Using a Database: Build Your Farm/Ranch Recreation Business

by: Barb Daniels, Jeff Powell and Susan Rottman

Building a database to track guests can enhance your chances of repeat business and increase the size of your new customer base. Knowledge about your customer is marketing power. Now, if you are a crop or livestock producer who hasn't been keeping records, then you probably won't be one of the early adopters of the concepts we are trying to promote in this bulletin. On the other hand, if you already keep records, you already know the benefits and just need a bit of know-how this bulletin should provide.

State tourism boards collect tourism information to learn more about the customer who is already visiting the state in order to build on an existing customer base. In Wyoming, each year a detailed report is published which provides those in the tourism business with a customer profile of visitors to Wyoming. It includes such information as; length of stay, money spent, where they're from, activities while in Wyoming, etc. This valuable information allows tourism boards and individual operators to do target marketing which increases their customer base and decreases marketing costs.
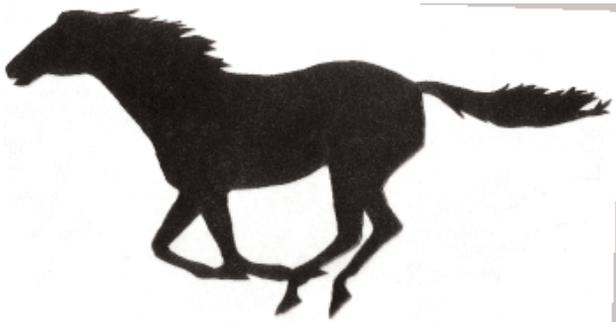
Make More Money and Spend Less

Repeat Customers

The farm/ranch recreation business relies heavily on repeat clientele. It is the easiest and least expensive method for building a business. Not to mention it is rewarding to see happy guests return.

Increase Your Customer Base

Building a list of new guests from the old guest list is why you need a database. This type of market-ing can move you to the next level of being in the tourism business - and toward your goal of making more money while spending less on marketing.

Why do you need customer information? Your own database will give you valuable insight into your customer. Here are a few good reasons:

🐎 you will know how to allocate your marketing dollars

🐎 your brochures and ad copy will be easier to design when you know your customer

🐎 you will know which activities to offer

🐎 you can keep former guests informed of your activities (and you on their mind)

🐎 you will know when and to whom to offer special vacation packages.

What format will you use to record and store your database?

A set of index cards should be placed by the phone along with your script.

Do you remember the index card? They still make them. Have a group printed up with some basic questions or key words. Don't rely on your memory. You will not be able to track trends if it is all in your head. At the end of the season, you need to compile your results long-hand or enter them into a computer and analyze your information . You may see the trend of guests coming in for 2 to 4 days or maybe from only 500 or fewer miles away or nearly everyone wanted to help with the fencing or over half of the your guests liked your farm stories at night. Along with the questions you need to ask, include a list of the information you want the guest to know about your operation. A database can be built around the demographics most commonly used by marketing experts to determine where and how to promote a product or service.

Where do you start when trying to build a useful database and not just collect a bunch of information? Turn the page to learn more with our 'DATABASE POSTER'.

How Farm/ranch recreation owners have used their database.

- *Joe and Jan kept information about each of their guests and built an electronic database.* They were then able to send little notes or information to their former guests. They personalized the notes easily with the help of the computer.

-Kent and Linda like to send their guests a souvenir. They jot down notes about each guest and take lots of digital photos. At the end of the season, they produce a souvenir for their guests like a t-shirt, mug, or key chain with a photo from the guest's stay. They send a note along and say, "We remember when..."

-Jim and Kathy are using their database to expand their market. They discovered that 75% of their guests in the first couple of years were coming from within 600 miles of their farm.   They continue to spend marketing dollars in the two major cities within that radius, but have expanded the radius. Today they use the database to plot trends. If several guests are coming from a certain area, they build in that area and expand from that point.

Resources:

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

Lotus, Excel or Quatro Pro, computer database programs

1996 Farm and Ranch Recreation Resource Directory, Montana Cooperative Extension Service, Bozeman. 121 p acxds@montan.edu ; www.visitmt.com

South Dakota Farm and Ranch Vacation Business Guide, South Dakota Department of Tourism, 711 East Wells Ave., Pierre, SD 57501 www.travelsd.com
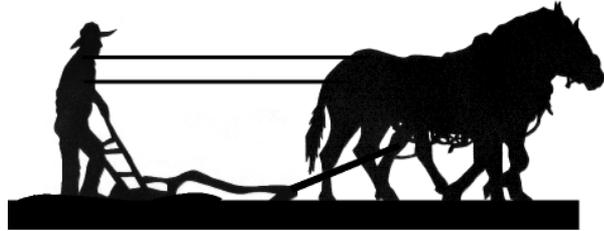
Tourism Database, Wyoming Business Council-Tourism Office. www.wyomingtourism.org

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

USDA, NRCS. 2001. Alternative Enterprises and Agritourism: Farming for Profit and Sustainability. www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/RESS/econ/ressd.htm

Wyoming Small Business Resource Guide, 1993, US Small Business Admin., 100 East 'B' St., Rm 4001, Casper, WY 82601   www.uwyo.edu/sbdc

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