

Farmers Markets and Social Media

Promotional Media Use by Missouri Farmers Market Organizers

Farmers market organizers face the challenge of developing a marketing plan that reaches their core audience segments and communicates meaningful messages to them. When selecting marketing tools, farmers market organizers should consider the potential of social media for reaching current and potential customers and building relationships with new and existing vendors.

Social media is the collective term for online engagement tools such as social networks, blogging and microblogging. These tools enable people to easily share information and network with like-minded others on the Internet.

This report explains how Missouri farmers market organizers promote their markets and perceive and use social media. This information was gathered through an online survey of 40 Missouri farmers market organizers.

By comparing the promotional strategies used by farmers market organizers to the media use of Missouri farmers market consumers, market organizers can make necessary changes in their marketing activities and can better craft marketing plans and messages to achieve their marketing goals. For information on how Missouri farmers market consumers perceive and use social media, see MU Extension publication G6227, *Social Media Use and Purchase Patterns of Missouri Farmers Market Consumers*.

About the survey

In March 2010, the Missouri Value Added Center at the University of Missouri conducted an online survey of Missouri farmers market organizers to discover how they perceive and use social media. The 40 survey participants were recruited via an e-mail message to the Missouri Farmers' Market Association listserv.

About the respondents

Of the 40 farmers market organizers who participated in the survey, 11 also sell products as vendors at their respective markets.

Most of the respondents' markets are seasonal; only 5 percent are open year-round (Figure 1). The majority of the markets open in April or May, and most close in October.

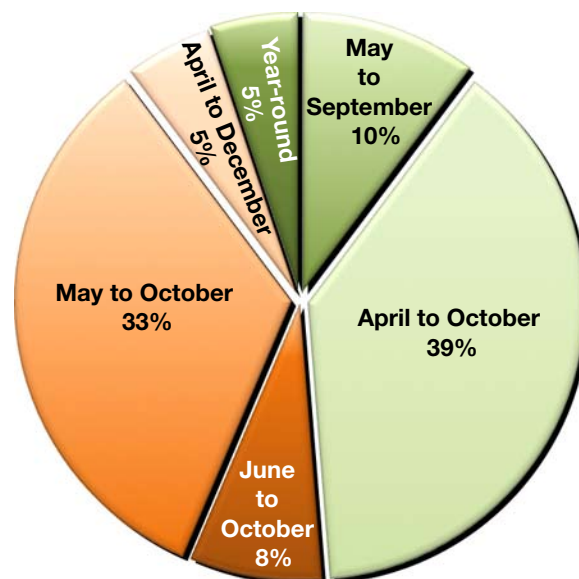


Figure 1. Seasonality of respondents' markets.

Overall, the respondents are relatively new to market organizing (Figure 2). More than half have less than

Credits

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two years of experience, 30 percent have been market organizers for three to five years, and 18 percent have six or more years of experience.

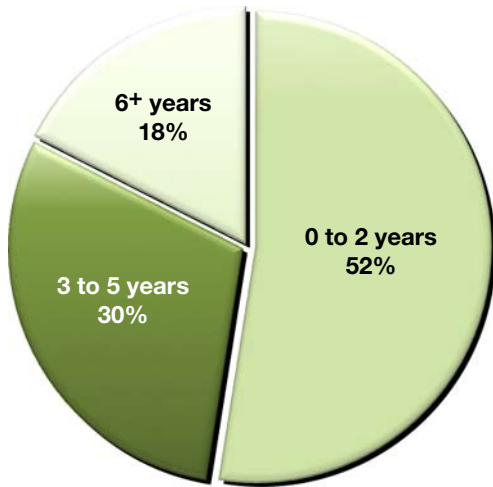


Figure 2. Respondents' years of experience as farmers market organizers.

Marketing activities

About three-fourths of the farmers market organizers surveyed said they have an overall marketing strategy that guides their marketing activities. About one-fourth said they do not have an overall marketing plan.

Farmers market organizers rely on several media forms to promote their markets. As Figure 3 illustrates, farmers market organizers most often use newspapers, word-of-mouth, websites and brochures to communicate about their markets. Social networks and e-mail were fairly popular, too; more than half the respondents reported using them to promote their markets.

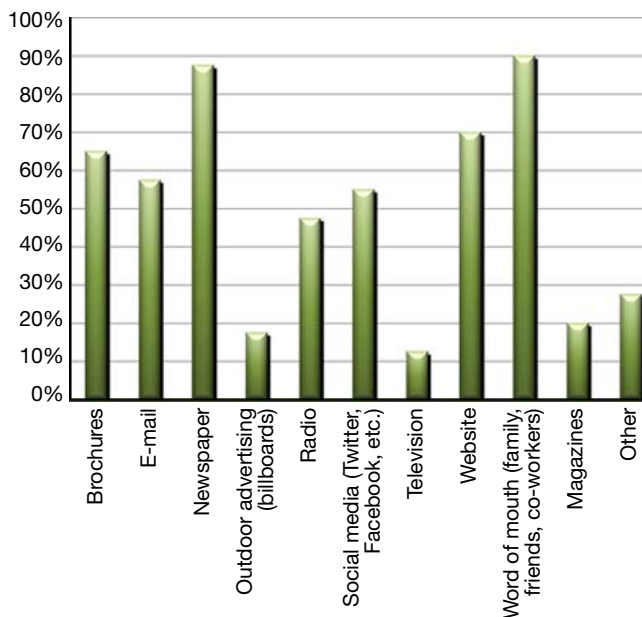


Figure 3. Media used to promote markets (percent of respondents who promote their markets through each form of media).

The social media most used by farmers market organizers are e-mail and social networks, such as Facebook, MySpace and Ning (Figure 4). At least 85 percent of the organizers said they use e-mail and social networks. In addition, 38 percent use blogs and 27 percent use microblogs. Video-sharing sites, photo-sharing sites, review sites and podcasts are not as popular with farmers market organizers.

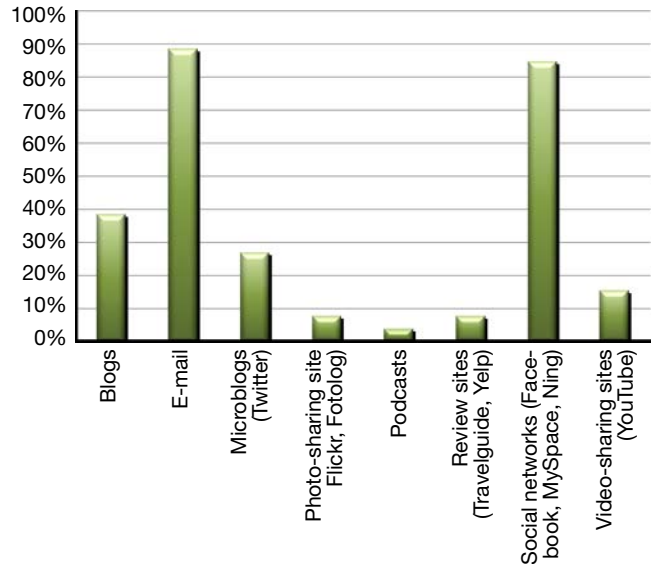


Figure 4. Social media used to promote markets (percent of respondents who use each social media tool for marketing).

Ninety percent of the organizers who have adopted social media as promotional tools said that customers seem to like the markets' social media presences (Figure 5). According to 19 percent, customers are getting information through social media channels before getting it through other channels. About 24 percent, however, believe that their customers do not use social media.

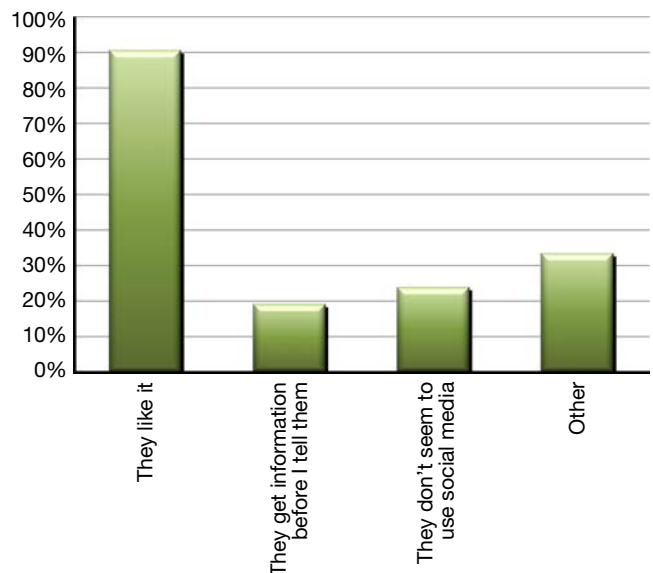


Figure 5. Customers' response to farmers markets using social media.

Most respondents said that they do not have social media policies that their vendors must follow. Only 5 percent of the farmers market organizers surveyed reported having such a policy.

Interest in social media

When asked which social media and promotional tools they would like to learn more about for use in promoting their markets, about half of the Missouri farmers market organizers surveyed said website development (Figure 6). The social media tools they most want to learn more about are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and blogs. They are least interested in learning more about MySpace, Ning, Meetup, Flickr and Wikipedia. Twenty-two percent of respondents are not interested in learning about using any social media as promotional tools.

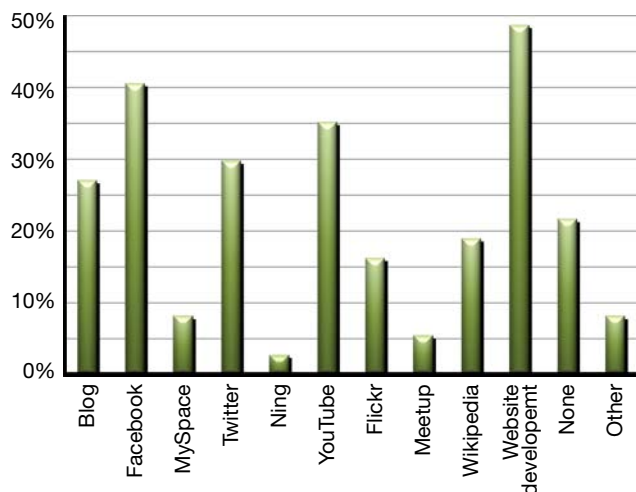


Figure 6. Interest in learning about social media (percent of respondents interested in learning more about using each social media or promotional tool).

Farmers market organizers have several goals they would like social media to help them achieve (Figure 7). The No. 1 goal, indicated by 95 percent of the survey respondents, is to stimulate market traffic. Generating awareness is a goal of 87 percent of the respondents; distributing market news and building relationships with customers are goals for about three-fourths of the respondents. Compared with these responses, promoting events, building relationships with vendors and offering customer service are less important goals that farmers market organizers would like social media to help them achieve.

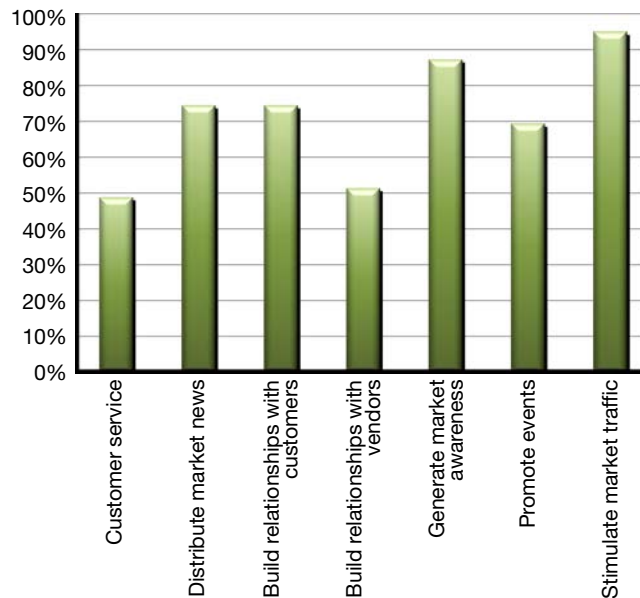


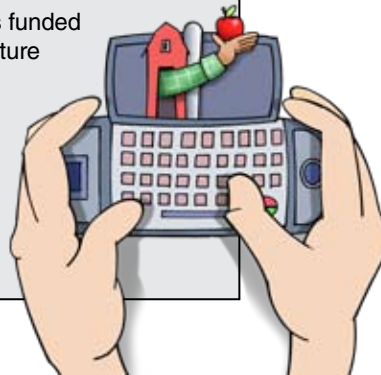
Figure 7. Farmers market organizers' social media goals (percent of respondents who would like social media to help them achieve each goal).

About the project

The goal of the **Leveraging Social Media as Farmers Market Promotional Tools** project is to identify and communicate easy-to-understand, easy-to-use social media strategies and best practices to farmers market organizers and vendors. By applying this knowledge, the organizers and vendors can begin or enhance the promotion of their markets through social media.

This University of Missouri project is funded by a Missouri Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant with funding from USDA-AMS.

For more resources that are part of this project, including social media how-to webinars, visit the Missouri Value Added Center website at <http://valueadded.missouri.edu>.



Also from MU Extension Publications

- G6227 *Social Media Use and Purchase Patterns of Missouri Farmers Market Consumers*
- G6229 *Using Social Media to Learn About Consumer Needs and Preferences*

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