

Summary of Webinar #4: The Community: Powerful Promotions through Partners

Speakers:

- Tiffany Dozier, Yolo County Visitors Bureau
<http://visityolo.com>
- Evan Oakes, Ag Venture Tours and Consulting
<http://www.agventuretours.com>

Archived webinar: <http://uc-d.adobeconnect.com/p5n5paud6x3/>

Working With Your Local Destination Marketing Organization

Speaker: Tiffany Dozier, Yolo County Visitors Bureau

Powerpoint presentation: <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/files/243093.pdf>

What is a DMO?

- A DMO is a Destination Marketing Organization that focuses on economic and cultural development in a community.
- It's funded through a city's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT). These are taxes that you get charged whenever you stay in a hotel. The city keeps a portion for the general fund, and then a designated amount is distributed to the DMO for the area.
- The funds are used to promote partner/member businesses in the region.
- To be a part of a DMO, you may or may not need to pay fees. For example, Visit Yolo doesn't charge any fees, but Visit Sacramento does. Be sure to ask your local DMO.
- DMO's usually have a district drawn for them (e.g., Visit Yolo only covers Yolo County; we aren't allowed to promote businesses outside of our jurisdiction).

Key Responsibilities

- Tell the destination story: Inform, educate and advise visitors.
- Spearhead a consistent brand message for the region. We strive to be the Wikipedia of the region with the most comprehensive information.
- Provide a platform for local businesses to harvest visitor demand.
- Stimulate visitor spending in the local area to fuel local economy.
- Inform private and public development decisions. We like to be the voice for the tourism sector.

How a DMO Benefits Agritourism Businesses

- We're knowledgeable about how to best promote your agritourism business.
- Because many DMOs are free for participating businesses, it has great marketing value for you!
- We also provide data-driven statistics to fine-tune how you're connecting with visitors.

Why Your Relationship With Your DMO Is Important

- Your local DMO is always your brand advocate. By using our voice and platform to attract visitors, we can then match these visitors with your business.
- Visitors are looking for genuine experiences; a research study showed that 58% of millennials have a fear of missing out on authentic experiences, so your DMO can connect them with you!

How The Tourism Entities Work Together

- The Visit California CA state tourism entity promotes CA to tourists nationally and internationally. For international visitors, they promote "gateway" cities that are key transportation hubs (e.g., San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego).
- The Visit Yolo DMO works with the closest gateway city (SF) to inform them of what Yolo has to offer. By doing this, the city can then help promote things to do in Yolo County so that visitors who have seen the "common" touristy things in the city can explore things outside of the urban center.
- Another example: SF Travel had their annual luncheon in the city with 1000 people in the tourism industry. Because Visit Yolo DMO has a relationship with SF Travel, we brought 4-5 honey producers from Yolo County for a honey tasting at the luncheon to inform all the industry folks about the cool agritourism activities Yolo has to offer.

Some DMO Tools & Resources

- DMOs offer many services and tools, but some of the key programs are:
 - Relationships with state and regional partners.
 - Maps and brochures. Visit Yolo produces a map just for farm tours too.
 - Tourism website, often the first stop for visitors to an area.
 - Press release distribution. Some will even help you write your press releases. Just ask.
 - Ideas to get your event in front of the right demographic.
 - Relationships with travel writers, bloggers and local TV personalities.
 - Strategic market planning and market analytics.
 - Consumer and travel trade shows: the primary ones that Visit Yolo attends are Bay Area Travel Show and LA Travel Show. Over 30,000 people (including DMOs) attend each of these over three days to learn about everything there is to do in CA.

- A range of newsletters. Visit Yolo creates multiple newsletters specifically for different audiences: for consumers, for events, for partners and for travel writers.
- Social media platforms.
- Be creative and be ready when/if a DMO asks for partners to be involved in their marketing efforts. For example, Visit California reached out because an East Coast chef and food writer was coming to town and asked if he could visit Yolo County to write some stories about the local farm and food scene. We then connected him with some local producers whom he visited with and interviewed for his stories. The chef then stayed in the area for two weeks after his visit, sharing his experiences with local people and visitors.
- Be responsive and proactive. Say Yes! DMOs will keep coming back to you for future opportunities.

Case Study: Capay Tomato Festival

- Tomatoes are one of the main products of the region, so we wanted to showcase the festival. Here's what we did:
 - Press release distribution to local & regional outlets.
 - Secured TV station coverage about the event.
 - Event promotion on our social media platforms.
 - Included in various Visit California outreach including website, social media and various publications.
 - Leveraged relationships with regional travel writers & influencers to do digital outreach.
 - Pushed event through our consumer newsletter database.
 - Promoted event on our website.
 - Contacted Bay Area and Sacramento magazines regarding the farm and their ag tourism events resulting in additional press coverage.

Tourism Works! Get involved...

- CA is the #1 travel destination in the U.S. It's the first state to have over \$100 billion in travel-related spending (more than entire countries like Australia, Turkey, Canada, etc.).
- Yolo County generated \$317 million in travel-related spending.

How To Work With Your DMO

- Google: Search the internet for "*your city name* Destination Marketing Organization."
- DMA West: Go to the Destination Marketing Association of the West website – www.dmawest.org > Membership. There you can find a list of all the DMOs in the western U.S. and Canada.
- Ask locally: Call or email your local chamber of commerce or state tourism board.

- Other tips:
 - All DMOs have an Executive Director and a public relations staff member, so just call or email them. Tell them about your business and what you do. We love to hear from new businesses that want to partner.
 - Be available for your DMOs. Once you are a partner, they're going to contact you about various ways to promote you or your products, so be responsive and offer ideas. The partners who respond right away get 10x the publicity.

Ag Venture Tours & Consulting: Hosting Tours & Working With Farms

Speaker: Evan Oakes, Ag Venture Tours and Consulting

Powerpoint presentation: <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/files/243092.pdf>

Background

- Always dreamt of integrating agriculture/wine and tourism interests.
- Being in Monterey County and Salinas Valley, we were perfectly positioned for both industries.
- People who come on our tours are interested in agriculture and want to learn more about what really happens on the farm. The educational aspect is really enticing.

Partners We Work With

- Local farm tour operators – like Ag Venture Tours.
- Local tour companies – like those doing basic sight-seeing tours.
- Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) – important to connect with them!
- Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) – important to connect with them!
- Destination Management Company (DMC) – in some of the larger markets; they're private promotion companies that bring in big conferences and sales groups; great to know too!
- Chamber of Commerce (CC) – in some ways the CC operate like a DMO; you pay a membership fee and then they help promote you.
- Hotels, Motels & BnBs
- Schools – usually they'll approach you versus the other way around.
- Campgrounds
- Booking agencies
- Transportation companies
- Wine & local food associations
- News outlets – local newspapers, magazines, bloggers.
- Farm Bureau – we're actually members of two of them.

Familiarization (FAM) Tours

- These are tours where you give a tour for the local tourism industry or press to educate them about what you're doing. They're really important for new businesses or agritourism programs.
- They're usually set up for partners by the DMOs, DMCs and CCs.
- The press from hosting a FAM tour is great, although you should be prepared to cover all the related costs on your own. Or, you could try to split the cost with others in the same FAM tour.

Working With or Starting a Farm Tour for Individuals

- Usually leisure travelers in small groups (2-6 people): can be a family with kids; or a group of friends wanting to go wine-tasting; or a group specifically interested in the agritourism aspect, which is great.
- Usually plan in advance and will be in touch by email or online.
- Almost always have their own cars.
- Have limited time; often prefer ½ day tours or a quick visit.

Working With or Starting a Farm Tour for Groups

- 12+ more people: often corporations, associations, incentive travel groups, senior groups, or organized farm groups from other parts of the country or world.
- Usually planned far in advance, usually through one person (Meeting Planner) who's in charge of organizing everyone. There may also be a translator.
- Always use a bus.
- They usually prefer full-day tours (i.e., 5-6 hours).
- Be prepared for last-minute cancellations. We recommend having a written contract and having a set cancellation policy.
- School groups are unique in that they want to be outdoors and have some sort of activity. They have short attention spans so you want to make everything really fun, fast-moving and educational.

Visiting Farms or Hosting Tours on Your Farm

- We always make an appointment with the farms we visit ahead of time, but if it's your farm, you should decide if groups/people will need to make an appointment beforehand, or if they can just show up.
- We always pay a speaker fee for the farmers' time because it's fair. On your farm, you should decide if you'll charge tours a fee or not.
- Will it be a walking tour or driving tour? Can a vehicle drive around the property? If walking, is there enough to see in the time allowed?
- Video presentations are a great way to give an overview of your operation, and people can learn a lot in a short amount of time.
- Stay on schedule!

- Allow time for Q&A.
- Have restrooms and water.
- Offer things to buy! People love to buy souvenirs.

Pricing

- Compare yourself to other programs in your area. Do some research. What's your niche? What makes you special? What makes people want to come visit you?
- We offer tours almost every day, and my pricing is set at two levels: High Season and Low Season.
- I set up an online booking platform, which is really helpful – especially if you have a busy destination or you are simply too busy to respond quickly to inquiries.
- Often, concierge and local hotels expect some sort of commission or thank-you gift as a reward for helping promote you. I think it's a nice thing to do.

Marketing Aside From Partners

- Your website is VERY important! I get about 90% of my business from my website.
 - Make sure yours is easy to navigate and not too complicated.
 - Make sure search engines can find you easily.
 - I also allow booking directly from my website so people can book at any time.
 - Revise your site regularly and keep it current.
- Getting good reviews on TripAdvisor and Yelp are also important. It's free so definitely look into developing a presence on both of those sites.
- Social media and blogging are great to get the word out – especially if you have multiple events to promote in a short period of time, or to keep your business name fresh in customers' minds.
- For paid advertising, it depends on how much you can afford. I really value advertising via wine events.

Final Thoughts on Working with Partners

- Stay open-minded and flexible. Even after being in business for 20 years, I make an effort to listen to customers and partners and think about how I can offer the best tours I can.
 - Value your reputation! My whole business is built on my reputation, and I value my long-standing relationships with the different farm and winery partners.
 - Have fun and enjoy what you do!
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Question & Answer Section

Questions for Tiffany Dozier

What is the general fee for DMO membership?

It all depends on how your local DMO is structured. For example, Visit Yolo doesn't charge any fees, whereas Visit Sacramento charges about \$100. Some DMOs choose to charge more to help fund more programs and services, and really it's up to each region.

Why would the local community want to invest its dollars in a DMO?

DMOs increase tourism in the area, so we're basically increasing visitor spending and money flow to local businesses. We help stimulate the local economy. For example, Yolo County generated over \$317 million in travel spending so that's why community members see the value in investing in the services of a DMO to maximize that dollar amount.

How does a DMO help an agritourism operation gain press exposure?

One of the things we do is generate buzz about the area, so we work with travel writers and bloggers. As an example, one of the partners we work with is Sunset Magazine, and when they want to write about our area, we need to offer ideas for stories. So, the more we know about our partners' businesses and tips about the area, the more we can refer them to you!

What are three things an ag business can do immediately to gain traction with a DMO?

First, you have to contact them. Then ask how you can be involved! DMOs can be bogged down sometimes with requests, so ask questions and stay on top of them for the best response. Also, you should check their website before you talk to identify all the places you see your business fitting in their website. And, let them know what you have coming up in the near-term, as they're always looking for things to promote over social media.

Can I pitch a story to my DMO, which they can then share with a travel writer to maybe cover?

Yes, of course! I'm always looking for great new ideas. They will probably take credit for the idea and add it to all the other things they have going on. If the story is really amazing and I already know a writer who would love it, I will contact that writer right away. If not, I'll queue it up for our newsletter specifically for travel writers. It's usually best for us to approach the travel writers, who then work with their editors to get the story approved. DMOs have a lot of different avenues to do that.

Questions for Evan Oakes

If we only can focus on a few partners to start, which would you recommend from your long list from your presentation?

The most important would be the Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in your area, since that's their job to promote you. But, you do need to take them on a FAM tour and educate them on what you're doing.

Where and how can we contact small group tour operations?

Often times, your local DMO and CVB will know about them, so they're a good place to go to first. You can check their website or contact them directly. You can also google "your city name tour operators." I don't know of too many ag tour companies though; they're pretty rare.

How can the Farm Bureau help?

Often times, farm groups from other states will go to the Farm Bureau first to find out where farm tours are, since the bureau is a national organization. And, some Farm Bureaus will actually offer farm tours. If you're a member of your local Farm Bureau (which does cost a fee), then perhaps they can and will promote you, but really it's dependent on each local office.

As tour operator, what do you look for when deciding which farms to visit?

There are several things: Something that is unique and educational in the area. A farmer or presenter who is a good speaker, engaging in their conversation, and have good information to pass on. A lot depends on the size of the group I'm dealing with. I also want to make sure I can get a vehicle in and out and that there's good parking and restrooms. And that the operation is organized – especially if we're on a schedule so we can get in and out in an hour. If they have extra things to sell, that's great. But, really it comes down to the educational aspect of going to that farm, what they're growing and what their special niche may be.

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>