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Building Relationships with the Tourism Industry

Building relationships with tourism industry organizations such as convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce or other businesses can be an effective promotional strategy. Tourism-industry organizations exist to bring tourist dollars to their communities, and tourism professionals are looking for additional attractions to entice tourists to visit and stay longer.

Tourism organizations may be able to assist you in developing promotional materials such as brochures and news releases. They may be able to include your business in regional brochures or on their Web sites. These organizations are also recognized by media outlets and may be able to obtain publicity more readily than an individual business. The more these professionals know about your operation, the better they will be able to promote it.

Methods to help build relationships with tourism-industry organizations include

- Joining these organizations and getting involved by attending meetings and events
- Making presentations at their meetings
- Inviting the organization leadership and membership to your operation and offering to host meetings
- Keeping the organizations informed about your schedule and special events
- Participating in “FAM” (familiarization) tours by offering complimentary services that tourism organizations can give to media reporters who will then visit your operation

Individual businesses may also build mutually beneficial relationships. Businesses may agree to display brochures, offer package deals to customers or combine resources to pay for advertising and promotional materials.

Tying in to tourism is challenging, especially in busy seasons. It takes a time commitment to build relationships and stay involved. These relationships, however, can be valuable and help you get the most out of your marketing efforts.

A list of regional tourism organizations is also included in the appendix of this guide.

Media Relations and Publicity¹

The media, particularly local media, can be a friend to agritourism entrepreneurs. Newspapers, television programs and radio spots can help publicize special events, new products and awards. Through coverage of special activities or exceptional employees, the media can also raise public awareness of services or products or of the enterprise's community-minded goals. For the plugged-in public, media Web sites can be vital links for news and information about an organization and its products and services.

Publicity

The trick to getting publicity or media coverage is to match your organization's needs to those of each of your chosen media outlets. Here are seven tips to help you determine how your organization can best use the media.

1. Determine your organization's needs.

For most businesses, the need for publicity will fall into one of four categories:

- a) Announcement of a special event or new product.
- b) Article about an award (for the organization or an employee).
- c) Feature article about something associated with the business and also related to the community.

Examples might include autumn events, school projects or holiday-specific products. A feature about something unique going on with the business like a new product line or a building expansion may also be of interest.

d) News.

Whether an item is news is best determined by the media outlet. Small businesses should submit a news item as an idea for a feature story. The news outlet will determine the best usage for their audience. If they really think

your item is newsworthy, they will contact you or send a reporter. Newsworthy stories have a demonstrable impact on the target audience. For example, a 50-percent-off sale is not news. Businesses have sales all the time. News would include an event where you donate your profits to disaster victims.

2. Identify which media outlets suit your needs and will value your information.

It is best to research your chosen media outlets. Does the newspaper have a special section that lists meeting announcements or specialize in community-related articles? Does the TV or radio station run business announcements on a daily or weekly basis, say between their weather and sports segments? How far in advance of the event do you need to submit information? The research method is simple: read, watch, listen and scan Web sites.

Submit routine items (announcements and information regarding awards or special events) by the methods described in the newspaper or magazine or outlined on the outlet's Web site. Often these submission procedures involve sending an e-mail or filling in a form available on the Web site. List events in the calendars featured on local radio stations (usually public stations), TV news shows that list community activities, local cable access TV and newsletters of other similar organizations in the community. Such entries are generally free of charge, except for your personnel time involved. Keep a record of calendars used for future reference.

If your organization or employee has won a significant award, consider informing the local media in advance of when the award will be conferred. They may choose to send a reporter to cover the event if it's local. Note:

¹Contributed by Patricia Clark McDaniels, The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, Marketing and Communications Services.

The author recognizes the contributions of her colleague Charles Walker, who is well known to the UT Extension community as a retired member of the Marketing and Communications Services news and information team. Charles authored the original version of the publicity portion of this manuscript. His original work has appeared in many forms in various UT Extension publications, particularly the Master Gardener Handbook. Chuck Denney, a producer with UTIA Marketing and Communications Services, also provided valuable input.

The award must be significant within your community or your trade. Employee of the month, while admirable, does not generally rate media coverage.

Submit feature articles or ideas for articles directly to the appropriate editor of a local outlet or to the appropriate editor of a specific (and pertinent) trade newspaper or magazine. If the outlet is big enough for beat reporters, approach an appropriate reporter with your idea. With agritourism topics, the most appropriate reporters may be the business or entertainment reporter. You can contact reporters by telephone or by e-mail. Both have their advantages.

If you submit an actual article, do not be surprised if the article is used, but not in its original form and without attribution to the actual writer or submitter. Remember, you are after positive recognition for the business, not personal recognition. The larger the media outlet, the less likely it will use your original copy. If an outlet chooses to have a reporter enhance or cover the story, then the topic is likely of interest to their audience.

Local-interest talk shows (morning shows, for example) might also be interested in story ideas or potential people to interview. Positioning yourself as an expert featured in local media can be valuable exposure for your business.

3. Answer the typical questions.

Successful news articles are short, factual and informative. They also answer six questions asked by journalists: Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?

As a guideline, ask yourself this question: Can your article answer the above questions in 300 words or fewer? Fewer are better. If the outlet thinks the idea merits more discussion, the editor or producer will happily allocate more space or time.

Finally, be sure your announcements and articles appeal to the target audience. A media outlet is not likely to use a submission that will not hold the interest of its audience.

4. Submit items to media in the correct format.

Each media outlet has a preferred method for receiving information. E-mail is the most accepted

format, and most outlets have contact names and forms on their Web site for submitting story ideas. If you directly e-mail a reporter, do not send any attachments to the file. Attachments are viewed with great suspicion and mail can be dumped, unopened.

Also, do not expect reporters, especially those working for larger outlets to respond to every submission. If they are interested, they will call you. For smaller outlets, such as weekly papers, you might try a personal contact first, and then follow the outlet's requested submission process.

You'll have the best success with feature articles or outside-the-box ideas if you contact the editor in advance of submission and follow his or her recommendations.

5. Submit photographs if you have them.

Every print media outlet has its own guidelines regarding the submission of photographs. Most of the larger outlets will send their own photographer for news or feature articles, but some will accept photo submissions. Weekly papers often accept photos. Just ask the editor whether a photo may accompany an article.

For the greatest success, be sure to follow the outlet's formatting guidelines. Color digital photographs are the norm. If you do not know whether a photo will be needed or used, or whether it might appear in a magazine or a newspaper or on a Web site, compose or scan the original photo as a TIF file or as a high resolution JPG. Not all outlets use TIFs, but more data is preserved in a TIF file or a high-resolution file than in a normal JPG file. Submitting a larger-format file will give the outlet some flexibility in terms of final photo quality.

6. Follow up on your submissions.

If your organization is submitting announcements and articles that never get used, give the editor or producer a call. Start with the least-senior editor and assume that you have somehow erred in the submission process. One common mistake is missing the outlet's production deadline. Media outlets have strict production schedules. In the case of magazines, schedules run weeks (sometimes months) ahead of the publication date. Newspapers and television run on much tighter

schedules, but they, too, like to plan ahead, especially for holiday or seasonal items. Since neither print nor broadcast media have unlimited space or time, submitting your announcement or story idea in a timely manner can increase its chances of being used.

A second common publicity mistake is failing to understand the outlet's editorial needs and policies. If the outlet does not regularly use announcements and articles similar to what you want to submit, chances are such items do not fit their editorial format. Observing the outlet over time will give you a sense of what ideas and announcements are appropriate to submit.

Also, remember a simple "thank you" never hurts. Reporters like to hear compliments if they have captured the essence of a situation and written or produced an informative piece. On the other hand, let relatively small errors pass unnoticed unless they can affect your business. Chances are the general public is ignorant of whether the correct term is straw or hay, so let small errors go unless the point of the story involves the sale of the particular commodity.

7. Measure your success.

While the successful placement of announcements in target media is exciting, the question remains "Has the effort contributed to the greater goals of the business?" Perhaps your goal is to increase attendance at an event or to enhance the business's standing in the community and to demonstrate that you are a good citizen. Be sure that your use of publicity is tailored to your organization's specific goals.

Measure success with a critical eye. If your announcements are being placed, but attendance is falling off, perhaps your organization needs to review its choice of media. One example of ineffective choice of media is placing announcements about literacy enhancement programs in a local newspaper. Radio or television spots are likely to be more effective if you want to generate attendance by those who are challenged as readers.

Beyond Publicity

Media relations involve more than just publicity. It includes building a level of trust between your business, the media, your customers and the entire community. The goal is for your organization to be viewed as an asset to the local area as well as to its clientele. Following several simple guidelines can help you earn that trust.

First, suggest only stories that have some value to the entire community (i.e., have value beyond publicity for your organization). Pure publicity puff pieces are easily spotted, and all media outlets have a limited amount of space or air time. They must be judicious in how they allocate it. The only exception to this rule would be announcements of employee achievements or items submitted to community calendars.

Next, always be honest and forthright. Answer all questions truthfully, and if you do not know an answer, say so. If you are unsure of an answer, tell a reporter that you want to check a fact before you give an answer that is incorrect. Do not forget to call the reporter back.

Next, do not be a bother. Constantly submitting article ideas or calling local reporters with tips that are not newsworthy will get you an unflattering nickname in the newsroom.

Finally, be prepared in the event of an emergency. How will you handle an environmental or personal injury accident on your facility? What if one of your products causes a consumer to become ill? What if a child falls off your hayride? Every organization should maintain a crisis communications plan.

Whole volumes have been written on developing crisis communications plans. Some plans are extremely detailed and include contact numbers for local emergency services, specific federal or local regulatory agencies, the business's owner/operator, and a designated spokesperson. Many businesses include contact information for their attorney in the event of an emergency. Your business and your perceived level of risk will dictate the level of detail in your plan.

With respect to crisis communications, remember the first rule in dealing with the media during a crisis is the same rule as for dealing with the

media in general: answer all questions truthfully. If you do not know an answer, say so. If you are not prepared or are uncomfortable commenting at the time say something like, "I am not prepared to comment on that topic." Never say, "No comment." It always sounds negative.

References and Additional Resources

Feeding the Media Beast: An Easy Recipe for Great Publicity. Mark E. Mathis. Purdue University Press (2002).

On Deadline: Managing Media Relations (Third Edition). Carole Howard and Wilma Mathews. Waveland Press (2000).

Soundbites: A Business Guide to Working With the Media. Kathy Kerchner. Savage Press (2001).

The Handbook of Strategic Public Relations and Integrated Communications. Clarke L. Caywood (Editor). McGraw-Hill Trade (1997).

Many public relations resources are available online. Use search terms such as "media relations tips," "crisis communications plan" and "publicity for small businesses." Keep in mind that much of the information on the Web is intended as a marketing tool for the agency that posted the information in the first place.

Coloring Your Marketing Message

Color choice is an important consideration in developing marketing materials. Colors have a psychological effect on people and can be used to your advantage (or disadvantage).

Consumer studies have found that some colors affect males and females differently. This may be related to the visibility of the color, the retention of the color, the preference for the color and the feelings associated with the color. For your marketing materials, choose colors with high visibility, retention, preference and positive associations your target audience, if possible. Reactions to basic colors by gender are described in the following table.

Reactions by Consumer Gender to Basic Colors ²					
Color	Consumer Gender	Visibility	Retention	Preference	Association
Blue	Female	Low	Low	Low	Depressing, Business-Like, Leadership
Blue	Male	Low	Low	High	Reliable, Intelligent, Secure
Pink	Female	Low	Low	High	Therapeutic, Feminine
Pink	Male	Low	Low	Low	Calm, Relaxing, Feminine
Black	Male and Female	Low	Low	High	Male = Rich Female = Sensuous
White	Male and Female	High	Low	Low	Pure, Clean
Red	Male and Female	High	High	High	Male = Danger, Bargain, Excitement Female = Warm, Intimate
Yellow	Male and Female	High	High	Low	Sun, Outdoors
Brown	Male and Female	Low	Low	High	Rich, Earthy
Green	Male and Female	Low	Low	Low	Money, Leisure
Gray	Male and Female	Low	Low	High	Security
Orange	Male and Female	High	High	Low	Healthful, Warm

²Adapted from Bill Gallagher, "Winning Colors and Shapes for Your Company," June 10, 1996. Available online at http://www.gmarketing.com/tactics/weekly_29.html.

Developing Paid Advertisements

Paid advertisements for your agritourism enterprise should be developed to reach your target audience and designed around your enterprise’s positioning statement. Advertising is effective only if the message reaches your target audience and registers with them.

Paid advertisements, like all other promotional materials, should portray a consistent image for your enterprise. The development and use of an appealing business name and an attractive logo will help to build awareness and recognition of your enterprise and to create consistency in

marketing efforts. A graphic artist could assist you in the development of your logo. You may choose to trademark the logo so that it cannot be used by other businesses.

Preparations for paid-advertising should begin at least two months prior to the time when the advertisements will be run. This includes contacting media for costs and scheduling information. If you plan to outsource the development of the advertisements, more time will be needed. If possible, advertisements should be developed by the same source to maintain consistency.

Consider this six point advertising strategy when developing paid advertisements. This strategy will assist in creating a focused and comprehensive advertisement that will effectively communicate needed information to potential customers.

Six Point Advertising Strategy³

1. Primary Purpose—*What results do you expect from the ad? or Why are you advertising?*

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2. Primary Benefit—*What unique benefit can we offer customers? What customer value or need can my enterprise meet?*

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3. Secondary Benefit—*What other key benefits will customers receive from our products or services?*

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4. Target Audience—*At whom (what target audience) are we aiming this advertisement?*

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5. Audience Reaction—*What response do we want from our audience (come to the operation, visit a Web site, call an information line)?*

--

6. Company Personality—*What image do we want to convey in our advertisements?*

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Once an advertisement has been developed, make sure to double-check it for grammar and spelling errors. You may choose to test your advertisements with a small group of customers to determine whether they have the desired effect.

³Adapted from: Marchall, Maria I. *The Marketing Mix: Putting the Pieces Together*. Purdue University. Available online at <http://www.foodsci.purdue.edu/outreach/vap/materials/marketing.pdf>. July 15, 2004.

Brochure Development

Brochures can be effective paid-advertising tools for agritourism enterprises, depending on the target audience. They can be used as rack cards in visitor centers, chambers of commerce or other businesses; distributed personally at speaking engagements; or used as direct mail pieces. Brochure design is critical to catching the attention of potential customers. Effective brochures will present pertinent information in an organized and easily understood format.

Catching Attention

The top one-third of the front cover should contain your business name and logo. For rack cards, the back cover should also include the business name and logo on the top one-third, in case the cards get turned backwards.

Photographs really are worth a thousand words. Using them on the cover and throughout a brochure helps in catching and holding attention. Photos should be of good quality, honestly depict your products and/or services, be current, and include people when possible.

Paper weight and quality are important. Brochures need to stand up in racks or withstand mailing. A brochure size of 4 inches by 9 inches fits in racks, can be mailed easily and is easy for customers to carry.

Legibility

The design should be appealing to the eye and easy to read. Color of paper, text and pictures should be attractive to your target audience. Although bright, neon colors are attention grabbers, these colors can make brochures very difficult to read.

Typeface and font size are also important. Text should be in at least 12-point type. If your target market includes senior citizens, your font size should be even larger. The type should be clear and easy to read. Serif typefaces are considered more legible in blocks of text than are sans serif typefaces.

Content

The following table lists information to include as well as the suggested placement in the brochure.

Placement	Information to Include
Top 1/3 front	Business name and logo City, state
Middle front	Days/hours of operation Picture Keywords, phrases or short text to describe activities, producers, services
Bottom front	Contact information Business name Mailing and street address Phone and fax E-mail and Web site
Top 1/3 Back	For rack cards: same as top 1/3 front
Back	Map and directions with easiest route
Bottom back	Contact information Month and year printed (To avoid confusion with reprints)
Alternative back	Mailing panel with logo and return address "To:"

The brochure may also contain other information if space is available, such as in a tri-fold brochure. This may include

- More detailed information about products and services
- Information about your family or operation history
- Price lists

- Tips related to customer visits
- Coupon

Remember that your brochure should focus on the benefits potential customers may receive from your operation. Use the Six Point Advertising Strategy discussed in the *Developing Paid Advertisements* section of the appendix to help develop the content of your brochure.

If you plan to use the brochure over a long period of time, do not include dates or information, such as prices, that would be likely to change. Brochures containing outdated information could do more harm than good.

Brochure Printing Tips

Getting a brochure printed can be a time consuming and somewhat complicated task. Here are some useful tips.

- Request bids from several printing businesses. The lowest bid is not always the best bid. Consider quality of paper and printing as well as services included.
- Begin design and consult with your printer well in advance of your deadline. It can easily take one to two months to produce a brochure. Short turn-around times can result in rush charges and less than the printer's best work.
- Verify that you have ownership of any artwork, logos, pictures and designs used in your brochure.
- Consider looking for other businesses with similar printing needs. If a printer does not have to adjust equipment and paper between jobs, he may be willing to reduce the price.
- Printers vary a great deal in the services they provide. If you want assistance with graphic design and typesetting, ask questions and shop around for a printer who can provide the level of service you need.

Planning a Successful Direct Mail Campaign⁴

Direct mail can be an effective way to target a specific group of customers with advertising flyers, brochures, postcards, specials, price lists and countless other types of promotional materials. As with all promotional strategies, careful planning and implementation are important.

Although a number of factors are critical to implementing a successful direct mail campaign, the single most critical factor is having an accurate and well-targeted mailing list. One simple and inexpensive way to generate a mailing list is to collect basic information from customers (name, address, city, state, zip code, telephone number and e-mail address). You may be able to do this by using a guest book or by assigning an employee to collect information from visitors as they enter or exit your enterprise.

Other methods to obtain mailing lists do exist but are much less effective and often more expensive than developing your own list from customers. Mailing lists can be obtained through list brokers, organization membership lists, news articles, magazines, trade lists and show exhibitor lists. You may also be able to work with your post office to deliver a mailing to each residence in a specified area. Be careful to choose a method that will allow you to reach your target audience. Response rates for residential mailings are often only one in 1,000, while responses to a target-customer list may be more than three per 100.⁵

Besides the careful compilation or selection of a mailing list, a number of other factors can significantly impact the success of your direct mail campaign. The basic elements⁶ to consider are

- The product and/or service offer
- Presentation of the offer
- Envelope considerations
- Mailing considerations

Product and/or service offer. The focus of the mailing should be a product/service offer that must somehow appeal to potential consumers and entice them to visit your operation. The offer must convince them that you can provide a benefit they want and/or need.

Presentation of the offer. The presentation of the offer is critical to a successful mailing campaign since the recipient is not able to evaluate the product in the traditional manner (i.e., taste, touch, see or smell the product). Therefore, the presentation of your company and product/service is critical to build the customer's perception of your enterprise. The material should emphasize product and/or service benefits, be presented in a professional manner and clearly written so your potential customer can easily and fully understand your offer. Pictures of people enjoying activities at your enterprise are an effective way to help in the presentation of your offer.

Envelope considerations. The envelope (or outside of the direct mail piece if no envelope is used) should look professional and avoid the appearance of junk mail to decrease the chances of having your mail tossed out unopened. Although the envelope should not look like junk mail, it should create some level of curiosity. If recipients are curious about the contents of the envelope, you increase the chances of them opening it. Hand writing the address on the envelope may arouse recipient curiosity.

Mailing considerations. First-class mail is less likely to be perceived as junk mail and is more reliable than bulk mail. The Direct Marketing Association estimates that anywhere from

⁴Adapted from Wolfe, Kent. *Planning a Successful Direct Mail Campaign*. University of Tennessee Extension Center for Profitable Agriculture publication ADC Info #44. March 2000.

⁵Attard, Janet. *Using Direct Mail to Build Business*. Available online at <http://www.businessknowhow.com/marketing/usingdm.htm>. July 19, 2004.

⁶Adapted from WGSC Publications. *Direct Mail Works Like Magic*. Phone: (909) 924-8831, FAX: (909) 924-8431 or online at www.wgsc.com.

5 percent to 15 percent of bulk mail is not successfully delivered. Check with your local branch of the United States Postal Service before designing your direct-mail piece. The post office has strict requirements for things like envelope dimensions, weight and acceptable address formats. In addition, you will want to know postage costs before you produce your direct-mail item. The benefits and costs associated with both first-class and bulk mail need to be compared when deciding on a class of mail.

Developing a Web Presence

Web sites can be an effective and important advertising tool for agritourism enterprises. A large segment of the public now relies on the Internet as a primary source of information. If you do not have a Web presence, Internet-savvy consumers may not know you exist.

According to a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project in 2002, approximately 63 percent of adult Americans used the Internet, and more than 75 percent of minors between the ages of 12 and 17 were online. The study also found that more than 80 percent of Internet users had researched a product or service using the Internet and that the number of people who bought tickets or made travel reservations online had grown by 87 percent between 2000 and 2002.⁷

The in's and out's of using a Web site as a marketing tool are very detailed and change rapidly. One marketing specialist described Web marketing this way:

Before deciding to dedicate effort and funds toward creating a Web site, it is important to be well informed and knowledgeable so that it can become a positive and important part of the business. This could take the form of reading books, talking with professionals, or attending seminars and workshops. Just as a new office building would not be built without doing extensive research, a virtual office should not be built without giving it the same relative amount of consideration.⁸

Using a Web site as a marketing tool requires four main activities:

1. Development
2. Hosting
3. Promotion
4. Maintenance

Web Site Development

The first step in using a Web site as a marketing tool is to develop the actual Web site which, will likely consist of several different pages (or screens). This can be done using either of two approaches.⁹

You may create a Web site using software available online or purchased at office supply stores. This software tends to be user-friendly and provides instruction and tutorials. This option may be inexpensive and would allow you to have complete control over the design, look and content of the site. However, learning an unfamiliar software program will take time and may cause frustration.

You may choose to hire a professional Web-site designer. This person will take information you provide and design a Web site using that information. Hiring a designer will be more expensive than creating a site by yourself using a software program. Since a professional designer may not fully understand the concepts or ideas behind the specific business or product, you will need to clearly communicate your needs and ideas. If this approach is chosen, it is important that you establish a good relationship with the designer and play an active role in the creation and maintenance of the site.

Here are several points to remember when developing a Web site:

- Use attractive colors but remember that colored type can be harder to read than black type.
- Your Web site should contain at least a description of your attractions and services, days and hours of operation, prices, clear directions/map to your operation, and contact information.

⁷Madden, Mary and Lee Rainie. *America's Online Pursuits*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, December 28, 2003. Available online at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Online_Pursuits_Final.PDF. Accessed April 11, 2005.

⁸Hubbs, Shasta. *Creation of an Internet Presence*. University of Tennessee Extension Center for Profitable Agriculture publication ADC Info #67. Available online at <http://cpa.utk.edu/pdffiles/ad67.pdf>. Accessed April 11, 2005.

⁹Adapted from Hubbs, Shasta. *Creation of an Internet Presence*. University of Tennessee Extension Center for Profitable Agriculture publication ADC Info #67.

- Use pictures to give potential customers a visual description of your enterprise.
- Make sure that customers can easily maneuver through the site.
- Your Web site should portray a positive image of your enterprise consistent with your other marketing materials.

Web Site Hosting

Once you have your Web site designed, you must find a host to place the site on the Internet. Since it is unlikely that you own or would care to own a Web server, you will need to use space on someone else's Web server. Hosting services are available for a fee, and some are even free. Choosing a hosting service should be done carefully, however. Cost should be only one of the factors influencing your decision. You should also consider reliability, speed of the connection to the Internet and ease of updating and maintaining your site.

You will also need to register for a domain name (Internet address) for your Web site, most likely through your hosting service. Your complete Web address is also referred to as a URL (Uniform Resource Locator). Choose a short, easy to remember domain name to identify your enterprise, such as www.smithsorchar.com or www.tnstrawberries.com. Avoid a domain name that includes the name of the hosting company such as www.hostingcompany.com/~smithsorchar, which is more cumbersome. You can determine whether your chosen domain name is available as well as register your domain name online through several companies. They charge a nominal fee for the service. Your registration will need to be renewed periodically.

Web Site Promotion

You will need to invest some time in promoting your Web site to ensure that it gets used by your target audience. There are several things you can do to increase usage:

- Place your Web site address (URL) on all possible promotional materials including brochures, advertisements, publicity materials, signage, business cards and product labels.
- Submit your Web site address to search engines by following the instructions on each search engine's Web site.
- Make sure your Web site design incorporates an appropriate title and descriptive keywords as Meta tags that can be picked up by search engines.
- Request that other businesses or appropriate groups such as your tourism organizations add links from their Web site to yours.

Web Site Maintenance

To be effective, a Web site must be maintained. Maintenance includes keeping content up-to-date, accessible and functioning properly. Web sites containing incorrect or out-of-date information will give potential customers a bad impression of the enterprise. Regularly testing the functionality of your Web site will alert you to any problems that may arise.

Creating an Effective Roadside Sign¹⁰

Roadside signage can be an effective promotional strategy for agritourism operations and can assist customers in finding your business. In a 2003 survey of 210 agritourism operations, 75 percent of respondents had an average of 4.5 signs.¹¹

There are several ways to maximize the effectiveness of signs. Remember, motorists will typically be passing the sign at 30 mph or more and may be unable to read or react to your sign if it is not designed correctly; therefore, content, design and placement are especially important. Always consult local and state regulations concerning signage before you produce and display signs. Some information on state signage programs is included in Chapter 9.

- Your sign should contain at least your business name and some indication of location, such as a directional arrow with an estimate of mileage or some instruction such as "Next Right."
- Your signs should attract the attention of potential customers and send a message consistent with your other marketing strategies. You may consider including your enterprise logo on the sign.
- Signs should be easy to read. Choose colors that will appeal to your target audience. Contrasting colors for the background and

lettering will help to make the sign more visible.

- Choose letter heights and widths to allow for legibility at the typical speeds for traffic at that location. The following table contains some recommendations.

Example Distances and Words Read at Various Speeds with Recommended Letter Heights and Widths						
Distance (feet)	Letter Width (inches)	Letter Height (inches)	Number of Words at Speed			
			30 (mph)	40 (mph)	50 (mph)	60 (mph)
50	3/8	1 3/4	4	2	1	0
100	3/4	3 1/2	8	5	4	3
200	1 3/8	7	15	11	8	6
300	2 3/16	11	22	16	13	10
400	2 7/8	14	30	22	17	14
500	3 1/2	17 1/2	38	28	22	18

- Signs need to be placed so customers can read and react to them safely. Use the following information to calculate the distance a driver needs to slow down safely in order to make a turn or pull off the road at your location.

Examples of Distances Drivers Need to Slow Down and Make Safe Turns or Pull-offs	
Speed	Distance Needed
at 30 mph	2/10 of a mile
at 40 mph	1/4 of a mile
at 50 mph	3/10 of a mile

For example, if traffic goes 30 mph on the road where your sign will be placed, your sign needs to be at least 2/10 of a mile before your driveway or the turn.

- A number of signs should be placed on busy roadways to ensure customer exposure from all directions and from all major roads. Consider the different directions and roads customers might travel to reach your enterprise. You may need to erect several signs to cover all the major routes.

¹⁰ Adapted from Holland, Rob and Kent Wolfe. *Considering an Agritainment Enterprise in Tennessee?* University of Tennessee Extension publication PB1648. Available online at <http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/pb1648.pdf>. Accessed April 11, 2005.

¹¹ Bruch, Megan and Rob Holland. *A Snapshot of Tennessee Agritourism: Results from the 2003 Enterprise Inventory*. University of Tennessee Extension publication PB1747. October 2004. Available online at <http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/PB1747.pdf>. Accessed April 1, 2005.

60-Second Guide to Building Word-of-Mouth Referrals¹²

Even in today's media-driven world, there is no better form of advertising than word-of-mouth – a personal referral from someone whose opinions others trust and respect. Small business owners are among the biggest beneficiaries of word-of-mouth referrals, as they require no advertising and marketing budget.

While you cannot always control how and when referrals come about, there are many ways to start and sustain a positive buzz about your business. In just 60 seconds, we will show you how to attract those high-value but low-cost word-of-mouth referrals.

0:55 Recruit Cheerleaders

Build a team of supporters for your business — friends, family members and colleagues who routinely talk up your business to their friends and acquaintances. Make sure that they know enough about your qualifications and capabilities to make an accurate and convincing case to others.

0:49 Network, Network, Network

Get involved with professional associations related to your industry or field. You will get to know experts and colleagues in your specific market. And, they may know of immediate or potential opportunities for your business. Other good networking opportunities include local or regional business associations, Chambers of Commerce and non-profits aligned with your field.

0:34 Capitalize on Your Current Customers

At the conclusion of all successful projects, thank your customers for their support and express your interest in working with them again. Also encourage them to pass along your name to others. If your operating budget can handle it, consider offering discounts for customer referrals.

0:27 Become a Knowledge Source

Take advantage of opportunities to show what you know by offering free presentations or articles on timely issues for business, professional and community organizations and publications. Make sure that your presentation/article is relevant to listeners' interests, not a thinly veiled commercial for your business.

0:20 Keep in Touch

Do not wait for customers to call you. Contact them from time to time to see how things are going, personally and professionally; what issues or trends they're dealing with; or perhaps to alert them to an event, article or Web site that may be of interest. Also consider issuing a newsletter to current and prospective clients with relevant news, tips and other information that can help their business or simply brighten their day.

0:13 Give as Well as Receive

Every small business should have a referral network of colleagues and associates to call on to handle excess workload or to provide service or experience you may not have. These relationships almost always result in reciprocal referrals to you.

0:01 Do a Good Job

There is no better source for a positive referral than a happy customer. Remember, the quality of your service says as much about you as the quality of your work or product. Responsiveness, the ability to help out with tight deadlines, and a willingness to do those all-important "little things" (e.g., working in small jobs for no charge) build goodwill and a good reputation for your business.

¹²Printed with permission from Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). Available online at http://www.score.org/60_building_referrals.html. July 14, 2004.

Handling Customer Complaints

Inevitably, you will have complaints from some customers no matter what quality of service you provide. Here are some tips to help you deal with the situation:¹³

- Show respect. Never argue with the customer.
- Do not take the complaint personally.
- Listen closely. Do not interrupt.
- Be patient.
- Do not make excuses.
- Do not quote policies and rules.
- Remain calm.
- Be understanding. Use phrases such as “I understand,” “I will address that right away,” “You have a right to feel that way,” and “I am sorry that happened.”
- Thank customers for bringing the problem to your attention.
- Indicate that you want to help.
- Be creative in finding a mutually beneficial solution if at all possible. Ask for the customer’s assistance in reaching a satisfactory solution.
- Write down the solution you and the customer agree on then take action immediately. Follow-up with the customer to confirm the solution was satisfactory.
- Instruct employees to call a supervisor when appropriate.

¹³Adapted from Ramay Winchester and Lee Curtis, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, *One Visitor/Customer at a Time Hospitality Training Program*, April 2002.

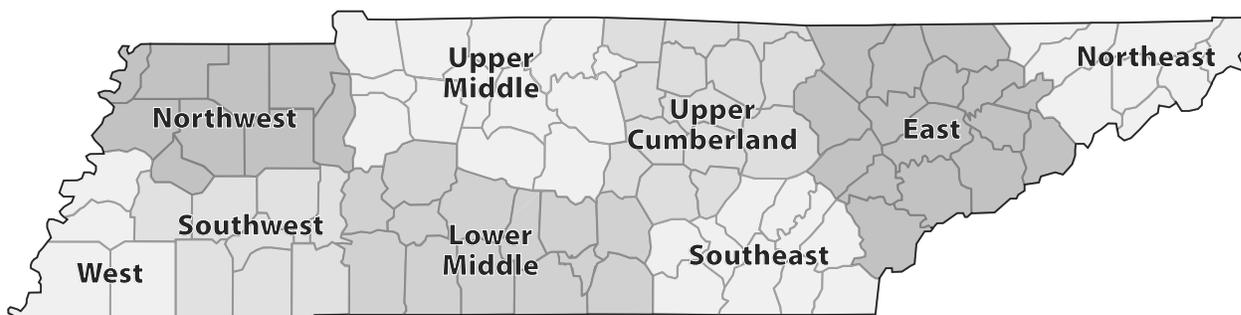
Sample Safety Inspection Checklist

Area/Location _____	Date _____	Date last inspected _____
<p>I. Customer environment ___ satisfactory ___ unsatisfactory (housekeeping, first aid/emergency station identified, first aid kits available, telephones or radios available and in working order, restrooms and hand-washing facilities availability, food or smoking in designated areas only, aisles and exits clear, parking lot and walkways smooth)</p>		Abatement period _____ Date corrected _____
Notes:		
<p>II. Fire/electrical safety ___ satisfactory ___ unsatisfactory (storage and use of flammable/combustible materials, condition of electrical system, all fuses/circuit breakers labeled, GFCI where required, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, alarms, proper clearances)</p>		Abatement period _____ Date corrected _____
Notes:		
<p>III. Hazardous materials ___ satisfactory ___ unsatisfactory (access denied to customers, MSDS availability, warning signs in place, containers labeled, proper storage, proper use, proper disposal, high pressure gas cylinders supported, proper ventilation)</p>		Abatement period _____ Date corrected _____
Notes:		
<p>IV. Hazardous equipment ___ satisfactory ___ unsatisfactory (access denied to customers, properly guarded/shielded, warning signs / decals in place, proper maintenance and use, manuals available)</p>		Abatement period _____ Date corrected _____
Notes:		
<p>V. Training ___ satisfactory ___ unsatisfactory (records of training available, knowledge of safe work practices, selection and use of protective equipment, emergency procedures, First Aid, CPR, etc.)</p>		Abatement period _____ Date corrected _____
Notes:		
<p>VI. Other comments (anything not covered above or additional safety suggestions)</p>		Abatement period _____ Date corrected _____
Inspected by _____ Department head/supervisor _____ Report corrective actions to Safety Officer		Copies to 1. Departmental File 2. Supervisor 3. Safety officer

Guidelines for using this checklist:

1. The checklist is divided into general categories of hazards that might be found at a variety of enterprises. The lists of items under each category are not intended to be all-inclusive. Your facilities may have hazards that are not listed but that should be included in your inspections. You may consider developing checklists specific to your operation or portions of your operation.
2. When conducting an inspection, consider the circumstances in each area. What is the nature of the work or activities that are conducted in that area? Imagine interacting in that area from several different perspectives: as a customer visiting the enterprise, as an employee assigned to work there, as a supervisor, as the business owner and as an investigator attempting to determine the cause of an injury that might occur there.
3. Record the findings, both good and bad, as appropriate under each category.
4. Set an abatement period, or deadline for correcting each deficiency recorded. Situations that can easily be corrected should have very short deadlines. Likewise, situations posing serious risks of injury or property damage should have short deadlines. Conditions that will require significant investment of time or funding may deserve longer deadlines, but be reasonable.
5. Record when each correction was accomplished, along with any additional information that might be useful in the future.
6. Keep records of inspections and corrections on file.

List of Regional Tourism Organizations



Map shows the counties included in each of the regional tourism districts. Contact information for each region is listed below.

Northwest

Northwest Tennessee Tourism
 130 Valley Oak Dr.
 Buchanan, TN 38222
 Phone: (731) 642-9955
 Fax: (731) 644-3051
<http://www.kentuckylaketourism.com>
<http://reelfootlakeoutdoors.com>

Upper Middle

Middle Tennessee Tourism Council
 501 Union Street, 6th Floor
 Nashville, TN 37219-1705
 Phone: (615) 862-8848
 Fax: (615) 862-8840
<http://www.middletennesseetourism.com>

Upper Cumberland

Upper Cumberland Tourism Association
 34 North Jefferson Avenue
 Cookeville, TN 38501
 Phone: (931) 520-1088
 Fax: (931) 520-8996
<http://www.uppercumberland.org>

East

Middle East Tennessee Tourism Council
 10205 South River Trail
 Knoxville, TN 37922
 Phone: (865) 777-2606
 Fax: (865) 675-5026
<http://www.vacationeasttennessee.org>

Northeast

Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association
 109 Fox Avenue
 Jonesborough, TN 37659
 Phone: (423) 913-5550
 Fax: (423) 913-5555
<http://www.netta.com>

West

Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau
 47 Union Avenue
 Memphis, TN 38103
 Phone: (901) 543-5300
 Fax: (901) 543-5350
<http://www.memphistravel.com/>

Southwest

Tourism Association of Southwest Tennessee
 250 Chapel Creek
 Jackson, TN 38305
 Phone: (731) 616-7474
 Fax: (731) 668-6914
<http://www.tast.tn.org>

Lower Middle

South Central Tennessee Tourism Association
 2018 Joann Road
 Pulaski, TN 38478
 Phone: (931) 616-363-3606
 Fax: (931) 363-5355

Southeast

Southeast Tennessee Tourism Association
 535 Chestnut Street, Suite. 300
 Chattanooga, TN 37402
 Phone: (423) 424-4263
 Fax: (423) 267-7705
<http://www.southeasttennessee.com>



About the Center for Profitable Agriculture

Adding value to food and fiber products through processing, packaging and marketing offers many opportunities to improve farm income. The mission of the *Center for Profitable Agriculture*, put simply, is to assist farm families in the successful and profitable pursuit of these opportunities.

The Center's efforts are focused in three general areas:

- Work with farm families and entrepreneurs to analyze value-added agriculture enterprises
- Conduct educational programs for Tennessee farmers and agricultural leaders
- Conduct market development studies and analyses to guide the development of value-added agricultural enterprises



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