

## **Module 10 - Marketing for Rural Grocery Stores**

Marketing is an important tool for any business, but it is often difficult to determine where to focus your efforts and budget. To find the most effective use of the advertising dollar, it is likely that some experimentation will be necessary. There will undoubtedly be successes and failures, but by tracking results of the various marketing ventures, you will begin to understand what works most effectively in your area.

Several marketing strategies are described in more detail below.

### **Digital Marketing**

The first step to any good marketing plan is identifying your target audience. This article from the Blue Water Marketing Group ([bluewatermarketing.com](http://bluewatermarketing.com)) shares a variety of ways to identify your digital marketing targets, whether you are a marketing beginner, or marketing pro! Among the recommendations are first to look at the characteristics of your current customer base. What is the typical age, gender, income level? How can that customer best be reached online? If you are unsure of the target market or how to reach them, another recommendation is to conduct a customer survey to collect this data.

After you have identified your target market you will be able to hatch a digital marketing plan, based on what that group responds to. Following digital marketing best practices, such as these tips from [Nerd Wallet.com](http://NerdWallet.com):

- Make sure your website looks and functions properly on a mobile device
- Start a blog and post regularly
- Build a contact list for email marketing
- Encourage customers to leave online reviews (Anthony, 2023)

### **Traditional Marketing**

Although digital marketing is becoming more and more popular, you may find that the previously identified target market responds best to traditional marketing types. Things like promoting your store through the local radio and/or newspaper can be just as beneficial as digital marketing. According to the article from Newsworks.com, "RAMetrics data covering 2022-2023 shows print ads deliver a recall of 78%, a whopping 48 percentage points higher than digital." (Print and Digital, 2024) This means that by printing in your local paper people may actually remember your brand better than if they had seen it online. According to a study done by the Radio Advertising Bureau, broadcast radio increased brand site traffic by 29%. (Radio Advertising Bureau, 2020)

Other things to consider when creating a marketing plan, specifically for a grocery store, may include branding, a loyalty program, and coupons. Having an established brand can be just as important to marketing as the advertisements you pay for. Branding your plastic grocery bags is a good start, but according to an ePromos article "10 Winning Strategies for Promoting Your Grocery Store" offering branded reusable bags may also be a beneficial option.

*"In line with the sustainable movement, offering branded, reusable shopping bags is a must. More folks are ditching paper and plastic bags in favor of these eco-friendly options. Not only does this help the environment, but it helps to get eyes on your business logo when*

*shoppers use their tote in other places around town. Don't forget – the more bags are used, the less money you spend on plastic or brown bags. Keep your grocery bags at check-out lanes where customers can easily see and buy them.” (S., 2021)*

The same article discusses loyalty programs as well as coupons. Although loyalty programs look different for every store, the idea behind them all is the same...keep repeat customers coming through the doors. Whether that be by exclusive shopping times, a purchase discount, specials on specific products, or other perks, there is sure to be a loyalty benefit that could be offered by stores of any size. Coupons offer the same idea, bringing people in the door. However, according to the ePromos article, you may want to make sure you are offering both printed coupons and digital coupons.

*“People still love deals, even if they're no longer scouring newspaper inserts to clip coupons. Instead, digitize your coupons so they can be found and retrieved with a simple finger swipe on a smartphone. Having a few coupons to use just may make the difference between whether they pick up their groceries at your store or the one across town.” (S., 2021)*

Statistics show that combining more than one of these marketing strategies can be even more effective. According to Finances Online.com “By combining print and digital ads, it will make online campaigns 400% more effective.” A similar statistic from the study by the Radio Advertising Bureau, mentioned above, says “Web lift is increased by over 50% when digital [advertising] is added to radio [advertising].” (26 Relevant Print Marketing Statistics: 2024 Ad Spending & Impact, 2024)

In order to figure out what works best for your store, develop a plan following these “7 Steps To Successful Strategic Marketing Planning” from [indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com). Report authors recommend starting with a SWOT analysis to determine your own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This review will help you determine where improvement is needed and where opportunities are available and achievable. Next you may consider doing a little market research to see what other small stores or your competitors are doing. Understanding what is working for them, and what is not, should help as you plot your own marketing strategy. As you plan next steps, set goals and develop a realistic budget for your activities. (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023)

### **Special Events**

Another form of marketing is to offer a variety of special events. Depending on the type of event that is held, there can be an abundance of planning and promotion required, so you may wonder if the return is worth the trouble. Results reported in this article, called “In-Store Retail Events: The Complete Guide” ([www.lightspeedhq.com/blog](https://www.lightspeedhq.com/blog)), show the effort is indeed worthwhile. Their research found that 87% of consumers claim to purchase a brand's products after having attended one of their in-store events. (Hamilton, 2023)

Events can range from a grand opening to a special holiday event, to a monthly special event. If you are just starting your grocery store a grand opening is a great way to announce your store to your community. Shopify offers these seven reasons to have a grand opening in their article “11 Grand Opening and Reopening Ideas for Any Business” (<https://www.shopify.com/blog/grand-opening-ideas>).

1. Generate press
2. Meet members of the local community
3. Reward early followers and supporters
4. Grow your social following

5. Build your email list
6. Collect valuable UGC (user-generated content) and testimonials
7. Start relationships with other brands and retailers (Winter, 2024)

These are all good reasons to start your marketing campaign and expand your reach right from the start. Although these are discussed in the context of a grand opening, they can also apply to holidays and other events throughout the year. The strategies can go hand in hand with the marketing plan developed in the previous section of this report. By meeting community members and starting relationships you set yourself up for future event partnership opportunities.

Other activities that have proven to be successful, yet simple, are tasting events in the store. Choose a product to feature, then market the event and that product all at once! According to an EPromos article, tasting events can be as simple, or complex as you want to make them and serve as a great way to get people through the door!

*“Are tastings samples? Essentially, yes. But we aren’t talking about the generic table set-up where a disinterested employee hawks cheese cubes between texting. Make these offerings feel more like an event. Create an attractive set-up. Make sure your employee is friendly, engaged, and put together (fresh uniform, no stains, ironed, etc.).*

*Host tastings them [sic] at the same times each week, or at the same time of the day, so that customers can plan their shopping trip around them. Have a fun theme and offer a greater variety of items than just one jar of salsa or type of cracker. Promote the events on your social media accounts to help get the word out, too. People love free stuff, even if it’s just a few bites of food – and will likely pick up the milk and cereal they just ran out of while they’re there to sample, too.” (S., 2021)*

Opportunities for events are endless. The most important thing to remember when planning events is that you know your target market, and your community. You know what types of events they will respond to, or what will bring them through the doors! With this in mind and following a plan, such as the Lightspeed article mentioned above, events can be a useful marketing tool.

### **Partnerships in Marketing**

An often-overlooked marketing strategy is to partner with businesses and organizations within the community. There are often synergies that can be capitalized upon when collaborating with other entities. For example, the grocery store could partner with a local school or community organization to educate students or adults on nutrition and cooking. Or the store could sponsor a fundraiser for a local non-profit organization. Working with other businesses on marketing projects can elevate overall visibility in the area. The more the rural grocery store is seen working within the community, the more likely they are to be viewed favorably, and this can pay dividends in sales and profitability. These and other creative promotional ideas are described in the section on Grocery Innovations.

## References

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