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Networking

By Ginger S. Myers

Building a strong business and professional network can provide the business and support leverage needed to implement your marketing strategies and grow your business. Business networking is an effective, low-cost method for developing sales opportunities and contacts, sourcing business support

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Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program Grant Writing Workshop

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) announced a partnership through the Agricultural Marketing Service Technical Assistance (AMSTA) Project to conduct workshops that will help potential grant applicants understand, develop, and submit their Federal grant applications for the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program.

The Maryland workshop will be conducted by Ginger S. Myers on Wednesday, March 25, 2015 from 9 AM to 3 PM at the Maryland Agricultural Resource Center, 1114 Shawan Road, Cockeysville, MD 21030. The cost to attend this workshop will be \$20.00 per person to cover the continental breakfast and lunch. To register you can go online to: <http://agmktgrantwriting.eventbrite.com/>

If you have questions about the workshop you can contact Ginger S. Myers at 301-432-2767 x338 or by e-mail gsmyers@umd.edu



**TRY
THIS!**



LOVE IT

Create Easy Ways for Customer to Share Word-of-Mouth

By: Ginger S. Myers, UME

Word-of-mouth referrals and marketing is still one of the most cost effective and productive forms of marketing strategies.

Consciously develop initiatives that get happy customers talking. Make it easy for them to share their positive impressions. Also, make it easy for existing customers to refer their friends, family and colleagues. Some tactics that can help are:

- **SPECIFICALLY ASK FOR REFERRALS**

Many customers are willing to give referrals — but they are busy. You have to nudge them, without irritating them. This could be done in a phone call saying, “Glad you’re happy—feel free to refer any colleagues to us—we’ll take good care of them.” Or send a follow up letter or e-mail with a thank you and gentle nudge.

- **SUGGEST EASY WAYS TO LEAVE TESTIMONIALS**

Be prepared to suggest quick and relatively painless ways to give testimonials. If you are a Business-to-Business (B2B) service provider, then ask people to recommend you on LinkedIn. Or ask them to leave a brief star review on your Facebook Page or Google+ Page.

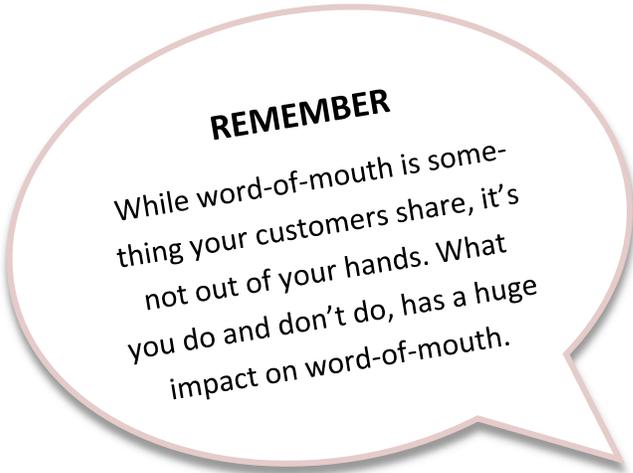
- **PROVIDE REFERRAL CARDS**

Have a preprinted card your customer can leave with a friend. It helps even to leave behind several business cards so they can hand one to a neighbor who may need your landscaping services.

- **OFFER “REFER A FRIEND” LINKS ON NEWSLETTERS**

If you deliver a beautiful e-mail newsletter, make it easy for people to share that and at the same time you may gain a new subscriber who eventually may become a customer.

These and other tactics will increase the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth being spread by your existing customers.



REMEMBER

While word-of-mouth is something your customers share, it's not out of your hands. What you do and don't do, has a huge impact on word-of-mouth.



Photo: pixabay.com

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and mentoring, and engaging potential customers through referrals and introductions. Personal networking can help you promote your skill sets and further your career as an entrepreneur.

More than ever, building and growing a business means having a presence on the web: websites, social media, e-mail, etc. While using web-based tools is important for expanding your networks, there is still good value in face-to-face meetings.

Your business marketing strategies should include intentional efforts to develop and expand both your business and professional networks. Here are several quick tips for accomplishing that task.

ON-LINE

1. Join business network sites like LinkedIn and keep your profile listed there up to date. Business networking sites are built around making business-to-business connections. When posting or responding to post on this site, be sure to request that others give you permission to add them to your online network.
2. Create a Facebook or blog page for your business. Social media tools such as Twitter and Instagram are excellent tools for rapid information exchange, but Facebook or blogging allows you to connect with a wider consumer audience than

your business-to-business networks. They provide a platform getting "Your Story" out. This can help differentiate your business from your competition.

OFF-LINE

1. Exchange business cards with both business and personal contacts. Your business card provides others with a tangible resource for gathering and distributing the vital information needed to build your contact lists. Whenever appropriate, offer them two of your cards, one for them to keep and one for them to give one of their contacts.
2. Join at least two associations, one that is directly related to your type of business and one that attracts a more general business audience such as your local Chamber of Commerce or Service organization such as a Kiwanis Club.

Networking provides a conduit with others to exchange and develop professional and social contact. Think of your network efforts as building a series of communications links for sending and receiving business support and information or sending out valuable information about your business to others. Creating and maintaining good lines of communication within your networks is as important and developing your contact lists in the first place.

Is Your Written Business Plan a Useless Document?

By: Ginger S. Myers, UME

Imagine visiting New York City for the first time and trying to find your way around without a map. You might find some of the places you want to visit, but not without a lot of detours and lost time. Time you could have spent visiting sites and enjoying the city.

This is exactly what you're doing with your business if you don't have a plan. There is a lot of controversy about the value of a business plan. Comments run from "plans are useless" to "plans are essential." The real concern should be "is your plan useful to you?"

Make no mistake, if you're applying for financing or a grant, you'll need a formal, written business plan. But, for those setting up their business or who review their business position on a regular basis, then your plan can more like a road map to implementing your business ideas and measuring your success along the way. This type of a plan, at least in the early stages of your business, should help keep you focused on your goals, serve as a reality check, and help get you back on track if you get distracted.

Everything you do in your business will be a test. When you try something that produces good results, you'll keep it. When you do something that doesn't produce, you need to stop doing it. Sounds simple, but a surprising number of businesses keep repeating a business strategy because it's easier, or they don't have another, or they've convinced themselves it's a good approach with willful disinformation.

Your "business map" can reflect the same components involved in larger more formal business plans. What are your products? You may have some product ideas or have even started producing and selling products. Sometimes while researching and develop-



Photo: pixabay.com

ing a product, the entrepreneur finds that his original product idea is weak or that it doesn't really satisfy his target customers' needs. Time to sack the whole idea, right? Wrong. This is the time to consider a variation of your product or a different target market.

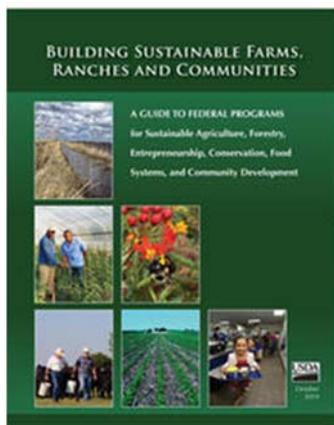
Even smart manufacturers and business professionals can overlook the most desirable attributes of their product for the buyer. For example, eighty years ago an entrepreneur/inventor tried to market an "electric flowerpot" which could be lit up at night using a battery powered lamp. Only when faced with the challenge of disposing of all his unsold flowerpots did Conrad Hubert think to remove the light tube and sell it as a "portable light". He sold so many that he founded the Eveready Flashlight Company.

What will you charge for your product? Setting your price requires knowing who your customers are and what they are willing to spend on products like yours. Pricing is part science and part art in that it has to reflect profit over production costs but, also has to consider what the market will bear." Experience running your business over time will give you a much clearer sense of what your profit margins can be and make your financial projections much more realistic.

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Updated Guide to USDA Programs Opens Door to Millions of Dollars of Available Funding

By: Abby Massey (<http://www.sare.org/Newsroom/Press-Releases/Updated-Guide-to-USDA-Programs-Opens-Door-to-Millions-of-Dollars-of-Available-Funding>)



The USDA has a wide range of financial assistance programs, but finding the right one can be difficult, complicated further by trying to stay up to date with changes in funding following each Farm Bill.

Beginning farmers faced with hefty start-up costs can use the guide to find grants and loans, in addition to technical assistance. Landowners will find opportunities to be compensated for participating in land and energy conservation programs. And experienced producers looking to conduct research to improve agricultural practices can find programs to help foster innovation on their farm.

Thanks to the newly updated guide [*Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities: A Guide to Federal Programs for Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry, Entrepreneurship, Conservation, Food Systems, and Community Development*](#), producers, researchers, nonprofits and landowners can find programs to help them achieve their goals.

The 86 page guide covers 63 government programs and has been updated to include programs included in the 2014 Farm Bill. Each listing provides a description of the program's available resources, information on how to apply, and in some cases, examples of how the funding has been used. Additionally, the guide includes basic information on how to design sound projects, find appropriate programs and write grant applications.

"*Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities* provided me with concise, comprehensive, well-organized and user-friendly information on federal grant programs," says Mary Holland, a regional food systems entrepreneur who serves the Upper Midwest.

The guide also opens doors for people who have never applied for USDA funding before. "I use this wonderful guide with start-up nonprofits all over the country. The guides are especially valuable because most groups I work with aren't familiar with federal programs. It's great having something that's so concise and also helps people understand how to go and look for additional resources," says Lorna Donaldson, a Tennessee farmer and national sustainable agriculture enterprise consultant.

Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities was developed through a partnership between the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI), the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), with support from SARE and other USDA agencies. The guide was first published in 1997 and this is the 4th update.

To download a free PDF of the guide and to learn how to order hard copies, visit www.sare.org/building-sustainable-farms.

Annual Maryland Farmers Market Conference Held on March 17

Source: <http://www.marylandfma.org/events/registration-now-open-for-2015-md-farmers-market-conference-march-17-2/>

Registration is now open for the **Annual Maryland Farmers' Market Conference** to be held on **March 17, 2015** from **8:00 am-4:00 pm** at the Maryland Department of Agriculture in Annapolis, MD.

Come and learn all about the best marketing tips for your Maryland farmers' market, the new and exciting opportunities for markets in Maryland, and current regulations in preparation for the 2015 season! There will be range of speakers, as well as training and certification for farmers for the WIC FMNP/SFMNP & FVC Programs, Scale Certification, a locally sourced lunch, and opportunities for networking.

Registration is \$30 for the day and includes coffee, fresh breakfast pastries & milk from local farms and a locally sourced catered lunch. It is St. Patrick's Day, so those who come dressed in a 'green theme' will be entered to win a door prize!

Space is limited to the first 90 guests who register and submit payment. Deadline for registration is March 10, 2015. **To register go to:** <https://mdamarketing.wufoo.com/forms/2015-md-farmers-market-conference/>

The Ag Marketing Newsletter is published periodically by the University of Maryland Extension Agricultural Marketing Program and it is written and edited by Ginger S. Myers, Marketing Specialist and Director of the Maryland Rural Enterprise Development Center.

Comments and suggestions regarding the newsletter are always welcome. References to commercial products or trade names are made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by University of Maryland Extension is implied. Articles and photographs can be reprinted with permission.

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Is Your Written Business Plan a Useless Document?

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Who will do the work? In the beginning you and any family or friends you can coerce into helping you and will probably be both your production and sales force. Labor costs can be very daunting for any small business. Only by having a good handle on your profitability, can you consider hiring additional help and as earlier stated, profitability may take some time.

The over-riding point here is that most start-up entrepreneurs just don't have enough good numbers to write a feasible, formal business plan that really can serve as their "business map."

The real value of a "business map" is to show you alternative routes to reaching your goals. You should develop your map with multiple options, products, prices, and outcomes in mind. Having such a plan will help keep your business on track when challenges arise and help prevent hasty decisions or changes in your core business. It's a way to handle business risks and offer some piece of mind. Armed with a well-used "business Map" you'll be ready to write a formal business plan that's extremely useful for your business.