

Social Media Marketing Messages for Direct to Market Farms

2017-18

Strategic Communication & Marketing Research

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research brief is to describe a field test of Facebook targeted advertising using four different conceptually informed messages designed to drive traffic to community supported agriculture (CSA) farmer websites with the larger goal of increasing sales of CSA shares. The project aim was to offer CSA farmers evidence-based recommendations for which types of messages would be most effective for marketing their businesses online.

Using Field-Tested Messaging to Drive Traffic from Facebook to Direct-to-Market Farm Websites

Farmers sell fresh, local produce and products direct to consumers during the growing season through community supported agriculture (CSA). Customers, or CSA members, buy shares of produce or other products before the growing season starts and receive a share of that food regularly throughout the season. Farmers also typically provide members with access to news, events, and other opportunities to participate with their farm. More info and definitions about CSA is available on the FairShare website at <https://www.csacoalition.org/>.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Advertisements that included a personalized photo of the CSA farmers were consistently the top performing Facebook advertisements for driving click-throughs to the CSA web sites.
- The advertisement communicating that CSA products are locally grown in the state, emphasizing Wisconsin pride and the local aspect of CSA farms, was the second highest performing message.
- Advertisements emphasizing that CSA membership is a social norm in the community, and product-centric ads emphasizing taste and freshness of locally grown produce, were the lowest performing.



Wisconsin grown graphic



Social norms graphic



Fresh and tasty graphic

MESSAGES TESTED

Four different strategic communication messages were developed based on the results of an earlier statewide survey of attitudes toward local foods.

“Wisconsin Grown” emphasized Wisconsin pride and the local aspect of CSA farms.

“Join Your Community” emphasized that buying through a CSA is a social norm in the viewer’s community.

“Fresh & Tasty” emphasized the perceived superior taste and freshness of locally grown produce.

“Our Farm to Your Table” emphasized the connection between CSA member and farmer in order to underscore the personal relationship between food consumer and producer.

With the exception of the CSA name, and the images used in “Our Farm to Your Table,” photographic images and wording were identical across advertisements. Photographs for “Our Farm to Your Table” used images of the CSA farmer(s), which were selected by the farms.

METHODS

In order to make generalizations about what types of advertisements were most effective for driving traffic to CSA farmer web sites, we tested four conceptually distinct messages for four Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms from geographically distinct areas of Wisconsin. Selection criteria for farms included 1) different geographic areas of the state, 2) potential member base serves diverse audiences (e.g. rural/urban/suburban, ethnicity, different stages of business cycle), and 3) a functioning Facebook page and website.

The test allocated a maximum total of \$300 per farm (\$300 x 4 farms = \$1200) to pay for advertising on the social media site Facebook over a 14-day period beginning February 14, 2017 and ending February 27, 2017. Equal dollar amounts were allotted to each of the four advertisements with the immediate goal of driving traffic to the farmers’ websites to learn more about how to buy a CSA share. The daily limit per advertisement was \$5.00.

The final amount spent on advertisements was \$1,042, for an average of \$261.41 per farm, which was lower than the allocated limit of \$300 per farm. According to Facebook policies, the platform only shows advertisements to users who fit the profile of the target audience as specified by the advertiser when the order is placed. Because this



Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm, Oconto WI



Winterfell Acres, Brooklyn WI



Whitefeather Organics, Custer WI



Community Garden School-Riverwest, Milwaukee WI

campaign specified a daily limit of \$5.00 per ad, advertisements were shown until the daily spending limit was met or the 24-hour spending period was reached, whichever occurred first.

Outcome Metrics

The success of each advertisement was gauged by measuring three different metrics: reach, total click-throughs and cost per click-through. Reach refers to the total number of unique users who see a particular advertisement. Total click-throughs represent the number of times a Facebook user clicked on the advertisement in order to visit each CSA website, which was the overall goal of the campaign. When considering the most efficient way to spend ad dollars, the cost per click-through is a good measure of overall cost effectiveness for each advertisement when the goal is to prompt potential CSA customers to visit the farm website.

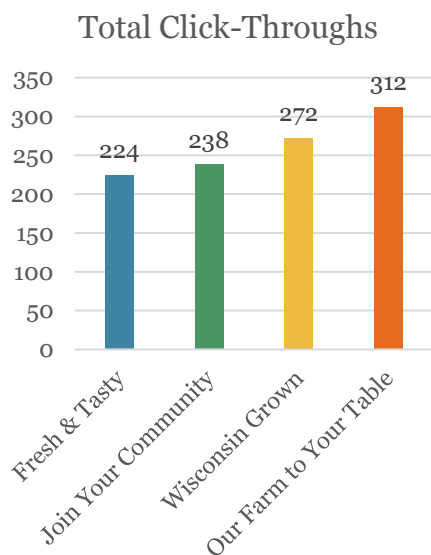
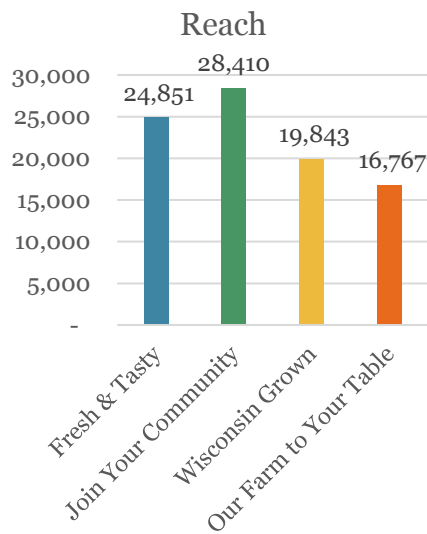
Behavioral & Interest-Based Targeting

One of the benefits of targeted advertising on a social media platform such as Facebook is that advertisers can specifically reach out to people who are more likely to be interested in their message. For this Facebook advertisement field testing experiment, the goal was to reach people who were already interested in local food and most likely to be interested in purchasing a CSA share. Based on the variables available in Facebook, the field test targeted each advertisement to Facebook users with interests or online behaviors related to: sustainable agriculture, farm-to-table, local food, slow food or foodie, fresh produce or 'fresh and healthy' products.

The field test excluded individuals who had already joined each farm's Facebook page in order to avoid overexposure to advertisements. The rationale was to not interfere with the farm's ongoing "organic" posts directed at those who have already "liked" or followed the farm's Facebook page.

Geographic Targeting

Because customers must pick up a CSA share, the geographical targeting capabilities offered by Facebook were central to the targeting strategy. The test selected a 30-mile radius around each farm, with adjustments to capture population centers, based on the assumption that prospective customers would not drive more than this distance to pick-up their CSA share.



Results

Advertisement effectiveness was gauged by three measures: Reach, total click-throughs and cost per click-through.

Reach

Reach varied from 16,767 users to 28,410 users for the four advertisements used in this campaign. While reach is an effective measure of how many unique users viewed an advertisement, a higher number doesn't necessarily indicate better performance. The most effective advertisements may require fewer showings in order to prompt click-throughs, and therefore reach fewer Facebook users more efficiently.

Total Click-Throughs

The advertising campaigns were set to pay only for click-throughs, and there was a daily limit of \$5 per advertisement, this number reflects the success of each advertisement within those parameters, and does not reflect the number of click-throughs each advertisement would prompt if there were not limits to spending.

The advertisement "Our Farm to Your Table" prompted 312 click-throughs as compared to 272 click-throughs for "Wisconsin Grown," 231 for "Join Your Community," and 224 for "Fresh & Tasty."

Although total click-throughs are a sound measure of how appealing an advertisement may be to a particular audience, this measure does not consider the efficiency of an advertisement, referred to as the cost per click-through.

Cost Per Click-Through

The overall cost per click-through for all advertisements across all four farms was \$1.00. However, advertisements did not perform equally well when compared to one another, nor did each advertisement perform equally well when we compare farm to farm.

The advertisement created to emphasize the connection between the CSA customer and farmer, "Our Farm to Your Table," had the lowest cost per click-through, \$0.84, and is considered the most effective advertisement among those tested. In contrast, the advertisement created to emphasize the superior taste and freshness of CSA produce, "Fresh & Tasty," had the highest cost per click-through, \$1.12, and is considered the least effective among those advertisements tested. "Wisconsin Grown" and "Join Your Community" fell in between these two advertisements at \$0.98 and \$1.10, respectively.

Social media message field test advertising images, copy and layout.

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Support Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm, your local family farm.



Our Farm to Your Table
Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm, Oconto WI

Growing Food for Our Community
When you become a member of our community supported agriculture (CSA) farm, you get a weekly share of the produce we grow.

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30 Likes · 3 Comments · 1 Share

[Like](#) [Comment](#) [Share](#)

**Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm**
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Get a season full of produce grown locally, right here in Wisconsin, when you become a member of Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm.



Wisconsin Grown
Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm
Oconto, WI

Grown Locally, Right Here in Wisconsin
When you become a member of our community supported agriculture (CSA) farm, you get a weekly share of the produce we grow.

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13 Likes

[Like](#) [Comment](#) [Share](#)

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Thousands of Wisconsinites, just like you, get their produce from one of the 392 community supported agriculture (CSA) farms in our state.



Join Your Community
CSA Members Get Fresh Produce All Season Long

Join Your Neighbors in Supporting Local Foods.
When you become a member of our community supported agriculture (CSA) farm, you get a weekly share of the produce we grow.

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10 reactions

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**Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm**
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Get fresh produce picked at the peak of its flavor, all season long, when you become a member of Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm CSA.



Fresh Tastes Better
Pensaukee Valley Certified Organic Farm, Oconto WI

Fresh and Tasty Produce, All Season Long!
When you become a member of our community supported agriculture (CSA) farm, you get a weekly share of the produce we grow.

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Partners



FAIRSHARE
CSA COALITION

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