

Promoting the Farm or Ranch Recreation Business

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Most commodity producers do not have a lot of experience putting together marketing plans. The tourism business of farm/ranch recreation will need to be marketed to be successful and generate the supplemental income wanted/needed by the family.

On a global scale, tourism generates about \$3.5 trillion annually - more revenue than any other primary or secondary industry, including agriculture and manufacturing. In the late 90's, Americans spent \$60 million per year just on wildlife-related activities. The tourism dollar brings economic value to the entire community. Keep this foremost in your mind when putting together a marketing strategy. You are not alone.

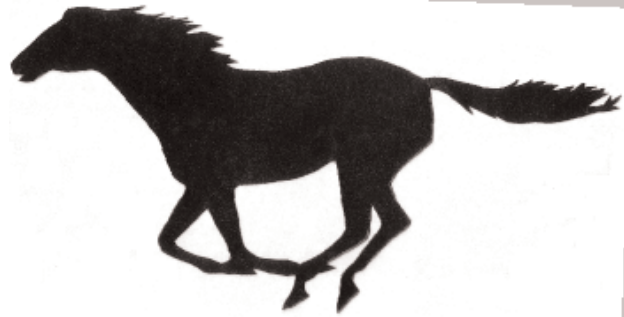
You may have a limited budget and feel like you can't compete with larger tourist attractions, but you have some distinct advantages over the big guys. For one, your promotion strategies can be more flexible; smaller businesses can react quickly to market changes and preferences. Another advantage is your quality control is limited to a few people. Word-of-mouth is the strongest and cheapest form of advertising you will ever use. It is often overlooked by large companies, but it is your single most important marketing tool. All of these advantages originate with the basic concept of customer service. Farm and ranch recreation operators can be the leaders in offering the best customer service in the tourism industry.

As in any other new business you need to define specifically what you have to offer and who's the potential customer. The simplest method for developing a marketing strategy is to begin with a description of the customer. Can you think of someone you know who would enjoy visiting your place and paying for it? Describe that person in great detail, like: a) who they are (age, income, education, occupation); b) what they do (activities and lifestyle); and c) where they are from (zip code, distance from farm/ranch). If you can always picture this person in your mind when you're deciding on activities, developing a brochure, placing an ad or writing a promo-

tional piece, you will hit the target every time. Never use the shotgun approach - you'll miss the target most of the time and waste valuable marketing dollars.

Word-of-Mouth

You can't buy word-of-mouth, yet it is the most effective method of advertising. Satisfied customer's may tell 3 or 4 people about their experience, but dissatisfied customers will tell at least 9 other potential customers. Never send away a disgruntled customer.



Building Referrals

- 🐾 Offer rewards/tools - At least 2 business cards with every contact as this will allow the person to keep one and pass one on to a friend.
- 🐾 Provide outstanding customer service
- 🐾 Ask for testimonials



Networking

Networking can be the most effective way to build or expand your business. Results may not be immediate - but you're in this tourism business for the long haul, right?

Build a reputation in the community, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Organizations

Joining organizations related to the travel industry, business or even agricultural groups will give you the opportunity of promoting your farm/ranch recreation business.

Volunteer to speak at meetings, sponsor parts of meetings, and always hand out business cards.

Repetition is a key to success with networking. You can't just make it to one meeting and hope it sticks.

Follow-up the face-to-face meeting with written materials.

Write an article for agriculture groups' newsletters.

Take out an ad in the tourism journal or do something special for your local chamber of commerce such as inviting the group out to your place for one of their meetings.

Telephone

This can often be the most difficult part of the recreation business for farmers and ranchers. One suggestion from a small business owner is to have the phone hooked up to voice mail or an answering machine. This allows you to have "someone else" answer the phone and then you can call back the potential guest when you are prepared. If you feel you must answer the phone with every caller, then get yourself a cheat sheet or script. List the most frequently asked questions and the answers you should give. When you come in from the barn out of breath and the phone rings with a potential guest, you will be able to gather your wits and use the script so you tell them what they need to know and close the sale. Give it serious thought before you allow the children to answer the phone.

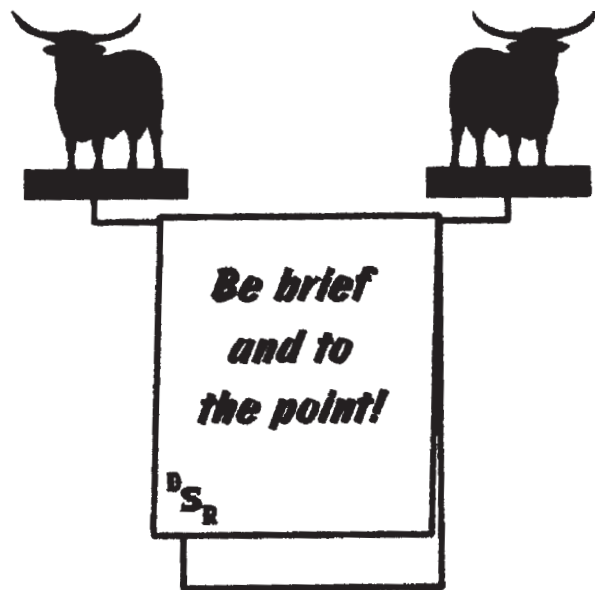
Collect important information from every caller... especially their name, phone number and address. Even if they don't book over the phone, you will want to send them a flyer for future vacation planning.

Publicity - Getting Your Name to Appear in the News Media

People remember and believe what they read in a news article far longer than in an ad. You have read articles in newspapers and magazines about business owners. Often it was the business owner who made the initial contact and got themselves "written up". Develop a press kit to send out information about the unique qualities of your operation/family and pictures to the newspapers and magazines you feel are most likely to carry a story about farm/ranch recreation.

Printed Materials

Depending on where you live, it is no longer the daunting task of going to the printer and having something type set and then having to purchase thousands of pieces to get a good price. Work with a person who can develop your materials on a computer for pictures to be scanned in and written text easily changed. This section of printed materials is interchangeable - if you have an effective brochure, then putting together a flyer/business card/newsletter is easy - you already have the materials. Work through your wording and get it right the first time and then use and reuse it.



Business cards

Use both sides of the card and try to include a map on how to get to your farm or ranch. Keep your logo simple and stick to the basics of address, telephone, email, web site and location. Remember to hand them out two at a time.

Brochures

Color and style are so important for your brochure. In this business, if you can't afford full-color, then keep it simple with a brown ink on buff paper, or bur-gundy ink on grey paper, etc. An old-fashioned tin-type look can also be effective with the right operation. Use a lot of white space, clear photos with people in them, and a brief, catchy narrative. Develop an insert with prices and special events. This allows you flexibility and any printer price breaks - design your brochure to last a few years. If you plan to put your brochure in a rack, the top one-third of the cover needs to have the main message and your name, as this may be the only visible part of the brochure in a rack.

Flyers

This may not be an effective method of advertising, but can be used on local bulletin boards and to hand out at special tourism or local events. If you plan to use a flyer as a small poster you need to keep the lettering large and the message brief. A picture and logo are a must. Prices will not be necessary on a flyer. Make it easy for a person to find out more information.

Newsletters

A short newsletter to previous guests will keep you in touch to build repeat customers and promote word of mouth. Include stories, testimonials, pictures and an update on the farm/ranch activities ...how the crops are doing, your calving update, which fences are down and a brief overview of a family member or two... keep it warm, friendly, and try not to complain about the farm/ranch industry. Information is good, but complaints are bad for business.



AD COPY

Generally paid advertisements in the newspaper, magazine, or on TV is very expensive. Therefore, start with the 'printed materials' section. Once you have determined the "look" of your advertising by reviewing all of your narrative, you can put together ad copy with ease and confidence. There's a rule in advertising that a person needs to see something 3 times before they believe or act upon the product or service. Of course they need to be vaguely interested in the first place. Therefore, if you are being fea-

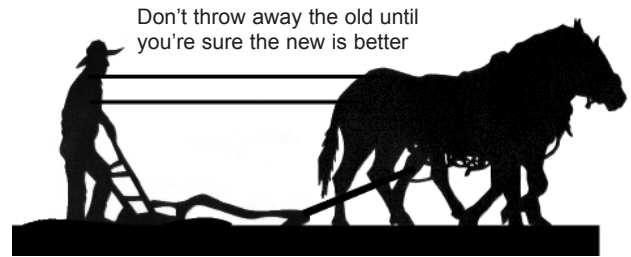
tured in a magazine, newspaper or on TV it is a good idea to place an ad in the same media. If you mail out brochures to a purchased mailing list, then try to find a newspaper or magazine to place an ad.

Newspaper

Although your budget may allow for a newspaper ad in the travel section, you may want to consider the classifieds. If the ad is on target for your customer it can be inexpensive, yet effective.

Magazine

Some magazines also have a classified section or may run a special with small ads from similar businesses. Make contact with the editors of the magazines to which your target customer will subscribe. Let the editors know about your business and your



marketing needs. This may even lead to a promotional write-up. Don't be afraid to ask their opinion on an effective ad or do some price shopping and review their readership analysis.

TV

This is usually the most expensive form of advertising and one not feasible for most farm/ranch recreation operations. However, cable companies may have local channels which have ad channels for local events and announcements. Otherwise, production costs and air time are expensive.

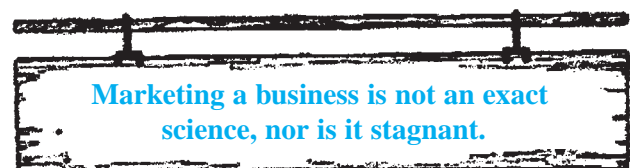
CD Rom or Video

With the writeable CD Rom drives and digital cameras, it is becoming easier and cheaper to make a CD than a video. It is also cheaper to mail and actually can be more effective. Half the fun of a vacation is in the planning. Sending a video or CD about your place prior to the visit will give your guests an idea of what to expect and get them excited about their vacation.

Using a CD or video is an excellent way to promote your farm/ranch recreation business. CDs can be sent to travel agents, and they can use it with potential guests. Imagine the client sitting in front of a travel agent and inquiring about where they can go to experience a working farm or ranch. The agent pops in your CD and spends a few minutes showing the client around your place. Now, they won't have to sit through a 15-minute video or find the machine, but sit right there at the desk and pick a few things out of the menu to look at.

Web Sites

People who want to visit a farm or ranch need to be able to find you using a method that best fits their lifestyle. Browsing the web has become a national past time; therefore, if your guests are looking for farm/ranch recreation operations on the web, you need to explore your options for putting your operation on the web where they can find you and contact you for additional information.



Developing a web tentail to reach a broader and more diverse group of US and international travelers. Each day will bring new marketing opportunities and challenges. A basic question to consider is what is most important to the guest? Put yourself in their shoes... Where will we sleep? What does the scenery look like?... Does this sound logical? Don't ever try to mislead a potential guest in any of your advertising or promotions. All it will do is give you unhappy guests, ruin your enthusiasm and reputation, and decrease your future bookings.

Resources:

Advertising - An Investment in Your Hospitality Business Future, Jim Huss, Carol Ouverson, Joy Banyas and Diane Nelson, 2001, North Central Regional Extension Publication #299. www.extension.iastate.edu

Guerrilla Marketing for the Home-Based Business, Jay Levinson and Seth Godin, 1995, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston

Farm and Ranch Recreation Handbook, A Guide for Operators, Jeff Powell and Susan Rottman, 2001. www.farm-ranch-recreation.com

University of California, Small Farm Center. www.dajolly@ucdavis.edu

Web Page Design for the Farm/Ranch Recreation Business, Barb Daniels, Jeff Powell and Susan Rottman, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wyoming, Bulletin #B-1125-4 . www.uwyo.edu/ces/ceshome.htm

Wyoming Homestay and Outdoor Adventures Assn., WHOA. www.wyomingbnb-ranchrec.com

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