

Promotional Ideas for Farmers' Markets

A. Create an Attractive Atmosphere

Decorate entrance or market with flowers, balloons, vegetable displays, scarecrows, etc

Hire local musicians to perform during market hours. Many will play if they can leave their hat open for contributions, others will volunteer for exposure.

Organize contests. Contests stimulate excitement and interest. Everybody likes to win and wants the chance to win. Even if you don't win, you want to know who does. This brings attention to the market.

B. Develop an Attractive Logo to Increase Customer Awareness Both On and Off-Site

While it may not be critical for smaller markets to have a logo, an attractive logo offers endless opportunities for building market recognition and consumer awareness. A logo can be put on virtually anything and go anywhere. An appealing logo promotes a professional and cohesive image for the market.

A logo can be used on:

- Market signs
- Letterhead: A letterhead is not only useful for business correspondence, it can be used for a recipe series and other promotional or educational materials that the market has.
- T-shirts
- Sweatshirts
- Caps
- Aprons: For customers to purchase and/or for each vendor to wear at the market.
- Market Bags: Canvas bags make a positive statement about how the farmers' market is an environmentally responsible entity.
- Buttons
- Unified Price Signage
- Market Cookbook: Publications like a small market cookbook can be sold as a fundraiser.
- Library Bookmarks
- Flyers, Signs, Posters: Put them up in highly trafficked areas of town. Ask local organizations to send them out with their mailings.
- Promotional/educational Pieces in the Media about the benefits of shopping locally, eating fresh foods, in season calendar, etc.
- Farmer Profile Book

C. Make the Market a Community Center

Include Community Organizations

Invite community groups to set up informational booths at the market. Encourage the participating organization to invite all members to the market and create their own event at the market. Ideas that have been successful are as diverse as the local garden club's bake sale and a Red Cross blood drive. The market can become a central meeting place for local groups and causes.

Encourage vendors to talk to customers. Establish an atmosphere of friendliness and hospitality.

Install a community bulletin board

Have a farmers' market information table

D. Organize theme events and festivals

Make it fun to come to the market. Using the themes of fresh, locally grown foods, there are numerous events that can be created to stimulate interest in the market. Events that are part of a market's promotion create reasons for people to come and explore possibilities.

Before the season begins, organize a schedule of special events, which will highlight the season and create special reasons for customers to come. Some ideas include:

- Scarecrow Making
- Cooking Demonstrations: Invite local chefs to come to the market and cook with local ingredients.
- Pumpkin carving or decorating
- Cookbook Signings
- "In Season" Festivals such as strawberry, tomato, zucchini, apple, corn, herb or cider festivals
- Host a farm/food parade at the opening of the market season.
- Offer hay rides around the market neighborhood.
- Create a photo and information exhibit of participating farmers' farms, where they are, what they grow, etc.

E. Gain Exposure by Supporting Local Fund-Raisers

Piggyback on fund-raisers: When other organizations are having a fund-raiser, a delicious basket of fresh market produce can be a welcome prize. If the perishability of donating produce is a problem, create market dollars which can be exchanged at the market. This will expose the market to another organization's audience and bring more people to market.

F. Accept Farmers' Market Coupons and EBT

State agencies assist markets who wish to accept farmers' market coupons. New technology is also making it easier for farmers to accept EBT (food stamps) at farmers' markets.

Make sure vendors who accept coupons are well marked so there is no confusion or unnecessary embarrassment for anyone.

G. Target Customers Using Email or Direct Mail

Develop an email or mailing list. An email list is preferable to keep mailing costs down.

Maintain a market visitor book to develop a mailing list and use this list to contact market customers with special deals, market openings, etc.

Newsletter: Keep customers, vendors and the press up to date of market activities

H. Take Advantage of Every Publicity Opportunity

Farmers' markets do not have to buy advertising to get the market covered in the mass media. Markets are community events, highly visual and full of potentially newsworthy story ideas. The ability to write a simple press release plus establishing contact with the local media will often result in much better coverage and results than advertising can buy. Publicity is an endless opportunity. Use it every chance you get.

Newspapers/Magazines/Newsletters: Before the market season begins, take the time to create a press list of all media in your area. Find out the name of the food editor and contact him or her to talk about when the market will open, and so on. Also, contact the business editor and suggest a story about the interesting businesses that sell at the market. Finally, have the name of the contact person and proper deadlines for

the community calendar or events listing section. When you have a special event, your market can be listed.

Television/Video: Send a news release highlighting the visual angle of your story to the local television station. Television stations want a visual story to entertain their audience.

Create a Market Video: Often, the local cable station will run community service and information pieces before and during the season.

Radio: Write a Public Service Announcement (PSA). Radio stations are required by law to designate a certain amount of airtime to worthy community events. Public service announcements are the way to apply for these spots. Write a 15 and 30 seconds PSA and attach it to your press release.

No matter what the media, the editor will expect you to present the “story angle” in your press release. This can be a simple announcement of market opening or a profile of chefs that shop at the market. The opportunities are endless and ideas are continually developing. Be sure to keep a list of “angles” available for market use.

Market Website: More and more consumers are tuning to the web for information. Create a market website with attractive photos, vendor profiles, recipes, and up to date market information.

Evaluate Your Success

Every farmers’ market is unique. Each market organizer must assess the promotional ideas mentioned, and judge the best ones to be implemented. In the final analysis, only experience will answer the following question, “which methods are best for my market?” After every promotional effort, use the following evaluation to ensure that every effort – success or failure – contributes to future promotional efforts.

Planning

Promotion:

Description of Activity:

Time Involved in Planning:

How Was the Promotion Promoted:

Costs:

Implementation

Ease of Organization:

Factors Which Influence Success:

Unforeseen Problems:

Time to Set Up:

Time to Take Down:

Response:

Vendor Response:

Consumer Response:

Approximate Number that Responded:

Additional Comments: