

Target Market Your Farmstand

Stop wasting money with scatter-shot marketing

by Marcia Passos Duffy

Kathy Moore of Gro-Moore Farms in Henrietta, N.Y., has used target marketing for years. She has been collecting names and sending out postcards to market her family farm, which includes a flower greenhouse, a farmstand that sells fruits and vegetables and has PYO strawberries and pumpkins and a full-fledged agritourism business in the autumn complete with a petting zoo and hay wagon rides.

When the mailing list topped more than 5,000 names and became unmanageable and costly, she decided to eliminate postage and paper costs and send out an e-newsletter. "With the increase in postage, I couldn't justify sending out the postcards anymore," said Moore. Luckily, she had a substantial list of not only physical mailing addresses, but also e-mail addresses that she had been collecting from her customers for over three years. She launched her first e-mail newsletter this spring (March 2007) that her customers could sign up for on the farm's Web site, www.gromoore.com.

The one issue of the newsletter so far this season has received positive feedback from her customers. "When we sent our first e-newsletter, I had more than a dozen customers reply to the newsletter thanking me for letting them know we were open for the season," said Moore. She plans on sending periodic newsletters to her growing subscriber list, including alerts on what is new or in season, special coupons, festival dates and seminars.

While what Moore has done with her database of customer names (which she has used to maximize her marketing efforts) may be business-as-usual for other industries, vegetable and fruit growers often do not utilize this kind of targeted market in their businesses, says Jane Eckert, a consultant and expert on farm direct marketing, and CEO of Eckert AgriMarketing (www.eckertagrimarketing.com).



March 9, 2007

It is Spring at Gro-Moore Farms

Large Selection of Beautiful Plants & Flowers!
It may be cold outside, but inside our huge greenhouses, Spring has Sprung!
We open our doors for spring on March 14. Our hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 9 to 5 on Saturdays and Sundays.

We have been preparing for the 2007 Spring Season in our greenhouses since the 1st of February, and everything is coming along beautifully.

Come select your Spring and Easter plants to put a fresh breath of spring in your home today. Check out our beautiful Easter baskets and shelves brimming with assorted spring bulbs, Easter lilies, primrose and more. We have many different sizes and styles to suit all your needs.

While you are visiting, be sure to pick up a fresh baked pie to treat your family!



Find out more about Gro-Moore Farms.

Gardenscape 2007 at the Dome

The Rochester Flower Show, March 15-18th
Plan now to go to the Gardenscape 2007 show at the Dome Center, March 15 through 18.



This year's garden show features flowers, plants, landscaping, and children's gardens, plus a dazzling garden full of free butterflies.

Cather up as many ideas as you can, and then stop in to shop at Gro-Moore after the show.

For more Garden Show and Seminar

Talk With Jim Guck, from "Turflite"

April 7, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Now is your chance to talk personally with the expert on lawn care, Jim Guck, one of the owners of Turflite quality lawn care products.

Jim will be at Gro-Moore Farms on April 7 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. to meet you, answer your questions, and help you select the best products for your specific lawn needs.



Turflite Quality Lawn Care Products

It's Garden Time!

Let's Get Dirty...
Are you getting the itch to get a head start on your garden?
We are ready with all your seed starting needs:

- A Complete Line of Harris & Hart Seeds
- Starter Soil
- Seed Trays & Cell Packs
- Gro-Lights
- & More!



Contact Information
email: kathy@gromoore.com
phone: (585) 359-4345
web: <http://www.gromoorefarm.com>

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Scatter-shot vs. targeted

Traditionally, the way farmstands get the word out about the start of their growing season or events has always been through the local newspaper. A farm will typically place an advertisement in weekly or daily newspapers to announce the start of PYO season or other events at the farm. While this may be somewhat effective—Moore, for example, still takes out a quarter-page

advertisement in her local weekly newspaper during the growing season—newspapers are often hit or miss and do not provide targeted marketing.

"Farms should not assume that their customers read the local paper... or that they will see the ad," said Eckert, who suggests using any money set aside for advertising for targeted marketing strategies that will get results. "The fact is that people are getting their information now primarily online," said Eckert.

A better and more cost-effective way to communicate with customers is to contact them directly through announcements on the farm's Web site, or, even more effectively, through an e-newsletter.

No Web site? No problem

What if a farmstand doesn't have a Web site or is not ready to start an e-newsletter? There's nothing wrong with old-fashioned mailed postcards to start out. This may be, in fact, an excellent way to start gathering names and e-mail addresses.

Farmers, however, need to be committed to this kind of targeted marketing if it is to work. If you collect names and addresses, you will need to commit to sending out some kind of communication. An e-mail or postcard can be sent as little as once a year announcing the opening of your farmstand or farm, or as much as every few weeks with coupons, specials and announcements as each fruit or vegetable comes into season. It can also be creative and include tips and recipes for using your fruits and vegetables or other information.

"Farmers often think they don't have time to do this kind of marketing... after all, just buying an ad is a whole lot easier," says Eckert. But, the fact is that many growers do have time to plan—and even write and set up a newsletter or postcards—in the winter

What You Need to Know About Can-SPAM Act of 2003

The Can-SPAM Act of 2003 was passed by congress to reduce the amount of junk electronic e-mail, which is known as spam. Before you send out an e-newsletter you need to know that:

1. You must have permission by your customers to receive the e-newsletter.
2. There must be an easy way to get off the e-mail list.
3. You have to remove anyone who asks to be removed within 10 days.
4. The e-newsletter MUST show your physical address and a legitimate "from" e-mail address.
5. You cannot gather e-mail addresses from other Web sites or other sources and put these on your mailing list without permission.

Learn more about Can-SPAM Act at www.spamlaws.com/pdf/pl108-187.pdf.

months. Many growers know when (approximately) fruits and vegetables will come in season and they can plan a series of postcards or e-mails during this time. They can also ask for help using local writers or PR professionals in getting a targeted marketing piece together.

For example, Moore says the newsletter takes only a few hours of her time. She gets the outline ready and sends it to an e-newsletter professional who then sends back a proof for her to review before it gets sent out.

Growers can also manage a small database of customers themselves, or have a family member or someone else in the farm business take on the responsibility. The key is that there is a commitment to this kind of communication.

Steps to targeted marketing

Before starting out on a targeting marketing campaign, there are a few steps you need to take:

1. Collect Names.

The easiest way to do this is to provide an attractive and inviting sign-up table where your customers can fill out a simple form. You can locate these tables throughout your farm or right at the farmstand. Make sure you collect the name, address, city, state, zip code and e-mail address, and include a privacy statement about what you will be doing with the information somewhere on the sign-up sheet. For example: "This information is confidential and we at "FARM

NAME" will not sell or give out your information to anyone."

If you have a Web site, you can include a sign-up box right on the site. If you are planning to send out an e-newsletter you should also become familiar with the 2003 Can-SPAM Act (see sidebar). You can also have slips that the customer can fill out and put into a box at the farm or stand. The slip could ask more detailed questions about what the customer would like to receive information about, such as the start of a particular PYO season or the opening of corn mazes.

2. Use the Names for Targeted Marketing.

Collecting names and addresses is a waste of time if you don't use them for target marketing. Make sure that you are dedicated to sending out at least one or more communications to your list per season. If you don't have time to create the postcard or newsletter, hire someone or make sure you have a family or staff member who can be committed to the project. Use the winter months to plan and start out small—even one postcard sent out in the beginning of the season to your loyal customers is a good start! And don't assume that customers remember where you are: be sure that you include your hours, address and a map.

3. Start Out Small, But Think Big.

Don't overwhelm yourself by putting out a full-blown e-newsletter right from the beginning. You can start with one or two postcards

a season, and grow from there into either more postcards or into an e-newsletter. The point is not to be fancy, but to collect names and then communicate key information about your farm and its products. E-newsletters are, however, probably what you would like to aim toward in the future since they are instantaneous and the costs are lower than postcards. Later, when you become more experienced at creating e-newsletters, you can start to include farm news items, a ripening calendar and another calendar of events, including summer workshops, u-pick seasons, hayrides, etc.

4. Test to See How Your Targeting Marketing Campaign is Working.

In your postcard or e-mail newsletter include a coupon that the customer could bring in for a discount or a giveaway. You can then begin to see what works, or doesn't work, in bringing customers to your farm. "Even if they don't bring in a coupon, talk to your customers," advises Eckert. "Ask them how they heard that you were open for strawberry picking. You will find out a lot about how your customers get to your farm or farmstand this way."

The author is a freelance writer from Keene, N.H.

Should You Hire a Professional to Create Your E-Newsletter?

You can easily do it yourself, particularly if you have a small database. Many of these home-grown newsletters are simple announcements of opening dates, etc. However, when your database grows, you may want to use a software package to help you manage your e-newsletter. Here are some vendors that you may want to consider:

E Newsletter Pro: www.newsletterpro.com

E-Campaign: www.IMhsoft.com

Newsletter Ease: www.newsletterease.com

You can also use e-newsletter service providers, which is a good option between do-it-yourself and hiring a professional to take care of all the details. There are many e-newsletter providers, but here are three that are worth looking into:

Go Daddy: www.godaddy.com

Get Response: www.getresponse.com

Constant Contact: www.constantcontact.com

You could also hire a professional to create your e-newsletter and design your Web site as well, by contacting a local PR, advertising firm or freelance writer or editor.