



EPISODE 32

When to Start Marketing Your Farm Business

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TIM YOUNG: If you're planning to start a farm—or any small business—when should you start marketing it?

Hey, it's Tim Young of [Small Farm Nation](https://smallfarmnation.com)!

Today, I'm going to tell you why you should start marketing your farm or small business BEFORE you even open for business.

So, perhaps you're planning to jettison your career and start a farming business.

Or maybe you've inherited land that can become a business, but you're not sure when or how to get started.

Regardless, let's say that you haven't pulled the trigger yet but you're committed to becoming an agripreneur.

Now, when most people go down that route—they do it backwards, at least from a typical entrepreneurial perspective.

Instead of thinking about the business model, they start by thinking about the resources.

Namely, land—where to find it, how much to pay for it and what to do with it.

Then they get all enamored with the romantic side of farm life—the tranquility, the animals, the soil sifting through their fingers.

And they begin to fantasize about **starting a farm**, but, here's the thing.

A farm can mean two things.

First, it can mean a *lifestyle*—a spot of land where you grow food.

Or it can mean something else.

It can mean a **business** that's located on a spot of land.

An agricultural business that generates not only food, but income to sustain your family.

And, actually, not only income, but it creates *assets* that appreciate over time, such as livestock, soil fertility, and land value.

But the reason so many approach this process backwards is they don't make the decision up front of whether they're committed to running a farm **BUSINESS**, or having a farm hobby.

If you recall, that was rule #1 in the last episode of [Small Farm Nation](#).

Treating the farm as a business rather than a hobby.

So, if you're thinking of starting a farm business and you're curious **when to start marketing** your “future” farm, homestead or online business, here's the answer.

The answer is Now.

As in, right now.

Now, does that make you nervous?

As in, you're afraid to market and don't know where or how to begin?

And Why are we all so afraid to market ourselves anyway?

Well, let's be honest about that

Some professions have, rightly or wrongly, a negative stereotype associated with them.

You may have heard the joke, "What do you call 1,000 lawyers at the bottom of the ocean?"

The punchline, of course, is "a good start."

Similarly, many people have the same negative impression of the sales profession.

Images of hard-core sales tactics, infomercials, and the outdated "used-car salesman" stereotype persist.

As a result, we're afraid to be lumped into these categories.

But here's the thing. Effective farm marketing isn't about "selling" anything to anyone. Rather, it's about sharing.

So, if you're thinking, "Hey, I don't even have a farm yet. No products, no nothing. So I have nothing to share!"

Well, now...that's not true, is it?

Because you have a story to share, even if you're just taking your first steps.

And the reason you're taking..or contemplating those steps is a very important part of your story.

That's the part that people will care about and connect with.

So you have an opportunity right now to be open—to be vulnerable, and connect with people on a very emotional level.

How?

By sharing the truth.

Your dreams about the life you want to create.

Your vision for the change you represent, which could be for the animals, the environment, your community or even personal health reasons.

Or all of them.

And be honest about your fears, because we all have fears.

If you're worried that you don't know how to farm, or how to run a business, then say so.

And that's all very powerful stuff that connects on an emotional level with an audience in a way that big brands simply can't match.

So, you don't have to worry about pushing product, or spouting features and benefits of what you have.

You simply get to tell your story and build relationships.

And that, small farm nation, is at the core of effective farm marketing.

Okay, I said you should start marketing now, before you start your farm business. So why do I think that?

All right, I'll tell you.

Here are **5 Benefits of marketing your Farm business before you start**

Benefit #1. You'll build a loyal tribe, because you're allowing others to live vicariously through you.

Back in 2007 when Liz and I opted-out of the rat race, we created a blog and began sharing our story.

This was over a year before we had any farm animals or anything to sell.

What did we write about?

We wrote about why we were moving to the country and what we were hoping to find and accomplish.

We shared both our successes and our failures.

We talked about how our values had changed once our eyes were opened, thanks in large part to folks like Michael Pollan and Joel Salatin.

And lots of people felt like we did, but, unlike us, they couldn't up and change their lives like we did.

So they lived vicariously through us.

By the time we had products to sell our fans had been following our footsteps for almost two years.

They felt like they knew us and we felt like we knew many of them.

That's the basis for a mutually loyal relationship, which is what you want.

I'm sure you'll find the same for you, just as James and Eileen Ray did of Little Seed Farm.

They have a wildly successful artisan goat's milk soap business in Tennessee. If you recall from episode 1 of this podcast, James said he also started their blog over a year before even moving to the farm.

Sharing your story with fans and potential customers has a number of benefits to you and your followers.

Now, at this stage, before you *launch* your farm or small business, effective marketing **isn't about "selling"**.

Rather, it's about sharing.

It's about building relationships.

About bonding.

And that's what you're gonna need down the road.

You're gonna need to have bonded with people who will be your champions.

Your loyal tribe, who will not only support you financially, but will cheer for you, recommend you and defend you down the road.

You can't get that relationship by selling.

Rather, you get those kind of supporters by being open and honest. By revealing your true personality, whether it's quirky, serious, funny or vulnerable.

Just be you, and let others live vicariously through you as you take this **journey**.

And that's what it is, right?

A journey you're taking, in your life.

And they get to go along with you.

Because you're not only changing *your* life, you're changing theirs as well by, hopefully, changing what and how they eat, their connection with the land and their local community and, in many cases, letting them live vicariously through you on your farm journey.

So, maybe you **buy** what I'm saying, but you're not sure what to do.

I mean, you heard me describe what Liz and I shared, but what should *you* do?

Okay, before you even start sharing, you're gonna need a platform.

A soapbox to share from.

Now, I think that should be a website with a blogging platform, and I highly recommend WordPress for that.

But, if you must, use Wix, Weebly, Squarespace or whatever.

Just create a website.

Also, create your main social media pages now, which will probably be Facebook.

It could be YouTube too, but YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest may not make sense, since those are highly visual channels and it's not like you have a lot of animal or farm pics at this stage.

But you decide.

Just make sure it's a platform where you can not only connect, but collect email addresses as well.

Because you're gonna need them.

And don't create a sloppy farm website.

If you can't do it right, then hire someone to help you do it.

Great themes aren't expensive for WordPress and you can get someone to configure them for you pretty cheaply.

I know this may cost money, but this is a business, remember?

So we want to look and be professional.

Now, once you set up your platform, start sharing.

And start by sharing your back story - who you are and what you've been doing.

Just share the highlights—not a brain dump of your whole life—I mean, this isn't your shrink's sofa.

And don't be stiff, like on those corporate or legal sites, where no one seems to have a personality.

Be real and give folks a glimpse of who you are, your personality and what's happened to you.

For instance, go to smallfarmnation.com and check out the about me page.

In one paragraph learn that Lynyrd Skynyrd once played a July 4th BBQ at my house for me and a couple dozen friends.

You'll also learn that I almost pursued a pro golfing career and that I love the Pittsburgh Steelers to the point where I can barely watch a game.

Hey, doesn't everybody?

And you'll get a sense of some business stuff I've done.
So readers have various ways to relate to and connect with me.
Hopefully I won't get too many nasty emails from Pats fans.

So start by sharing the *interesting parts* of your back story.
And even though I just told you a few things about me, I really only shared about 3 things.
Out of the past 30 plus years.
And that's because most of what happens to all of us ISN'T interesting to anyone.
So pick what is invite people into a relationship with you.

But that's the past.
Readers and listeners (if you go the video or podcast route) will also want to know about the future.

So what's your vision?
Why are you here?
Think of it like a story—a novel.
What's the *inciting* incident that caused you to be where you are now, doing or contemplating what you're contemplating.

Everyone loves a good story, and this is marketing at its purest and easiest.

Well—*easiest to understand*—not necessarily easiest to accomplish.

Because, let's be honest, many people don't like talking about themselves.

They think they're being egotistical or something.
And, unless they're bragging—**they're not.**

They're connecting with other humans.

But another reason it can be challenging to share the story is you have to be a decent writer.

And I think many farmers and small business owners either underestimate or don't appreciate how important wordsmithing and copywriting is.

Copywriting is important, if you want to connect with people and get them to keep reading or listening.

So, just as your about page will share your backstory, be sure to also share your vision.

Your mission. Your reason for being.

If you can't wordsmith it properly, hire someone.

Or join the [Small Farm Nation Academy](#) and post what you're struggling with in the forum.

I'll help you out.

Once you've created your About Us page, shared your background and vision, the rest becomes incremental updates.

And that's where blogging, podcasting or vlogging with video comes in.

So, you do frequent updates—not necessarily every day, but with some regularity, if you want people to care about you.

And you do—that's EXACTLY what you want.

Your updates should very openly share what you're doing, feeling and experiencing.

We were very open with our blog and podcast, sharing the good, the bad and the ugly of sustainable livestock farming.

It earned us lots of fans, and even earned me some enemies.

Check out the reviews of *The Accidental Farmers* on Amazon and you'll see how many haters I have.

But—and this is important so pay attention—what we wrote and said made people **care**.

Care enough to love us or care enough to hate me.
But few were indifferent.
I say hate “me” because no one could possibly hate my darling wife.
So the anger comes my way.

And, that’s okay—I don’t take it personally, because they don’t even know me.
So they don’t really hate me even if they say they do.
They just disagreed with my views or practices, and that’s cool.

So that's Benefit # 1—You’ll Build a Loyal Tribe

Now, here’s benefit #2, and it’s of huge importance.

You’ll get a head start on building your most important marketing asset: your **email list**.

As a result of our blogging, we picked up a steady stream of followers that ultimately grew into a customer list that numbered over 5,000.

Turns out a lot of people were living their homestead dreams through us, but were tethered to “real jobs” in the city.

So, when you set up your platform—your website and social media presence—you’ll also want to set up an email marketing account.

Might as well start with MailChimp, because it’s free until you get 2,000 subscribers.

Many farm businesses never get to that level, so it’s always free for them.

Now, I’ve used lots of email marketing tools, from MailerLite and MailChimp to Constant Contact, HubSpot and MadMimi.

Today, I use ConvertKit, but you don’t need it to start.

What you DO need is to have an opt-in form front and center on your website, and a clear incentive for people to sign up.

If you're sharing great content, that could be incentive enough right there. Just promise to email updates to those who join your list. Otherwise, you'll need to create an incentive, such as a lead magnet.

Go to smallfarmnation.com and check out my blog post called, "How to Create an Email List for Your Farm"

It'll walk you through the important steps.

So, benefit #2 is you'll get a head start on building that all important email list.

Let's move on.

Benefit #3, is also of huge importance.

Maybe even huger importance, as my five-year old daughter might say.

And that is you'll get a great head start on **search engine optimization** (SEO) by marketing early.

This is particularly true if you blog, since you'll have the opportunity to "optimize" lots of different posts.

Of course, you can share your story in other formats than blogs, such as using a podcast, like this one.

But if you take that route just be sure to create excellent SEO-rich show notes. Or better yet, a transcript of the episode.

That way you get SEO benefits and create an opportunity for fans to engage you.

If you want to see what I mean just go to smallfarmnation.com and look at the show notes for this episode.

You'll see I've also included a word-for-word transcript of this episode, which is both a service for my listeners and an SEO benefit for my site.

So, creating a running blog now (And, yes, blogs are still relevant) will mean that search engines will easily find you a year from now when you start your business.

So you gotta get all that going well in advance so that you're present online when you need to be.

And, if you're planning a farming-related business, be sure to incorporate geo-tags into your blog posts.

In other words, don't do a post that says, "Farm Update."
Because that has no meaning, really.

Instead, write a post with an SEO-rich title, such as, "Update on our Topeka grass-fed beef farm," if you're starting such a farm for the Topeka market. Make **that** the blog post title, make sure it's in the URL and optimize the phrase "Topeka grass-fed beef" throughout the blog post.

Two years later when you've got meat to market, you'll likely show up high in the search results when a consumer searches for "Topeka grass-fed beef."

Okay, so here's benefit #4. It's the potential for media exposure.

Now, as a result of high search engine ranks, we received lots of **media coverage** on our farm.

And I mean, LOTS.

Virtually all unsolicited by us.

CNN, The New York Times, NPR, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, RFD TV, Southern Living Magazine and other outlets **reached out to us**, simply because they found us when researching story ideas.

CNN came out twice to video our farm because we were one of the first to offer a meat CSA, which they discovered via our blog.

Some of the other media stories were profile pieces, such as featuring a couple who [left corporate life for the farm](#).

Others featured specific farming enterprises, such as heritage turkeys for Thanksgiving—an NPR station visited to do a story on that.

Or about our rare-breed Ossabaw pigs—The Food Network visited our farm and we were in an episode that featured our pork and farmstead cheese.

Heck, Fox & Friends even had me on an episode to go up against a PETA person on a topic that related to dairy farming.

And all that happened because we were “out there.”
We were present and talking about stuff that was interesting to folks in the media.

I'm not promising the same thing will happen to you, but I will promise you this. If you don't put yourself out there, there's NO chance of anyone finding you.

So the opportunity for media exposure is benefit #4.
Now, let's move onto the last benefit on the list.

Benefit #5, is that you'll have access to free and valuable market research.

Because marketing early through blogging and social media also allows you to get **customer feedback** in advance.

Basically, you can get pre-product release intelligence into what potential customers want.

Maybe they're not interested in another pastured poultry supplier of whole chickens, but would pay a premium for retail cuts.
Or perhaps they're eager to find local mushrooms.

Or maybe they value [agritourism and farm events](#) over food products, so you can use that feedback to plan farm events or farm stays.

By listening to your growing base of followers on social media and your blog, etc., you'll learn what *they* want.

And you'll connect their wants to your vision, so that when you go to market, they'll feel like you created this awesome farm business just for them.

How cool is THAT?

So, incorporate this market intelligence into your product offering and blog posts so that you come out of the gate swinging.

Okay, so there are five pretty compelling benefits of starting your marketing NOW, regardless of what stage you're at.

Benefit #1 is you'll build a loyal tribe of fans

Benefit #2 is you'll begin to build your email list

Benefit #3 is you'll earn SEO juice and rank on search engines

Benefit #4 is potential media exposure

Benefit #5 is market research

Ok, so **how** do you start marketing to reap the benefits I described?

Here are nine steps I want you to take ASAP:

1. Choose your farm or business name and get the URL. Now. Right now.
2. Create a Facebook page (not a personal page) for your farm, even if you're not ready to start using it. But DON'T let this be your main hub...that's GOT to be your website. Create a page and drive traffic to your site.
3. Set-up a web hosting account and create a Wordpress website and blog. I use and recommend SiteGround, but use what you want. Now, your new website will default to "construction" mode and be offline. That's what you want...you're not ready to go live yet. You need to tweak your design and set-up some additional resources.
4. In addition to your blog posts, set-up an "About" page on your website. It doesn't...and shouldn't—all be on a separate page. You can put much of your "about" info on your home page. Go to smallfarmnation.com and see how I do it on the home page, with a link to more tantalizing Timmy tidbits on the about page. And remember to inject lots of "you" into the about page. I want to **feel** your personality and your passion. I don't want to read the

same thing I see on everyone else's about page. Convince me that I should follow and keep up with you.

5. Set-up an account with an email service provider before you launch your website. Like I said, I use ConvertKit but I suggest you go with MailChimp.
6. Once you've done that set-up a form so that you can **capture email** on your website **as well as from** your Facebook page. So add the form and make it front and center ABOVE the fold on your homepage, and in the top of the right sidebar on secondary pages.
7. Okay, now that you have your email service provider set-up, you'll want to lay the foundation to build your email list. Sure, it would be nice if visitors would simply and freely volunteer their email address to you, but, like you, they'll want something in return. That "something" could simply be your compelling writing and the promise to update them periodically with new posts. More often, however, it requires a more tangible offer. That offer is called a lead magnet.
8. Now that you have an ability to capture email in place, you're ready to take your site live. So do that.
9. Start blogging, and blog on a specific schedule. Daily is too much because you won't do it. Monthly is too little. Personally, I prefer 1-2 times per week, but choose what you can commit to. If you only do weekly but do it well, you'll have **52 SEO-rich posts** after the first year. Not bad.
10. Share your posts across social media. This can become a chore, but you can use tools such as CoSchedule, Buffer and others to automate this for you.

Okay, so do these 10 things as soon as you can.

By that point you'll be off and running. **You've got a story to tell and you're starting to share it.**

Now, let me get to the final benefit of you doing this.

And it's the most important benefit of all.

Because, once you do this and start sharing, it makes your story **REAL** and actionable.

It sets you in motion to beginning to live your farm dream instead of living someone else's dream (like your employer).

After you take that first, slow and heavy footstep, you'll be amazed how your pace quickens.

Your readers will energize you as you inspire them.

Now...stop listening to this podcast and get started on your own entrepreneurial journey!

Well that's it for this episode, [Small Farm Nation!](#)

Remember, you can keep up with me and all my content at small farm nation dot com

There's a link on the site to my FREE Farm Marketing Group on Facebook, where thousands of farmers discuss issues important to growing their farm and food businesses.

Of course, we'd love to have you in the [Small Farm Nation Academy](#), and you'll find more information on that on my site at small farm nation dot com

As always, you can find the show notes from this episode on small farm nation dot com, and don't forget to subscribe to this podcast on iTunes or elsewhere. If you already have, please take just a second to leave a review on iTunes! I read 'em all and I sure do appreciate it!

Okay, until next time here's to hoping Get Growing!