

Online Direct Sales: Part 3

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Today's blog is the third in a four-part series on options and strategies for online direct sales of local farm products. In this edition, I will discuss using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, for local food sales and promotion. Your customers are on social media, are you?

Consumers are looking for you, so help them find you through social media. Social media marketing is a great way to interact with customers, its easy and fun, and very cost effective. Basic business social media accounts are free, although there is a charge to "boost" a post (Facebook) to a specific target market (age, education, interests, etc.). Social media marketing will enhance customer traffic on your website, improve brand recognition and loyalty, and allow you to target your niche market effectively. It also provides you the opportunity to obtain customer feedback and insight.

There are several social media platforms, and your business should have pages on multiple platforms, but let's start with Facebook. Facebook in itself can be used as an online storefront. Many businesses have Facebook pages, but do not have a separate webpage. Hence, a Facebook page can bring your farm or ranch online immediately. Facebook will increase your business's online exposure, allow you to showcase new products or services, obtain customer feedback, and attract new customers. These pages can be used to inform customers about product availability, hours, location, how to place orders, how and where to pick up orders, and how to

pay. Updates and changes can be posted at any time so that your customers are informed. A Facebook page inbox can be used to answer customer questions, set up appointments, and communicate with customers one-on-one, thus helping build relationships. The inbox should be monitored and responded to ASAP.

As second popular social media platform is Instagram. Instagram was purchased by Facebook in 2012 for \$1 billion. Instagram is highly visual, placing photos, graphics, and videos first with text and comments below. Instagram gives you exposure. To maximize exposure, you will need to tell your story one or two times daily. You can do this through photos and videos of your products, chores, mistakes, your property, animals, gardens, hoop houses, seasonal activities, such as planting or harvesting, new baby animals, etc. You can discuss farm facts, community events, gardening tips, or other educational messages.

Other potential platforms include Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Twitter is more like a news reel, allowing you to place a picture or video along with 280 characters of text. Like Facebook, Twitter as has a personal messaging feature. LinkedIn is a professional networking site, used to post resumes, business credentials, association affiliations, etc. YouTube is primarily for videos and "channels" can be set up to host videos which you can then link to your Facebook, Twitter, and other social media posts. Each platform has a different focus, and in many cases, a different type of consumer. For example, Instagram is very popular with younger Gen Z and Millenium folks and Facebook has an older, Gen X and Baby Boomer following.

Generally, social media posts should be made at least daily. They should be short, direct, and contain interesting images or videos. The best time to post depends on your target market, try posting at different intervals, times of day, or days of the week. Social media management tools such as Hootsuite, Buffer, Loomly, etc. give you the ability to schedule all of your postings across social media platforms in one place. You can choose the day, time, and social media platform(s) for each of your postings.

New or special offers (discounts, contests, etc.) and invites to events will entice customers to follow your social media pages. Importantly all of your social media pages should follow a "brand" or consistent style. Use logos and imagery to illustrate the brand, provide a company description, vision and mission on all social media pages. Show you passion, enthusiasm, and values!!!

Okay, that's it for today. Next week I will discuss how to enhance customer communications and build relationships online.

Stay healthy!

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Online workshops, courses, webinars, and podcasts:

- Purdue Women in Agriculture Online Sales Webcasts: <https://ag.purdue.edu/extension/WIA/Pages/default.aspx>
- CFARE WEBINAR: E-Commerce During COVID-19: Opportunities for Food Producers to Make Direct Market Sales Online: <https://www.cfare.org/new-blog/c-fare-webinar-april-24-2020-e-commerce-during-covid-19-opportunities-for-food-producers-to-make-direct-market-sales-online>

Other resources:

- USU Extension COVID-19 Resources: <https://extension.usu.edu/covid-19/>
- UDAF Utah's Own Program: <https://www.utahsown.org>
- Taxes and Federal Programs: <https://ruraltax.org>

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