

“Free marketing” opportunities for your farm

-Eric Barrett¹

Free - something that one does not have to pay for.

Marketing - the process of getting goods/services into the hands of people to help them solve problems.

So, let's assume free marketing is something someone does not have to pay for (that is, in the traditional method exchanging money for an advertisement!) Yes, a bit of a stretch – but basically free marketing is thinking outside of the realm of traditional marketing. Spending cash on traditional advertising is not a luxury most of us have AND it is getting more difficult to find the correct form of advertising for our target market.

'Free marketing' should be thought of as:

- Eliminating traditional advertising as a way of getting customers
- Developing a mindset of getting directly to the customers you want
- Having one-on-one discussions with customers and potential customers
- Motivating customers to purchase your product or service

Starting your 'free marketing' plan:

1. Develop a brand (grow a relationship...)
 - a. Adopt a logo
 - b. Keep it simple and consistent – font, colors, logo, style
2. Write press releases
3. Speaking engagements
4. Printed materials (table tents, business cards, rack cards, 'stamp' for bags, etc.)
5. Email
6. Social media
7. Everybody loves a parade!
8. Good old fashion customer service
9. Basically, creating good word of mouth
10. What else? The ideas are bountiful!

Hints to take advantage of 'as free as possible':

1. Find out what you are good at and stick to it
2. Turn your product into a need
 - a. Are you selling a need? – An essential
 - b. A want? – Something that fulfills a desire
3. Do less interruption – more permission
 - a. Interruption – Hitting them when they aren't asking for it! – Billboards, paper ads
 - b. Permission – Creating a learning relationship with customers
4. Grow sales to existing customers
 - a. Add on Sales – “Do you want fries with that”
 - b. “Shut-up! Gifts” at child level
5. Make “doing business” with you fun!
 - a. Pleasant Greeting
 - b. Something Free – An experience, sample, laugh, game
6. Do not apologize for pricing – educate your customers
 - a. Why should they be paying more?
 - b. Help them know what it is, how to use it, or how it compares to other experiences
7. Tell the customer “why”
 - a. “Do not enter” is a negative way to say something - “Trespassers will be propagated, pruned & potted” says the same thing in a pleasant manner
 - b. Because you are the best!

¹ Eric Barrett, Ohio State University Extension, barrett.90@osu.edu

Action Items for the Promotion Mix For Your Business²

The weather is to blame. That is, for giving garden centers an excuse to complain! Here's a chance to move from complaining to succeeding by adopting an appropriate promotion mix for your retail operation. The promotion mix is similar for most retail operations and is easily adapted to or from any other type of retail – no matter the products. Take these ideas and build a promotions plan.

<p>Garden Center– Spring Season</p>
<p>Advertising (paid, non-personal communication)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design effective brochures & rack cards for year 2. Plan parade participation – a part of your community! 3. Direct mail postcard with awesome pictures – Distribute to CVB/Chamber for Businesses; Other target market opportunities might include: preschool type moms' clubs, preschools, PTO's, book clubs, Panera/Café bulletin board, etc. 4. Workout a strategic media-based advertising plan: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Set dollar limit on actual ads b. Develop a list of media outlets, cliental demographics and pricing structures c. Find deadlines for Radio and TV stations, local magazines, and other print media d. Seek out low-cost ads with impact: Athletic programs, school billboards, team t-shirts, etc. e. Work with local like businesses for discounts and ad sharing
<p>Personal Selling (paid, personal communication)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visit with local groups about coming to the garden center for classes 2. Create a great on-farm marketing piece for customers 3. Plan sales section of employee manual; Set orientation/training date 4. Create a great on-farm marketing piece for customers 5. Plan sales section of employee manual; Set orientation/training date 6. Complete a manual on answer garden questions – use Extension based factsheets and factsheets from your business on planting containers, selecting plants, etc. Have some of your employees write down their best ideas based on questions they receive to have a handout for customers.
<p>Public Relations (building relationships)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pre-write press releases for every week of busy season. Topics might include: Choosing plants; how to plant a tree; best mulches; do-it-yourself; bigger plants make more impact; local ownership; etc. 2. Find deadlines for CVB/Chamber publications, community calendar, local magazines and other print media. Use to send press releases about your business. 3. Create media link on website with story ideas 4. Develop topics and material for speaking engagements to civic organizations (30-60 days before busy season). Use these presentations to talk to Rotary, Lions Club, etc on ways to improve their landscape, ideas for upgrades, ways to improve the value of their home in a tough economy. 5. Deliver samples of 'first blooms' to five most popular media outlets along with a media packet
<p>Sales Promotions (incentives to buy)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discount or free coupons to local charity boards; charity auctions; volunteer groups 2. Plan samples (tasting); Demonstrations (how to cook with... use...); Contests (best photo) 3. Print and market gift certificates 4. Coupons to local charity boards; charity auctions; volunteer groups 5. Plan samples (tasting); Demonstrations (how to carve a pumpkin); Contests (best photo) 6. Print and market gift certificates

² By Eric Barrett, Extension Educator, Agriculture • Ohio State University Extension • barrett.90@osu.edu. Reviewed by Rob Leeds & Christi Leeds, OSU Extension Educators, Delaware & Union Counties.