

Social Media for Your Farmers Market

Social media is among the fastest growing marketing tools used by businesses and causes of every stripe, including farmers markets. It is also one of the fastest changing. Simply keeping up with the new “platforms” and “apps” can be a full time job. In addition to giants like Facebook and Twitter, Wikipedia lists over 200 types of social media sites -- and the list is not exhaustive (2/2016). Regardless of whether or not you use social media personally, it is an important tool to know about for your farmers market. Research shows that “word of mouth” is one of the most effective marketing channels for farmers markets and this now includes online communication with friends, peers, and strangers. With all the seasonal beauty farmers markets offer, the visuals alone can speak volumes.





Choosing a Social Media Platform

Given the seemingly infinite social media options, where does a farmers market with an already extremely busy market manager start? There may be a simple social media tool that will fit with the time and technical skills you have on hand. Whatever anyone says, social media is **not** free. Access to the apps may not have a cost, but the time to learn and maintain your social media strategy is extremely valuable.

In a presentation at the 2015 WSFMA conference, Emily Crawford of Pike Place Market recommended starting by reflecting on four questions:

- ① What audience do you want to reach?
- ② Which social media platforms best meet your goals?
- ③ Which tool would you be most likely to use?
- ④ What tools do you already have?
 - Farmers market website
 - Personal or Market Facebook page
 - Smartphone



| Social media | | What it does | Primary users |
|--------------|---|---|---|
| Facebook |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This is the most robust site, featuring text, photos, video, links. ▪ Doubles as a free and easy to update webpage. ▪ Drives 20x more traffic to websites than Twitter. | Well over a billion users. Nearly 30% are between 25-34 years old. |
| Twitter |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Micro Blogging / Personal News Channel ▪ “Tweets” must be 140 characters or less ▪ Posts reflect daily activities ▪ Users can “re-tweet” your messages | Over 300 million users |
| Pinterest |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Photo-based virtual pin board or scrap book ▪ 47% of online shoppers have made a purchase based on recommendations from Pinterest ▪ Ability to cultivate different boards to tell different stories | Gen X and Boomers Women-dominated platform at 70% , core users are 18-34 |
| Instagram |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Photo- and video-sharing ▪ Easy to share photos and video from Instagram to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites | Millennials |

Source: Adapted from Emily Crawford, “Social Media Strategies: Find the right social media platform to tell your story” (2015 WSFMA Conference, Olympia, WA).

Rules of Thumb

Whichever social media platform you decide to do, it must be maintained. Social media, after all, is designed to be interactive and alive. Facebook posts that are over a month old feel like ancient history online. Designate someone to be the point person for actively managing your market’s social media presence. However, it is also important to share this responsibility and recruit others to post, gather content, and share photos. Emily Crawford of the Pike Place Market recommends the following “rules of thumb” for keeping your social media fresh and effective.

Post content regularly

It doesn’t all have to be original. You can repurpose content from other areas, but be sure to tailor and connect the content of anything you post to what’s happening at your market.

Sometimes asking a question can engage people. The trick is to pose engaging questions that challenge their thinking – but not too much. “Who is your favorite farm vendor at the market?” is too general and flat (plus politically problematic). Try

asking: “If you could invite a farmer for lunch and use their products for the meal, who would it be?”

Create valuable content – be helpful

Give advance notice of activities at your market. Be sure to include dates and times. Is it enticing? If not, think of a way to make it appeal to your audience. Use compelling images and always link to more detailed information.

Use the best quality photos that you have available. If needed, recruit a great photographer to help stage shots that reinforce the “brand” messaging your market wants to project.

Respond to posts by others

Conversation is key to building strong relationships via social media. While you don’t necessarily need to respond every time someone posts or comments on your site, acknowledging when someone makes a thoughtful post, or shares something unique is a nice way to show your followers that you are paying attention.

The one time you must always respond is if negative or offensive comments are made. There are many great articles online on how best to approach this type of feedback, and how to tell the difference between a genuine complaint and a “troll.” Think about what standards you want for your site and how, in general you will handle negative comments before the situation occurs and you will be better able to deal with the situation objectively and consistently.

Connect with others in your field

This means “liking” your vendors’ sites, your market sponsors, other farmers markets, the WSFMA and Farmers Market Coalition, any restaurants or chefs that shop at your market, food writers, partners like Master Gardeners or the WIC clinic, and especially any organization that promotes your local businesses and tourism.

It’s okay to be light-hearted.

People tend to check social media as a break between projects or to have a little fun, not necessarily to digest the intricacies of your market policies and health department regulations. Think cocktail party banter, not board meeting presentation.

Create a schedule to keep the site fresh.

You do not necessarily need to post on every site every day, but find a frequency that works for you and stick to it. Not only will having a regular schedule for developing content help you prioritize your updates, your audience can look forward to hearing from you consistently.

Social Media Support

Each social media tool has loads of features to improve your online presence and to “boost” viewings, likes, and sharing. If this feels like foreign territory, ask for help from someone in your market circle who knows the ins and outs. Typically, “millennials” (born in the 1980s to 2000s) who have grown up with the Internet are good interpreters and tour guides to social media’s possibilities.

Other recommended resources include:

10 Tips For Marketing With Social Media (recommended by the Farmers Market Coalition)
<http://www.bizsugar.com/blog/2010/06/08/10-tips-for-marketing-with-social-media/>

“Farmers Market Social Media Cheat Sheet”
<https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/farmers-market-social-media-cheat-sheet/>

“Handling Negative Comments or Complaints in Social Media”
<http://agsci.psu.edu/communications/web/social-media/handling-negative-comments-or-complaints-in-social-media>

“Social Media & Your Business: How to Guide for Vendors” from the Seattle Farmers Market Association
<http://www.sfmamarkets.com/socialmedia>

“The Social Media Glossary: 207 Essential Definitions”
<http://blog.hootsuite.com/the-2015-social-media-glossary-207-essential-definitions/>

“Social Media Tools for Farm Product Marketing”
<https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=412>

“Weeding the Social Media Garden” from FMC
<https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/resource/weeding-the-social-media-garden/>