

## Using the Internet to Market New Crops

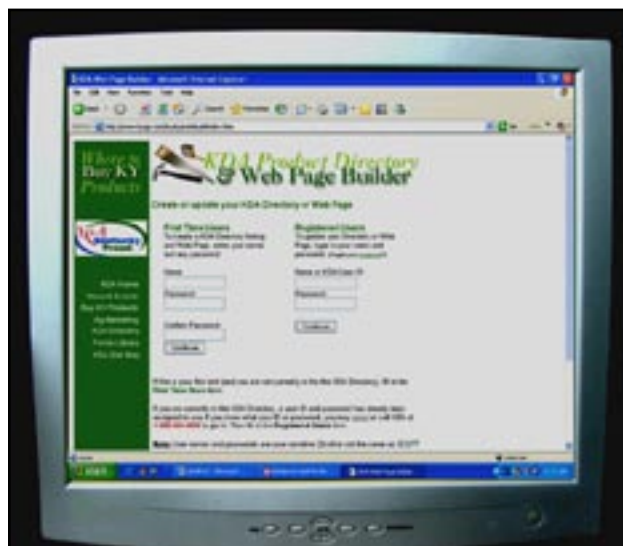
The Internet, one of the newest market channels for farm products, can be utilized in a variety of marketing strategies. Producers may sell their products online through e-commerce, use a Web site to take orders for their goods, or simply advertise their operation through a “billboard” type Web site. A variety of Web-based marketing and inventory tools are also available for grain and nursery/greenhouse producers.

This fact sheet is intended to provide a summary and starting point for growers who are considering using the Internet for marketing. Producers interested in a more comprehensive guide for direct marketing on the Web should consult the USDA Publication *How to Direct Market Farm Products on the Internet*.

### Know Your Customers

Like any other market, Internet selling depends on *knowing* your customers. Asking yourself basic questions about your customers is a good place to start. Who are they? Do they have Internet access? Do they use e-mail?

A clear idea of who your customers are and how they use the Internet will allow you to develop a Web site that meets your customers’ needs. For example, there is no need to develop an elaborate, interactive Web site for your orchard if your customers are only interested in knowing when different apple varieties are coming into season.



### Focus on Marketing, Not Selling

Establishing a presence on the Web can benefit your farm in many ways. The Internet can be great for promoting your enterprise and increasing your exposure to customers. Advertising and product promotion through a Web site is used by many Kentucky growers to let customers know what varieties are in season and what is going on at the farm. Not only are more and more consumers shopping online, an even greater number are using the Internet to research future purchases. Your Web site can be another tool in a well-planned total marketing plan for your farm.

However, “marketing” does not necessarily mean “selling.” The Internet may not be the best means for transacting sales. For example, taking orders online is not a good method of selling products advertised as “a premium, fresh alternative to other produce.” However, the Internet could be used for taking orders for fresh

produce delivery or for selling value-added items, such as honey, that can be easily shipped.

### **Develop a Good Web Site**

It is not enough just to have a Web site; you must have one that is well-designed. Unfortunately, there are many examples of poorly designed farm Web sites, especially for small farms engaged in direct-marketing. The following tips will help you to avoid some of their pitfalls:

- The site should be eye-catching, well-organized, and easy to navigate.
- Keep the Web site simple. Avoid the excessive use of graphics and images which result in a lengthy download time.
- Choose font sizes and colors that are easy to read.
- Make sure your site is free of errors in spelling and grammar.
- Contact information should be clearly listed on every page.
- Only display information that will be relevant to potential customers.
- Maintain your Web site regularly and keep it up-to-date.

### **KDA Product Directory and Web Page Builder**

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture maintains an online directory of markets and businesses that sell Kentucky agricultural products. In addition, the KDA Web Page Builder enables agribusinesses to create a simple Web page that can be accessed through the KDA directory. The KDA must approve all information, including any later updates, before it goes public on the Internet. The approval process can take up to five days.

This program is free to all Kentucky producers and has several advantages for growers who choose to participate. It is a great way to advertise, whether the business is just listed in the directory or a Web page is created. The Web Page Builder program is extremely easy to use and could be a good first step (or an alternative)

for growers considering designing their own Web page. Businesses that already have an Internet site can include their company link in the directory listing and on the Web page, thus providing additional advertising. The information on the site can easily be updated at any time.

#### *Product Directory*

Information is provided for the KDA directory in two steps. Users should be prepared to provide their name, address, two phone numbers, FAX number, e-mail address, name of a contact person and the company Web site URL if there is one (step 1). The types of products being sold are added to the directory by selecting them from drop-down lists under the Country Store and/or Farm Store categories (step 2). The user can preview the directory information before submitting it to the KDA.

#### *Web Page Builder*

Once the directory information is completed, users can choose to continue on with steps 3 to 5 to create a KDA Web page. Step 3 involves adding the text for the Web page. The information requested includes: the business name, list of products, slogan, company information, directions, hours of operation, and up to three locations where products are sold. Step 4 offers a selection of six different Web page designs to choose from and prompts the user to create a Web site address (URL). Step 5, which is optional, makes it possible to add KDA logos and/or up to three JPG or GIF images to the site. Images must be 150 pixels across and no larger than 20 K in size. The user can also include an e-commerce link to the Web page, if desired. The Web page can be previewed before submitting it to the KDA.

### **Use E-mail Effectively**

E-mail has transformed the way that many farm marketers do advertising. The cost of direct mailings can be greatly reduced through the use of e-mail. However, e-mail can also turn into an annoyance for the consumer. Furthermore,

many Web mail servers may identify your e-mail as spam and it may never make it into the recipient's mailbox!

Follow these guidelines to help ensure that your e-mail communication with customers is effective:

- Be concise—but without seeming in a hurry.
- Include your hours of operation, contact information and brief directions.
- Let customers know when your next e-mail update will be coming.
- Provide customers with a clear way to unsubscribe from the e-mail list, if they desire.
- Always include other useful information in addition to what you are advertising. For example, if you have a farm peach festival approaching, provide some recipes that use fresh peaches.
- Incorporate printable coupons into your e-mail.

## More Information

- Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA)  
<http://www.kyagr.com>
- Kentucky Product Directory and Web Page Builder (KDA)  
<http://www.kyagr.com/buyky/webbuild/index.htm>
- Where to Buy Kentucky Products (KDA)  
<http://www.kyagr.com/buyky/index.htm>
- How to Direct-Market Farm Products on the Internet (USDA, 2002)  
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/MSB/PDFpubList/InternetMarketing.pdf>

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