

# Marketing Strategies for Your Web Site

## value-added and alternative e-agriculture



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### OVERVIEW

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The Internet is a versatile marketing tool. Web sites make your business available to prospects and customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The electronic nature of the medium allows you to change information almost instantly. And the visual power of a web site creates a distinct advantage by combining words, pictures and graphic design to tell people your story.

### DESIGN WITH YOUR AUDIENCE IN MIND

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The most important thing you can do as you design your web pages is design with your target audience in mind. For example, urban and younger prospects enjoy active, busy web sites – and they typically have Internet connections with fast download speeds. Using sound, bits of video and other interactive tools often appeals to this group of customers.

By contrast, customers over 40 typically wear glasses – possibly bifocals. They have learned to use the Internet as adults. Many older adults see the Internet as a basic information-gathering tool, and not much more. Larger font sizes, easy-to-see colors and less clutter on each web page will help these prospects navigate your site more easily.

Something else to keep in mind is that rural customers may not have access to high speed Internet connections. Dial-up download speeds are considerably slower than high speed connections, so you will want to limit the number and size of your photos. One option with photos is to reduce the color density, which facilitates faster downloading. Paint Shop Pro is a fairly inexpensive photo editing tool that you can purchase and use to edit photos for Internet use.

### CREATE A MEMORABLE MESSAGE

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Think of your message as your brand identity – the very heart and soul of what makes you different from another business that might be perceived as offering the same, or very similar, products.

A good approach to establishing your identity is to answer this question: “What do I want people to remember after they have visited my web site?”

Your answer is the key to the text on your web site. The professionals call this the “message strategy,” and the objective is to communicate clearly who you are and what you have to offer your prospects.

Write your message strategy in a way that addresses your prospects directly. Let them know that you understand what they want. If you sell in-season vegetables, then emphasize their freshness, and your growing practices and local presence. If your products are jams, jellies or relishes that are made from local ingredients using family recipes, then you may want to promote the local sources for, and the heritage of, your products.

### USE A VIRTUAL DISPLAY

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As we have already discussed, the great value of the Internet is its ability to communicate through a variety of media types. Here, too, keep your target audience and your message in mind.

You can take advantage of the visual nature of the Internet to show pictures of your products, your farm, your kitchen, and even of people eating what you produce. You may wish to use other Internet tools to tell your story by developing a video clip that provides an on-line tour of your farm or talks about your various products. If you are concerned about download speeds, you can create a link on your home page to extra photos or to clips that give users the option to view them.

### THINK ABOUT YOUR COMPETITION

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Although you are designing your web site to appeal to prospects and educate customers, it helps to remember that your competitors will be checking out your site, too.

You may find words and phrases on the web sites of your competition that sound close to what is on your site. The key to separating yourself from your competition is in how you brand your product and create value for your customers.

If you are conducting business through the Internet, then your prices will also be available to your competitors. This is one of the challenges of using the Internet as a marketing tool: it is an inexpensive way to attract customers and conduct business, but it provides an easy way for competitors to learn a lot about your company.

## **BE A RESOURCE**

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Your web page is one of millions of web pages accessible on the World Wide Web. Take advantage of this interconnectedness to identify informative, non-competitive web sites that enhance your own marketing message, and include links to these sites on your web page. For example, if you are a beef producer, consider including sites that offer information on different cuts of beef, recipe choices and breed information. If you sell your vegetables, find sites that provide recipes and information on varieties. If your customer base includes restaurants, then ask the owners if you can include a link to their web sites on yours (and ask them to reciprocate).

A word of caution here: Web content is unregulated, and there is a wide spectrum of information available on every topic. You want to choose your resource links wisely. It is recommended that you direct people to sources that are generally well-respected and known for their expertise. Be aware of web sites that provide limited information on the promise that more is forthcoming if a product is purchased. And, finally, you may need to check with the webmaster of

web sites of privately-owned companies to obtain permission to link to their sites.

## **PROVIDE CONTACT INFORMATION**

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Almost as important as the overall web site design is the ease with which you enable visitors to your site to contact you. The most efficient form of contact is to include a link that opens a window to send an e-mail. There are ways to code this link so that it places your e-mail address in the "To" window and you can pre-code the "Subject" line, so that you can identify the message as one coming from a web site inquiry. (Check your "Help" section of your web design software, or discuss this with your web designer.)

Some sites are more sophisticated and use a form, but this requires additional file set-up beyond a simple e-mail.

If you want to show your full name, telephone number and mailing address, remember that this information is available all over the world.

## **KEEP YOUR SITE FRESH**

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A first-time web design can be a time-consuming and sometimes tedious process. There is often a sense of relief associated with completing the design and seeing your finished product on the computer. However, this initial design is just the beginning. Look for different ways to keep the design fresh, up-to-date and appealing. Change your photos periodically so that they are seasonal is one approach. Add a newsletter or new information to maintain the relevance of your web information. Color scheme changes and new layouts are other, longer-term options.

The web site is your prospect's electronic window on your world: keep your site shining.

## **RESOURCES**

**[http://www.inc.com/guides/biz\\_online/20664.html](http://www.inc.com/guides/biz_online/20664.html)** Inc. Magazine's guide to web content design. Contains links to other sites related to web content development.

**<http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/value-added/toolkit.html>**

The Value-added and Alternative Agriculture Toolkit has several quick guides to developing marketing strategies for your agri-business, along with helpful resources.

**<http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmta/basic-principles.htm>** "Marketing for the Value-Added Agricultural Enterprise," published by University of Tennessee Extension.