



**People Sure Are STRANGE  
Coming to Understand the Customer  
Marketing Webinar for Direct Marketing Farmers  
1/15/13 and 1/16/13  
Presenter: Marty Butts, Small Potatoes Marketing**

**Webinar Questions and Answers**

- 1. What about the Senior Farmer's Market coupons? Is that breaking open the senior citizen market?**

Senior citizens are traditional shoppers/eaters of fresh fruits and vegetables. Experience has shown that Seniors Farmers Market coupons may not break open the market, per se, but gives them additional buying power within the market.

- 2. If you are in a rural area can you search for county instead of town or city?**

You can still find demographic information for rural areas. You might start by looking at a local university. They often have demographic information about their surrounding community. Another source would be the local government, whether village or county. What you will run into, however, is that there will be smaller communities of ethnic groups, perhaps not large enough to support cultural services that will help you reach these groups.

- 3. Faith-based ethnically oriented institutions are tempting, but I have found them hard to crack as an outsider. Any advice?**

It is hard to break into any community that you are not a part of. But you would want to meet with them – clergy, community center, etc. to begin the conversation. You don't want to start with the idea that you want to sell them something. You want to tease out information about their faith, culture, food preferences, etc. Where do they buy their food and do they have adequate access to everything they need. What you are looking to accomplish is to satisfy an unmet need.

Other suggestions would be to advertise in the church newsletters or leave flyers to post on community boards. Finally, look into their secondary food projects, food pantry or feeding programs. Can you get your foot in the door by donating to their food projects?

- 4. Can these research tools be used to help determine what the market will pay for your products (community food budgets, etc)?**

The tools presented here will not give you this kind of information. There may be other websites that will give you some guidance. For instance, USDA offers a Wholesale Produce Price Indicator. But to get at the local level, visit other places where foods are sold and get a sense for what prices are. Not just local grocery stores, but visit farmers markets, independent grocers, local food stores, etc. Don't go into community centers to ask what their members would be willing to pay, rather ask where they shop. Then visit those places to get ideas of pricing.

**5. What if the product is not really for the multicultural groups in your community but for the original people who lived there.? What key words to use then to find your customers?**

You can substitute and consumer group into the word search and follow it up with your community name. What you are looking for is a community group that is supported by services that you can access. So, for example, use veterans/Syracuse to find veterans services in Syracuse. Finding local food eaters is a bit more difficult. But use words like natural foods or organic foods followed by your community. This may give you some useful information. Another would be independent grocers followed by your community.

**6. How do you determine the food preferences of various communities of consumers?**

Ask! Go into their community centers or contact their service organizations. Tell them you don't know much about their culture and would like to learn. Most would be happy to talk with you.

**7. Where can I find a directory like your Multi Cultural Directory in my area?**

If there is a University within 60 miles of you, contact them. Most universities put together cultural information to help their ethnic students feel comfortable in their new community. They usually have a Department of Cultural studies or services or community affairs office.

If you do not have a local university, contact your local government. They most likely have collected this information.

**8. You talk about the SNAP program. What is that?**

The food stamp program has been renamed SNAP, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This presents an opportunity to reach a very large community of people. Many farmers markets are now participating in the SNAP program. The market becomes an authorized SNAP retailer through USDA. They then have a point of sale terminal that will accept SNAP benefits. In exchange, they give the customer wooden tokens to use as scrip. The tokens can be used with any farmer in the market to purchase SNAP eligible foods. The farmers then redeem the tokens back with the market and receive their funds. The program is beneficial to all farmers in the market – they do not have to be individually authorized by USDA food and Nutrition Service, since the market is acting on their behalf, and it brings in extra revenue.

**9. Can you tell me some references or resource materials where I can go to learn more about customer service?**

The best information I found, and use in all my work and trainings, is the Zimmerman's Guide to Giving Great Service. Their website is [www.zingtrain.com](http://www.zingtrain.com).

There is another book published by Project for Public Spaces on How to start a business at a local market. You can order it at this website: <http://www.pps.org/store/featured-items/how-to-start-your-business-at-a-local-market-a-vendor-handbook/>

"Why we Buy" by Paco Underhill might be another good book. While not specifically about customer service, it does cover much of the research behind the tactics retailers use to draw customers and build sales. It is an interesting read and you could get many tips from it.

**10. I don't sell at farmer's markets, but I do sell year round from my farm which is out of the way other than during the summer season. How can i attract customers to my farm year-round (I have meats and cold season veggies to sell year round)**

There are a couple of suggestions. You might try a share program. This will get customers to your farm each pick up day to get their share. While they are there you can also sell your other products. Another suggestion is to act as an aggregation point for multiple farmers, such as dairy products, fruit, etc. When you can offer a wider variety of product, it is easier to attract customers.

**11. What is a share program?**

This is similar to a CSA, Community Supported Agriculture, but on a smaller scale. This is where you prepay for a season's worth of a product, for example, paying up front for a weekly share of milk. Then the customer will pick up their share on a regular basis, i.e. weekly or monthly.

**12. I run a farmers market in Hershey PA. We are surrounded by a Medical Center, 2 large corporations (Hershey Company and Hershey entertainment and Resorts), a new Nursery school. It sounds like a no-brainer for a market but it has been very difficult to penetrate. What are we doing wrong? We are not a very diverse area. We are a volunteer organization and at the moment we have a newsletter, email blasts by HE&R, Facebook page news, vendor Facebook pages, signage, and have worked with the chef/admin to development programs for our marketing campaign and find it difficult to get customers on a regular basis. Our vendors are all organic, grass-fed high quality foods. Any suggestions? Thanks so much in advance.**

It sounds like there should be a lot of opportunity here. I would start with the corporations, then the hospital. Reach out to the HR (Human Resources) Department. Find out if they have an employee wellness program. You may be able to play into that program. If so, you may want to consider satellite markets in their parking lots. This would benefit their employees, although it could be open to the public. Or you can try a CSA style program. You can aggregate your farmers products and deliver weekly CSA shares to employees in these companies.

Individual farmers may want to contact the businesses of hospitals and offer to rent a parking space or two and set up an ad hoc farmers market.

Remember, contacting the HR Department, is not about what can you sell them, but about how you can meet their needs.

If the company does not have an employee wellness program and these suggestions don't get you anywhere, ask if the company is providing meals. In other words, do they have a commissary, dining room, or cafeteria where their employees meet. You might be able to get your farmers food on their menu. Not only will the employees eat the food there, but they might be enticed to seek out this fresh, local food at the market, as a result of tasting it in the company dining room.

**13. Can you talk about any tips for landing restaurant accounts?**

Restaurants are tougher to break into. They generally want to purchase all their product from one single source and have only one delivery. It saves them time. So the best bet is to provide a wide diversity of product, maybe collaborating with other local growers. The fewer phone calls the chef has to make to order product and the fewer trucks pulling into their driveways, the better they like it.

Chefs are now drawn more to heirloom varieties and heritage breeds. So if you can offer that, you will have a much better chance of getting in. Also, ask the chefs what their most popular dishes are. If you can provide the ingredients for those dishes, you will have a better chance.

You also need to begin your conversations with the chefs well ahead of your season. The conversations should help you to understand how they do business and how you can fit into that framework. If you can't, then working with restaurants may not be for you.

**14. Our farm wants to get into selling raw milk on a small scale. Can you recommend a good source that can give us information on getting started?**

Each state has their own regulations regarding the sale of raw milk. I would suggest contacting Cooperative Extension and the State Department of Agriculture. Keep in mind that this is a very sensitive issue and not everyone is in favor of it. When you contact your State Dept of Ag, you might want to leave off who you are and just say that you are calling for more information. Keep your name out of it until you have a better sense of the response you will be getting to such a business venture.

Another resource might be Weston Price Foundation, as they promotes raw milk consumption.

**15. We do SNAPs and Senior Farmers Cards where the Senior are given a card with a certain amount of money attached and we scan the card and give out tokens until that amount is used. We use a different color token for the separate moneys.**

Build on your successes. If the Senior program is successful, then look for ways to play off that. For example, look for senior centers or senior programs where you can promote the market. The same is true with SNAP customers. Look for ways to make connections. One example is the local WIC offices. They work with low income families. If they can make their clients aware of your market, you might be able to bring more SNAP dollars to your market's farmers.

**16. Our Market is entering it's 3rd year. We conducted a survey last season and determined that the age group we're missing is the 30 - 45 year olds. We presume that it is parents with young kids in many activities. Any suggestions for drawing in those families that are so busy?**

There are a number of things you can do here. First is to make your market kid-friendly. Add kid's activities that will have kids asking their parents to take them to the market. Things like face painting and balloon animals work well. Or activities that educate about food at the same time they are having fun, like coloring pictures of food, while that food is being discussed. (Organic Valley provides kids coloring books and crayons.)

You can also advertise in parent networks, such as the Holistic Mom Network. Church newsletters may also work.

If the problem is that parents are simply too busy to come to market because of the kids sports and activities, then you need to go to them. Go to the sports events and hand out flyers or coupons. Even better, hand them out along with a locally grown apple. But if they are truly too busy to attend the

market, you may have to accept that this is a demographic you cannot reach. But keep your market name in front of the m. When the kids grow up, they may take the time to come then.

**17. We are a small community without much ethnic diversity whose farmers market has hit a plateau in both consumer traffic as well as desire for vendor participation - probably a direct correlation. Besides special events, is there anything in particular in your experience that you have found that has drastically revitalized both customer & vendor participation in your or any particular farmers market.**

You need to find a way to make your market look fresh. You might try rebranding – update your logo and market signage, for example. (Word of caution. You cannot rebrand frequently or you will lose credibility with your consumers. But done well, it should last many years.)

Another suggestion is to add locations. A mobile market of your vendor's products may be able to reach consumer groups that you are currently missing. A satellite market may also help you reach new customers.

Adding new vendors could help draw in new customers. But it should be a different vendor than you already have. Try adding ready-to-eat foods. Bring in restaurants and other food purveyors to add a new element to your market. Many other markets have had great success, as these vendors have a powerful draw of their own.

**18. I'm looking into marketing a few gourmet herbs and mushrooms. Restaurants and ethnic stores seem to be my best place to start. What is the best way to enter the markets, and approach these customers?**

The approaches are different for grocers vs chefs. With both you will want to leave samples along with a sell sheet. You want to encourage them to taste your product and agree that it is worth putting it in their store or on their menu. With the chef, the product is purchased and used. But with grocers, the product is purchased then waits until a consumer purchases it. You will need to make samples available for the consumer. Make arrangements with the store to come in and sample your product with consumers

**19. What is a sell sheet?**

This is one of your premier marketing tools for wholesale. The front of the sheet is all the sexy stuff about your farm, along with pictures. For example, you are a 125 year old family farm raising heritage breed beef. The second side is all the nuts and bolts on how to do business with you. For example, you will tell the ordering process, the method of delivery, pricing, product size and minimum orders, and any other information they need to know to buy your product.