

Learn Marketing (and create work) from Rural Development

Linda reaches into the hinterlands to find tips on how to market small business from – of all places – small towns.

Think of Yourself as a Small Town

I've been known to reach into some odd places to find marketing ideas. You might think this idea is the strangest of all, but – after looking through a few [rural marketing](#) sites, presentations and papers – I walked away with some ideas for marketing my own business. And, since I'm not one to keep things to myself (I think of myself as an open source venue), I thought I'd share some sites and ideas with readers.

No matter if you live in the U.S., Europe, India or any other country, you have rural development somewhere. Get your head out of the city for a bit and think about how difficult it might be for a small town to market itself, especially to tourists. The competition is fierce in areas where interstates or highways pass right by a town that is located between two larger cities. That small town or rural area must develop a plan to pull in tourism dollars – or to pull in new businesses – or that small town might shrivel and die.

Now, think of yourself as a small town. The competition is fierce for designers and developers, right? And, if you're flying solo, you also have to compete against larger agencies and established businesses that surround you. How do you stop potential dollars from flying by on a figurative highway on the way to a larger business?

You don't need to reinvent the wheel – just take a look at some of the links I've gathered below to harvest some marketing ideas. The idea of thinking of yourself as a rural area (or – hint, hint – marketing yourself TO a rural area) just might work. The real advantage? Getting out of the urban rat race into a pace that feels more like community.

Rural Tourism Marketing



HOME ABOUT CONSULTING & TRAINING RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS FOR SMALL TOWN BUSINESSES SUCCESS FOR SMALL TOWNS

Why Adin Supply Is a Rural Area Tourism Destination

by JOANNE STEELE on SEPTEMBER 28, 2010

I've written before about [how valuable your country grocery store can be to your rural area tourism industry](#). I rediscovered a real gem of an example the other day in Adin, California.

[Adin Supply Company](#) is a rural area tourism destination on Highway 299 in the middle of the little town of Adin, California. It has been continuously operating since 1906 as a center of commerce for the Big Valley. It's clearly "hunter central" for Big Valley, and a great stopping place for Hwy 299 travelers.



The country store itself is a gem. You walk in to a museum, housing a modern grocery store, a meat market and a little of everything else.



Besides serving 299 travelers with well-advertised coffee and excellent road food, it is clearly the Big Valley rural area tourism destination. If you have any question about what attracts visitors to Big Valley, you only have to look at the store space given over to sporting goods, and the wall

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This is one of my favourite rural development/marketing sites, because I've download some free marketing tools and found some interesting links and articles here. Joanne Steele, the owner and CEO for this site, spent the past 14 years helping small tourism related businesses and rural communities develop clear, targeted and effective marketing programs on a very limited budget. Additionally, Steele helped small towns become more Internet-savvy to effectively compete in the greater tourism industry.

So, on Steele's site, you'll discover articles such as the one about saving time by using Google's new [Priority Inbox](#), how to [market in the age of social media](#) (especially in down times – just replace the word, "town" with the word, "myself"), and another article on [how to step into the mind of your customer](#).

This is a great site, also, for learning more about your potential rural customers. What are they using in social media? How are they using the Internet? What are some rural areas doing to attract customers and businesses? All this information can help you learn more about your smaller clients – and, by using the information on this site to gain knowledge about marketing smaller businesses, you can end up looking smarter than the big guys.

Alaska Community Tourism Handbook

Alaska Community Tourism Handbook



How to Develop Tourism in Your Community



[This Alaska Tourism handbook](#) is a PDF file, and it speaks to garnering tourism business in Alaska. But, the important part of this paper for (small and remote) towns and (small and remote) designers and developers begins on page nine. At the bottom of page nine, look for a purple box that lists the “Five A’s of Successful Tourism Development”:

1. Attitude: “There is a saying that if a customer is pleased with the service they receive, he or she will tell three friends about the experience. But, if they are unhappy with their experience, they will tell TWELVE other people about it.” Beautifully said.
2. Access: “Even if transportation to a smaller community is available only two or three times a week, visitors will come if they are sure about the schedule.” In other words, let clients know when and where to find you.
3. Accommodations: Although this section focuses on providing accommodations such as a place to sleep and food, think more broadly – what can you offer your clients that the “big” guys cannot offer? More personal service? Faster turn-around?
4. Attractions: “Attractions do not have to be on the scale of Mt. McKinley to be a successful tourism draw.” In other words, you need to have a way to pull in viewers, and you don’t have to be all flash and bravado...a simple Web site that features your work, interaction on Facebook or Twitter and a personable open-door policy might work for you.
5. Advertising: “Never assume visitors will automatically hear about your community. Someone has to tell them, and that someone is probably YOU.”

I think most of those points are self-explanatory. Although they are elementary, it never hurts to hear them over and over again...especially the attitude, access and advertising (even if it’s public relations rather than paid ads).

Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook



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Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook

This guide is designed to help farm and ranch operators (and other individuals who grow or process food products) market their products and services directly to the consumer.

You can access the guide online by following the links [below](#). Please note that these pdf files require Acrobat Reader, which can be downloaded free from the [Adobe website](#).

[Link to online Farm Directory](#)

[Complete Handbook as a single pdf file](#) [2 MB pdf file]
(requires Adobe Reader 5 or higher)

The Handbook is also available in individual files as listed below.

You may not be growing tomatoes for sale; but, if you have developer or design skills, you might think of those skills as fruits of your labour. Take a look at the list of marketing ideas offered by the [Direct Farm Marketing and tourism Handbook](#). You'll find "Direct Marketing Alternatives" that might get some ideas flowing; "Business planning," that offers a variety of ideas on how to plan your own business, and "Market Analysis and Pricing," with tools that can help you seize a market with your skills.

Don't miss the "Advertising and Promotion" section to this publication, especially ideas on direct marketing. The direct marketing article has a list of ideas to follow for direct marketing and the fifth bullet states:

Fifth, make sure that the design is attractive. If you don't have a good eye for design, find someone who does. Often print shops will have employees with some design skills.

Hm...interesting. Perhaps there is a market for design in rural tourism, no?

Putting It All Together

**PUTTING
IT ALL
TOGETHER**

Using Your Ratings



CHAPTER FIVE

GOAL SETTING AND DEVELOPING A PLAN OF ACTION

Putting It All Together

You have explored each section of your tourism environment one at a time. Now it is time to tie together what you have learned. You need to stand back and try to picture the whole network of interacting pieces which combine to form your tourism profile, and possibly your tourism potential.

Using Your Ratings

First, you have given an overall rating for 14 major categories. Review your inventories and bring those ratings together.

Overall Tourism Rating Scales (copy from the appropriate pages)

	Bad	Excellent
• Natural Attractions (page 24)	0 _____	10
• Man-Enhanced Natural Attractions (page 24)	0 _____	10
• Festivals/Events (page 26)	0 _____	10
• Recreational Activities (page 28)	0 _____	10
• Nature-Based Traditions (page 30)	0 _____	10

Take a look at [this sample brochure](#) [PDF] for marketing a rural area. If you live in a rural area (or a small town next to an urban area – now called an “[edge](#)” community), take stock of what you have available to you. You might be surprised. Even urbanites can play this game – pick a suburb near you and begin to learn more about that suburb.

When you fill out the blanks in this form, you may realize that you have markets that you haven’t tapped for your design and development skills. Which natural attractions need your help in setting up a Facebook Fan Page? Which man-made attractions might need help in developing a blog or an app to pull in business and tourist dollars? What festivals and events can you tap into to sell your designs or computer skills?

The point behind all this is to realize that rural marketing is taking first steps into turning a poor economy into a life-saving strategy. You can be part of that revolution by tuning your mindset to “rural” rather than to “urban.”

Conclusion

I applied for a job in an “edge” community recently and was offered the position. One reason I got the job, I’m sure, is that I did my homework. I researched the group that offered the job, I researched the area and what that area had to offer. I also was the only person who offered papers at both interviews – papers that talked about a specific project and how it could help that community grow economically.

The project wasn't my idea...in fact, the community already had that project in motion. But, nothing had been done to keep the project alive, including surveys to determine if the project really worked. I didn't reinvent the wheel, in other words – all I did was learn what had been used and expanded on how that project could move forward.

I thought the competition for this job would be stiff, as more than a dozen people applied for the position. But, from what I understand, not one applicant other than myself knew anything about the organization that they were applying to, nor did they offer solutions to an already-existing problem. While you may think that this was rather naïve on the part of the applicants, I've learned recently that many job applicants often don't conduct research on the businesses that they approach for jobs.

Be different! Be smart! If you're intrigued by rural marketing and you want to get in on this often sustainable, environmental and organic trend, then get to know the rural marketing movement. Understand that rural marketing might be limited by lack of Internet connection and lack of computer savvy. Also realize that many business owners in rural areas may be leery of strangers who want to market their businesses, or that many business owners may feel apathetic about marketing in this down economy.

Be the person who knows solutions. Study rural marketing sites and studies. Learn what these markets already know, and what they might need to learn. Offer free classes for local businesses on developing Facebook Fan pages or on how to get up to speed with a blog. Get involved with the local tourism committee or local rural development organization and go to meetings.

While all of this "knowing" might take some work, you may realize what a market you're about to tap. You may, if you know what you are doing, end up being the "go-to person" for your local rural development market. Once you've opened the door to this opportunity, you may begin to understand why customer loyalty is so important...once you've become the person to tap for marketing knowledge or Internet interactions, why go elsewhere?

Just take a page from any one of the sites listed above (or the thousands of other sites devoted to "rural tourism" or "rural marketing") to learn the tricks and tools that can make your own rural marketing a success. Just think like a small town, learn where you live, and you might open doors to new markets for your skills.