

Creating a Virtual Community

Overview

With ever-growing awareness about the impact of our dietary choices on health, animal welfare, and the environment, public interest in how food is produced is on the rise.

But attracting—and retaining—customers can present real challenges, particularly for smaller, independent producers who sell directly to the public. While traditional marketing still has its place, social media can no longer be ignored.

Small is beautiful

One of the most exciting aspects of social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, is the potential to help smaller producers who sell through box schemes, farm shops, and farmers' markets to help level the playing field.

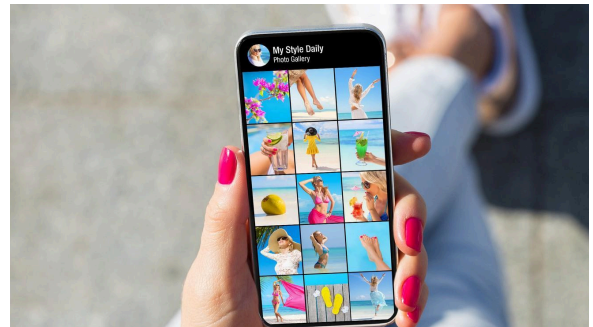
Many shoppers are no longer satisfied with just picking up a bag of carrots at the supermarket. They want to know how their food was produced and the story behind it. And they want to feel part of that story; to feel they are making a positive difference. That's where social media surpasses all forms of traditional marketing.

Using social media

Social media is a cost-effective way to communicate intimately with existing (and potential) customers and create a 'virtual community' around your

the larger national food distributors would die for.

You can not only promote the products and services you offer, but educate and inform your customers about what



you do - and why it really matters.

What to post

While social media marketing is about promoting your business and selling more products, don't overdo it. Yes, your followers need to know what you offer and where they can buy it, but don't bombard them with heavy sales. Focus on posting interesting 'content' and sales will follow naturally.

Almost **everything** you do on a day-to-day basis is 'gold dust' and will interest your customers. Photos of management tasks, such as weeding, sowing, picking, feeding livestock, fieldwork, or fixing machinery will fascinate and entertain, as will seasonal events such as lambing or harvest.

Start with simple, high-quality photos and then perhaps move on to short

successful and do more of them, learning from what other successful businesses are doing. Remember to include a laypersons' explanation about the photo and be ready to answer questions.

Commitment

Unless you commit to maintaining your social media platform(s), you won't see results. It will take time. Success means planning content, setting a schedule and then sticking to it. Post at least 3-4 times a week, ideally in the early evening.

You should also set aside time to check in and respond to any comments and questions. Just like any human relationship, if you fail to nurture your social media followers they will soon lose interest or feel neglected.

Makes sure to include your social media links in email footers, on your website, and on invoices. This is

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essential and will help your customers find you and engage in what you are doing.