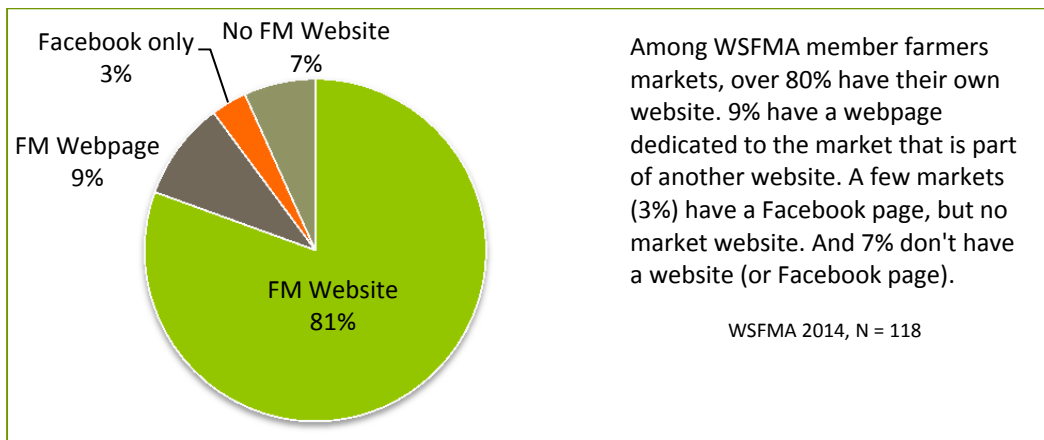# Tips for Your Farmers Market Website

Shoppers, vendors, sponsors, other supporters, the media, and public in general expect to find information about your farmers market on the Internet. As such, farmers markets have created websites that try to provide information for a mix of different audiences. This can be a challenging balance to navigate and maintain, especially at the pace technology and the Internet are evolving. The eight website tips described here are especially relevant for smaller markets with part-time staff and rotating market computers, roaming files, and intermittent tech support.

Facebook only
3%

No FM Website
7%

FM Webpage
9%

FM Website
81%

Among WSFMA member farmers markets, over 80% have their own website. 9% have a webpage dedicated to the market that is part of another website. A few markets (3%) have a Facebook page, but no market website. And 7% don't have a website (or Facebook page).

WSFMA 2014, N = 118

❶ Search for your farmers market

Know exactly what people find when they search for your market. Try searching for your market using a variety of names, not just the official one. The market may be the "Kittitas County Farmers Market" but people will search for the "Ellensburg farmers market" or even common abbreviations like "Eburg market." Does your website or Facebook page show up? Is it the first result or down in the mix? Try Google images as well as the main Google search. Be sure to try different search engines to see if results are consistent or vary. Try it on a smartphone or tablet as well. Can someone read it? There may also be a lot of "flotsam and jetsam" online from previous market website incarnations, past posts, and links you thought were buried or didn't know about. If possible, try to get rid of any potentially confusing or incorrect information about your market.

Search Engine Optimization or SEO
SEO helps websites or webpages show up in a search engine's unpaid (or "organic") results. The most important parameters in search engine's algorithms are high quality content, a good organizational structure, and frequently updates.

Source: WSU Communications at http://cahnrs.wsu.edu/communications/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/01/Virtual-Office-Hours-SEO-Optimization-1-20-2016.pdf

❷ Fit the Website to your market capacity

Just as there is no "one size fits all" for farmers markets, there is no one size fits all for farmers market websites. The most important feature of any market website is that it is up-to-date. What time, technical skills, and money does your market have available to create and keep a website up-to-date? You may have a comprehensive digital marketing strategy which includes a "full service" website. Or you may have a single page that serves as a static "front shingle" that has all of your important information. There is no right or wrong. The key is being able to maintain your site in a way that best represents your market and reinforces your brand identity.

Figure 1. Dog River Coffee's website c. 2014. A clean static "front shingle" with basic information.

❸ Feature information for shoppers first

Most of your market's website users are probably your current and prospective shoppers. On average, markets have thousands of shoppers whereas there are dozens of vendors and a handful of staff or volunteers. Therefore, think about designing your website with your shoppers in mind first and foremost. In graphics, this is called the "visual hierarchy." What do you want someone to see first? Ideally, anyone should be able to Google your market and immediately answer these three questions – *without scrolling* or having to spend more than 3 seconds to find:

- ☐ *Name of the farmers market*
- ☐ *When is the market open?* Preferably answered by having clear dates for the season AND market day times AND the current calendar year.
- ☐ *Where is the market located?* Including street address, city and state.

www.communityfarmersmarket.net

This information is far more important than beautiful market visuals. It may be counter intuitive, but "how" and "when" to go to your market edges out the "why" go to your market on the visual hierarchy. Current shoppers already know why (but can't remember when you open) and prospective core shoppers are already are sold on farmers markets but need information about yours. Once you have the "big three" questions (name, when you're open this year, and where are you located) abundantly clear, the second tier of information includes:

✓ Contact information for the market

✓ Information **for** your vendors

✓ Information **about** your vendors and/or product mix

❹ List your full address

When you give the market location and the market mailing address, be sure to list the town, state, and zip code. Some market websites never really say what state they are in. Locals may know the difference but search engines don't. A website for a market with the same name (or city) but in a different state may show up instead of yours. This happens far more than you might think. The full address and zip code is especially important for people who try to look up your location or directions to your market on Google maps. (It is also well worth searching for your market on Google maps to make sure the results are correct.)

Website vs. Blog

WEBSITE	BIOG
Mostly static content	Regularly updated content or storytelling
Professional calling card	Informal storytelling
One-way communication	Back and forth communication
Business minded or transactional	Informative and educational
Information about products and services	Feedback from customers
Competition – your biggest competitor likely has one	Your competition may not have a blog

Source: "Digital Marketing 101" presentation by Emily Crawford, WSFMA Conference February 2016.

❺ Help vendors find your market information

Farmers market websites typically have a section or links with the market policies, rules, and application. Be sure to label this information in such a way that makes it easy for your current and prospective vendors to find it. Simply labeling it "Vendors" can be confusing to shoppers who may expect a list of vendors or products. Labels like "Join Us" can be too vague for vendors to know that this includes them. "Become a Vendor" or "How to Vend" are much more likely to be found. Keep in mind if a vendor sells at six markets, he or she may be navigating six different market websites. The goal is to reduce the "where is it?" or "I couldn't find it" factor.

❻ Have a real person named on the market website

Much of farmers market work involves personal relationships, transparency and trust. It is, therefore, very odd (or unfriendly looking) when market websites (and farm websites) are disembodied: there is no person "named." To fix this, include a name of a real person as the market contact. If privacy is a consideration, even just listing a first name only can help personalize the market.

❼ Use photos wisely

Farmers markets are visually incredible and lend themselves to great pictures. However, they can also be overdone. Try to "curate" your visual images instead of overwhelming people with too many.

- Don't let photos dominate your website at the expense of conveying the critical information in Tip 3.
- Pick shots that distinguish or identify your market. If the image could also be at a produce stand or produce section of the grocery store, think about re-framing it.
- Keep visuals and photos in sync with the season. Pumpkins in May and cherries in November erode your credibility.

❽ Plan an annual website schedule

Nothing reduces confidence in a farmers market website more than a "Welcome to the New Season" message in November. Try to plan to update your website on a schedule that is realistic for you. A minimal schedule for a seasonal market might be:

Message	Purpose of Message	Timing
Get ready for the new season	Remind shoppers about market; build anticipation	Before market opens
New season is here	Remind/retrain shoppers to come; build excitement	When market opens
Come enjoy amazing variety-quality of vendors/products	Maintain momentum when people are distracted by vacations and gardening, etc.	Peak season
Market closing soon – enjoy/celebrate harvest	Good crowd in late season	Before market closes
Thank you for a great season	Signals that market season is over and appreciation	When market closes
See you in May (or whatever month market opens)!	Plant seed for coming to market in spring	New calendar year

Resources

"Digital Marketing 101: Stay open year-round & tell your story online" presentation by Emily Crawford of Pike Place Market at the 2016 WSFMA Conference.
http://www.wafarmersmarkets.com/conference/2016/MarketingPromotion-GrowYourOnlinePresence-EmilyCrawford-Presentation.pdf