

## How to Get the Most Out of Online Tools for Marketing Your Farm or Farm Products

Feeling overwhelmed by all the different social media networks? Wondering how to choose the best ones? You're not alone. The world of social media reminds me of fashion. As they say on Project Runway, "One day you're in, the next day you're out." If you enjoy keeping up with the latest tools, by all means, try them out! But if you're more interested in the results than the technology, don't rush to get into every new network that comes along. Many will peak and fade very quickly or never expand beyond a narrow niche. For example, the jury is still out on Google+, and it's been around for quite a while. Watch what your peers are doing before you jump in.

Unfortunately, no single network or application will enable you to reach all of your customers. You need to employ at least a few different approaches to be effective. Although it may seem repetitive to post similar messages on your website, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, very few of your customers—if any—will see them all. In addition, you can use one channel—for example, an email newsletter—to drive traffic to your other channels, such as an article on your website or a Facebook special. While the content you post on each place can be targeted to take advantage of that channel (for example, an Infographic works great on a visual medium like Facebook or your website, but might not work as well in an email message), you should try to have a consistent look and feel and use compatible messages in everything you produce.

Ask your customers how they search for information online, which social networks they use regularly, and how they'd like you to communicate with them. Choose the top two or three and build your relationship with your customers on those channels. But you also need to make sure that new customers, journalists, and suppliers can find you, so don't neglect the "old" standbys, like your website or online directories.

Here are some things to keep in mind when choosing which tools to use for specific purposes. But ultimately, the best way to determine what's most effective is to try it out. Test different messages, times of day, and promotions on each channel. Keep track of what you're doing and whether it's achieving your goals. If one tool isn't working for you, try another one.

### Website/blog

**Yes, you still need a website.** While some customers would no sooner visit your website than pull out a print copy of the Yellow Pages, the majority of consumers, wholesale customers, journalists, and others who are searching for your business will expect you to have a website.

**Your website is the best platform for your business presence online.** You can post articles, product information, images, testimonials, and other content on your site and link to it from social media sites. Even your Facebook fans may want to search for your recipes on your website. A website is the best place to organize and store your information.

**Some businesses are using their Facebook page as the platform for all their communications instead of a website--don't do this!** The problem is that Facebook has a lot of control over how you set up your Facebook page and who gets to see it. And Facebook can change the rules at any time. Facebook is great (see below), but don't use it in place of a website.

**Free tools like Google Analytics** provide information on the number of unique visitors to your website each month, how long they spend on each page, the keywords they used to find you, the sites that referred you and lots of other useful information to help you keep improving your site. Take advantage of them to track and measure results.

**Many businesses are opting to use a blog format instead of a traditional website.** Blogs are often written in a friendly, personal style that can help customers feel connected to you. You don't have to have a traditional-style website, but make sure your blog is well-organized and has all the information that your customers are likely to want. And if you're not going to update your blog regularly, don't start one.

**Think mobile.** As more and more people access websites from mobile devices, it's become increasingly important for customers to be able to view and use your site on their smartphone or tablet.

**Seek out listings in web directories.** National, state and local directories for farms, farm stands, CSAs, farm-based products, farmers markets and local foods rank highly on search engines, generate traffic to your website, and provide high quality links to your website. Use them all.

**You'll have a better chance of getting your website to show up higher in search engine results** if your site is updated regularly, contains lots of content (product information, articles, reviews, videos, photos, etc.) and a number of popular websites are linked to yours.

## **Email Marketing**

**Email is not dead!** Despite the rumors of its demise, email is still used more often than Facebook. While you won't be able to reach everyone through email, it's still a very effective way to communicate with many people.

**Email marketing is relatively inexpensive and can be one of the most cost-effective marketing tools** for your farm and food business. If you're sending customers timely, relevant, useful and/or entertaining messages about your products, recipes, events, or the issues you care about, there is typically a 15-50% chance (depending on your industry and your list) that they'll open your message. On average, only 16% of your Facebook fans will see your posts (unless you advertise on Facebook), so your odds of reaching people through email are probably greater.

As with your website, when you use email marketing, you can **maintain control over the words, images, and “look and feel” of your messages.**

**Get the best results by testing.** Test different subject lines, message lengths, inclusion of video and other content to see what gets the best response. **Use the analytics** that your email service provider offers to find out how many people are opening your newsletter and what they’re clicking on.

**Try offering email exclusives,** such as coupons or promo codes, to reward people who open your emails and use them.

**Purge periodically.** It’s a good idea to contact everyone on your list periodically to ask if they still want to receive your messages and to purge them from your list if they don’t respond.

## Facebook marketing

**Facebook surpassed 1 billion global users a while ago.** Although some Facebook users are showing signs of fatigue, new people are joining this social network every day. If you sell or provide a service directly to consumers, you need to have a Facebook page.

**Facebook is great for** building relationships with your customers, creating brand understanding, sharing photos, stories, and information about your business, and offering promotions.

**If you want to be successful with Facebook,** post several times a day and respond when your Fans post. People are much more likely to stay engaged when you keep a conversation going.

**Balance your promotional posts with informative or fun posts.** No one wants to read ads all the time.

**Your page will engage more people if you ask questions and post photos, videos, and infographics on Facebook.** Facebook posts with photos get 53% more Likes and 104% more comments than posts without images, according to a [HubSpot study](#).

**Ask your Fans to Like or Share your posts.** While fun, beautiful, or thought-provoking content and images all encourage people to respond, studies show that people are much more likely to share content when you directly ask them to share it.

**Take advantage of Facebook Insights.** Facebook Insights is Facebook’s free analytics tool. It enables you to keep track of page views, which posts are most popular, your Fan’s demographics, and more. Your Page must have at least 30 likes for Facebook Insights to be available.

**Face(book) the music and advertise.** Typical Facebook posts only reach about 16% of their Fans. If you want to be sure that more Fans see your posts or want to attract new customers through Facebook, you should consider paying for Facebook ads, sponsored posts, or sponsored stories. Ads/sponsored posts are generally pay per click; you set how much you want to spend per campaign – typically \$5-\$300.

## YouTube

**Video will account for half of all Web traffic by 2014.**

**YouTube is the second most used search engine** in the world (after Google).

**Having a video on your home page** improves your search engine ranking.

**Video content can be used with virtually all the online tools.** While high quality video is always appreciated, even videos shot with cell phones can be effective on social media.

## Other Tools

**Twitter is a relatively easy way to promote your presence on social media.** If you can text, you can Tweet. But if you don't have the capacity to take on one more thing, Twitter is less essential than some of the other tools.

**LinkedIn** is generally more effective for B2B marketing than marketing to consumers, but you can use it to build relationships with your peers, suppliers, and individual customers. LinkedIn results get high search engine rankings, so create a free LinkedIn Company page.

**Google+** is the second largest social network in the world, by some measures, but I haven't seen it reach critical mass for farms and farm-related businesses. You should definitely create a free Google Places for business listing and encourage customers to review you on Google.

**Yelp business pages are free** and great customer reviews on Yelp are very effective marketing tools. Thoughtfully respond to all reviews, whether positive or negative. Yelp advertisements can be cost effective for specific products or services, but Google AdWords may provide better return on your investment.