Solutions for Marketing AgriTourism Online Goal of Interactive Magazine

How are you going to get them back on the farm?

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Service and North Dakota State University Extension Service have teamed up to answer that question. A recently released interactive online magazine, "Marketing Agritourism Online," is geared to help agritourism enterprises attract customers. The program is available at http://go.unl.edu/agritourism

Agritourism is defined as any agriculture-based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. Examples are U-pick fruit farms, farm stands or shops, farm stays, tours, on-farm classes, fairs, festivals, pumpkin patches and Christmas tree farms.

"Many individuals today are looking to experience some part of the rural life," says Connie Hancock, UNL Extension Educator. "Whether going out to pick berries, getting lost in a corn maze, taking a trail ride, going hunting or just experiencing what one's parents or grandparents did, consumers are turning to rural attractions as tourist destinations."

Marketing Agritourism Online offers agritourism businesses a tool to reach a targeted audience with a focused message about what they have to offer.

"Finding the potential agritourism customer has always been difficult," says Hancock,. "And being able to tell prospective clients your story and what they will experience has also been a challenge."

Marketing Agritourism Online helps meet those challenges. This self-directed course and resource guide focuses on helping the agribusiness owner understand and plan for:

* Being online: Agritourism business owners will gain an understanding of direct online marketing, the associated technology and the "experience" economy, or where you and your activities become part of the actual event

* Getting found – Just being online does little to create awareness that a business exists. The program shows agritourism businesses how to develop and communicate their brand and get found when someone does a search.

* Being customer focused – Agritourism businesses get help in determining their marketing effectiveness, understanding what information they need to include on their website and developing online marketing tools.

* Telling others – Agritourism business owners learn how to encourage customers to help spread their story, along with how to remain engaged with people as a returning customer, a brand advocate or an ongoing buyer/user of the products and services offered. Business owners also receive information on using customer testimonials and tips on making short video clips of customers talking about their experiences.

Learning from others who have promoted their business online successfully makes this interactive online magazine unique and especially helpful to the business owner, according to Jay Jenkins, UNL Extension Educator. The online magazine includes video clips of Nebraska agritourism operators Sarah Sortum, with Calamus Outfitters, http://www.calamusoutfitters.com/ and Regina Ochoa, with RLazyJ at Whitney, Nebraska http://www.rlazyj.com and a member of the Nebraska High Country - http://www.nebraskahighcountry.com/, as well as three agritourism owners from North Dakota. These video segments provide examples of effective online marketing.

"The goal of the online magazine is to help the business owners effectively use this tool, online marketing, to reach, engage and eventually bring in new customers while encouraging previous customers to return,"

Jenny Nixon, UNL Extension Educator. “Today an effective marketing strategy must be integrated using all possible tools, including social media.”

Agritourism businesses and other small-business owners also can keep up with changes in online marketing tools and trends by subscribing to a free weekly newsletter, Direct Marketing, at http://paper.li/UNLeShip/1319999929

“Agritourism is all about experience,” according to Jenkins. “The customers’ experience begins long before they ever come to your business. It begins with their contact with you and will continue long after they leave.

“You want to help shape the customer’s expectations, ensure those expectations are met and, finally, to become an ambassador for your agritourism business,” he adds. “Marketing Agritourism Online is designed to help these three things happen.”

The interactive online magazine was made possible through the support of UNL Extension and NDSU and funding from the Southern Rural Development Center’s National eCommerce Initiative.

For more ideas and assistance on marketing for your small business, contact your local Extension Service office or go to UNL Extension’s website at http://eship.unl.edu