

Marketing to Enhance Farm Viability



Using Paid Advertising as Part of a Marketing Plan

Choosing how to advertise your farm products and events can be confusing. There are so many choices. And, purchasing advertising on radio and television stations is costly. Many farms don't have a large budget for advertising and marketing and must choose how to spend their dollars wisely.

Before you begin to use paid advertisements, there is work to be done! Background work includes knowing your farm's identity and message and designing a marketing plan and budget that works for you. The marketing plan should include design and use of basic marketing tools such as business cards, farm logo, brochures, a website, and business signs and product labeling, as well as paid advertising. For more information on marketing your farm, see CISA's Tip Sheet Developing a Marketing Plan for Your Farm.

Because you pay for advertising, you expect results. However, many small business owners don't use paid advertising effectively and therefore think it doesn't work. Here are some tips on how to use paid advertising to increase your farm's visibility and visits.

STEP 1 UNDERSTAND KEY ELEMENTS OF ADVERTISING

Timing

Be sure that your advertising is ready to go before your season starts. Hastily created ads often lack punch or clarity and don't do a very good job at attracting customers.

Frequency

Paid advertising is expensive, especially if you place one ad at a time. However, most media give you better per ad rates the longer you advertise with them. It costs more overall, but your ad needs to be seen or heard more times to be effective. One-time ads rarely have much of an impact. This is especially true for radio, where repetition is the key.

Visibility

Consider running smaller ads more often to get both greater frequency and visibility. You can have two smaller ads in two papers for the price of one larger ad. Bigger is not always better.

Consistency

Your ad should be visually consistent with your logo, your website, and any other marketing tools you are using. You want people to catch your ad out of the corner of their eye and recognize it. Consistency builds familiarity and awareness.

Adaptability

A strong farm logo helps establish identity but gives you the ability to adapt your ads to suit your needs over the season. Make sure you design an ad that has consistent design elements and the ability to highlight different seasonal crops or activities over time.

Creativity

Have fun and be creative. Just be sure not to obscure your message. Once you have decided that using paid advertising fits into your marketing plan for your farm, you need to decide which type or types of media will meet your marketing goals.

STEP 2 WEIGH PROS AND CONS OF MEDIA OUTLETS

Print benefits

- ❖ People who read the local paper are interested in what is going on in their community.
- ❖ Your ad has clear directions on how to find your farm and people can save it.
- ❖ You can have the ad placed in the relevant section of the paper (food, weekend, etc) to find the kind of reader you want.

Drawbacks

- ❖ People toss the paper out every day; short shelf life.
- ❖ Studies say that newspaper readership is dropping.

Karen Randall, President and Owner of Randall's Farm and Greenhouse in Ludlow, Massachusetts, has increased her use of paid advertising as her business has grown from a small farmstand to a large farm market, nursery, and ice cream stand.



Print advertising is a good place to start your paid advertising campaign. "I started with paid advertising in weekly papers," says Karen Randall of Randall Farms. "I felt that my target customers were reading these papers. Next, I moved up to advertising in the Springfield Republican, increasing the number of people and the geographic area that I reached with my advertisements."

Because the move up to advertising in the Springfield newspaper was a riskier decision than choosing to continue advertising only in weekly local papers, Karen used another strategy to ensure that she got the most visibility from her ads. "My ad appeared on the same page every weekend for a year," she says. "I wanted people to start looking for our ad each week to see our weekly specials. Repetition is the key to successful advertising."

Karen's strategy paid off. "Now I see people shopping with our ad clipped to their shopping list," she says.



Karen writes the text for her ads and uses the in-house design services provided by the newspaper to design the art for her ads. Designing your own ad, including art, is another option.

Radio benefits

- ❖ Radio is a great venue for storytelling about your farm.
- ❖ A good radio ad creates a positive image of your farm.
- ❖ Catchy ads are remembered long after they are gone.
- ❖ Radio reaches a large mass market.
- ❖ On-air appearances may come with ad contracts and add value to your investment.

Drawbacks

- ❖ People tune out radio ads at first. Repetition is the key.
- ❖ Your ad needs to be compelling to break through ad clutter.

When Karen began using radio advertising, she picked the station that she listened to most. Later, she added a second station—one with a different audience, a country station—and then added other stations in her market area owned by the same company. The stations targeted her customer demographics. She received a better rate on advertising every time she added an additional station to her list. In addition, Karen adds that “once you are a frequent advertiser, you may qualify for lower advertising rates.”



Other ways to advertise through radio include inviting the station to do a remote broadcast from your farm—especially interesting and newsworthy when held in conjunction with an event on the farm. But the live broadcast itself could be the event.

Not only will people interested in your farm or event come to the broadcast, but people who are fans of the radio station will come to the broadcast as well.

Karen developed a relationship with a local radio station. She now provides a weekly news spot on gardening and local produce and farm products. “It’s great visibility, and customers tell me they hear the spot each week,” she says.

Another inexpensive form of advertising through a radio station is to sponsor a promotion the station is highlighting or to give the station prizes from your farm to be given away as part of a contest. In western Massachusetts, one station provides an online form of advertising with a ‘Save 30’ store. The station buys gift certificates from its advertisers and sells them to listeners online at a discounted price (30%—hence the name of the promotion).

Television benefits

- ❖ In some rural markets, local TV stations have a captive audience that is far larger than print and radio combined.
- ❖ Good visuals can show viewers how beautiful your farm is or how fun your festival will be.

Drawbacks

- ❖ Self-produced ads can be hokey.
- ❖ If you are not comfortable being on camera, this may not be the venue for you.
- ❖ Ads can be produced without showing the farmer, but studies show that consumers want to connect a real person to their food.

If you’re considering television advertising, but worry that it’s too expensive, make sure you call your local station to verify the cost. We’ve found that in some cases TV advertising prices are comparable to radio.

STEP 3 EVALUATE YOUR EFFORTS

After carefully developing your marketing strategies, you’ll want to know if the money you spent on advertising paid off. Your entire farm operation will benefit from customer feedback on your advertising and from tracking which ads caught people’s attention.

Here are a few evaluation tools to consider:

Coupons

Insert coupons into an ad and code them so you know where they came from. Remember, a 1% response rate is considered good. Be sure to put an expiration date on the coupon!

Discounts or special offers


Tell people to mention your radio ad for a special discount. Give a free gift to those who mention your ad.

Collect customer comments

Train yourself and your staff to jot down comments from customers. Both positive and critical comments can help you adjust your advertising plan to be more effective.

Karen Randall says that evaluation of her paid advertising—print, radio and television—comes from customers telling her that they heard or saw the ad. No matter what advertising strategy you develop for your farm business, make sure to evaluate it annually to keep your marketing strategies fresh and effective.

Therese Fitzsimmons adapted materials for this “Tip Sheet” from Creating Successful Agritourism Activities for Your Farm by Mark Lattanzi (May 2005), a CISA publication. See www.buylocalfood.com to order a copy. Special thanks to Karen Randall for interviews.

Funding for these materials was provided by the Risk Management Agency of the U.S.  Department of Agriculture, by Northeast Farm Credit AgEnhancement Program, the Agway Foundation, and the Lawson Valentine Foundation.