

Summary of Webinar #2: The Invitation: Social Media, Online Booking & Websites

Speakers:

- Kristin York, Sierra Business Council
<http://sierrabusiness.org>
- Lauren Gagliano Saline, Suzie's Farm
<http://suziesfarm.com>

Archived webinar: https://uc-d.adobeconnect.com/_a841422360/p2sd0werb3c/

Social Media

Speaker: Kristin York, Sierra Business Council

Powerpoint presentation: <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/files/241743.pdf>

Social Media Landscape

- With dozens of tools and websites, creating a strategy can seem overwhelming, but really you can focus on just the most widely used sites.
- Pew Center research showed that most people only focus on one to two social media sites, so you should understand where your customers hang out online.
- Primary areas to start:
 - Your website
 - Yelp & TripAdvisor
 - Facebook
 - Google & YouTube
- Secondary areas to focus on:
 - Blog
 - Twitter
 - Pinterest
 - Instagram

Strategy Overview

- Understand who your customer is, and make sure you have a Customer-Centric Strategy.
- Know your goals (e.g., increase visitors and purchases) and know where your existing and new customers are coming from online.
- Leverage other people's content.
- Think about expanding your network exponentially: share posts, retweet, comment on others' posts so they're compelled to reciprocate, "create 100 fans from a single fan."

- Use planning tools:
 - Social Media Assessment – Understand where you are now and how it’s working now: Goals/objectives, customer demographics, current social media status, social media profiles, content strategy, analytics.
 - Defining Your Target Market – Local existing customers, visitors, new customers; prioritize what they’re looking for, how to reach them and an action plan.
 - Social Media Strategy Calendar – Create a consistent schedule to post.
- Ultimately, evaluate the best use of your time and the best return on your money. If you don’t have the time/money, hire an outside person to help.

Compelling Websites

- Make sure your website is optimized for mobile. More and more people are browsing on their phones instead of computers, so make sure your site is “responsive,” meaning it displays properly on both laptops and phones.
- If you don’t have a website or you don’t like your current site, there are several free/inexpensive website building tools:
 - Wix
 - Wordpress
 - Squarespace
 - Weebly
 - GoDaddy
- For simple sites that simply help people find you, learn a bit about your business, contact you and maybe make a purchase, you can probably build it yourself. But, if you want more interactive or complex features, you can hire an outside programmer to help.

Google and YouTube

- Make sure you’re easy to find on Google, since it’s the most prolific search engine.
- Google your business. If you don’t show up on the first two results pages, focus on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategies to ensure people see your listing when they search for you!
- Register your business in Google, so that whenever people search for you, a side panel with all your business details and map will display:
 - Go to <https://support.google.com/business/answer/2911778?hl=en> to add or claim your business.
 - Verify your business details.
 - Get found by potential customers!
- “Google loves Google,” and since Google owns YouTube, make sure to also register your business on YouTube.
- “Get busy on YouTube” – Create some videos and share everywhere! Get your friends and family to watch them to increase the number of views.
- Videos can be very simple and brief (60-120 seconds). They can even be shot on your SmartPhone. Be creative and entertaining and offer relatable content so that they go viral!

Facebook

- Facebook is the most ubiquitous social site, so it's a great way to get referrals and connect with customers. You may have a personal profile/page already, but you need to set up a dedicated business page. There are almost 3 billion businesses on Facebook.
- Setting up your business page is quick and easy:
 - Go to <https://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php>.
 - Choose your business classification.
 - Fill out your basic business info.
 - Upload a profile photo and banner photo.
 - Invite all your contacts to like your page!
- Posts with photos and videos get the most Likes and double the comments.
- Best times to post:
 - Weekdays after lunch, around 3pm.
 - After dinner.
 - NOT: late nights or weekend mornings.
- Familiarize yourself with all the management features for your business page, especially the Scheduling feature and Analytics so you can see how effective you're reaching people, and how engaged they are in what you're posting.
- You can Boost posts for as little as \$5, where you basically specify very specific target readers and Facebook guarantees that your post will reach a specific number of people who fit that demographic.
- We recommend taking baby steps when paying to boost posts, starting with just \$10-20. Select very specific target readers and test how well your boosts resulted in more page likes or comments. If you're not seeing an impact from boosting, switch up your target readership and/or what you are posting.

Yelp

- Yelp is the default travel planner, especially for local trips "real time," meaning that most people are searching for something they want "right now."
- Most people search for shopping, eating and things to do.
- Set up a business page, if one doesn't already exist. Get your friends, family and customers to write positive reviews. Make sure they're sincere and organic.
- Even if you only have 8 reviews, if they are 4-5 stars, that can be really effective.
- We don't recommend paying to advertise or pushing your listing to the top of results pages. Research shows that sponsored listings that appear at the top are trusted less than organic search results.

TripAdvisor

- This is our new favorite site to promote agritourism businesses; our clients have had great results on this trusted site among travelers from afar.

- Like on Yelp, it's not so much about number of reviews as it is about quality scores. For example, Willow-Witt Ranch only has 8 reviews, but because of the limited number of competing businesses in the area, they are ranked #3 of 11 for Specialty Lodging.
- You can improve/expand your ratings by using a TripAdvisor feature called Review Express. It's a tool to generate emails for your past customers to encourage them write a review and rate their experience.

The following are secondary social media sites, but they can be effective as well...

Twitter

- Twitter has a very broad base (over 500 million users), but they tend to skew very young and urban. Topics are predominantly about politics and entertainment.
- If you like it and it's easy for you, go for it. It can be helpful to build your brand.
- Use visuals and make sure to measure how successful it is at engaging users (followers, retweets, mentions, etc.)

Instagram

- This is the fastest growing social media platform; it's visual, fun and quick! It also skews young but not always urban, and the topics are more diverse.
- You can link it to your Facebook account so that you can post in one place and it will show up in both places.
- Our client Willow-Witt has had a lot of success with Instagram, where they are surprised at how engaged readers are, posting about them and commenting on their own!
- Setting up your account is easy:
 - Download the Instagram app to your phone.
 - Enter your profile details and profile photos.
 - Start following people!

Pinterest

- Pinterest has 2 million daily visitors (third most trafficked social media site), and skews to mostly women.
- People are looking for something different, something indulgent: food, design, shopping and travel. Agritourism fits perfectly into this niche.
- After creating an account:
 - Create a visually appealing board.
 - Organize pins by interest.
 - Use quality images.
 - Follow others and comment on their posts so that they will do the same for you.
- Check out other profiles that are similar to yours to get ideas and learn best practices.
- Best times to post = when people are looking for an escape:
 - Saturday mornings.
 - Fridays after 3pm.

Making the Connection: Cultivating Relationships through Internet Presence

Speaker: Lauren Gagliano Saline, Suzie's Farm

Powerpoint presentation: <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/files/241744.pdf>

Background

- I chose to work at Suzie's Farm based on their website, so that shows how effective a great website can be!
- About the farm:
 - 100% certified organic urban farm but also has 70 acres on an estuary, 15 minutes north of San Diego.
 - Sell to grocery stores and restaurants, and via farmers markets, CSA and farm stand.
 - Have all types of visitors – about 3000/year: farm tours, farm stand 7 days/week, field trips, baby showers, marketing events, adult and kids events with their pizza oven, corporate events. Have always been willing to try anything to get people to connect with the farm.
 - Have hosted events with Toyota, Google, Food Network, CA Bountiful, California Pizza Kitchen, even a reality show.

Our Internet Presence Overall

- It's actually simple to do, but does take time and thought to get to where your customers are hanging out online.
- Primary modes: Google search, our website, social media and web listings. All of these pave a road for customers to learn and share with us.
- When our founders first started in 2009, they would farm all day and then spend four hours each night cultivating their internet presence: creating original content, liking and commenting on others' posts in Facebook, Twitter, etc. It has really paid off.
- We now have about 20,000 followers across various social media and our newsletter.

Our Website

- Our site is our landing pad where people come and learn about what we offer. We love to engage with clients in all kinds of ways:
 - Recipes & cooking tips
 - Farming info
 - Restaurants
 - Farmers Markets (plus, our staff at farmers markets can also quickly pull up recipes and blog posts for customers on the fly)
 - Grocery Stores
 - What's in Season
 - Partners

- Earlier this year, we completely revamped our site, which has led to an exponential increase in number of visitors and visibility.
- It's critical that your site is mobile-friendly. It's the new standard for where people get most of their information now. If you have an existing site, it's possible it can be easily modified to be mobile-friendly. But, in our case, we needed a complete overhaul.
- Make sure to have a good map! Make it easy for people to find you.
- Using a booking tool has many benefits:
 - "Action buttons" that stand out and enable your website readers to commit, book and pay!
 - Without a booking program, you can lose clients if you don't respond right away. People will often contact us on the day of an event over the weekend when no one is in the office. Our booking program gets their registration and collects their money even when the office is closed.
 - Remember: "Clicks are like currency." Make sure people are clicking where you want them to.
- There are three main booking programs to choose from:
 - Peek.com: what we use.
 - FareHarbour: supposedly a lot like Peek.
 - Convergence: a more complex tool to build a customized portal.
- Peek.com overview
 - Bright green "action button" to book now via our website.
 - Full calendar with all the events coming up. For public events, people can register up until the day of. For private events, we set up a deadline two weeks prior to the event.
 - Once someone clicks to book, they're led through a few screens where we can capture some demographic data and also have them sign an electronic liability release (easy!).
 - After the event, we can click to send prompts to those who attended the event to write a review on Facebook and/or provide direct feedback to us internally. Feedback is key!
 - At any time, there is an Administrative Dashboard to see all sorts of analytics about your events and clients.

Social Media

- We invest the most time in Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.
- We're also on Pinterest and Flickr and have an RSS feed, but these are not our main focus.
- Tips:
 - Post in batches and schedule out several weeks = lifesaver!
 - Word things so they are a Call to Action! Be suggestive, and not repetitive: Research shows it takes people seven or eight times of seeing something before they'll actually take action on it. You can frequently post about the same *type* of

thing, but make sure the wording, angle and photos are constantly new and fresh even if the core message is the same.

- Get a lot of diverse content across different channels (e.g., our recent posts were about a salad-naming contest, an upcoming event, cooking tips, about the event, photos of the farm, and so on).
- Connect your content to a larger pool of people who are interested in the same type of content that you are posting (e.g., by broadly sharing, tagging, using hashtags, using text overlays, and emojis and emoticons).

Web Listings

- Make sure your business is found in popular online resources:
 - Google: for everyone
 - Yelp: for everyone
 - CA Agritourism sites: for farmers and fans
 - TripAdvisor: for tourists
 - EventBrite: for millennials
 - Red Tricycle: for families
 - Local Harvest: for the CSA community
 - NextDoor: for your local neighborhoods
 - Meetup: *not really a go-to resource but we've scheduled events via Meetup groups.*

Question & Answer Section

Questions for Kristin York

Do you have any thoughts about Snapshot for agritourism programs?

First, I want to clarify that Snapshot is different than Snapchat! Snapshot is an app that's a couple years old that lets you share your own social media channels (messages, links, hashtags). It's usually used for corporations to aggregate data for customers. For example, if you go to a Giants game and they're running a contest, they'll want you to log into your phone. When people are logging in and responding through their phones, the organizers can see right away what people like and are responding to. Not sure how it could apply to agritourism however.

Are there any statistics about how frequently to schedule posts to your Facebook account for maximize reach with minimal effort and cost?

Fast Company has a blog that tracked this. You don't want to be annoying and over-post. You also don't want to send them all in one day. But, you don't want to be so infrequent that people forget about you. You want to be top of mind. Posting 1-2 times a week is best, so people can look forward to it. But, if you're reposting others' content, you can share their posts any time at any frequency. But, for your own organic posts, keep them fresh and new. Don't

repeat content or reuse photos, especially when boosting. It's kind of the "Goldilocks rule" where you have to get it just right.

Why use one of the free website-builder programs instead of investing in a professional website?

Some people spend a lot on a site but then can't figure out how to get in to the administrative area to manage the site. Many times, people's sites are basic and they just want to change photos and some wording. Especially in these cases, the free sites are completely fine. Even if you want to include e-commerce, you can create your own site using Shopify for a small fee. If you're comfortable using these free tools, we recommend it for ease and cost. At least explore the different tools that are in your budget before spending more on a professionally-created, custom site.

Questions for Lauren Gagliano Saline

What metrics can you share about the benefits of upgrading Suzie's Farm website to be a mobile-friendly site?

We're getting google analytics set up now so I don't have detailed numbers to share today, but our numbers of bookings have increase about 80%. Before our new site, we considered canceling our public tours, but now they're doing great.

My husband and I are planning on purchasing a farm and are exploring agritourism programs. Do you have any recommendations for a new farm?

Absolutely! Start with a website. Having a great functional website is great first step. You can also choose one to three social media platforms to start with. Start slow, maybe getting the hang of just one to start. Make your presence known in-person as well. Coordinate with groups that are coordinating community events already in your area and have a beautiful brand, logo and brochure or banner ready. You can go to the events and let your potential new clients get to know you and learn what you're up to. This can complement your social media strategy too.

What are some of your most successful types of Facebook or Instagram posts?

The salad-naming contest I mentioned earlier on Facebook was pretty popular, reaching over 2000 people. It was great because it got people talking and engaging and interacting, posting their comments and ideas. For Instagram, we gave all of our staff the login info so they're able take snapshots of their day when they're at the market on a tour. People love to see real-time photos like that. Someone was doing mandalas with the vegetables, which was really popular. It's hard to say just one successful post, but those are some of the types that are popular.

Do you have any tips about setting up your online booking features? How far in advance do you accept reservations? What kind of information do you gather from people when they book? How do you handle cancellations?

It took about two weeks to set up the online booking. The booking program you choose will definitely have tech support, so they can help you out. We worked with the Peek team a lot, and we still use them as we expand our use of it. It was about \$200 to set up, so it has already

paid for itself. There are some small fees for each booking, which are paid by the client. They seem to be okay with this, but we also let people walk-in and pay at the farm if need be. For public tours, people can sign up and attend within two hours of the tour, after which time they would be redirected to book the next date. For private tours, there's a two-week buffer for scheduling. When people go through booking prompts, we track the number of adults, children, date/times and so forth. Emailing back and forth with clients about schedules was the biggest time suck before, so now clients can simply see when the event they want is available and take care of it themselves. We also have a new cancellation policy, where you can simply reschedule for no extra fees. If you completely cancel and don't want to be rescheduled, there's no refund.

For more questions and answers by the webinar series panelists, see the FarmsReach CA Agritourism Group online: <http://www.farmsreach.com/welcome/groups-view-single/?group=california-agritourism>