



Building Relationships Through Permission Marketing

How does this sound? *Send an e-mail and watch the customers arrive.* It's not that far fetched.

A Connecticut farmer recently mentioned, "We sent an e-mail to the 300 people on our list just as our pick-your-own berry season started. Enough people came to pick that we didn't have to buy any advertising for the first weeks of the season." Brisk sales and advertising savings—not bad!

There's an affordable and easy way to bring customers to your business. And it's available to anyone who can send a simple e-mail message. It's called 'permission marketing' and it can increase your direct retail sales. Permission marketing doesn't have to be fancy or complicated. Here's why it works and how to do it.

Persuade consumers to raise their hands—to volunteer their attention.

Stop interrupting me!

Most advertising is 'interruption marketing.' You're watching TV and a commercial interrupts. You're driving down the road and you see a billboard. Interruption marketing has gotten so pervasive that we receive approximately 3,000 marketing messages a day. This massive information overload has caused

us to evolve to the point where we ignore most of the ads we encounter. Ads now need to be very creative, compelling or completely unavoidable to gain consumer attention. Most small farmers don't have the time or budget to create those kinds of ads.

Seth Godin, credited with creating and popularizing the term permission marketing, puts it this way:

Persuade consumers to raise their hands—to volunteer their attention. You tell consumers a little something about your company and its products, they tell you a little something about themselves, you tell them a little more, they tell you a little more—and over time, you create a mutually beneficial learning relationship. Permission marketing is marketing without interruptions.

Getting started

A customer will give you permission to send them e-mail messages if they know what's in it for them—and you do.

You know your customers appreciate your farm's products. Some know your harvest season as well as you do. Some are eager to learn more. Many want to feel the connection with the family that is growing their food, and all of them appreciate feeling like an 'insider'—especially when your limited supply of delicious berries is ready for picking.

Create a simple slip that customers can use at your farm to give you their names and e-mail addresses. You can even create a free raffle for a weekly, monthly, or seasonal prize. Train your family and staff to remind customers of the opportunity to sign up for your e-mail list with each sale. Reassure customers that you never sell or rent your list, and that you want to be able to let them know first when it's harvest time on the farm. Some customers may demur, but many will eagerly sign up. You now have their attention and permission to send them periodic e-mail messages. As Godin says:

But that's the beginning of the story, not the end. You have to turn attention into permission, permission into learning, and learning into trust. Then you can get consumers to change their behavior.

Permission marketing is not just about getting the customer to agree to hear from you. It's about you making sure you tell the customer what they want to hear. Create a simple e-mail message that contains useful information, such as:

- Favorite crops being harvested
- Stories and anecdotes from the farm
- Recipes and tips for using your products
- Upcoming events and activities
- Special offers for e-mail list members

Any or all of these topics should be considered for your e-mail messages. You don't need fancy graphics or a slick layout. A simple direct message informing valued customers about happenings on the farm will do the trick.



Getting beyond yes

Many customers are happy to give permission to you to send them e-mail messages. Once you master the simple e-mail message and begin seeing the rewards, you might be tempted to get more sophisticated. That's great. You can learn more about your customers' interests by asking them more questions. Create a form with check boxes to gather information about customer interests. Do they want to hear more about your PYO crops? Farm events? Recipes? Keep the list short and sweet. You can then create special e-mails for the customers that want that specific information.

Permission marketing makes frequent advertising free.

You can also add more sophisticated design elements to your e-mails, like your farm logo, pictures, and a professional layout. E-mail companies like Constant Contact allow you to improve the look of your e-mail newsletter with simple-to-use templates and to track the responses of your customers. You can learn who opens your e-mail and what they click on. Future e-mail messages can be tailored to these customers' interests.

Carefully manage your e-mail list as it grows. It's worth a lot—these are your best customers and it is far easier to get them to return to the farm than to get a new customer to stop by. Help turn your customers into ambassadors by making it easy for them to forward your messages to friends.



We grow just for you!

Be A Local Hero Buy Locally Grow Better

We're serious about growing the best local vegetables for you & your family. Everything on the farm is grown here, picked in the fields, and rushed right to the stand. We're a quick and easy stop right on Routes 5 & 10, and we have all your summer favorites right now: our own tender sweet corn, crisp cukes and carrots, juicy tomatoes, spicy radishes, melons, peppers and so much more.

Golonka Farm
6 State Road, Whately
—on the Hatfield line
open daily 9am–6pm

CISA
Community Involved In Sustaining Agriculture
www.buylocalfood.com

Should I stop my mass-market advertising?

Permission marketing makes frequent advertising free. You can keep talking with people, keep trying to turn them into customers. It's tempting to think that this will allow you to cancel your print, radio, or TV advertising contracts. But even enthusiastic Internet marketing experts see a role for continued mass-market advertising. Godin says:

Mass-market advertising helps companies talk to strangers. Companies will always need to talk to strangers—to persuade people to pay attention for one brief moment. But after you get their attention, then what? That's where permission marketing comes in. People who've agreed to pay attention... want to get

note

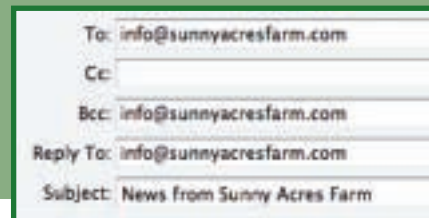
It's not spam...right?

By its definition permission marketing is not spam. But make sure the rules, regulations, and industry-guided practices are part of your e-mail program.

Protect privacy. If you are sending an e-mail from your personal account, make sure to protect the privacy of your customers by putting their addresses into the 'BCC' address field. This stands for blind carbon copy and it means that they won't see all the other e-mail addresses on your list. Simply send the message to yourself and BCC the rest of your list. Alternatively, sign up for a reputable online e-mail service like Constant Contact, which follows industry rules and regulations for bulk e-mail messages—and offers great data on customer response to your messages.

Include reminders. Some customers will not remember that they signed up for your list. In all your e-mails be sure to include a simple, friendly reminder that they signed up and that they can remove themselves from your list at any time. Again, companies like Constant Contact create permission reminders and facilitate address removals for you.

Avoid suspicious subject lines. We've all grown wary of e-mail subject lines like 'special offer' or 'important information' and so on. Avoid getting trapped in spam filters by using specific, relevant subject lines such as "News from Sunny Acres Farm" or "Sunny Acres farm berries ripe this weekend."



to know you. . . . Permission marketing turns strangers into friends and friends into loyal customers.

Bringing it all together

Taken separately, Web sites, blogs, stores and e-mail newsletters are interesting activities with some potential. When they are well-integrated they can increase your sales. There are numerous examples of online businesses that are very successful at integrated online marketing and sales—and not just Amazon.com. Your blog should drive customers to your store, not just give them free entertainment. Your e-mail newsletter can tell thousands of readers that you are having a monthly sale and give them an easy path to a purchase in your online store. Your online store can offer a simple, efficient way to get a piece of the farm delivered to a customer across town or across the country. Understanding the power of these tools collectively will help you understand how to make them work for you, so you can spend more time doing the work you love.



This material is based upon work supported by USDA/CSREES under Award Number 2004-49200-02254.



One Sugarloaf Street
2nd Floor
South Deerfield, Massachusetts 01373
phone: 413-665-7100
fax: 413-665-7101
www.buylocalfood.com

CISA is an equal opportunity service provider and employer.