

How Can Farm Markets Compete with Online Delivery?

The simple answer is, you can't. So, the question really is, what can you offer that the online companies can't? The main attraction of ordering products online is convenience. Are there things we can do in our markets that adds some convenience to the buyers shopping experience without taking away from the main reason they might be at your market to begin with? Things that make your business stand out such as the experience, authenticity, and relationships that you have hopefully created for your customers.

As grocery stores see their online ordering slowly increasing which leaves the industry trying to figure out how to handle it. At my grocery store you can order online. They give you a time to come pick up your order, you then pull up to the front of the store and they bring it out to you and put it in your car. All this sounds very nice except if you are one of 90% of the customers who still shop AT the store. The experience for that customer is, struggling to find a parking space, bumping into store employees clogging the aisles filling online orders and long checkouts. Basically, the store shopping experience is that I'm not as valued as the online customer. They're making it as convenient as possible for the online customer while not addressing the shopping experience for the in-store customer.

I think we can create an experience that values ALL our customers. We as small business owners have the flexibility to address our customers' needs more easily than some larger businesses can. As part of a community, we understand the people of that community and can cater to their needs.

Maybe your market has an online ordering option, or you are thinking about having one. That's great and that is an important convenience option for your customers and there are many companies offering software for your business that will do just that but what are we going to offer online? Prepared foods that are ready to heat are very popular particularly with Millennials and I see a good number of markets adding this to their offerings. Chances are you know what your kitchen will be offering for the week ahead. How about promoting that week's offering on social media and maybe have a menu page on your website so your customer can plan their meals for the week. Maybe we can offer preorders where the customer prepays and picks up without waiting in line if they are in a hurry.

For the moment, online grocery shopping is primarily for what's known as "center of the store" items. That is, household products. People still want to be able to see, touch, and smell their food so let's enhance that experience for the customer. If you don't have a bakery or a kitchen, how about bundling products together? Something not only visually appealing but gives them great ideas for creating a dish or a meal. Do you offer a gift card or have a rewards program? Are there other farm markets or small businesses in the area that you can partner with to create a "passport" program that encourages them to visit more of the local businesses? These are things that not only can get them to your market but keeps them coming back.

