

JULY 2017

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MASTERING MARKETING



Christmas in July—Getting Your Social Media Marketing into Holiday Mode

With July temperatures approaching triple digits, it's hard to start thinking about holiday marketing plans. For many that would be the Christmas season but, for direct farm marketers, the “holidays” encompass the Labor Day weekend, a six-week period in the Fall that crests every weekend in October, Thanksgiving meals and decorations, and of course Christmas.

Retailers seem to launch into the holiday marketing mode earlier each year, with most starting even before Halloween. We can take a page from their playbook and plan ahead too, particularly our social media marketing plan for the holiday ahead. With the successes of Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and sites like Amazon Prime Days, shoppers are relying more and more on digital marketing messages and on-line shopping platforms to make their seasonal and holiday purchases. Now is the time to develop a social media marketing plan and benchmark implementation dates to capture the largest portion of market sales possible.

1) Establish a link with possible customers now. During the holidays, consumers are inundated with promotions and sales. It will be tough to grab their attention with your message if they're not familiar with your farm or the types of products you offer. Build a trusting and mutually beneficial relationship with them now rather than waiting to reach out in November. Be a brand advocate now by reaching out through your social media tools to offer:

- ▶ Product discounts
- ▶ BOGO-buy one and get another one free or half price
- ▶ Announcing upcoming holiday discounts or special sales promotions.

- ▶ Offering an invite to an exclusive event
- ▶ Conduct a poll for consumer feedback

2) Make your social media voice stand out from the crowd. What unique messages and content can you build on through the upcoming months through all your social media channels that will help customers find relevancy in your posts, emails, or newsletters?

That voice shouldn't be about inflated self-promotion, but rather it's about problem solving for your customer. Help consumers overcome the stresses of holiday shopping and event planning by providing on-line shopping opportunities, shopping lists, integrating shopping guides or recipe suggestions, or chat lines for customers to ask questions about your products before purchasing. These types of links can be embedded in your social media posts.

3) Determine your paid social media marketing strategies now. Recent changes in many social media algorithms dictate that if you aren't using some type of paid tactics, then your social media presence is probably ineffective. To make the most of your paid social media postings:

- ▶ Make sure your paid strategies compliment your other marketing messages. Traditional marketing strategies generally work well at the top-of-the funnel when customers are making purchasing decisions. On the other hand, your social media postings might play a larger role during the evaluation and purchasing phases for the "decision-to-buy" process.
- ▶ Start with Facebook. Facebook continues to be the highest performing social media platform for most businesses. It has developed some great resources to help get an effective paid marketing strategy in place. Once you've experimented with this platform, it will be easier to see how other sites such as Instagram and Twitter might work into you program.
- ▶ Know your goals. Are you trying to increase brand awareness, drive clicks to your website, or build your customers knowledge base. Different ad and posting types are targeted for different desired objectives. Again, there are resources on most sites that will help you find the campaign objectives that will best help you reach your goals.

Incorporating social media into your holiday marketing plans is no silver marketing bullet for success. But, it can be a valuable and expanding part of your marketing strategy to reach an increasingly tech savvy customer. Having a social media marketing plan put together in the summer will help you determine your best marketing messages, the use and amounts to invest in paid marketing, and the best return on your investment of time spent getting your products in front of your customers' eyes.