June 27, 2009) – Five years ago, Johnson Farm was a tangled mess of overgrown invasive plants and rocky, infertile land. The farm had been abandoned since 1999, and included a burned-down house, overgrown fields, a rickety barn, and fields filled with trash. After purchasing the land in 2004, farm owner Susan Johnson and her family began clearing the invasive plants, restoring the land and its buildings and returning the farm to health. “Our first thought, though, was ‘What did we get ourselves into?’” said Tom Johnson, Susan’s father and farmhand. And after five years of steady progress, Johnson Farm will reopen its farm stand on July 5, 2009. The stand will be open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Fridays through Sundays throughout the summer and fall.

The first farm stand in 2004 was simple – vegetables sold on the front lawn, under a tent. This year, the farm’s general-store style stand, with its solid wood construction and wraparound porch, will offer expanded grass-fed beef, produce, and local groceries. Rocking chairs rock lazily on the porch, while Tom Johnson sells antiques in a nearby barn. “Once the farm stand here opens for the season, I don’t do my grocery shopping anywhere else,” said Eleanor Kohn of Hamilton.

Johnson Farm has expanded its vegetables, cattle herd and flock of chickens, for more eggs, grass-fed beef, veggies, fruits, herbs and flowers. They also make their own cider donuts, muffins, cookies and brownies. All local salad dressings, salsas, honey and syrup also fill the farm stand shelves. “We only want to carry local food,” Susan Johnson said. “We want everything to come from New England, and the closer, the better. We seek out local vendors.”

-more-

Additionally, a new greenhouse will allow for an expanded tomato season. “It’s our goal to extend deep into autumn and early winter with our vegetables this year,” Susan Johnson said. “We’re growing winter veggies like salads, lettuce mixes, spinach, kale – things that can be grown later in the year.” Johnson Farm practices sustainable, organically based agriculture. They use organic practices and use no synthetic chemicals, herbicides or pesticides. “People come in, they see our grass-fed beef, and they see how we raise our chickens,” Susan Johnson said. “That’s what keeps people coming back. We want people to be part of our community as well as enjoy our food.”

Johnson Farm is a small, chemical-free family farm that raises a diversity of farm products and believes in the humane treatment of animals. Animals are free-range and grass-fed, and are always humanely treated. More information can be found at www.johnsonfarmexample.com.

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APPENDIX 3: WEB RESOURCE LIST

Free Website Software

Weebly (weebly.com): Free hosting and simple drag and drop templates. Good place to start for website newbies.

Wix (wix.com): Free, and simple to use.

Blog Software

WordPress (wordpress.com): Basic level is free to use. Highly customizable- can be very simple or more complex. Gives users 3 GB to work with. This software seems to be the favorite and most popular of many different sources. It can also be used as a platform for your website.

Blogger (blogger.com): Google's blogging software is free and known for being very easy to use.

TypePad (typepad.com): Not free—there are 3 versions of the product, ranging in cost from \$8.95/month to \$29.95/month. Distinguishing feature is the Search Engine Optimization service.

Email Newsletters

Constant Contact (constantcontact.com): Simple to use, allows social media sharing, statistic tracking, and design templates. Cost ranges from \$15/month for up to 500 subscribers to \$50/month for 2,500 subscribers.

Mail Chimp (mailchimp.com): A free email service that allows up to 2,000 subscribers. Premium features carry a monthly fee, which is determined by the number of subscribers to your newsletters.

Social Media Dashboards

Threadsy (threadsy.com): Free to use, connects multiple email accounts, Facebook, Twitter, (“the big names”).

Hootsuite (hootsuite.com): Offers a free basic version or a \$6/month premium version. Both allow you to network your social media profiles and blog.

Marketing to Enhance Farm Viability



Workshops and Classes as a Marketing Strategy

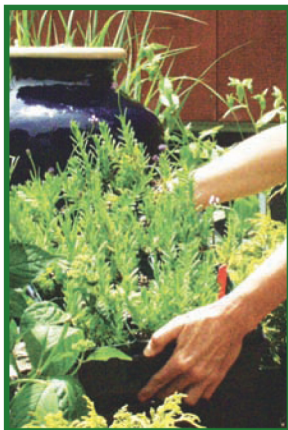
Turning your farm into a place where people come to learn through classes and workshops is one option for farm diversification and sustainability. Holding classes and workshops at your farm gets people used to coming to your farm or business and acquainted with the products that you have to offer. For other ideas on increasing farm viability, see *Creating Successful Agritourism Activities for Your Farm* by Mark Lattanzi (May, 2005). You can order a copy from www.buylocalfood.com.

STEP 1 DETERMINE IF THERE IS A MARKET FOR WHAT YOU WANT TO OFFER

Is there a need for the information you are going to present?

What do you do that no one else can do as well?

Local Hero Farmer Lilian Jackman realized that there was a need for her to offer classes in her gardens because she was always stopped on the street and asked the questions that became the foundations of her Beyond Organic I and II workshops, classes for folks who want to learn some serious gardening techniques and Lilian's gardening secrets in a hands-on workshop.



"Everywhere I go, I'm asked for gardening advice, says Lilian, owner of Wilder Hill Gardens in Conway, Massachusetts (www.wilderhillgardens.com). "I love talking with people about their gardens, and I found it challenging to try to give good information in response to people's questions while in line at the grocery store. Now, I give out my brochure and invite people to participate in one of the workshops I offer. The workshops give me an opportunity to answer questions more fully and to show people what I do."

When you first sit down to design the workshop, think through your personal goals for offering the workshop. Are you trying to earn more income? Get more people to visit your business? Develop your own skills as a teacher? Write down your goals and review them after the class is completed.

If you decide that the need exists for the class or workshop you plan to offer, go ahead and plan and offer the class. You might be wrong about your decision that a need exists for this class or workshop, but be willing to experiment and test the waters anyway!

STEP 2 HONE YOUR TEACHING SKILLS (Or hire someone else to teach the class!)

Do you have what it takes to teach a class?

What skills do you need to learn or brush-up on?

Teaching skills include being able to organize your thoughts and communicate them effectively to a wide variety of people. "There's no excuse for boring anyone," says Lilian. "Work on your presentation skills if necessary. Attend other classes to get ideas about how to organize the class time. Read about and research the subject you will be teaching."

Lilian designs her workshops with the idea that people who come to her workshops don't want to learn lots of theory. They want to watch her doing something that they want to learn how to do, too. They want to come, observe, and ask questions.

If you decide that you are not the best teacher and don't want to learn how to teach better, you can hire teachers to come to your farm or agribusiness.

Michelle Elston of Annie's Garden and Gift Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, offers workshops many Saturday mornings at 10 o'clock at her store. She hires others to teach some of the workshops because of the variety of topics taught and the number of workshops offered each year—25 or more. Nevertheless, Michelle does teach a number of the workshops herself because she believes it "offers proof that you know what you're doing" and gives you "an increased level of credibility with your customers."





There are other benefits to teaching the class yourself. Michelle's business, Annie's, is a busy gift and garden center with many customers. When Michelle teaches a class, she makes a connection with her customers that she is not able to make in other ways. "Teaching a workshop connects you with your customers," says Michelle. "You get to know them and hear about their garden. When they come into the store, they will say, 'I took your class three months ago,' and instantly we have a connection. Participating in classes at the store makes our customers feel more connected, too."



If you're working on improving your teaching skills, teach the class with someone who is more experienced, even if they don't know the subject matter as well as you. This is a great way to learn.

STEP 3 DESIGN THE WORKSHOP

Organize!

Develop an outline of how you will use the workshop time. Write down what you plan to say and follow your notes during the workshop. No one can listen to someone talk for four hours—break up the class with hands-on projects, videos, and time for questions and coffee breaks. A good workshop will include a combination of the following: lecture, reference materials, a hands-on project, and/or a video.



"My experience is that people really like to work on a project and then bring it home with them," says Lilian. "It really increases participants' satisfaction with the day and helps reinforce what I am teaching during the workshop."

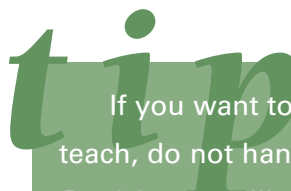
If you have a website, incorporate it as a teaching resource. "If your website is well designed, it will answer



Give participants a Resource Guide for further study to take home with them, including information on books to read, websites to visit, and product purchase information.

some questions raised during the workshop," says Lilian. For example, if your website provides links to other sites, workshop participants explore these to learn more.

Make sure you give enough information during the workshop so that participants can complete the task you are teaching, but don't overwhelm them with information.



If you want to use written materials to teach, do not hand out them during class. Participants will read the handouts instead of listening to you. Hand them out at the end of class. Don't forget to put your name and advertisement on the handouts.

STEP 4 MARKET THE CLASS

Are you going to rely on word-of-mouth or are you going to purchase advertising?

Do you have a brochure, web site, and signs directing people to your farm?

How will you distribute brochures or promote your website?

Will you use any other marketing methods (print, radio, television)?

Lilian holds her workshops in May and June, after her big Spring Dig sale. This sale brings hundreds of people to her garden who then hear about the upcoming workshops. Lilian recommends teaching in-season. It's a busy time for you, but you must



take advantage of the excitement about the season. “No one wants to come to a class on gardening in July and August!”

tip

If the registration for an upcoming class is smaller than you would like, but you still want to hold the class, invite a few friends—for free—and fill it up! Don’t forget that some people will decide to come to the class at the last minute—leave a few spaces for them.

STEP 5 PREPARE FOR THE DAY OF CLASS

Are you prepared to handle all of the participants’ needs—parking, washrooms, drinking water, coffee, snacks, lunch?

Do you have adequate insurance to protect you against the liability of inviting the public onto your property?

Are you in compliance with all permits, licenses, inspections, and regulations from the federal, state, and local level?

Making sure workshop participants are comfortable will increase their ability to focus on the learning experience you are providing. At minimum, you should be prepared to provide clean toilets, fresh drinking water, and clear and easy to navigate parking. Nametags are a nice way to help participants get to know each other. Make sure that if you are not providing coffee, snacks, or a meal (depending on the length of the workshop) that participants know that ahead of time so that they can plan accordingly.

It is important to research the requirements of specific regulations and to be aware of the time required for approval. Make sure, too, that you have adequate insurance coverage to cover the liability of inviting guests onto your property. Have a conversation with your insurance agent well before offering the first class or workshop on the farm.

Now you’re ready to market your class and hold the first one! Remember to relax and enjoy the day. You will be a much more effective host and instructor if you are enjoying yourself. After holding the workshop, there is still one more step to complete.

STEP 6 EVALUATE YOUR EFFORTS

Review the goals you set for yourself in the planning stage.

Use a simple survey to determine what participants liked and didn’t like about the workshop and what other topics they would like to learn about. Or simply ask folks these questions at the end of the day.

Evaluating the workshop is an important step in determining your success. Further evaluation includes your reflections on the workshop and participants’ evaluations. Did you achieve your goals? Which ones? Is it worth teaching the class again? What changes would you make? During the workshop, watch body language for clues of interest levels, tiredness, boredom or confusion.

It’s best to write down your thoughts and impressions about the workshop immediately, but then wait a day or two to evaluate the experience. Don’t wait too long, or you’ll forget some of your thoughts and impressions about the day!





A four-question survey with room to write comments works fine. Here are some sample questions:

- ❖ What did you like about the workshop?
- ❖ How could we improve the workshop?
- ❖ What other topics would you like to see offered?
- ❖ Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?
- ❖ Please share the names and email addresses of friends who may be interested in upcoming workshops.
- ❖ What did the participants have to say about the workshop? You can either ask them verbally or in writing at the end of the class.

tip

Ask participants to share the names and addresses of two friends who might be interested in attending a workshop on your farm. Add these names to your mailing list.

You will be a much more effective host and instructor if you are enjoying yourself.

You may decide to offer the workshop another time before making a final decision on your success. You might add another workshop to your offerings. Or you may drop this workshop idea and try another. Remember, don't be afraid to experiment with offering new workshops. It may take up to two years for you to determine if this diversification strategy works for you.

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One Sugarloaf Street
2nd Floor
South Deerfield, Massachusetts 01373
phone: 413-665-7100
fax: 413-665-7101
www.buylocalfood.com

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