



# Marketing on the Internet

Matt Ernst<sup>1</sup> and Tim Woods<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

The internet can be utilized for a variety of farm marketing strategies. Producers may sell their products online through e-commerce, use a website to take orders for their goods, develop email-based marketing campaigns, or simply advertise their operation through a “billboard” type website. Social media and blogs provide other channels through which the internet can be used for promoting a farm enterprise. Internet marketing tools continue to change as consumers make more and more purchasing decisions using handheld devices.

This profile is intended to provide a summary and starting point for growers who are considering using the internet for marketing. Producers interested in more detailed guides for direct marketing on the web should consult Penn State University’s extensive marketing publication list at <https://extension.psu.edu/business-and-operations/business-management/marketing>. The University of Tennessee’s Center for Profitable Agriculture has also published guides specific to internet marketing, available at <https://ag.tennessee.edu/cpa>.

## Creating Your Own Web Page

### FOCUS ON MARKETING, NOT SELLING

Establishing a presence on the web can benefit your farm in many ways. More and more consumers shop online, with an even greater number using the internet to research future purchases. Your website can be another tool in a well-planned total marketing plan for your farm. The internet can help promote your enterprise and increase your contact with current and potential customers. Many Kentucky growers advertise and promote products through



websites to let customers know what varieties are in season, build brand awareness, and what is going on at the farm.

However, “marketing” does not necessarily mean “selling.” Depending on the product being sold, the internet may not be the best means for transacting sales. However, the internet can be an ideal tool for ordering fresh produce for local delivery or pickup or for selling value-added items, such as honey, that can be easily shipped.

### KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

Like any other market, internet selling depends on knowing your customers. Asking yourself basic questions about your customers is a good place to start. Who are they? Do they have internet access? Do they use email? Are they on social media?



A clear idea of who your customers are and how they use the Internet will allow you to develop a website that meets your customers’ needs. For example, there is

<sup>1</sup>Matt Ernst is an independent contractor with the Center for Crop Diversification.

<sup>2</sup>Tim Woods is an extension professor in the UK Department of Agricultural Economics.

no need to develop an elaborate, interactive website for your orchard if your customers are only interested in knowing when different apple varieties are coming into season.

#### DEVELOP A GOOD WEBSITE

A basic website should contain the farm name, business description, contact information, types of products available, and where to purchase products (e.g. farm store, farmers market, etc.). Business hours, contact information (phone number, email, etc.), and driving directions should be included when appropriate. Product descriptions with images and pricing information can help enhance the site and serve to better promote the items you are marketing. A more elaborate site can include additional information, such as farm news, special event notices, recipes, a “who we are” page, and a location map.

It is not enough just to have a website; you must have one that is well-designed. Unfortunately, there are many examples of poorly designed farm websites, including those for small farms engaged in direct-marketing. The following tips will help you to avoid some common pitfalls:

- The site should be eye-catching, well-organized, and easy to navigate.
- Keep the website simple. Avoid the excessive use of graphics and images that result in a lengthy download time.
- Make sure your website is designed in such a way that it can be accessed via mobile devices.
- Choose font sizes, colors and backgrounds that are easy to read and see.
- Make sure your site is free of errors in spelling and grammar.
- Contact information should be clearly listed on every page.
- Only display information that will be relevant to potential customers.
- Maintain your website regularly and keep it up-to-date.

### Marketing Through Existing Websites

#### KDA BUSINESS DIRECTORY AND WEB PAGE BUILDER

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) maintains an online directory of markets and businesses that sell Kentucky agricultural products. In addition, the KDA Web Page Builder enables agri-

businesses to create a simple web page that can be accessed through the KDA directory. The KDA must approve all information, including any later updates, before it goes public on the internet. The approval process can take up to five days.

This program is free to all Kentucky producers and has several advantages for growers who choose to participate. It is a great way to advertise, whether the business is just listed in the directory or a web page is created. The Web Page Builder program is extremely easy to use and could be a good first step (or an alternative) for growers considering designing their own web page. Businesses that already have an internet site can include their company link in the directory listing and on the web page, thus providing additional advertising. The information on the site can easily be updated at any time.

#### BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Information is provided for the KDA directory in two steps. Users should be prepared to provide their name, address, two phone numbers, fax number (if available), email address, name of a contact person, and the company website URL if there is one (Step 1). The types of products being sold are added to the directory by selecting them from drop-down lists under the Country Store and/or Farm Store categories (Step 2). The user can preview the directory information before submitting it to the KDA.

#### WEB PAGE BUILDER

Once the directory information is completed, users can choose to continue on with Steps 3 to 5 to create a KDA web page. Step 3 involves adding the text for the web page. The information requested includes: the business name, list of products, slogan, company information, directions, hours of operation, and up to three locations where products are sold. Step 4 offers a selection of six different web page designs to choose from and prompts the user to create a website address (URL). Step 5, which is optional, makes it possible to add KDA logos and/or up to three JPG or GIF images to the site. Images must be 150 pixels across and no larger than 20K in size. The user can also include an e-commerce link to the web page, if desired. The web page can be previewed before submitting it to the KDA.

### KDA Agritourism Website

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) Di-

vision of Agritourism has a website for the purpose of promoting agritourism in the Commonwealth. Agritourism operators can have their business information included in the site's searchable database. In addition, the KDA will use the registrant's information to create a free web page accessible from this site. Up to three digital images may be included with the business information. To register, click on the "Agritourism Resources" link near the top of the Kentucky Farms Are Fun home page, then click on the "Agritourism Business Submission Form" link. After saving the Agritourism Venue Information Form to your computer, the business data can be typed directly into the document and then submitted as an attachment via email. Alternately, the blank registration form can be printed, completed by hand and returned via traditional mail. The KDA email address and postal mailing address are listed at the bottom of the registration form. You can also request an electronic form from the KDA contact person listed on the site.

### **On-line Directories and Databases**

Adding your business to one or more online directories and/or searchable databases is another way to increase your farm's visibility on the internet. Some of these sites will only list your business name and contact information, while others may allow you to enter additional information, such as a product list. Growers with a business web page can generally include a link to their site, thus making that site available to even more customers.

The following is a list of some groups and organizations that maintain a directory or database online. A search of the internet will no doubt reveal many more possibilities. While some directories/databases are available for free use, others may charge a fee.

- KDA Business Directory
- MarketMaker
- Grower associations
- National or local private specialty websites (e.g. there are online directories of pick-your-own farms)
- Kentucky Farm Bureau (Certified Farm Market Program)
- Local Chamber of Commerce (online business directory)
- State, regional or county on-line farm directories

### **Use Email Effectively**

Email has transformed the way that many farm marketers do advertising. The cost of regular direct mailings can be greatly reduced through the use of email. However, excessive emails can turn into an annoyance for the consumer. Furthermore, many web mail servers may identify your email as spam and it may never make it into the recipient's mailbox.

Follow these guidelines to help ensure that your email communication with customers is effective:

- Be concise — but without seeming in a hurry.
- Include your hours of operation, contact information, and brief directions.
- Let customers know when your next email update will be coming.
- Provide customers with a clear way to unsubscribe from the email list, if they desire.
- Always include other useful information in addition to what you are advertising. For example, if you have a farm peach festival approaching, provide some recipes using fresh peaches.
- Incorporate printable coupons into your email

Utilizing an email marketing platform, such as MailChimp or Constant Contact, can help your emails reach the recipient's mailbox more seamlessly and be less likely to be identified as spam. These companies are also in compliance with the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003, in which enables recipients to opt out without any hassle. They also format the email to be mobile friendly, which is especially relevant today when so many consumers are opening emails on their phone.

### **Web-based Social Media**

Social media platforms are internet tools for sharing and exchanging information in the form of text, photos, and videos. This includes blogs (internet journals), as well as social networking programs like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Flickr (photo sharing), Pinterest and YouTube (video sharing) are also forms of social media. These internet-based resources provide a way for anyone and everyone to post, share, and comment on various topics online.

Using social media to promote farming enterprises is a fairly new concept that has been quickly adopted by businesses of all sizes. Like an internet web page, social media can allow growers to connect with a wider audience, one that extends well beyond the farming

community. Social media, however, permits the user to connect on a bit more of a personal level (e.g. blogs) and often encourages exchanges between the grower and the general public (e.g. Facebook, Instagram). As such, this web-based tool is useful for building and strengthening relationships with both current customers and potential ones.

Farmers may choose to use social media tools to highlight their business, to showcase their products, and to educate the general public regarding farming practices. Social networking sites are useful for providing brief farm updates, such as when a particular crop is ready to harvest. Many of these social media tools have the added bonus of being free, or at least relatively inexpensive, to use.

One North Carolina blueberry grower reported a 25% increase in the number of customers visiting her farm since she began a weekly blog. Through the blog, she is able to keep customers interested in what is going on at her farm, promote her products, share recipes, and pass on practical information to readers. In addition, the blog provides a valuable link between the non-farming community and the farm.

Growers wanting to pursue the use of social media should first define their purpose and goals. After investigating the various types available, they can then determine which methods will best meet these goals. Consideration should also be given to the grower's personality, abilities and schedule. For example, writing a weekly blog will require a time commitment, writing skills, and a certain amount of creativity.

More detailed information and links to resources specific to farm marketing using social media are available in the CCD fact sheet [Useful Social Media and Mobile Technology Tools for Agricultural Businesses](#).

## Selected Resources

- Kentucky Farms Are Fun (KDA Division of Agritourism) <http://www.kentuckyfarmsarefun.com>

---

*Reviewed by Kati Bowman, Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD), and Joshua Knight, UK Senior Extension Associate*

*Photo courtesy of Christy Cassady*

- Kentucky Business Directory and Web Page Builder (KDA) <http://www.kyagr.com/buyky/webpage-builder.html>
- Where to Buy Kentucky Proud Products (KDA) <http://www.kyproud.com/kentucky-proud-producers.aspx>
- Kentucky Market Maker <https://ky.foodmarketmaker.com/>
- “Selling On-line, a 24/7 Opportunity (University of Maryland, 2017) <https://extension.umd.edu/learn/selling-line-247-opportunity>
- Tips for Selling on the Internet (ATTRA, 2020) <https://attra.ncat.org/product/tips-for-selling-on-the-internet/>
- “Building Your Business With An Email Marketing Program” (Penn State University, 2016) <https://extension.psu.edu/building-your-business-with-an-e-mail-marketing-program>
- “Internet Marketing: Monitoring the Effectiveness of Your Web Presence” (Penn State University, 2016) <https://extension.psu.edu/internet-marketing-monitoring-the-effectiveness-of-your-web-presence>
- “Mail Order and Internet Marketing” (Penn State University, 2016) <https://extension.psu.edu/mail-order-and-internet-marketing>
- Keep Your Social Media Marketing Legal (Penn State University, 2019) <https://extension.psu.edu/keep-your-social-media-marketing-legal>
- An Introduction to Marketing Opportunities on the Web for Specialty Crop Growers, PB1823 (University of Tennessee, 2014) <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB1823.pdf>

## Suggested Citation:

Ernst, M. and T. Woods (2020). *Marketing on the Internet*. CCD-MP-2. Lexington, KY: Center for Crop Diversification, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. Available: <http://www.uky.edu/ccd/sites/www.uky.edu/ccd/files/internet.pdf>

**August 2020**

---

For additional information, contact your local [County Extension](#) agent

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.