

Tips of the Trade for Marketing Organics in Florida

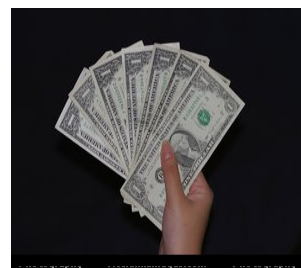
For most green industry professionals, highly effective marketing is a make-or-break business necessity. It's virtually impossible to successfully market recycled organics and compost-related products/services in Florida today without a good marketing and promotional strategy. First, you will need to let potential customers know about all the products and services your business can provide which it turns means knowing what customers need and are willing to pay for. To assist the recycled organics industry in marketing strategies, key tips of the trade have been outlined below.



Know your audience. The market for recycled organics products (compost and mulch) is in its comparative infancy. This being the case, it is wise to conduct your own research, no matter how informal it may be, to learn more about existing markets and conditions in your area. Familiarize yourself with prospective customers. The more you understand about the businesses you are selling to, the more likely you will be able to succeed. Know what matters to your target market. Marketing is fulfilling a need, and finding out what that need is will help determine a niche for your business. Examine the issues facing your potential client. What matters to them? What problem are you solving?

Identify the barriers to purchasing your product.

What are your prospective buyers using at this time? How much volume, at what price and where are they obtaining this product from? Determine what businesses consider to be the positives and negatives of the product they are currently using so that you can identify the barriers you need to overcome for them to consider being your customer.



Promote the end results and success stories.

Your customers don't really want your product or service. They want the benefit produced by using it. Focus on the benefits! There really is a strong case for using recycled organic products if you consider environmental and performance benefits. It is vitally important to educate the target audience and focus on these benefits in order to change any possible negative perceptions.

It may seem obvious but your customers are one of your company's biggest assets. Everyone knows that fact and by the same logic your customer success stories should be your biggest marketing asset. "Seeing is believing" is a philosophy which can work to your advantage in showing other customers the value of your product/service.

Test your product. The importance of product testing can not be over emphasized. A number of labs around the state can provide an analysis of your recycled organic product. You may also want to consider the U.S. Composting Councils *Seal of Testing Assurance Program* to evaluate compost quality.

Since growing conditions and plant requirements vary, compost users can benefit from information that accurately characterizes the compost products they use. This data can improve the utilization of compost in ways to best meet particular needs and to fit a specific situation. The specific characteristics of a compost product determines how, and in which applications it can be best utilized. Characterization data helps the compost user obtain product that is appropriate for use with their project or application.



Define a marketing budget. Determine what marketing materials and outreach efforts your business will need and subsequent costs associated with these efforts. Marketing should not be an after thought but should be considered as an avenue for you to win business contacts. Calculate how much your business is prepared to spend on this important part of your business plan.



Understand the supply chain. Understand your customer's customers. If you can identify where your business fits in the supply chain and how your customer is using your product, you have a much better chance of meeting their buying criteria.

Become a valuable resource to your customers.

Look for ways you can be a resource for your prospects and customers. Supply them with free information. on the use of compost/mulch. Help them do things faster, easier, less expensively. You get another opportunity to promote something every time your customer comes back to you for help. Remember to be accessible should this customer need to contact you. Nothing is more frustrating than being unable to contact you when you're needed. Use a 24-hour voice mail service or answering machine if you do not have a receptionist or answering service. Check your e-mail or FAX regularly, or have a toll free phone line or service if appropriate for making it easier for your customers and prospects to reach you.

Target your communications. Recycled organics product end-users can be segmented into different customer types. It is more effective to target prospects via direct activity or through the relevant trade publications. To assist in locating potential end users, the following directories have been compiled and can be obtained at www.floridaforce.org



- Florida Vegetable and Fruit Growers
- Florida Sod and Landscape Companies
- Golf Courses and Golf Properties of Florida
- Florida Top Soil and Soil Dealers



Make a commitment to meet product supply demand. If marketing strategies go well, will you be able to meet current supply obligations? A general rule is to under-promise and exceed expectations. Make a realistic appraisal of what you can deliver and make sure you can meet or better yet exceed that commitment.

Anticipate change. Change is the biggest challenge to any business success. The days are gone when a business could constantly grow by simply repeating what it did successfully in the past ...or even recently. Aggressive, innovative competitors and rapidly changing technology make it impossible. Expect change and prepare for it. Don't wait until your income declines to take action. Develop the habit of looking for early signs that something is changing. Then confront it before you start to lose business.

Keeep adding something new Every time you add something new to your business you create an opportunity to get more sales. For example, something as simple as adding new information on your web site creates another selling opportunity when prospects and customers visit your site to see the new information. Adding a new product or service to the list of those you already offer usually produces a big increase in sales. The added product/service increases your sales in three different ways:



- It attracts new customers who were not previously interested in your current products and services.
- It generates repeat sales from existing customers who also want to have your new product.
- It enables you to get bigger sales by combining two or more services or items into special package offers.

Separate yourself from your competition

Find or create a reason for customers to do business with you instead of with someone else offering the same or similar products. For example, do you provide faster results, easier procedures, personal attention or a better guarantee? Determine the unique advantage you offer to customers that your competitors do not offer. Promote that advantage in all of your advertising. Give potential clients a reason to do business with you instead of with your competition and you'll automatically get more sales.



Maintain a continuing presence. With today's marketplace noise, out of sight truly is out of mind. Make certain that when buying decisions are made, you are on the short list. Avoid being intrusive - people are too busy today to spend much, if any, time with your self-serving information. Maintain visible and active participation in organizations organics end users actively support. Send emails, or clippings that provide valuable information the potential clients otherwise might have missed. Regular, pertinent, short newsletters, with good, easy-to-read, valuable new information, can create effective top-of-mind awareness.

Marketing is an ongoing task requiring successful businesses to turn their thinking inside-out. Re-think your business regularly to be sure you continue to serve your customer better than anyone else. Remember, it's a lot easier to keep an existing customer than to attract a new one.

FORCE would like to obtain your comments, suggestions or recommendations regarding this information.

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