

An Introduction to Marketing Opportunities on the Web for Specialty Crop Growers



September 2014

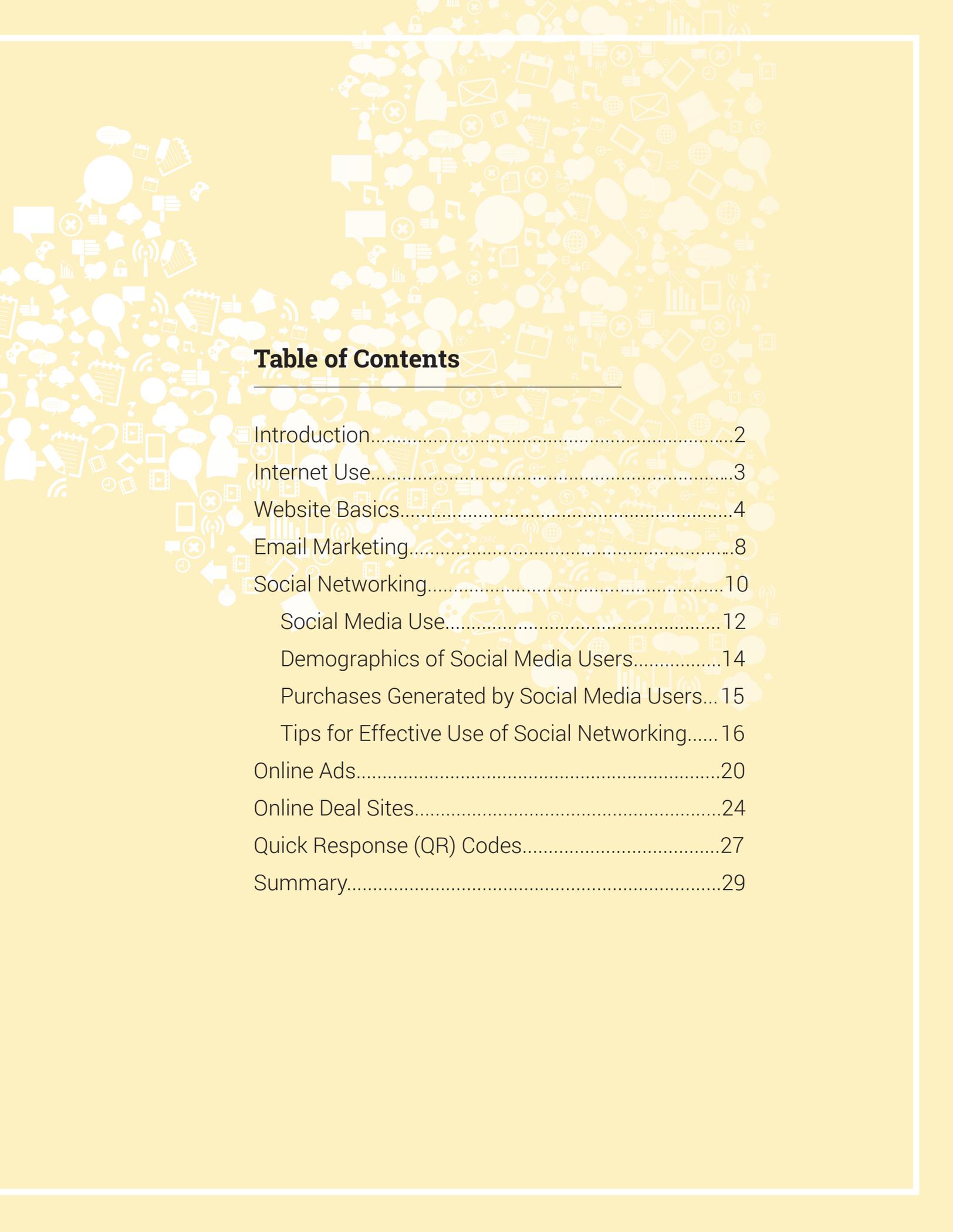


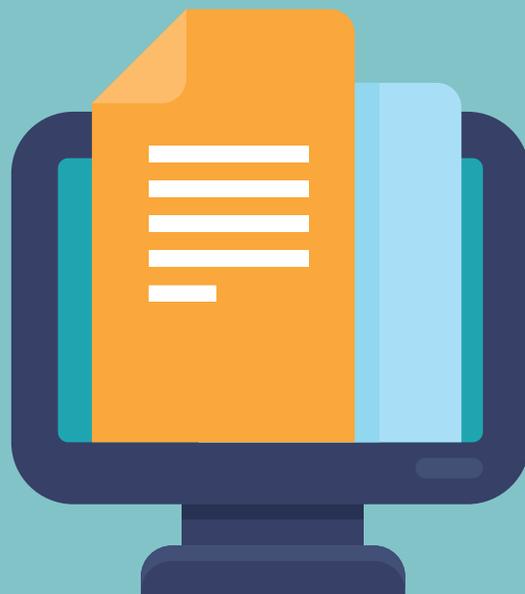
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Introduction

Not that many years ago, websites were viewed as emerging online marketing tools. Today, business websites are almost as common as business cards. Businesses, including specialty crop growers direct marketing to consumers, that do not have a website essentially do not exist or will not be considered by some customers. And while the website is still an essential tool in a marketing plan, there are new ways that specialty crop growers can use the Internet to promote their business and develop relationships with consumers.

This publication provides an introduction to many of the marketing opportunities on the Web for specialty crop growers. It is designed to familiarize specialty crop growers with some opportunities to market their products via the Internet, help growers identify methods to promote their products on the Web, provide resources where they can find up to date information on Internet use and marketing tools and provide some basic tips on how to effectively use the Web to market their products. Topics discussed include Internet usage, website basics, email marketing, social networking and social media, online ads, online deal sites and Quick Response (QR) codes.



Internet Use



The Pew Research Center has tracked Internet use and trends since 1995. Specialty crop growers can use this information to help determine if and how to best connect with target customers on the Internet.

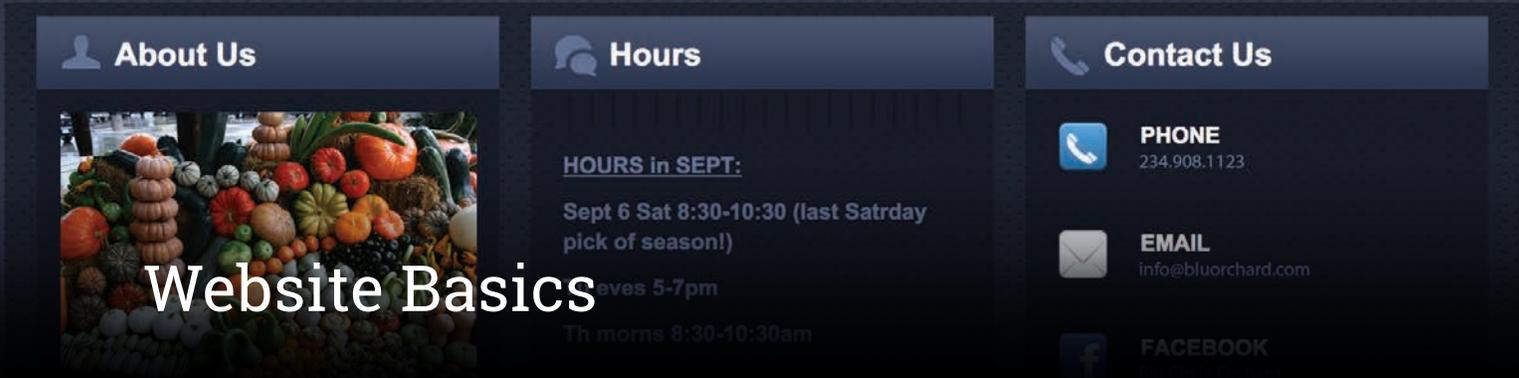
In a study marking the 25th anniversary of the World Wide Web on March 12, 2014, the Pew Research Center reported that 87 percent of adult Americans used the Internet. This number increased from 79 percent in 2010, 66 percent in 2005 and 26 percent in 2000.

Internet use on mobile devices is increasing over time. According to the 2014 study, approximately 90 percent of adults owned a cell phone with 58 percent owning a smartphone. While smartphones were introduced in mid-2007, the center first studied smartphone ownership in 2011

when 35 percent of adults owned them. Smartphone users were more likely to have at least some college education. Sixty-seven percent of people with at least some college have a smartphone, while only 44 percent of adults who have a high school graduation or less have a smartphone. Age is also a factor in smartphone use. Almost half of people age 50 to 64 used smartphones, while 83 and 74 percent of adults age 18-29 and 30-49, respectively, had a smartphone. Studies from Pew also show that low-income households use smartphones as their primary source of Internet access.

Specialty crop growers may look for up to date information on Internet usage by visiting the Pew Research Center's website at pewresearch.org.

¹Pew Research Center, February 2014, "The Web at 25." Available at: <http://www.pewInternet.org/2014/02/25/the-web-at-25-in-the-u-s>. Accessed June 3, 2014.



A website presence is a must for almost any business in today's society. Specialty crop growers should follow a few basic best practices to increase the effectiveness of their websites. First, the website should be developed with the needs of the target customer in mind and not the needs or desires of the specialty crop grower themselves. Growers should think about what customers will need or want to learn through the website. Site design should be intuitive to users and easy to navigate without unnecessary clutter.

Website content should include:

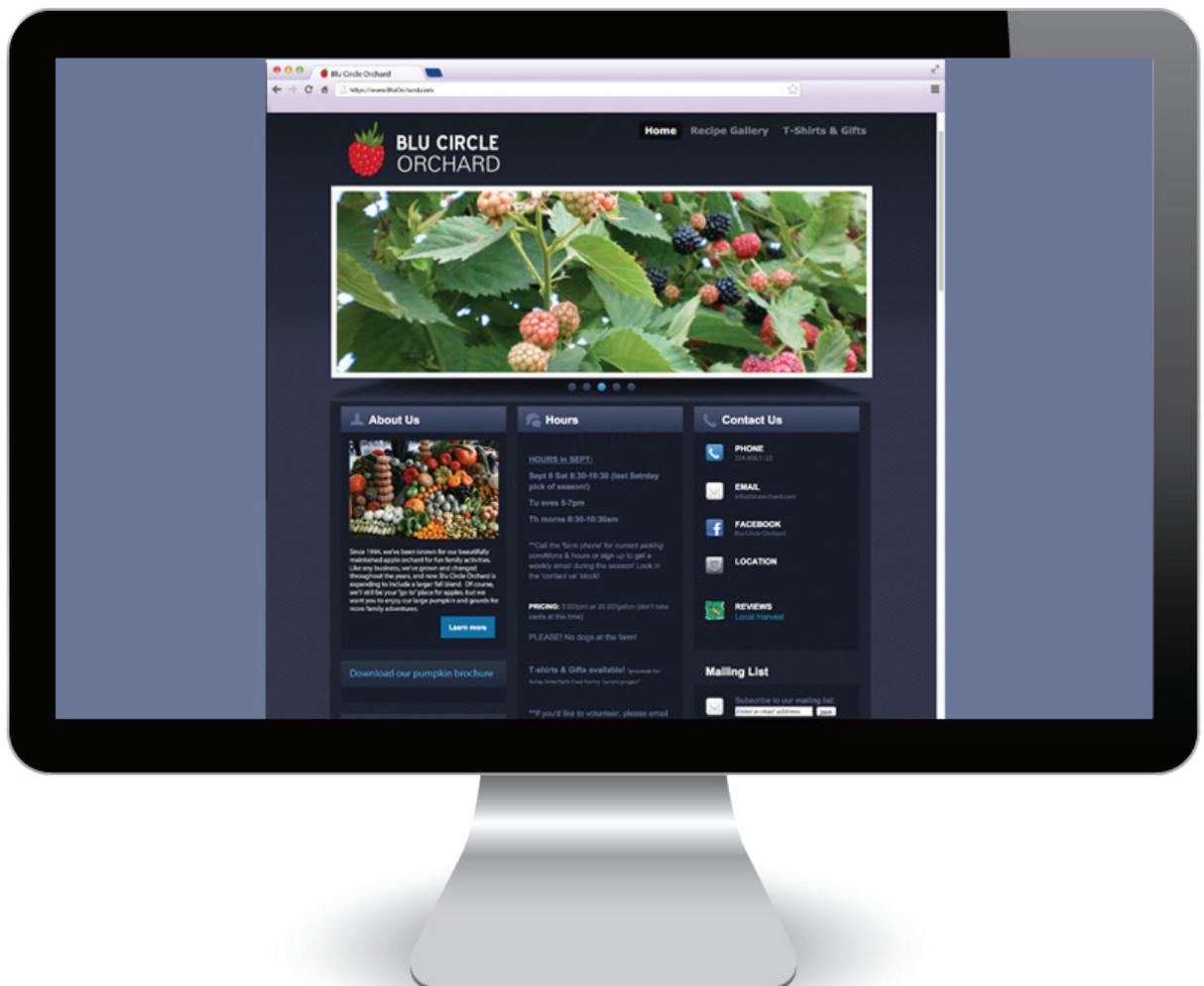


Page Optimization

- Background information about the grower(s) and the farm — the story adds value to customers.
- Information about products and services including what is offered, when the operation is open and where it is located.
- Details on other locations or other options customers can use to purchase or receive products such as retail stores, roadside stands, personal delivery or shipping.
- Contact information, which should be included on every page of the website to make it easy to find.
- A map and turn by turn directions on how to get to the operation from major routes — growers should also indicate if mapping software is not likely to bring them to the correct location and provide accurate GPS coordinates.
- Other methods customers can use to connect with the operation — links to social media, methods to subscribe to e-newsletters or email lists, etc.
- A variety of pictures showing the farm, the crops growing, the products available for purchase, products that can be made from the specialty crops offered for sale and of the growers themselves.
- Content of interest or value to the customers, such as answers to frequently asked questions, favorite recipes, storage or preservations techniques or other ideas on how to use products.



Website design is important in order to positively impact search engine optimization (SEO). According to dictionary.com, SEO is defined as the methods used to boost the ranking or frequency of a website in results returned by a search engine, in an effort to maximize user traffic to the site. Specialty crop growers should try to get their site to show up as early as possible in search engine results for the farm name and key terms associated with the operation. The methods search engines use to determine search results changes relatively often. Growers should find a website designer who is skilled in SEO or learn themselves and then keep up to date with changes.



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Home Recipe Gallery T-Shirts & Gifts

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Since 1994, we've been known for our beautifully maintained apple orchard for fun family activities. Like any business, we've grown and changed throughout the years, and now Blu Circle Orchard is expanding to include a larger fall blend. Of course, we'll still be your 'go to' place for apples, but we want you to enjoy our large pumpkin and gourds for more family adventures.

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Hours

HOURS in SEPT:
 Sept 6 Sat 8:30-10:30 (last Saturday pick of season!)
 Tu eves 5-7pm
 Th morns 8:30-10:30am

**Call the 'farm phone' for current picking conditions & hours or sign up to get a weekly email during the season! Look in the 'contact us' block!

PRICING: 3.00/pint or 20.00/gallon (don't take cards at this time)

PLEASE! No dogs at the farm!

T-shirts & Gifts available! *proceeds for Valley Interfaith Food Pantry 'potato project'

**If you'd like to volunteer, please email us!

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Responsive Design

With the growth of smartphones and mobile device use, websites need to be designed to be used effectively on these devices. There are multiple programs online that will allow a simulated test of websites on various devices or operating systems to determine how they will look and if they are easy to use. Growers can search online for “test mobile websites” or “test website on mobile devices” to test their site on a variety of tools.



Target Keywords

The website address (URL) should be promoted to target customers as much as possible. For example, it should be included in or on business cards, email signatures, fliers, posters, billboards, radio advertisements, social media and/or photo opportunities created at the farm. Specialty crop growers can sign up with programs such as Pick Tennessee Products for a free listing on the program website (PickTNProducts.org) with a link to the farm website. Relevant links from quality sites will help potential customers find the site easier.



Analytics

Finally, growers should take advantage of tools to track website use. Tools such as Google Analytics can monitor and report how visitors are accessing the site, what pages on the site they visit, how long they stay on the site, how many people are visiting and more. Growers may assess website effectiveness by including printable coupons or special discount offers on the website, which can be tracked upon redemption.



Specialty crop growers can sign up with programs such as Pick Tennessee Products for a free listing on the program website (PickTNProducts.org)



Email Marketing

Once a potential customer makes contact through a website or visits the farm or market, specialty crop growers should try to find a way to stay connected. Email allows a direct way to communicate with people who are interested in the products and may be effective in helping retain customers and encourage repeat purchases.

Growers can use a spreadsheet or database to store email addresses. Email messages can be generated through their regular email program or an e-news service. A couple of well-known services at the time of publication are Constant Contact and Mail Chimp. Mail Chimp currently provides some free services to businesses with less than 2,000 email addresses in their database. These services may have the added benefit of providing data about the effectiveness of the email in reaching contacts and the ability to add sign-up forms to websites or social networking platforms.

By law, growers must provide a method for people receiving the email to opt out if they do not want to continue receiving messages. The CAN-SPAM Act sets rules for commercial email and other electronic messaging. Growers may learn more by reading the *CAN-SPAM Act: A Compliance Guide for Business* at: business.ftc.gov/documents/bus61-can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business.

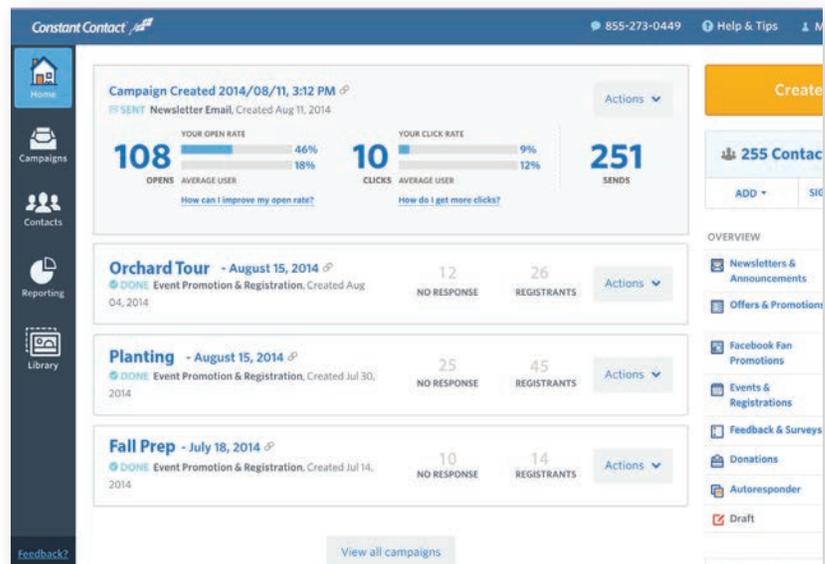
Specialty crop growers interested in connecting with customers via email should:

- Develop easy methods to collect names and email addresses such as a website form or a simple sign-up sheet at the farm.
- Indicate that the information will be used solely for the farm and will not be shared, and then follow through on this promise.
- Encourage people to sign up by telling them what is in it for them — what benefits will they receive through your news list.
- Decide how the emails will be generated – using a basic email program and a list of emails or using an e-news service. If a regular email program is being used, be sure to enter the addresses in the blind carbon copy (bcc) line so the addresses are hidden, and the list cannot be hijacked by a subscriber.
- Provide subscribers with valuable content such as what fruits and vegetables will be available at the farmers market that week, a recipe for a favorite product or how to care, store or preserve product once they get it home. Special offers, drawings or contests are other ways to engage customers in emails.



Effective emails will:

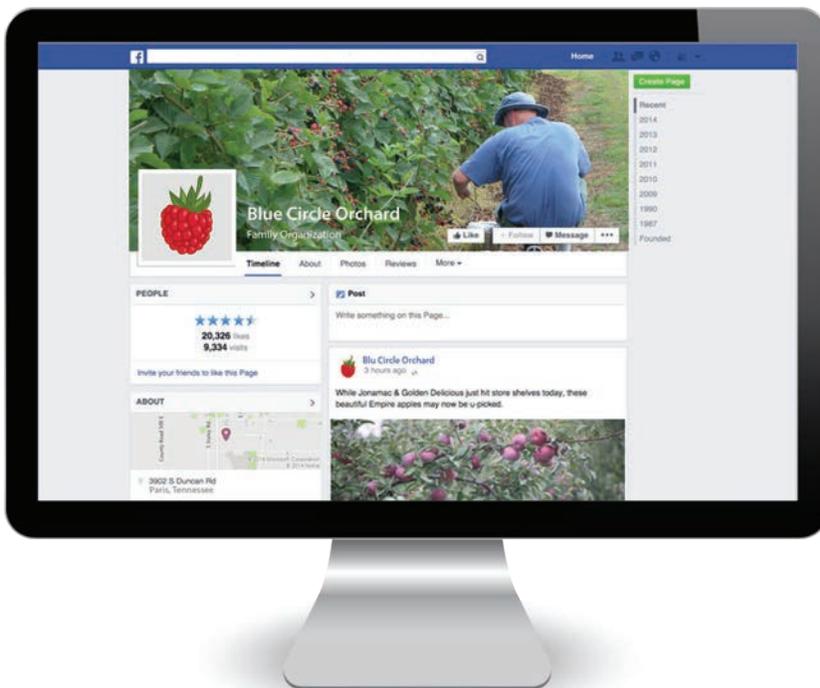
- Begin with an eye catching subject line that will entice recipients to open the message — avoid blank or general, boring subject lines.
- Address the email to the individual if possible — email services provide this functionality.
- Be short and sweet with a clear focus as people do not take time to read lengthy messages.
- Include a call to action — lead recipients to do what you want them to do — such as “visit the website now to learn more,” “make plans now to visit the farm on Saturday to pick peaches” or “sign up for the CSA season today.”
- End with a signature including name, title, farm name, phone number, website URL, social networking links and farm address, as needed.
- Use correct spelling and grammar — check it twice!
- Be easily read on phones or other mobile devices as people are more often reading emails on these small screens.
- Not include attachments as many people will not open them due to risks of viruses. Include the content within the email or direct them to a website with the additional information.





Social Media

Social networking is the use of a website to connect with people who share personal or professional interests. Social media are websites or other online means of communication, such as smartphone apps, that are used by large groups of people to share information and to develop social and professional contacts².



Candace Corlett, President of WSL Strategic marketing discusses the importance for retailers to interact socially with customers in the December 2013 issue of Marketing News:

It's where your reputation lives or dies. Your reputation is no longer on the full-page ads in the newspaper. It's created, or it dies, in social media. It's important ... to be out there on the offensive, creating all of the attention and the messaging that they want to bring to their brand. The retailer doesn't own their own reputation anymore; it's created by the chatter on social media, and you have to own that chatter and be louder than two or three people's one-star rating of you. You have to be leading the conversation.



Development

Specialty crop growers may use social media to:

- Develop and maintain relationships with customers through ongoing updates, information and engagement.
- Tell their story to develop an image or personality of the farm in the minds of customers.
- Inform customers of current situations on the farm such as whether berries are ripe for pick-your-own today or that the pumpkin patch will be closed tomorrow because the field is too muddy.
- Encourage repeat visits by reminding customers about product availability, encouraging them to try new products or new uses for products or informing them of events on the farm.
- Gather feedback from customers to help make decisions on the farm. For example, a specialty crop grower might poll Facebook followers about their favorite colors of flowers or varieties of pumpkins or for their interest in purchasing strawberries from the farm in addition to blueberries.
- Help spread the word to other people connected to their social media followers, which are often friends, family and colleagues of the followers, by encouraging engagement with the site. Provide fresh, relevant, timely, creative, valuable and sharable content, and invite followers to upload pictures or participate in a poll. In some situations, producers may ask followers to comment, share, retweet or re-pin. Growers should stay informed of the methods used by social media to determine when posts will appear on followers' pages to help decide what to do and what to avoid doing. For example, in early 2014, Facebook posts with "like baiting content" or, in other words, posts that ask followers to "like" the post were penalized and less likely to appear on followers' news feeds.

Specialty crop growers interested in using social media should develop a social media plan as part of their overall marketing plan. The social media plan should be developed to reach and interact with the farm's target audience. Growers should carefully choose the social media tools they will utilize and determine how they will use those tools, who will be responsible for managing content and how they will track effectiveness of their efforts.

²<http://dictionary.reference.com/>

Of these, specialty crop growers may find Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram of most benefit to their operations due to their purpose, usage and user demographics. In addition, blogs and review sites may also be beneficial to specialty crop growers. A short description of each of these social media is provided below.



Facebook ([facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com))

Business pages allow growers to connect with customers and others interested in the business. Growers can post text, photos, videos and other content to the site to share with followers. Growers can engage customers to comment or share posts, communicate with the business through messaging, answer a poll, RSVP to an event, check in at a location or post a review of the business.



Twitter ([twitter.com](https://www.twitter.com))

Sometimes referred to as a mini-blog, Twitter allows users to send short messages or updates called "tweets" of 140 characters or less to a network of followers. Followers can comment or retweet (share) posts with their own followers.



Pinterest ([pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com))

Pinterest is a virtual pinboard allowing users to post (aka "pin") and organize photos, graphics (text, infographics, checklists) or videos to collect or generate ideas for various projects and interests. Other users can "re-pin" content they like from other users to their own boards. Growers can develop a business page on Pinterest to showcase products, illustrate uses of products, develop tutorials for how to create something else from the products (recipes, crafts, decorating ideas).



Blogs

Blogs may be another social media tool of interest to target audiences of specialty crop growers. "Blog" is a shortened form of the word "weblog."

It is a way for people to communicate their thoughts, news of special events and other current happenings. It is sometimes described as an online journal or diary and may be an effective tool in helping growers tell their farm story. While Facebook and Twitter have replaced the use of blogs for many people, blogs can still function as effective marketing tools to add to and complement a website or as part of an overall social media plan. Blogs may especially be useful for growers producing regular, more in-depth content like a CSA newsletter or for a business that is regularly encouraging customers to think about certain issues or topics. For example, a nursery's blog may provide seasonal tips for gardeners. Growers can promote blog posts on other social media to help connect those followers to this tool.



Instagram ([Instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com))

Now owned by Facebook, Instagram is a photo and video sharing tool. Specialty crop growers can take photos or videos with a smartphone or mobile device, apply a design filter to transform the look of the content and add a caption. Growers can then post photos or video to Instagram and/or other linked social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Other users can comment on the posts. Content can only be uploaded with a mobile device; however, users can log in and view, like and comment on content using a desktop version that was released in 2013.



Review Sites

Online review sites may also be of importance to specialty crop growers. Sites such as Tripadvisor and Yelp allow customers to submit reviews of and for businesses. Visitors to a cut-your-own Christmas tree farm, for example, may submit a review of their experience at the farm. Other people can search for businesses and reviews to help them decide whether or not to visit the farm. Growers who invite customers to visit the farm should register with the sites, when possible, to provide some additional details to the listing, more easily monitor posts and respond to reviews.



Demographics of Social Media Users

A summary of selected user demographics for four social media platforms from a study from the Pew Research Center conducted in 2013 is provided in Table 1.

Facebook users were diverse in gender, age, income and other demographic characteristics. Users of other social media channels were less diverse. For example, Pinterest users were mostly women and account for 33 percent of all women online and just 8 percent of men. Pinterest users were also more likely to have higher incomes and a college level education. Instagram experienced significant growth in users in the 18-29 age category and by African Americans between 2012 and 2013.

Table 1. Percent of Internet Users Engaging in Social Media by Demographics

% of Users	Facebook	Pinterest	Twitter	Instagram
All Internet Users	71	21	18	17
Online Men	66	8	17	15
Online Women	76	33	18	20
Age 18-29	84	27	31	37
Age 30-49	79	24	19	18
Age 50-64	60	14	9	6
Age 65+	45	9	5	1
Income Less than \$30K/yr	76	15	17	18
Income \$30K - \$49,999/yr	76	21	18	20
Income \$50k - \$74,999/yr	68	21	15	15
Income \$75K+	69	27	19	16
White, Non-Hispanic	71	21	16	12
Black, Non-Hispanic	76	20	29	34
Hispanic	73	18	16	23

Source: Maeve Duggan and Aaron Smith, Pew Research Center, January 2014, "Social Media Update 2013" Available at: <http://pewInternet.org/Reports/2013/Social-Media-Update.aspx>. Accessed June 3, 2014.

More than half of Facebook and Instagram users are likely to check accounts daily if not more often—63 percent of Facebook users visit the site at least once a day and 40 percent report visiting multiple times a day while 57 percent of Instagram users visit at least once and 35 percent visiting more than once. For Twitter, 46 percent visit at least once and 29 percent visit multiple times per day.

Specialty crop growers may be able to use this and similar information to determine social media outlets that will help them reach their specific target audience. While this information is relevant at the time of publication, specialty crop growers should find up-to-date information when developing their social networking plan. This information serves to inform growers of what types of data are available as well as sources for updated statistics. Growers should visit pewInternet.org for updated information and search out additional sources to determine if new types of data are available.

Purchases Generated by Social Media Users

Research is now being conducted on how social media is driving traffic to retail sites generating purchases. One company conducting research, RichRelevance⁵, collects data on shopping sessions produced from select social media sites, although it only collects data from browsers and not from shopping sessions originating from mobile app versions of the social media. Specialty crop growers can check richrelevance.com for updated data on the Insights section of the site.

From January through September 2013, social media generated less than one percent of total shopping sessions. Facebook created by far the highest number of sessions, 4.31 million, which is more than three times that of other social media sites included in the study. Pinterest produced 1.1 million shopping sessions and was growing at a rate of 10 percent per year. Twitter generated 322,000 shopping sessions by comparison. Facebook had the highest average conversion rate, the percent of shopping sessions that developed into purchases, of 2.69 percent, which is comparable to non-social shopping sessions, according to RichRelevance. Pinterest followed with a conversion rate of 0.96 percent. Facebook generated higher total sales of \$10.7 million compared to \$2.1 million for Pinterest and \$93,000 for Twitter. Pinterest, however, produced the highest average sale per order at \$199.16 compared to Facebook at \$92.27 and Twitter with \$58.02.

FACEBOOK

63%

of users visit the site at least once a day

40%

visit multiple times a day

INSTAGRAM

57%

of users visit at least once

35%

visit more than once

TWITTER

46%

visit at least once

29%

visit multiple times per day

⁵RichRelevance. Social Media Shopping. Accessed online June 18, 2014 at <http://www.richrelevance.com/insights/shopping-insights-social-shopping-112013/>.

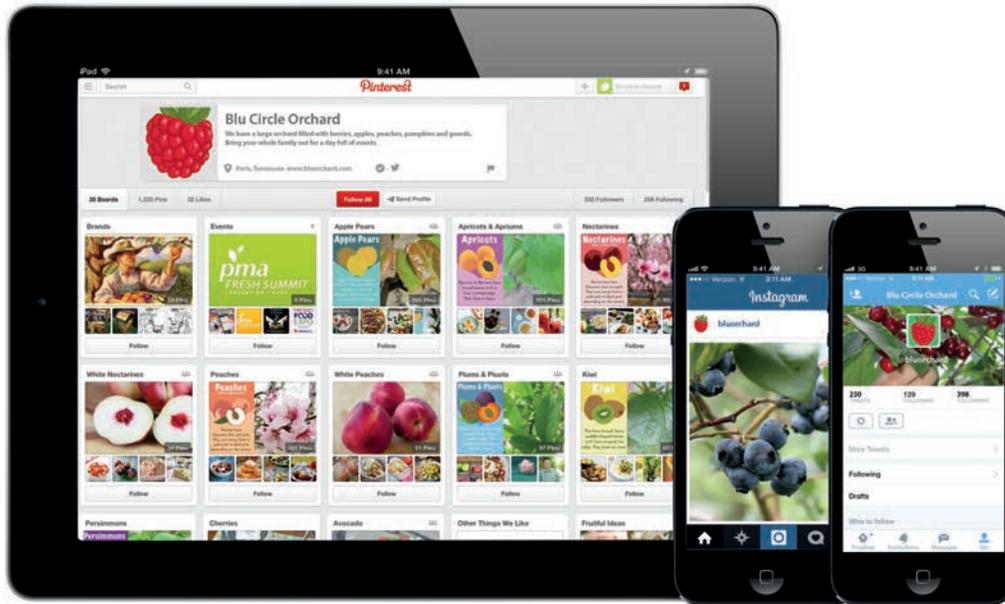
Tips for Effective Use of Social Networking

Specialty crop growers engaging in social media may be more effective by following these tips.



- Choose social media based on which tools the target audience is engaged with the most.
- Set up a business account or page with social media for the operation rather than using a personal page.
- Be sure to complete sections where information about the operation can be displayed such as the “About” section on Facebook.
- Budget time to effectively manage social media. In a survey of 2,887 marketers, 64 percent spent six hours or more on average per week on social media in 2014 while 19 percent say they spent more than 20 hours on social media on average per week.⁶ In an informal poll of direct farm marketers, respondents indicated they spent anywhere from an hour to five hours per week in season and 30 minutes to two hours per week during the off season on social media for their enterprise.
- Be involved in only as many social media tools as can be managed consistently and effectively.
- Follow businesses, groups or people that target audiences for the operation are following such as the Pick Tennessee Products program, local mommy bloggers, local food publications, gardening clubs, etc. This will allow you to learn about the audience and may provide opportunities to engage the audience.
- Use authentic pictures of the farm, growers and products as often as possible as pictures are likely to catch followers’ attention better than text alone. As an added benefit, posts with pictures or video are rated higher in Facebook’s algorithms so they are more likely to appear in newsfeeds.
- Search for the operation name regularly or set up Google Alerts to automatically send notices when the name is mentioned online to keep up with what is being said or posted about the operation.
- Use social media analytics to determine how many people are viewing posts and when. This can help determine the best time to post information.
- Promote the social media presence(s) by linking to them from the farm website, printing the social media logos on business cards or other marketing materials, providing links in the signature of emails or inviting farm visitors to connect at the farm using signage.
- When making posts applicable for a specific time period such as “the farm will be closed today due to inclement weather,” specify in the text of the post the day of the week and the day such as “Saturday, June 28.” The post may pop up a day or days later than the post was made, and followers may not look at the date stamp on the post.
- Pay attention to and respond in a timely manner to comments and questions posed by followers. Thank customers for positive comments about products or experiences at the farm. Provide information when requested and thank followers for their questions. If negative feedback is received, thank the follower for their feedback, apologize for their expectations not being met, and let them know that they will be contacted privately to follow up, if possible.
- Incorporate hashtags, text preceded by #, to categorize posts by a topic or keyword so they can be searched by that term. For example, a vegetable producer may include hashtags in

⁶Nanji, Ayaz. “The Most Important Social Network for Marketers.” Marketing-Profes. June 4, 2014. Accessed online June 18, 2014 at <http://www.marketingprofs.com/charts/2014/25286/the-most-important-social-network-for-marketers>.



#PickTNProducts #TNfarmfresh



Specialty crop growers should regularly update their knowledge of the tools they are utilizing and determine how they can best use the tool to promote their business.

posts to Twitter, Facebook and Instagram such as #PickTNProducts, #TNfarmfresh, #buylocal or #CSA so social media users searching by those terms may come across their posts. Growers may promote a hashtag with their business name or a specific term to encourage customers or social media followers to use it.

Features, tools and the inner workings of social media are in a constant state of change. Specialty crop growers should regularly update their knowledge of the tools they are utilizing and determine how they can best use the tool to promote their business. For example, a relatively new functionality within some social media allows specialty crop growers to schedule posts in advance to help them post regularly, especially in busy times. Facebook also allows users to boost or promote important posts. Users pay a fee, and Facebook will share the post with more people than a typical post reaches.

#buylocal #CSA

Social Media in Action

“I think Facebook and Twitter both have attracted more customers to our markets, and maybe our CSA, but I can’t be sure of that.” Delvin added that he can be sure social media brings existing customers back. “I have had customers tell me at the markets that they came out specifically for something I advertised on Facebook or Twitter,” he explained.

Farm marketers in Tennessee have found using social media is a good investment in enhancing the relationships or “community” built with customers. Andrew Dixon, whose family operates Granddaddy’s Farm in Estill Springs, Tennessee, said, “Where we gain something in social media is just in building that relationship with the customer.” Dixon said that regularly updating the farm’s Facebook page during the fall season to let customers know of upcoming events and other farm news helps the farm complement other advertising channels with more recent information.

Delvin Farms’ best promotional tool is word of mouth. Social media helps extend the reach of word of mouth. “We’ve added Facebook and Twitter to our marketing plan,” said Hank Delvin, Jr. of Delvin Farms in College Grove, Tennessee. “Facebook and Twitter are free marketing tools that have really helped us reach more people than general word of mouth, because anytime you tweet or put up a new status, it pops up in other people’s news feed and all their friends see it, too. You’re able to reach more people than you would normally come in contact [with].” “People put a lot of stock in what they read online, specifically from their friends on social media. Products in particular sell best when other people vouch for them.”

Delvin said producers should not rely solely on social media to attract new customers. “I think Facebook and Twitter both have attracted more customers to our markets, and maybe our CSA, but I can’t be sure of that.” Delvin added that he can be sure social media brings existing customers back. “I have had customers tell me at the markets that they came out specifically for something I advertised on Facebook or Twitter,” he explained.

Posting information to both Facebook and Twitter does not mean twice the work. “I have the two sites linked so I only have to put something in one place, but it shows up on both Facebook and Twitter,” Delvin said. Tools such as Hootsuite allow growers to post to multiple social media accounts through a single site rather than through each individual social media account.

Growers should carefully consider the audience for each social media tool. Twitter followers may accept more frequent posting than Facebook followers will. Users of different sites may be looking for different information or content as well. Some posts may be appropriate to the audiences of more than one social media tool; however, growers should post the same content to all sites sparingly.

Delvin gives these tips for farms using Facebook, and adds that the same principles apply to Twitter:

- Update social media at least three times per week. “Every day is ideal,” he said. Stumped for what to say? Delvin said that what producers might consider mundane, customers might consider wonderful and exciting. “I’ll often say, ‘planting tomatoes today for your summer goodness’ or something about what I’m doing on the farm, and people respond with enthusiasm,” he said. This helps the marketing effort because when someone comments or “likes” something you post, it is shown in their friends’ news feeds, too. “Your farm is being advertised just by you telling them what’s going on,” said Delvin.
- Use images. “Pictures are very important, so post pictures to your Facebook page whenever possible,” he said. The pictures allow customers to connect with the place, practices and even machinery used to produce their food or value-added products. “Farming is a different world for many people, and what you consider to be ordinary, your customers consider extraordinary!” said Delvin.
- “Every now and then we reward customers for using the “check in” feature of Facebook,” he said. “We put up a sign to encourage customers to do it. If a customer “checks in,” we give them a discount or something free. For example, a customer can check-in on Facebook and show us their phone to prove they did. We might give them credit to spend at the market, a free apple or a bottle of water. By that customer checking in at one of our markets, it shows up on all their friends’ news feeds as well, so it’s free advertising to people we wouldn’t normally be able to reach.”
- Always answer customer comments or questions on Facebook. “Ignoring them does not seem professional and by answering them it lets other people looking at it know that you care about your customers,” he said.
- Make sure your social media and website are smartphone-friendly. “We’ve made sure our website is able to be loaded easily on smartphones. If your site has plug-ins or music or too many pop up features, it won’t be loaded very easily on people’s phones.”



Posting information to both Facebook and Twitter does not mean twice the work. “I have the two sites linked so I only have to put something in one place, but it shows up on both Facebook and Twitter,” Delvin said.





BLU CIRCLE
ORCHARD

Family Event
Open through July

Food & Drink (32)

Things To Do (41)

Beauty & Spas (35)

Health & Fitness (48)

Automotive (3)

Shopping (50)

Electronics (1056)

Recommended For You

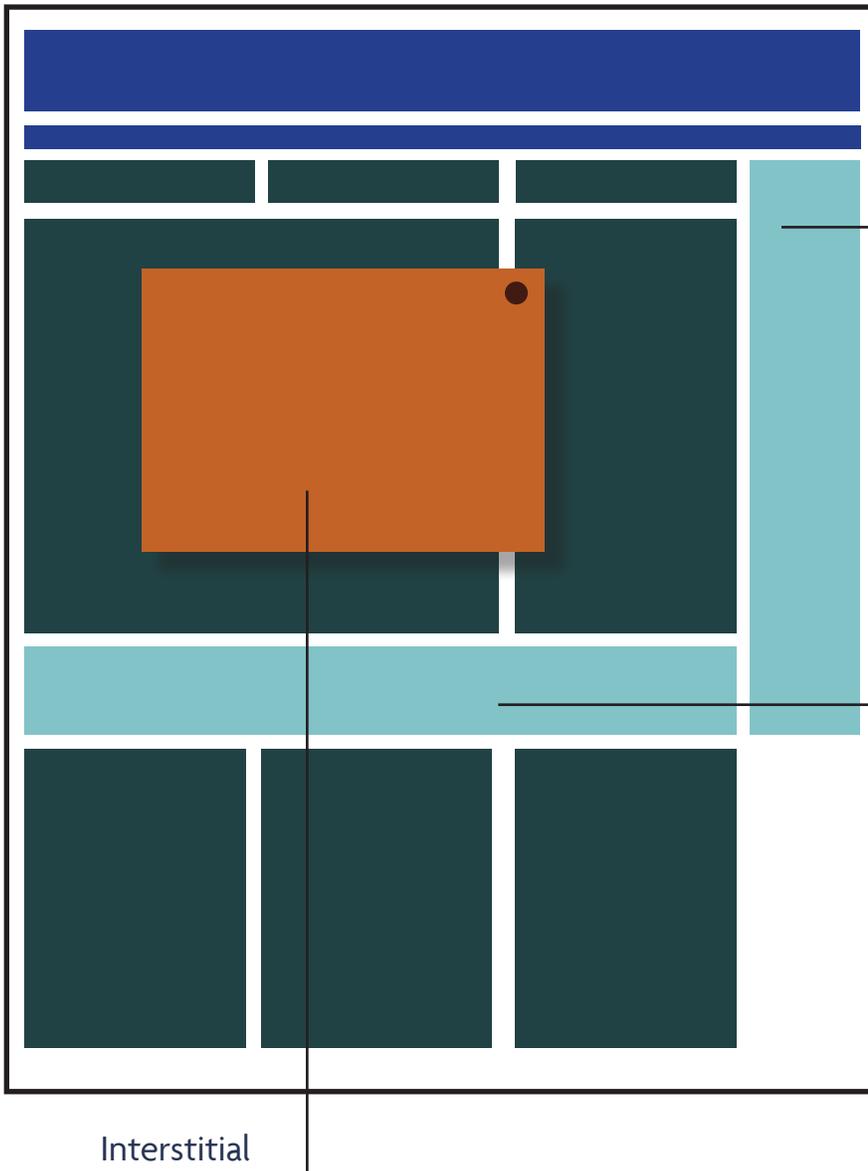


Online Ads

There are many opportunities to buy advertising space on the Web. Advertising options are often available through search engines, social networking sites and individual websites. Specialty crop growers should choose sites where target audience is likely to visit, with positive reputations and quality content. Sites that currently sell advertising may have a link to provide available ad sizes and pricing. Growers may also be able to request more information in the form of a media kit or rate card. Sites that are not accustomed to advertising may consider trying it. Growers should contact the webmaster to pitch the idea.

Growers can develop online advertising themselves or work with an advertising firm or online advertising network. The most affordable and customizable option is to develop the plan and ads themselves, however, this takes time and expertise to do it well.

There are several types of Internet ads. Banner ads are hot linked graphic ads that typically appear at the top or bottom of a Web page. A user can click on the ad to be taken to a website to learn more. The Internet Advertising Bureau set the standard size at 468 pixels wide by 60 pixels high with a typical limit of 15 kilobytes in memory size.⁷



Skyscraper

Skyscraper ads are vertical banners or tall, slender ads. The Internet Advertising Bureau set sizes for standard skyscraper ads at 120 by 600 pixels and a wide skyscraper ad at 160 by 600 pixels.⁸ They are typically placed to the right of Web page content.

Leaderboard

Leaderboard ads are long, narrow ads which have standard dimensions of 780 by 90 pixels. These banner ads are located between the title area at the top of a Web page and the content of the page.⁹

Interstitial

Interstitial ads pop up on a page or between pages. Small text, graphic or video ads may appear on the right side of content on search engines and social networking sites.

Advances in technology now enable ads to target Internet users based on their location and Internet behaviors, such as what terms they are searching for or what websites they have visited. Location or geotargeting is especially beneficial with increased use of mobile phones and devices. These targeting techniques can help specialty crop growers more effectively reach their target audiences with Internet ads.

⁷BusinessDictionary.com

⁸http://www.marketingterms.com/dictionary/skyscraper_ad/

⁹<http://searchcrm.techtarget.com/definition/leaderboard>



Pay Per Click

The costs of online ads can vary tremendously, and there are a variety of ways ads are priced. Typically, ads are priced by cost per thousand (CPM) impressions or pay-per-click (PPC). With CPM, the growers would pay every time the ad is shown 1,000 times. Typically, there is a minimum number of thousand impressions that have to be bought when purchasing ads using this method. With PPC, payment is only made when a user clicks on the ad, which is linked to a Web page.



Keywords

The price paid per click may be negotiated at a set rate or based on an auction system. For Google Adwords, for example, a specialty crop grower could choose keywords that he or she wants the ad to display for when those keywords are searched upon by Internet users. Some sites, such as Google Adwords, may also allow growers to define negative words, or words when searched for that growers do not want their ads to appear in combination with. The growers also set a maximum bid amount that they are willing to pay when an Internet user clicks on that ad. Google determines if and how high the ad will show up on the page when that term is searched for based, in part, on the bid made by the advertiser.

Other payment options include pay per lead where an ad buyer pays each time a user registers on a site or requests a catalog. Pay per sale is another option where an ad buyer pays each time a sale is made.

Some sites have software that allows users to design their own ads. For banner ads, a graphic designer may be able to design ads. Advertising firms or networks would also likely design ads for growers.



Specialty crop growers interested in purchasing Internet ads should:

- Study all of the options carefully and understand when and where ads will be displayed and how much the ads will cost.
- Set the parameters for the ads carefully, including keywords chosen, prices willing to pay and maximum limits on what will be paid, when possible.
- Design ads to effectively reach the target audience and be consistent with other marketing materials. Remember to include a call to action in the ad to prompt a response from the Internet user.
- Make sure the website where clickable ads take Internet users is designed well so users will be more likely to spend time there.
- Analyze data from ad companies and their website to track effectiveness of ads.
- Use data from ad companies to verify clicks were made by human Internet users and not Web bots causing fraudulent clicks.
- Incorporate graphics, images or video when possible to increase the visual appeal of the ad to the Internet user.
- Start slow and grow smart. Growers can test the Internet advertising waters with a low investment to learn how the systems function and how to get the most bang for their marketing buck.

Online Ads in Action

Ken Oakes of Oakes Daylilies in Corryton, Tennessee, started using pay-per-click ads many years ago and has watched the marketing medium evolve. “Five or six years ago, there weren’t as many nurseries doing pay-per-click and it was relatively easy to stand out,” he said. “Pay-per-click is still very important, but everybody’s doing it these days, which makes it much more competitive.”

A big advantage to pay-per-click ads is the extent to which advertisers can trace the effectiveness of their ads, said Oakes. “You can run four or five different ads with different texts, and [the search engine companies] will let you know which ads do better than others, so you can just keep on running and refining the ads,” he said. “You can trace the money spent on advertising to your bottom line results.” Oakes continues to invest in online ads because of the resulting increases in website visitors, catalog requests and sales.

Oakes also said that he has found it worthwhile to outsource this part of his company’s marketing. “We outsourced this to a consultant to handle this for us,” he said. “It has been a good use of our ad budget and helps us stay focused on what we’re best at.”



**BLU CIRCLE
ORCHARD**

Family Event
Open through July

Food & Drink (32)

Things To Do (41)

Beauty & Spas (35)

Health & Fitness (48)

Automotive (3)

Shopping (50)

Electronics (1056)

Women (767)

Home & Garden (876)

Recommended For You



Online Deal Sites

The use of the Internet for communication and social networking purposes has allowed the companies offering products and services to target consumers with specific, local ads and discounts. Customers can purchase a deal through online deal sites for a specified product or service.

Groupon was the pioneering firm in this area of “next generation” couponing or online daily deal sites. Customers sign up with Groupon to receive notices about coupons or deal offers. As Groupon became more popular, other providers like LivingSocial, Deal Chicken and many more followed.

Generally, these sites offer discounted deals of approximately 50 percent off to the customer. The deal site takes a commission of typically 50 to 60 percent of what the customer pays, and the rest goes to the business. For example, an offer may be promoted where people could buy an online deal for \$10 to purchase \$20 worth of vegetables at a farm. The online deal site would collect the \$10 and provide the customer with a certificate for the deal. The daily deal site would retain a part of the purchase, say \$5 or \$6, and provide the grower with the remainder \$4 or \$5. The customer would then redeem the certificate at the farm for \$20 worth of vegetables. This is worth saying again – the grower would receive \$4 or \$5 for \$20 in product.

Currently, Facebook presents an opportunity for businesses that have at least 50 people liking their page to create a Facebook Offer. In this case, the business pays Facebook to promote the offer. Facebook uses information gathered from variables selected by the business and from user Internet activities to help deliver deals users are likely to be interested in. Users claim deals that they can then redeem at the business. The user does not pay Facebook to claim the deal. Businesses can set the maximum amount of offers that can be claimed and a maximum budget to spend to promote the offer.

Specialty crop growers should carefully consider whether or not to offer deals through daily deal sites. Daily deals may work better for some kinds of operations than for others and for some purposes rather than others. For example, Ken Oakes of Oakes Daylilies described his experience, “We used Groupon for our mail-order plant business, and we found that people wanted to come out to our location. Since we are set up as a mail order business instead of a retailer, that wasn’t as convenient for us.”

There are several benefits and challenges to using daily deals. Daily deal sites may be useful in getting an operation’s name out to a high number of people and encouraging people to try a product for the first time. This may be especially useful in introducing a new specialty crop operation or product to the public. Some growers may offer deals specific to a time period when sales are typically low to help encourage people to buy at that time rather than at a busy time period.



As Groupon became more popular, other providers like LivingSocial, Deal Chicken and many more followed.

Some growers have reported challenges of using daily deals such as restrictive details of the contract, not getting paid what they expected to be paid or when they expected to be paid, and being obligated to provide the value of the purchase price for an extended period of time after the deal expiration date. Growers may also have trouble keeping up with demand if too many deals are purchased or too many people try to redeem the deal at one time. Other growers observed that mostly deal seekers buy and use the daily deals. They buy a deal and use it but do not come back unless another deal is offered.



Specialty crop growers interested in working with a daily deal site should:

- Start working on the deal with plenty of lead time to work out all the details and run the deal when it is best for the operation.
- Carefully design the details of the contract and understand the terms fully (the product being offered, pricing — what the customer pays and what the operation received, when the deals will be run, how many will be offered, expiration date, how long the purchase price of the deal must be honored, etc.) Carefully consider how many of the deals will be offered to make sure the deal can be honored and excellent customer service provided to daily deal and regular customers.
- Make sure the farm website is working well to receive extra traffic from people considering the deal or looking for answers to questions related to redeeming the deal.
- Be prepared to answer questions that come in by phone and email during the redemption period.
- Be prepared to redeem deals by scanning barcodes and submitting them to the deal site (smartphones may work for this).
- Be ready for an influx of customers, especially when the promotional value of the deal is about to expire.
- Collect email addresses from people redeeming deals to continue to communicate with them as daily deal sites typically will not share purchaser contact information with the grower.

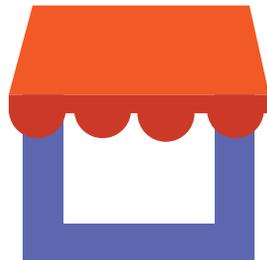


Scan this QR code to visit:
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Quick Response (QR) Codes

QR codes are now used on all kinds of consumer goods and in advertisements, and specialty crop growers may be able to incorporate them into their marketing efforts as well. A QR code is a matrix of contrasting colored, typically black, designs on a white background and stores information similar to a UPC code. It is scanned with a smartphone app. A person with a smartphone can use the camera to scan a QR code to access content on the Internet rather than typing in a URL.

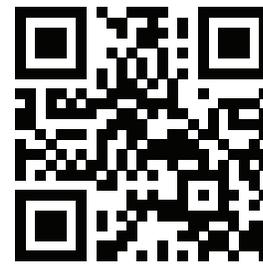
A specialty crop grower could develop a QR code which will direct people who scan it to a website, video, online coupon, social networking site or other Internet content. For example, specialty crop growers could incorporate a QR code onto a business card or flier that will direct customers to their website or to an online coupon. Alternatively, growers could use a QR video on how to prepare a special recipe with an unfamiliar vegetable or how to make preserves from fruit, for example.



To create a QR code, specialty crop growers can access a free QR code generator by searching online for current services. Specialty crop growers should test the QR code to make sure that it works. The site the code takes users to must also work well on smartphones. QR codes should not be printed any smaller than 5/8 inch by 5/8 inch. Track the effectiveness of the QR code by incorporating Google Analytics into the URL where the code directs users to or find a QR code generator that provides analytics.¹⁰

QR codes work best with short URLs. Longer URLs result in more heavily pixelated QR codes which can cause difficulty in printing and scanning. Growers may use a URL shortener software to create a short URL out of a long one. Sites such as bit.ly or ow.ly and some QR generators offer URL shortening.

One benefit to using a tool like QR codes is the ability to track use. Just as newspaper ad coupons might contain a code indicating which paper the customer clipped the coupon from, clicking on QR codes can be recorded and tracked using websites like qrcodetracking.com, Google's goog.gl and Scan.me. Some URL shorteners also offer analytics or information about the use of the URL.



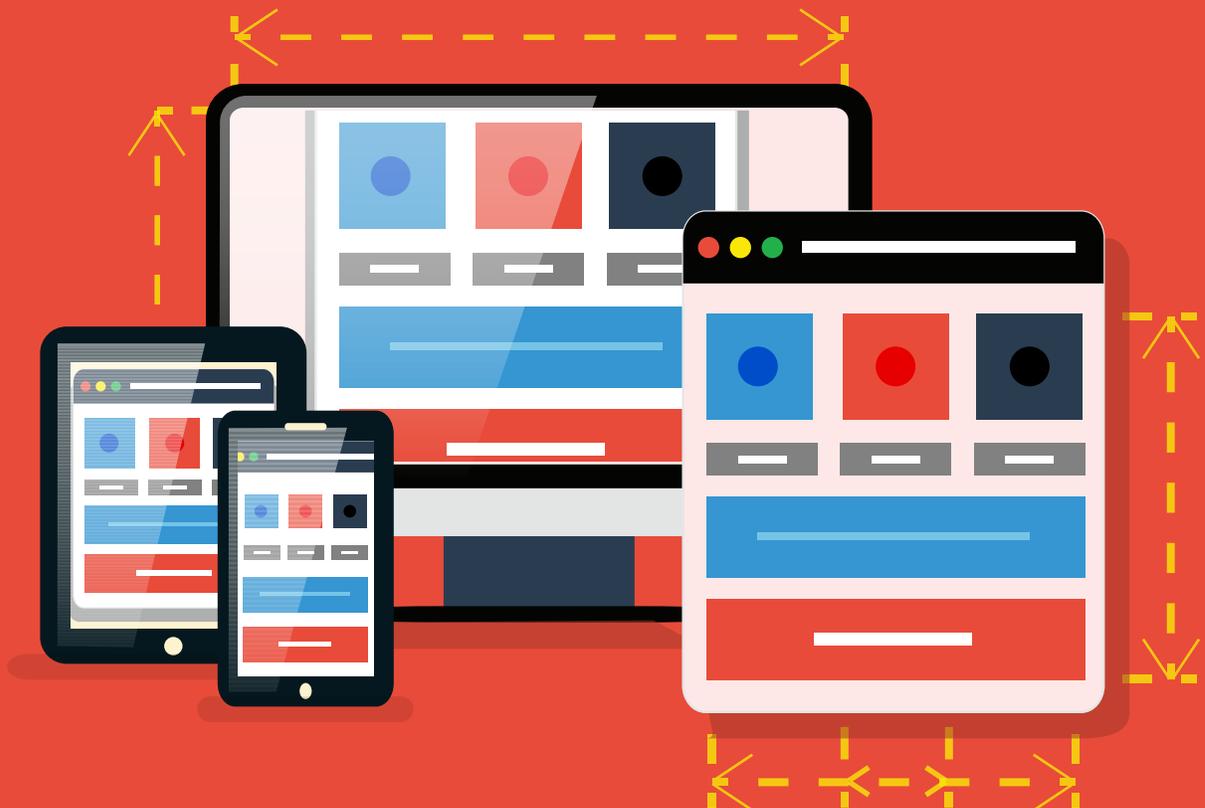
5/8 inch

5/8 inch

¹⁰Cornelisse, Sarah and Kathy Kelley. Tools and Strategies to Upgrade Your Social Media Impact. Presentation. Penn State Extension. August 2012.

Summary

Internet use is growing across demographics in the United States. Specialty crop growers have an opportunity to take advantage of a multitude of tools to market their operation, communicate with customers and interact with customers and potential customers. Growers should consider these tools as components of their overall marketing plan and choose tools that will reach their specific target audiences. Specialty crop growers should learn all they can about the online tools chosen to help market their products and keep up to date with changes in how the tools work and how potential customers are using them. Growers should only engage in online marketing tools that they have the knowledge and time to conduct effectively.



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