

ONLINE MARKETING FOR AGRITOURISM BUSINESSES: E-NEWSLETTERS

Author: Audrey Comerford, Agritourism Coordinator, OSU Extension Service

Email marketing (including e-newsletters) is a key marketing strategy for agritourism businesses. Building an email list and sending out a regular e-newsletter is something you as a business owner have 100% control over. Having an e-newsletter allows you to communicate directly with your customers, ensuring they get up-to-date information on hours, crops, product availability, new product announcements and what is happening at the farm.

Picking a Platform

There are two basic ways to send out an e-newsletter: using your regular email program or signing up with an email service provider (ESP). With your own email program, you create a regular email or PDF attachment and send it out to your contact list using your own email program. This is easy to create and virtually zero cost besides time, however you do not get the subscription management features, security and analytics that an email service provider (ESP) offers.

An ESP is a program that allows the user to build and send email campaigns to subscribers. Examples of ESPs include Mailchimp, Constant Contact, Drip, and many more. In most cases, you can integrate your website with the ESP order to collect email addresses (e.g., through a “subscribe” button). Some website platforms, Wix for example, even have their own email campaign program so you do not have to use the third party (although there may be some additional fees associated with this).

ESP allow the user to easily build templates, create and edit content, schedule and send email campaigns, and track analytics such as number of opens and clicks. The analytics are important to see how many of your subscribers are not only opening the emails you are sending, but also how many of those people are clicking on links within that email (for example, if you linked to your website or social media).

When picking an email service provider, it is important to know your goals when it comes to email campaigns. Most ESP charge based on the number of subscribers you have but there are a few that have their fees structured based on the number of emails sent. If you want to be sending out lots of emails throughout the year, makes sure to look at if there is a fee increase based on the number of campaigns. If you want to grow your customer base and subscribers to have a large recipient list, make sure you check out if the platform fee increases after a certain number of subscribers.

To see the pros and cons of 10 different email service providers that were picked out specifically for farms, check out [this article](#).



Photo: Audrey Comerford, OSU Extension Agritourism

How to get email signups

There are a number of strategies to getting your customers to sign up for your newsletter. If your farm or ranch has a website, make sure a newsletter subscription box or popup is enabled and linked with your ESP (if you are using one). The goal is to make it easy for customers or potential customers to sign up and stay in touch with the business.

Another strategy is having a point of sale sign at your checkout register. It can be as simple as “sign up for our newsletter” with a QR code on it. A visitor can use their phone’s camera to access the newsletter signup provided by the QR code. If the farm has a reward’s program of some sort, this is an excellent way to also get email addresses. And, of course, a customer may also verbally request to be put on an email list and good old-fashioned pen and paper also work in that case. Make sure you follow best practices regarding customer privacy. Customers should sign up voluntarily or with their express permission.

For example, if you have them fill out a form by hand make sure there is a box they can check that says something to the effect of “I would like to receive emails” or “I want to subscribe to emails.” Also do not sell or share your email list. One major advantage of using an ESP is that they protect your list, and emails sent from the ESP do not show all recipients. If the customer is filling out a subscriber form online that is linked to your ESP, they are already giving consent and will be automatically added to the list.



Photo: Audrey Comerford, OSU Extension Agritourism

It is also good practice to have a way for subscribers to unsubscribe at any time. A lot of ESPs will have that option built in either at the top or the bottom of the campaign. Remember, a few people will unsubscribe from your emails now and then and that is okay. Things change with your customers or maybe they move away. Giving them the option to remove themselves from an email list is recommended and good customer service.

Content and timing

The content of your newsletter ties directly to actions taken by your customers. If you have interesting things to say and good quality photographs, your subscribers will be more apt to read your newsletter when they see them in their inbox. As with social media, your customers want to hear what is happening on the farm or ranch, so talk about what is in season, how the year is going, farm animal updates, new products coming out, or exciting events to look forward to are all great content ideas. And anything you write for your newsletter can also be used in social media posts or on a blog.

Decisions about when to send out your campaign/e-newsletter and how often should be based on your marketing goals, what you want to accomplish, and the time required to produce the newsletter. For example: Are you looking to connect with your customers all year-round? As updates during your open season? To share farm updates? Whatever frequency you choose—quarterly, seasonally, monthly, or weekly—keep to a consistent schedule. We recommend you start off with a quarterly newsletter or whenever your open season is. If you feel like you are getting good reactions and it is not too much of a time constraint on you, move it up to monthly.

Sources

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), [*How to Pick an Email Marketing Platform*](#)

This material is based upon work supported by USDA/NIFA under Award Number 2018-70027-28587.



Oregon State University
Extension Service

For more information: <https://beav.es/w6M>