

2.3 Communication

SPADEWORK
BROADCASTING
GERMINATION
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SUSTAINABILITY
RESOURCES?

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Introduction

Running a small business is often stressful and exhausting. A farmers' market is a collection of many small businesses that come together in a burst of frantic activity for a few hours each week. For many stallholders, income from the market is vital for their livelihood. The market may be their only retail outlet and market day is the only time they have contact with their customers, other producers and the market management. It is no wonder the site is often a hive of rumour, innuendo and gossip. Keeping everyone informed regularly in as many ways as possible won't stop this but will provide a source of official and up-to-date information that will help assure stallholders that their business is in safe hands. It also provides a channel for questions, enquiries and complaints. If the manager collects stall fees on market day, he or she can touch base personally with every stallholder each week.

It is also important to facilitate communication between customers and market management.

Communication strategies

Here are four communication strategies that worked for the Willunga Farmers Market:

- > **The information stall** represents the face of the market management to the market patrons. If positioned at the entrance to the market, members and visitors can be welcomed, and given information relating to location of stalls, what's on or special for that week, and seasonal updates of new produce and producers. It also gives people a place to connect with if they have praise or criticism to offer.
- > **The suggestion box** can be a source of market research that has anonymity.
- > **Two newsletters**
 - A weekly stallholder's newsletter
 - A seasonal newsletter for market members

The stallholders' newsletter

- > A newsletter written every week a day before the market is an opportunity to provide stallholders with up to the minute information about everything that affects the market and stakeholders. This valuable tool is not only a source of information but also acts to strengthen the brotherhood of the market. It can contain:
 - Information about visitors to the market ie press, VIPs
 - Reminders about special events

Notice of sales and promotion opportunities

Personal information about producers such as births and marriages etc

Announcements about stallholder successes and awards

Latest media stories about the market

News about regulatory changes

The Willunga Farmers Market Experience

We had always intended to publish a general newsletter but it took some time and many volunteer hours before we were ready to go to print. *The Forager* has been an incredibly effective communication tool both for the Market and the region's food culture and 5000 copies are now distributed throughout the region. It is published seasonally in summer, autumn, winter and spring. Helen acted as main writer, editor and designer with all costs underwritten by the Willunga Farmers Market until we were able to find a sponsor to publish in-house and could afford to contract an outside editor and designer.

Setting up a website seemed to be one of the last and least important aspects of getting the market up and running. There were so many more practical and necessary things to contend with. With a functioning database and by using email we could access most of our member producers and customers electronically. The seasonal *Forager* was acting as our regional what's-on publicity arm and the weekly *Producer's Press* was particularly useful in disseminating information on market day.

A website however could offer two important things – customer access to and information about individual producers and products as well as a point of contact for people planning a visit to the region. We wanted everyone who visited the region on a Saturday morning to include a visit to the Market as a must-see destination on their itinerary. Seeking professional help with the website will ensure value for money and hopefully provide you with what you need. We're still working on ours!

The members' newsletter

A newsletter for market members can act as the market's external communication tool. It can reinforce the values and objectives of the farmers' market movement, and act as a regional advertisement for the market, the producers and the local food culture. Most importantly it can give members a feeling of inclusiveness.

The market newsletter can include:

- News of market activities and events
- A what's on diary of regional events that feature food
- Profiles of local food personalities
- Restaurant reviews of establishments that feature regional produce
- Member profiles and stories relating to the market
- Reports and reviews of regional festivals and special events
- Stories and articles about the big picture such as GM food debate, global markets
- News of interest to local food producers and consumers such as changes to labelling requirements
- Reports from regional food group
- Seasonal produce updates
- Recipes
- Local chef profiles and appearance dates
- Sponsor of the issue
- Shopper of the issue
- Photos and details of member stories and activities ie weddings, overseas experiences etc

Make sure the newsletter is available via email and on the website as well as in hardcopy.

Copies should be available at the information stall and other market stalls and it should be distributed to public venues such as local winery cellar doors, restaurants and cafes, retail food outlets, visitor centres, tourism offices and venues, and farmgate outlets.

Electronic copies can be sent to stakeholders, relevant government agencies (ie Food SA) and media files on the database.

Website

A website however can offer two important additions to the communication strategies outlined above.

1. customer access to and information about individual producers and products
2. a point of contact for people planning a visit to the region.

Things to consider when setting up a website:

- > Check to see if there is a regional organisation that can offer a web site as part of their brief. ie regional tourism organisation, regional food group, local council

- > Check out as many market websites as possible to work out how you might like your site to look and function. Remember the more complicated it is, the longer it takes to download.
- > It is useful and cost effective for managers to be able to update websites themselves so before you purchase any software make sure it does what you want it to.
- > Pay an expert to set it up and assist you to understand and use the software package.
- > Be prepared to have to set up each producer's website presence for nothing if you want to have every stallholder represented. Often farmers are not good marketers or technology whiz kids, so make it easy for them.
- > To control content the manager should be trained to upload and update the site. Producers should submit information they want included on their page to the manager who can guide them about what to include on their page. Tori Morton of Fleurieu Peninsula Food estimates that it takes her a couple of hours to load member details and about 1/2 a day each month to update the site.

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Checklist

- > List communication needs within and outside market
- > Check local publications for opportunities to piggyback
- > Visit as many farmers' market websites as possible
- > Develop communication plan from above

Websites

Google <farmers market>

Willunga Farmers Market:
www.willungafarmersmarket.com/

Appendices

Appendix D Producers Press