

# HOW TO TALK TO PRODUCERS ONLINE

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In the March issue, we discussed the importance of setting goals and protocols, understanding your audience and having genuine, unique content. The next steps are to get the message to the producer, integrate your communications and to measure and analyze the outcomes.

## BE EVERYWHERE

When you are looking for opportunities to influence producers, use their behaviors to determine where they go online.

**E-mail marketing:** According to "The 2009 NAFB Internet Usage Survey," producers use e-mail more frequently than any other digital two-way communication. Co-sponsor or buy media on trusted e-newsletters; piggy-back on an existing double opt-in e-mail list; build your own opt-in list and provide your own content; create mobile-friendly messaging campaigns — just a few ways to reach producers at their convenience.

**Search:** Producers told *Successful Farming* that they most frequently begin their hunt for information on a search engine. Your search engine marketing strategy should include:

- **Prominent brand placement via keyword ads** on the search engine results page, where your audience will click through to your web site or absorb your messaging as part of the information gathered.
- **Prominent brand placement on the web sites** that are listed among the top results of a search. Those web sites listed are likely some of the sites that your audience is visiting, so you should determine if there are media buying opportunities on them.
- **Publication Web sites:** Trusted-source web sites are inviting and familiar to producers because of their print-to-web behavior. These sites offer weather, commodities, futures and information, and often have media placement opportunities, too. Associate your

brand with the content on these sites. Having a great relationship with these publications can open new ways to connect with the audiences they have been cultivating for years.

- **Social media:** When you consider your communications and marketing mix, it is easy to be complacent about social media. In *Successful Farming's "2009 Farmers Use of Media Study,"* nearly 35% of producers under age 39 tell us that they participate in discussions online. **Nielson Online** reports that the fastest growing **Twitter** segment is 45 to 54 year-olds. Discussion forums have long been a part of the social media mix for producers: Forum sites like tractorbynet.com have been online since 1999 and receive 100,000 visitors per day.

So even while we wonder if producers are ready for social media, many of them are already there; and those who are not represented an age bracket showing signs of exploding online. The following will help you define your use of social media:

**Online Brand Reputation Management (OBRM)** is a process of monitoring and responding to the online conversation about your brand.

Social media as a marketing channel takes careful planning and maintenance. Listen first and earn respect. Provide 80% valuable information for 20% marketing messages.

Social media as a media buy is an easy way to enter into social media. Sites like **Facebook** or various blogs sell advertising — just be sure your audience is there before you buy.

The amount of marketing messages you can include is in direct proportion to the expertise and value you give away. Remember to keep your posts open-ended to invite dialog.

**Mobile:** Joel Jaeger at **Commodity Update** says it best, "Producers grab three things when they go out the door — cap, keys and cell phone." Co-branded opportunities exist for delivering content producers want to a device they already carry. Think

double opt-in for any mobile marketing. E-mail marketing and your web site should also be mobile-enabled.

## INTEGRATE COMMUNICATIONS

When you think about digital communications, don't limit your ideas to any single media. There is a seemingly endless list of digital opportunities for promotion, but remember that, once launched, all of these elements need constant care and maintenance. The best strategy is to only take on the ones that you can do well.

Another thing: be sure all your branding, marketing and public relations efforts in the print world are in concert with your digital offerings. The fact that producers learn of new web sites via magazines is a reminder that your offline campaigns need to be part of your online efforts.

## MEASURE AND ANALYZE

Digital generates lots of beguiling data. If you do not have staff devoted to its analysis, then pick one set of measurements (like **Google Analytics**) and watch for trends over time. There are legitimate reasons for inconsistencies between different sources of data, and sorting them out will only eat up valuable resources with little return. Instead, mine the responses to search engine marketing terms and ads to help refine marketing messages in other mediums.

Talking to producers online involves a wide spectrum of strategy and tactics. Smart use of current technologies will mean that, as more of your audience brings the conversation online, your agribusiness will already be there, ready to respond. **AM**

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