

Marketing Strategies of Ohio Agri-tourism Businesses

HONORS PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Agri-tourism is currently an expanding business that has directed urban attention to the rural countryside. Agri-tourism markets have helped increase farm profits while teaching travelers about the beauty and importance of the world's agricultural economy.

Research conducted on agri-tourism markets assists farmers, business owners, and commodity leaders in understanding how to strengthen and build on the success of agri-tourism. More importantly, research that takes a direct look at what marketing strategies are being used by a business in Ohio is vital. Knowing which marketing strategies are being used could lead to better development of outreach resources and programs that will stimulate the growth of the agri-tourism industry.

By surveying a large population of agri-tourism business owners about how they conduct their marketing and advertising, a report was compiled that shows what type of marketing strategies are being put to use in Ohio, how these entrepreneurs are discovering these marketing strategies, and which marketing strategies are believed to be the most useful by the producer.

In the end, this project shows how marketing strategies for agri-tourism businesses in the state of Ohio can be maintained, improved, and shared in order to increase the overall success of Ohio agri-tourism and to continue its journey in being an integral part of the number one business in the state of Ohio—agriculture.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Agri-tourism, recreational travel to agricultural entities or agriculture-related events, is a growing business in the United States of America (Lobo, n.d.). Rural bed and breakfasts, u-pick operations, roadside fruit and vegetable markets, corn mazes, and hay rides are just a few of the many agri-tourism businesses developing across the nation. As commodity prices decrease and input costs increase, farmers nationwide are being trained on implementing agri-tourism in their operation in order to increase income and viability. Programs, such as the “Agri-tourism Initiative” sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development are helping farmers realize the economic opportunities that can be accessed through agri-tourism (Center for Profitable Agriculture, 2003). To some, these sites are also bringing positive change to the rural countryside. During the 1990s, rural counties that stressed the development of recreation and tourism averaged a 20% population growth and a 24% employment growth (Reeder and Brown, 2005).

In maximizing these available profits and growth opportunities, farmers must develop innovative methods of marketing that allow them to reach a larger, more diverse audience. Numerous states, including Virginia, Illinois, and Arizona, have developed workbooks and interactive websites that provide step-by-step instructions for farmers interested in starting an agri-tourism business. Entire chapters in these government or non-profit publications are devoted to marketing agri-tourism. The publications focus on how to support direct marketing with community support and word of mouth and roadside sign advertising (Blacka, et.al., 2001). Other books and articles explain how farmers can use websites, fliers, and television or radio advertisements to market their business (Agri-tourism workbook, 2007).

Research conducted in the realm of agri-tourism has focused on the producers, consumers, and products. Case studies that observe the effects on an agri-tourism site on the county have been conducted a handful of times (Reeder and Brown, 2005). Other research has explored how agri-tourism businesses begin and how they help and hinder the communities around them (Reeder and Brown, 2005). However, very little research has been conducted on what marketing strategies agri-tourism businesses are actually using. No study has been presented that shows what Ohio business owners are using to learn about marketing, and no project has been published that shows what methods of advertising and marketing Ohio business owners are currently using.

The Direct Marketing and Tourism Development Team here at The Ohio State University has conducted some research specific to the state of Ohio. Currently, their website contains documents, from several years ago, with research on the demographics of producers and consumers, and what products are currently being sold in the industry (About direct marketing, 2003). However, with the current thrust in traveling and eating locally, it could be argued these numbers have changed. There is also not a sufficient amount of research that focuses solely on the marketing strategies being used within these agri-tourism businesses.

Though not currently available, research that focuses on marketing strategies of agri-tourism businesses in Ohio could show what methods are being used the most compared with what method is being used the least. A study could also explore what resources these businesses are using to learn more about marketing strategies and how the sizes, locations and types of businesses relate to their marketing strategies. In the end, understanding where business owners are going for resources and what marketing strategies are being used the most in agri-tourism could do two things. First, the data could show what resource providers (Extension, farm

bureaus, industry organizations, chambers of commerce, etc.) are proving to be used the most and/or the least. Second, the data could help these resource providers develop new and improved educational materials and workshops specific to what is currently needed. Ultimately, the strength of the relationship between agri-tourism and its consumers could be improved, capitalizing on an economic gain for both the business owner and the surrounding community.

Significance of the Study

The knowledge of what marketing techniques and tools are being used by a company can provide not only the company but the overall industry a better understanding of what is being used to grow and prosper. A “ripple effect” of awareness occurs in the following way.

First, a study that analyzes the communications and marketing among a defined group of businesses demonstrates the diversity within the group. The commonalities and differences can then be compared to see what the most profitable companies are doing versus those that are the least profitable. A study of this type could also show business owners how they “stack up” compared to competition (i.e. a majority of them operate a Web site, but company “XYZ” does not). This allows business owners to look at their communications and marketing efforts and see where their operation can be improved.

Second, knowing the success of outreach programs is vital to the day-to-day operation of an outreach organization. Many of these organizations or departments operate on small budgets. Understanding if their information is reaching the right audiences in the right manner is very significant. If an agri-tourism outreach entity exists but is not being used by a significant number of the people it is expected to be utilized by, then a break in the line of communication between the outreach entity and the audience may exist. By knowing about this break, the outreach entity

could look at how to market their resources better, ultimately improving the overall success of the outreach entity's program and possibly the business that uses the resources offered by the program.

Finally, a study on the marketing strategies of agri-tourism could show advertisers where their sales are being supported by the industry. Understanding where agri-tourism businesses are going to buy advertising provides those who sell advertising where they and who they could gain sales from.

This study could make an impact educationally and economically. With feedback from agri-tourism business owners, current marketing strategies can be analyzed and improved. For example, if research shows that advertising through the internet is a favorite and effective method for large agri-tourism businesses, but small agri-tourism businesses do not use the internet, government workbooks and non-profit organizations could provide better documentation to small businesses to assist them in developing a Web site.

Research on the marketing strategies of agri-tourism businesses in Ohio would ultimately improve the overall growth of agri-tourism in Ohio. Improvement in the growth of Ohio agri-tourism is important because it advances the sustainability of agriculture, something that is in danger because of urbanization.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze what advertising and marketing methods agri-tourism businesses in the state of Ohio are using to promote their products and services and what resources they are using to learn about advertising and marketing strategies. The study is narrowed to companies located in Ohio that were defined as agri-tourism businesses by the

following: any for-profit or non-profit business that uses agriculture as a form of entertainment or that attracts attention to agricultural goods and services by offering an experience unlike what can be found in a grocery, supermarket or shopping mall setting.

Objectives of the Study

The initial idea behind this project was gaining insight into how agri-tourism businesses promoted themselves to their targeted audiences. After reviewing the relevant literature, specific goals were outlined to help define the study, which in turn assisted in composing a survey. In order to fill a broad void in current research, a total of four objectives were identified (as listed below).

1. To define the types of agri-tourism businesses that currently exist in the state of Ohio by location, size, gross income, and type of product or service offered;
2. To determine what advertising agri-tourism businesses throughout the state of Ohio are using to promote their products and services, and their perceptions of these advertising methods;
3. To establish how the communications and marketing departments within these agri-tourism businesses operate, including who operates them and what their budget is;
4. To identify what networking and educational tools and resources agri-tourism businesses are using to improve the success of their business

Key Terms

Advertising: The paid public promotion of a good, product, service, event or notice (WordNet, 2006).

Agri-tourism: Any for-profit or non-profit business that uses agriculture as a form of entertainment or that attracts attention to agricultural goods and services by offering an experience unlike what can be found in a grocery, supermarket or shopping mall setting.

Farm Market: An alternate title for agri-tourism business (used by the author in the survey).

Marketing: The commercial processes involved in promoting, selling and distributing a product or service (WordNet, 2006).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Before commencing the research study, a literature review was completed to gain insight into agri-tourism and business communications. The following subject areas were examined: defining agri-tourism, agri-tourism growth and expansion and the qualities of business-to-consumer communication. A theoretical framework was also developed using the Expectancy Value Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Defining Agri-tourism

The word agri-tourism is derived from the two words: agricultural tourism. Because agri-tourism is an expanding and changing industry, it is constantly characterized by different terms. One study found that more than 13 unique definitions of agri-tourism have evolved (Busby and Rendle, 2000).

Agri-tourism is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online as “the practice of touring agricultural areas to see farms and often to participate in farm activities (agritourism, 2009).” The United State Department of Agriculture describes agri-tourism as any farm-based recreation or onfarm entertainment-related activities, including hunting, fishing, petting zoos, horseback riding, and onfarm rodeos (Brown and Reeder, 2007). Other agencies across the nation have defined it in the following ways:

- Colorado Department of Agriculture: “Activities, events and services related to agriculture that take place on or off the farm or ranch, and that connect consumers with the heritage, natural resource or culinary experience they value (Agriculture-Colorado Agritourism, n.d.).”

- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: “New, highly consumer-focused types of agriculture (Adam, 2004).”
- Oklahoma Agritourism Association: “A working farm or ranch that invites the public in to purchase products, learn, have fun or just relax (What is agritourism, n.d.).”
- University of California Small Farm Program: “Refers to the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation (Lobo, n.d.).”

As can be seen from the broad existence of definitions for this industry, a “standard” description that answers “What is agri-tourism?” does not exist. For the purposes of this study, the following definition was composed by the authors: Any for-profit or non-profit business that uses agriculture as a form of entertainment or that attracts attention to agricultural goods and services by offering an experience unlike what can be found in a grocery, supermarket or shopping mall setting.

Agri-tourism Growth and Expansion

Agri-tourism is currently in a state of extreme growth and expansion, in terms of both supply and demand. As commodity prices decrease and input costs increase, thousands of small family farms are turning to agri-tourism to stay viable. By replacing or supplementing traditional farm operations with alternative functions, farmers are discovering increased profits (Brown and Reeder, 2007). In terms of demand, societies interest in farm activities has increased in recent years as the number of farms continues to steadily decrease (Carpio et.al., 2008). People are retreating to vacationing at rural locations for a number of reasons, including cost efficiency, a growing support for locally grown products and an increased desire for outdoor, family-friendly

recreation (Carpio et.al., 2008). This realm of expansion and increased supply and demand has been the subject of a number of recent research projects.

A study titled “The Demand for Agritourism in the United States” by Carpio, Wohlgenant and Boonsaeng (2008) looked at the state of farm recreation trip visits and the economic value of the rural landscape around the year 2000. In 2000, it was estimated that 62 million Americans visited farms at least one time, which was equivalent to 30% of the national population (Barry & Hellerstein, 2004). In addition, the national percentage of farms with income from agri-tourism was 2%, but in state-to-state studies, some Midwest states showed farms with over 7% of their income resulting from agri-tourism (Barry & Hellerstein, 2004; Carpio, 2006). The estimate of the overall farm income generated from agri-tourism nationally in 2006 was a minimum of \$800 million (Carpio, 2008).

Published shortly following “The Demand for Agritourism” was a study by Brown and Reeder (2007) looking at opportunities for farm operators in agri-tourism. The findings from their study reported that, in 2004, 2.5% of all farms (n=52,000) received income from farm-based recreation. From this data, the estimate of the overall farm income generated from agri-tourism in 2004 was \$955 million (Brown and Reeder, 2007). This demonstrates that in four years, from 2000 to 2004, the number of farms receiving part of their income from agri-tourism increased a half of a percent. In addition, the amount of income generated from agri-tourism increased by \$155 million.

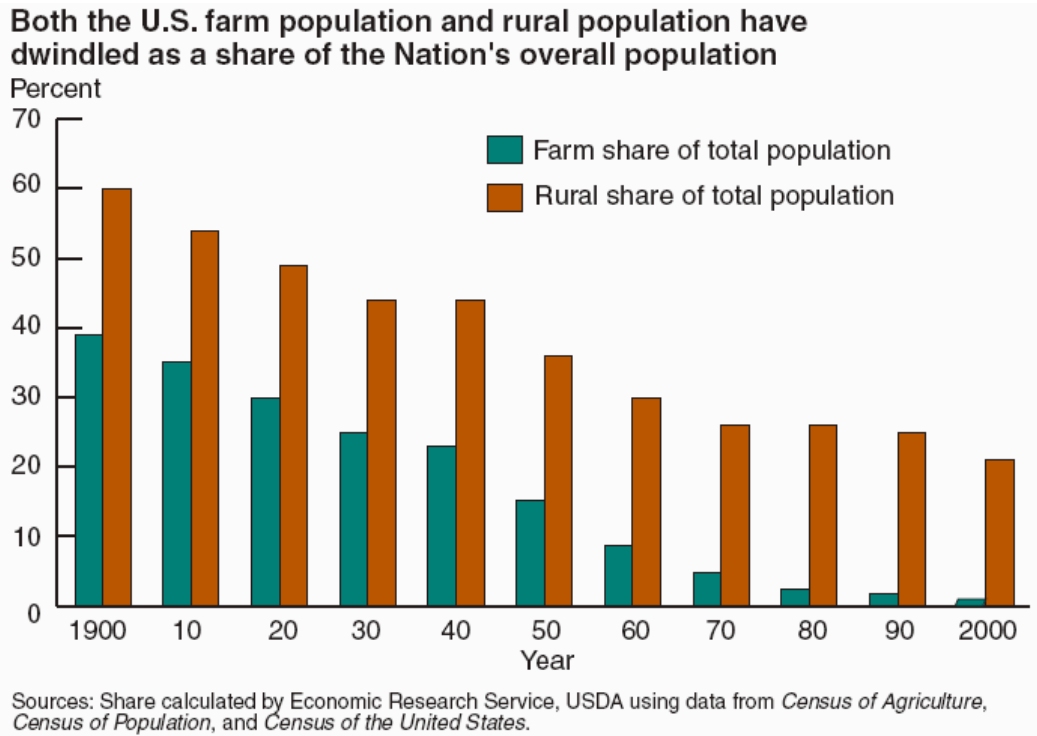
A third report from data collected in Tennessee improved on national reports, showing the actual economic impact of money spent at agri-tourism businesses. The Center for Profitable Agriculture (CPA) at the University of Tennessee did a study on agri-tourism and the arts (Bruch and Holland, 2004). The study looked at money being spent in farm-based recreation and how it

helped the outlying economies found that for every dollar spent at an agri-tourism venue, about \$0.77 of additional economic impacts were multiplied through Tennessee's economy (projections were for dollars spent on-site only). Additionally, 30% of study respondents earned between \$1 and \$10 on average per customer visit. Respondents stated that the agri-tourism portion of their operation accounted for a significant number of full and part-time jobs both year-round and seasonally, and 63% of respondents had plans to expand their operation in the next three years (Bruch and Holland, 2004).

The University of Tennessee CPA study also compiled data on the demographics of agri-tourism businesses operating in Tennessee in 2003 and 2004. After inventorying 210 enterprises, the research team found that 48% of the agri-tourism businesses offered an on-farm retail market as an attraction. Other attractions included on-farm concessions (43%), on-farm tours (35%), pick-your-own (26%), pumpkin patches (19%) and petting zoos (16%). In a second study, the CPA reported that 38% of 273 agri-tourism businesses inventoried had annual gross sales of less than \$25,000. However, the total sales for all 273 enterprises was estimated at \$21 million (Bruch and Holland, 2004).

Ultimately, these studies illustrate that, despite the challenges agriculture is facing in terms of its own growth, agri-tourism is a significant sector of the agriculture industry that is making an economic impact in terms of financial gain. The graph below demonstrates the steady decline of agriculture, showing that both the U.S. farm population and the rural population have dropped considerably in the last century.

Figure 1: The Decline of the U.S. Farm and Rural Populations 1900-2000



Source: University of Tennessee Center for Profitable Agriculture 2003 Enterprise Inventory Study (Bruch and Holland, 2004)

It appears that, in the face of a downturned economy and a regressing population, agri-tourism has not only maintained itself, but expanded.

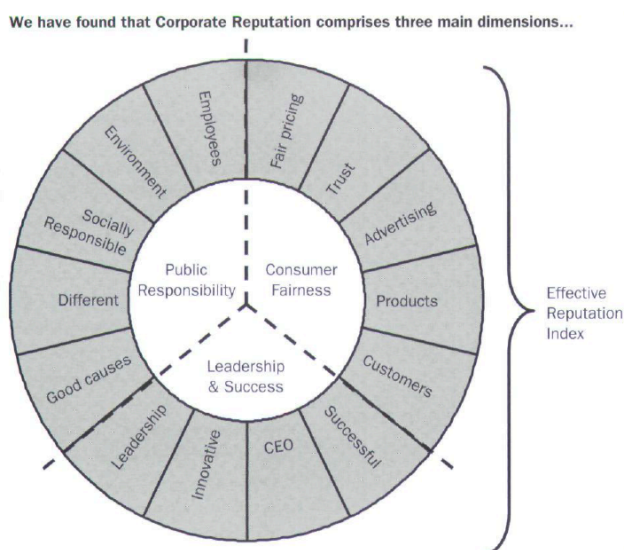
Qualities of Business-to-Consumer Communication

In the 2003 Enterprise Inventory study done by the Center for Profitable Agriculture at the University of Tennessee, 22.4% (the majority) of the agri-tourism businesses surveyed identified “advertising,” “promotions” and “marketing” as the most important factor for creating and maintaining a successful business (Bruch and Holland, 2004). In recognizing that advertising and marketing promotions are important to agri-tourism, a number of business operators need to know how to build good communications internally and externally for their venue. This allows them to capitalize on available profits and maintain stamina and success.

A report from Page and Fearn (2005) in the *Journal of Advertising Research* found that promoting the company's reputation over their goods and services created favorability toward a company. This favorability does not guarantee a significant economic gain, but it does create the opportunity to develop stronger brands, which could indirectly lead to an increase in consumer traffic and sales. In their study, Page and Fearn (2005) used a series of surveys to determine two things: (1) do consumers care about corporate reputation and (2) which elements of corporate reputation matters more to consumers than others? The surveys asked consumers to rate companies on characteristics of their perceived reputation and overall success. Analysis of the data showed that the consumers concern for corporate reputation could be divided into three broad categories (See Figure 2):

- *Public Responsibility*: The traditional view of consumer reputation. Looks at whether or not companies play a useful role in society, if they are charitable, if they support the local community and if they are environmentally sound.
- *Leadership and Success*: Looks at whether or not the company is successful and if they are innovative or cutting edge.
- *Consumer Fairness*: Considers how the company treats consumers in terms of respectfulness, product pricing, and product quality.

Figure 2: The Three Dimensions of Corporate Reputation



Source: "Corporate Reputation: What Do Consumers Really Care About," a study by Page and Fearn in 2005

Most consumers care about the goods or services offered only after evaluating how fair businesses are to them. This study reveals that prior to advertising a product or service, businesses, especially those new to the industry, should develop a reputation for themselves through promotions and marketing (Page and Fearn, 2005).

In exploring advertising and its efficiency, Eldridge (1958), in the *Journal of Marketing* breaks down the parts of advertising and the qualities of good advertising. Eldridge writes that there are two principal parts to advertising: *what* is said and sold, or the product and its attributes, and the *how* of the advertisement, or the headline, typography, layout, copy, etc. He explains that much more time has been spent developing the *how* of advertising over the *what*, causing the latter to lack considerably; therefore, the *what* deserves a good amount of time and focus when being developed (Eldridge, 1958).

Eldridge, combining the research of others and his own theories, composed five key characteristics of good advertising. The following is an excerpt from his writing (p. 243) describing these five qualities:

1. It must be truthful, both in its statements, and its reasonable implications.
2. It must be believable.
3. It must not unfairly disparage competitors or competitive products.
4. The advertising claims must be effectively presented—in order that they may be heard or read, and in order that they may register with readers and/or listeners a clear and memorable understanding of the product-attributes and sales-appeals.
5. The product-attributes which are the subject matter of the advertising must be attributes which are, or can be made to be, important to those whom the advertising is intended to influence.

Any advertisement conforming to these guidelines has the most potential to be, from a consumer standpoint, good advertising. Despite a current evolution of advertising, where the marketing mix is transforming from newspaper, television and radio spots to multimedia and online forms of promotion, Eldridge's points still hold value. They focus on what the advertisement is itself—the *what*—instead of the media of which it is established on. Therefore, advertising can still be

critiqued using the aforementioned guidelines (Eldridge, 1958).

With agri-tourism's growth and expansion probabilities, advertising, marketing and promotions hold an invaluable status in terms of improving gains and maintaining success. If advertising and marketing strategies can be enhanced, they have the potential to attract the attention of a larger and more diverse audience, which could benefit the economic stability of the operation, the community, the state and, quite possibly, the nation.

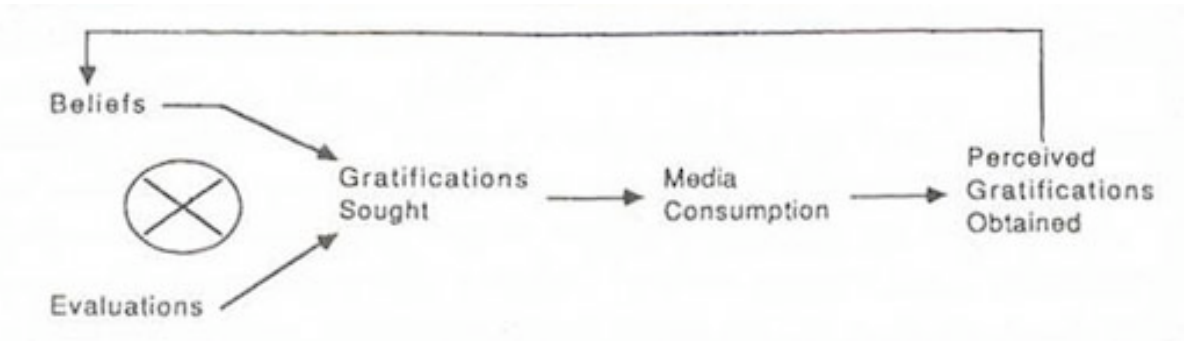
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study consisted of one theories: the expectancy-value theory. The expectancy-value theory explains how behavior is a function of expectancies, and choices are made based on expected successes and value.

Expectancy-Value Theory

The expectancy-value theory was founded by Martin Fishbein in the 1970s. The core assumption of the theory is that behavior is a function of expectancies and goals. The theory predicts that, when more than one behavior is given as a choice, the user choosing a behavior will pick the one that will be the quickest and most successful route to their expected goals and values. This theory is based in the philosophy that humans are goal-oriented, and are therefore motivated by their beliefs and values (Expectancy Value Theory, 2004). The conceptual model for the theory is as follows (Figure 3):

Figure 3: The Expectancy-Value Theory



Source: University of Twente Expectancy Value Theory, 2004

Researchers have explored this theory in relation to perceptions of small business managers. A study in 2003 reported on the expectancy-value theory and how it related to small business managers attitudes toward growth (Wiklund et.al, 2003). The authors concluded that beliefs play an important role in understanding why people act the way they do. The small business managers' beliefs about the consequences of growth provided insights into the reasons why they think that expanding their business is a good or bad thing (Wiklund et.al., 2003). Similarly, their practices in advertising could be affected by their beliefs regarding the growth of their business. If they believe that the quality of their business is more important than expanding, they may be less likely to value marketing.

Theories' Significance to Study

This theory is significant in understanding the responses and results in this study. The expectancy-value theory demonstrates that the agri-tourism operators will choose the advertising methods they believe will fulfill the needs of the business, which may or may not be to increase consumer traffic and sales. This theory also illustrates that these operators will makes choices in advertising, marketing and promotions based on what they believe will lend readily to improving the success of the business overall (because success is the ultimate value of a business).

Summary

This chapter provided background information on the definitions of agri-tourism, the

growth and expansion of the agri-tourism industry and the qualities of business-to-consumer communication. This chapter also included a theoretical discussion of an important communication theory upon which this study is based: the expectancy-value theory.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Agri-tourism is a growing sector of the agriculture industry both across the nation and in the state of Ohio. The methodology of this study was designed to support the purpose of this study, which was to analyze what advertising and marketing methods agri-tourism businesses in the state of Ohio are using to promote their products and services, and what resources they are using to learn about advertising and marketing strategies.

Research Design

This descriptive study was designed as an analysis of existing agri-tourism businesses and their communications and advertising efforts. The goal of the 34-question survey (see Appendix A) and the data analysis was to fulfill the following four objectives, which were outlined in Chapter 1.

1. To define the types of agri-tourism businesses that currently exist in the state of Ohio by location, size, gross income, and type of product or service offered;
2. To determine what advertising agri-tourism businesses throughout the state of Ohio are using to promote their products and services, and their perceptions of these advertising methods;
3. To establish how the communications and marketing departments within these agri-tourism businesses operate, including who operates them, and what their budget is;
4. To identify what networking and educational tools and resources agri-tourism businesses are using to improve the success of their business

Limitations of the Study

The mailing list for the survey was composed from a random sample of 928 businesses that had an address listed on one of the following Web sites: Ohio Proud's Find a Farmers Market (<http://www.ohioproud.org/searchmarkets.php>); Discover Ohio (<http://consumer.discoverohio.com/searchresults.aspx?category=92>); and the Ohio Bed and Breakfast Association (<http://www.ohiobba.com/searchproperty.asp>). If a business was not listed on one of these Web sites, they were excluded from the study. Due to time and funding restraints, the researcher could only do a random sample of 304 businesses, removing hundreds of Ohio agri-tourism businesses from the study. In addition, of the 304 surveys that were mailed, 108 of them were returned (35.5%). Five were undeliverable to the recipient due to wrong addresses.

Instrument Design

In order to collect data for this study, a 10-page survey was composed with 34 questions. The questions were created to answer all of the objectives of the study. Questions asked the following: the demographics of their business, including size, location, income and type of products and services offered; months their business is open for operation; who is in charge of their communications and advertising and how much they spend on advertising; what advertising they use; who their target audience is for their advertising; how well they know the consumers of their products and services; if they offer any specials or discounts throughout their operating season and if so, what they are; if they attend conferences, workshops or other networking opportunities, and if so, where; and if they use other resources in libraries or online to improve their business. The last portion of the survey asked the respondents to define on a Likert scale of

1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) how effective, entertaining, interesting, attractive, informative and easy to maintain the five categories of advertising methods are. These categories were newspaper and magazine; television and radio; billboards and roadside signs; websites, e-mails and internet; and mailing, postcards, fliers and other forms of paper handout advertisements. The survey included both qualitative and quantitative questions.

The cover page of the survey explained to the respondent the purpose and design of the research. It clearly stated that they would receive no compensation for their participation and that all participation was completely voluntary. It also asked that all surveys be returned as soon as possible, with a due date set for January 19, 2009. Before being mailed, the survey and the research study were approved by the Institutional Review Board at The Ohio State University (See Appendix B). The research was exempted from review under category two. Also, a panel of experts reviewed the survey to confirm its validity.

Survey Population

After composing the survey and cover letter, a mailing list was compiled. A search on the internet revealed three Web sites that contained registries for businesses that fell within the agri-tourism definition. These Web sites were Ohio Proud's Find a Farmers Market (<http://www.ohioproud.org/searchmarkets.php>); Discover Ohio (<http://consumer.discoverohio.com/searchresults.aspx?category=92>); and the Ohio Bed and Breakfast (<http://www.ohiobba.com/searchproperty.asp>). From these three registries', the researcher typed the following information for 928 businesses into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet: business name, contact name, street address, city and state, zip code and phone number. Then, the list was randomized within the spreadsheet. It was decided that, due to the

budget available and the time allotment, only one-third of the addresses would be mailed surveys. The 304 addresses used were randomly sampled by selecting every third address on the randomized spreadsheet. Using Microsoft Word, cover letters and labels were printed with the business name, contact name and full address on them.

Data Collection

The researcher used a modified form of the Dillman Tailor Design Method to collect data for the study. In the first wave, the survey was mailed to respondents in nine by twelve inch envelopes, with a number 10 envelope accompanying it. The number 10 envelope was stamped and addressed for prompt and convenient return to the researcher. The survey was mailed on November 24, 2008. The first survey was returned on December 1, 2008. Five surveys were returned due to undeliverable addresses, resulting in an actual population of 299.

On January 20, 2009, a second wave, a reminder post card, was mailed to all 304 businesses who received a survey. The post card thanked those who had already responded and reminded those who had not that the survey was due as soon as possible. It also stated that those respondents who had never received or lost their survey could contact the researcher by e-mail or phone to have a replacement sent to them. A total of two respondents asked for new surveys and a total of four surveys were received after the post card was mailed. The last survey used for data collection was received on February 23, 2009. A total of 108 surveys were returned for a 36.1% return rate.

As the surveys were returned, they were removed from their envelope and filed into a cabinet. Once all 110 surveys were received, the answers to the questions were typed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Method of entry was determined by the type of questions. After the

data from a survey was typed, the survey was marked with a number and filed back into the cabinet.

Variables

The independent variables in this study were the agri-tourism business's demographics, including their location, nearest community population, annual income, number of customers, location where majority of customers come from, number of times in a year a majority of the customers visit, months of operation, and type of operation.

The dependent variables were the advertising and marketing methods they used to communicate with their consumers. Respondents' perceptions toward the advertising and marketing strategies utilized by their businesses were also dependent variables.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The SPSS PASW Statistics 17.0 for Mac OS X software was used for the analysis. The data to be analyzed was chosen in order to fulfill the needs of the four study objectives. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used in the analysis. The reliability was measured at .97. In addition, early and late responses were compared, with no significant differences being found in the data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

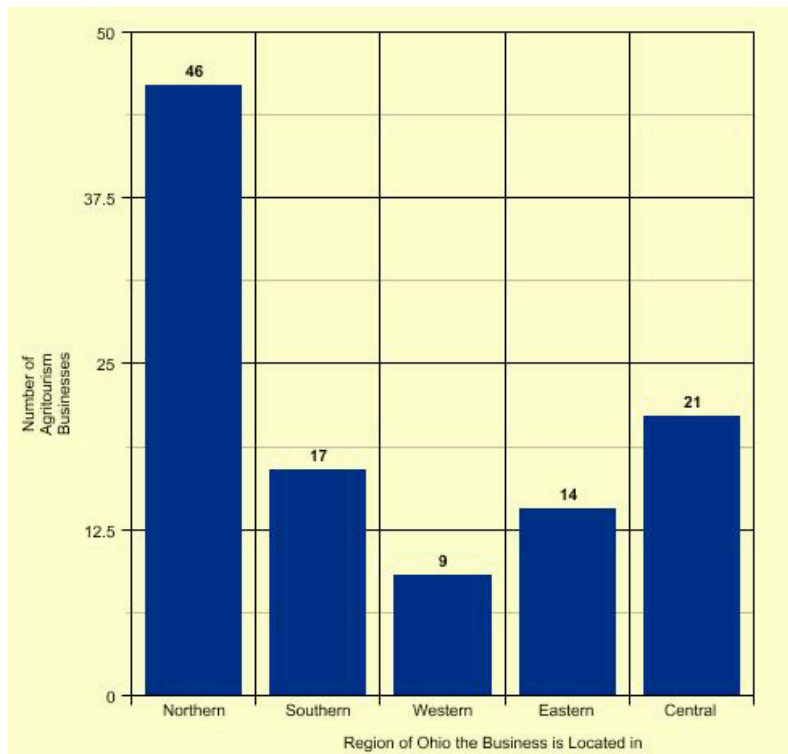
In this chapter, the findings of this research study, which analyzed demographics and marketing strategies of currently operating Ohio agri-tourism businesses, are presented. Utilizing a survey, data was collected and subsequently run through SPSS PASW Statistics 17.0 software in order to answer the four objectives outlined in Chapter I. Briefly, these objectives were to define the demographics of Ohio's agri-tourism businesses; to determine these businesses advertising methods; to establish how the communications and marketing departments within these businesses are operated; and to identify what these businesses are using to improve their overall success. The findings are presented in the order of the objective they answer.

Objective 1: To define the types of agri-tourism businesses that currently exist in the state of Ohio by location, size, gross income and type of product or service offered

The demographics of the businesses were defined by respondents' answers to questions asked in the first section of the survey.

In terms of farm market location, 42.6% (n=46) were located in northern Ohio, 15.7% (n=17) were located in southern Ohio, 8.3% (n=9) were located in western Ohio, 13% (n=14) were located in eastern Ohio and 19.4% (n=21) were located in central Ohio (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The Location of Agri-tourism Businesses by Region of Ohio



The average total annual income of the farm markets surveyed fell between \$50,000 and \$199,999. Over half of the respondents (55.6% or n=60) listed their company's total annual income as less than \$49,999. A minority of 9% (n=10) of the businesses brought in a total annual income over \$500,000, with 3.7% (n=4) of the businesses bringing in more than a million dollars annually.

In terms of customers, respondents provided the following data. A majority (84.3% or n=91) of the respondents listed that the largest share of the customers for their farm market traveled 24 miles or less to visit, with 13.0% (n=14) of the respondents listing that the largest share of the customers for their farm market traveled less than five miles to visit. Only 2.8% (n=3) respondents said that the largest share of their customers travel 100 miles or more to visit.

Additionally, 79.4% (n=85) of respondents marked “As the owner or employee, I am very familiar with our customer base,” while 17.6% (n=19) said they were somewhat familiar with their customer base and 1.9% (n=2) said they were not familiar with their customer base.

The most significant data for Objective 1 came from analyzing “My company is/includes the following: (please check all that apply)” A list of 42 choices for business type followed the question, including an “Other” category. The top three types of entertainment offered by agri-tourism businesses were: roadside stands and markets (41.7% or n=45), u-pick operations (39.8% or n=43) and agricultural food and craft shows (25.9% or n=28). The data for the other 39 choices is represented in Table 1.

Table 1:
Types of Entertainment Offered at Agri-tourism Businesses in Ohio

ENTERTAINMENT	N	FREQUENCY
Roadside Stands/Market	45	41.7%
U-pick Operations	43	39.8%
Agricultural Food and Craft Show	28	25.9%
Other	23	21.3%
Educational Tours	20	18.5%
Hay Rides/Sleigh Rides	20	18.5%
Harvest Festivals	16	14.8%
Animal Feeding/Petting Zoo	14	13.0%
Crop Tours	14	13.0%
Crop Mazes	12	11.1%
Farm Working Experience	12	11.1%
Children’s Camps or Field Trips	11	10.2%
Gardens/Arboretums	9	8.3%
Barn Parties/Weddings	8	7.4%

School Activities	8	7.4%
Food Festivals	7	6.5%
Floral Arrangement Workshops	7	6.5%
Flower Shows	5	4.6%
Hiking	5	4.6%
Restaurant	5	4.6%
Barn Operation Tours	3	2.8%
Camping/Picnicking	3	2.8%
Wildlife Watching	3	2.8%
Barn Dances	2	1.9%
Horseback Riding	2	1.9%
Hunting and Fishing	2	1.9%
Off-Road Motorcycling, ATV or Mountain Biking	2	1.9%
Rock Climbing	2	1.9%
Wagon Trains	2	1.9%
Wilderness Experiences	2	1.9%
Bed and Breakfast	1	0.9%
Bird Watching	1	0.9%
Boating and Canoeing	1	0.9%
Fossil/Rock Collecting	1	0.9%
Historical Museums and Displays	1	0.9%
Pack Trips	1	0.9%
Self-Guided Driving Tours	1	0.9%
Rodeos	0	0.0%
Swimming	0	0.0%

Objective 2: To determine what advertising agri-tourism businesses throughout the state of Ohio are using to promote their products and services and their perceptions of these advertising methods

The advertising and marketing strategies and the producers perception of these methods were defined by respondents' answers to questions asked in the last half of the survey.

Question 18 of the survey asks respondents of the 19 methods listed, which do they use to advertise. The most popular marketing methods chosen by the respondents were newspaper advertisements (68.5% or n=74), a business Web site (52.8% or n=57), and roadside signs (51.9% or n=56). The least popular marketing methods chosen by respondents were television commercials (4.6% or n=5), online blogs (5.6% or n=6), personal Web sites (5.6% or n=6) and media kits (5.6% or n=6) (See Table 2).

Table 2:
Types of Advertising Methods Used by Agri-tourism Businesses in Ohio

ADVERTISING METHOD	N	FREQUENCY
Newspaper Ad	74	68.5%
Business Web site	57	52.8%
Roadside Signs	56	51.9%
Mailings	40	37.0%
Fliers	31	28.7%
Brochures	27	25.0%
Radio Commercials	23	21.3%
Magazine Ad	21	19.4%
T-shirts	17	15.7%
E-mails through a Listserve	17	15.7%
Posters	12	11.1%
Local Community Billboards	11	10.2%
Internet Advertisement	9	8.3%
Shop Windows	9	8.3%
Highway Billboards	8	7.4%
Personal Web site	6	5.6%

Media Kits	6	5.6%
Blog	6	5.6%
Television Commercials	5	4.6%

After answering what their chosen advertising methods were, respondents were asked to evaluate the methods on a rating scale of 1 to 5. The rating numbers correlated in the following way: 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree and 5-strongly agree. The advertisements were evaluated to the extent the producer felt they were for his operation under the following categories: effective, entertaining, interesting, attractive, informative and easy to maintain.

The report from the data analysis showed that nearly every rating had a mean between 2.80 and 3.93, representing that, overall, the respondents maintained a neutral attitude toward their advertising methods (Table 3). Two means fell outside this range: with a mean of 4.01, respondents agreeing that billboards and roadside signs were effective for their companies. In addition, with a mean of 2.73, respondents disagreed that television and radio advertisements were easy to maintain for their company.

Table 3:

Means of Respondents' Evaluations of Advertising Methods

	Effective	Entertaining	Interesting	Attractive	Informative	Easy to Maintain
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	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Newspaper and Magazine Ads	3.48	1.23	2.91	1.05	3.20	1.00	3.27	1.06	3.65	1.13	3.34	1.13
T.V. and Radio Ads	3.00	1.33	2.80	1.22	2.82	1.17	2.80	1.15	3.04	1.30	2.73	1.13
Billboards and Roadside Signs	4.01	1.09	3.07	1.13	3.33	1.08	3.58	0.99	3.73	1.04	3.55	1.08
Web sites, Mass E-mails and Internet Ads	3.87	1.11	3.60	1.10	3.69	1.12	3.78	1.18	3.84	1.18	3.45	1.19
Mailings, Postcards, Fliers & Other Paper Handouts	3.92	1.19	3.33	1.20	3.52	1.21	3.73	1.38	3.93	1.17	3.44	1.26

Finally, question 33 asked respondents to describe the best marketing strategy they had ever used or seen used for agri-tourism. Twenty-two of the respondents (n=20.4%) wrote in word-of-mouth as the best marketing strategy for agri-tourism businesses.

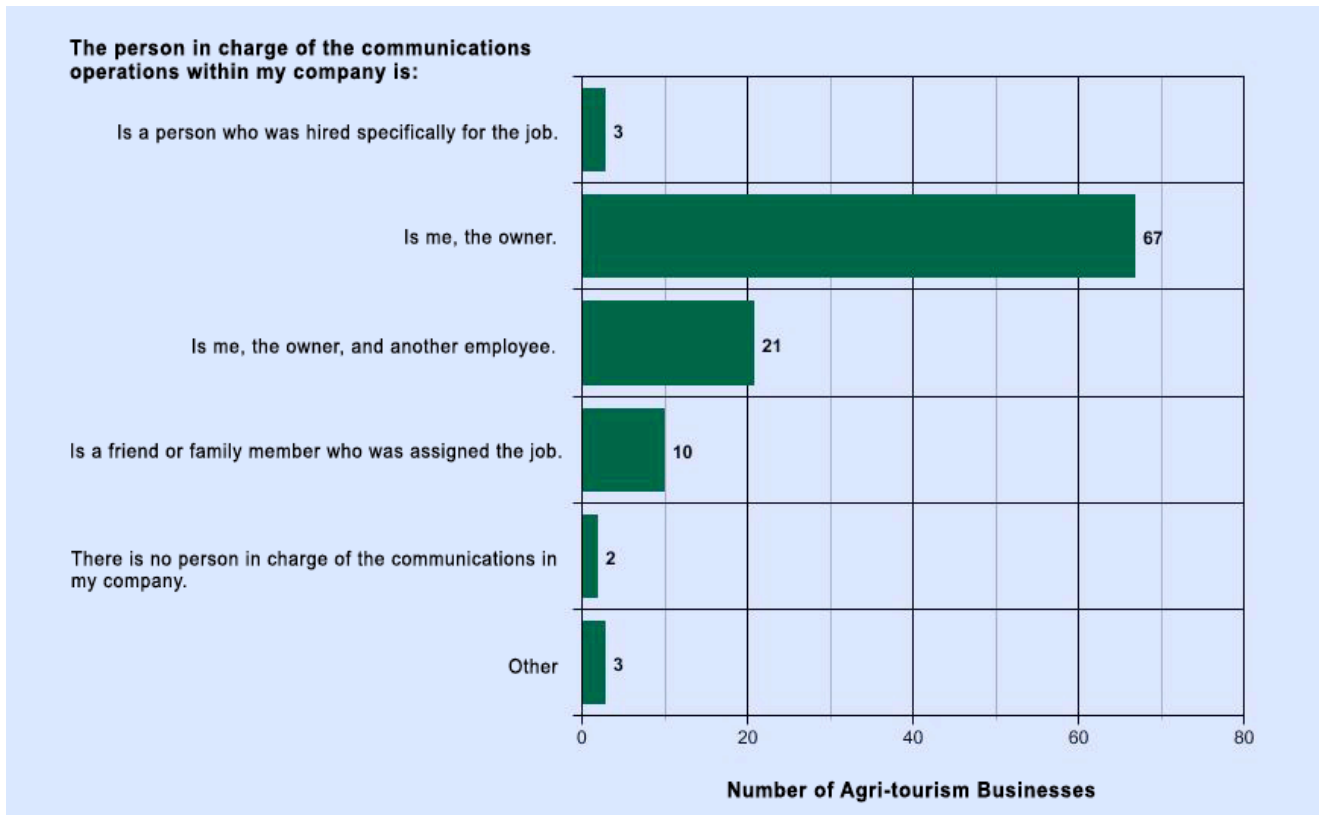
Objective 3: To establish how the communications and marketing departments within these agri-tourism businesses operate, including who operates them and what their budget is.

The details regarding the operation of the communications and marketing departments within these businesses was defined by respondents' answers to questions asked in the middle portion of the survey.

Sixty-two percent (n=67) of respondents said that the owner was the person in charge of the communications operations within their company. The second highest remark (19.4% or n=21) was that the person in charge of the communications operation was a friend or family

member who was assigned the job. Only 2.8% (n=3) of respondents listed a person who was hired specifically for the job as the person in charge of the communications operations, while 2.8% n= (2) said that there is no person in charge of communications at their company (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Person in Charge of Communications Operations

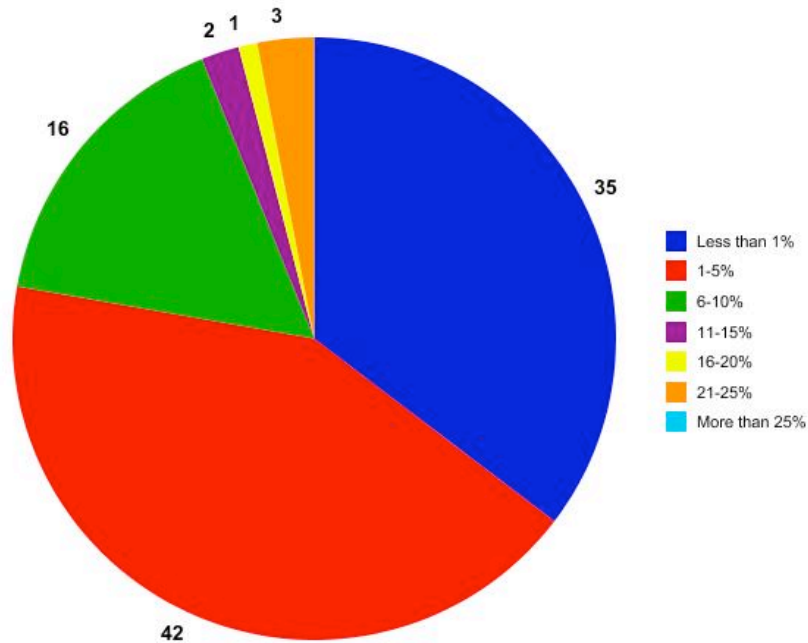


In regards to their customer base, the respondents provided the following data. Respondents were asked if they felt that, as the owner or employee, they were either very involved, somewhat involved, rarely involved, or never involved in communicating with the customers of their company. A majority of 82.4% (n=89) said that they were very involved in communications to their customers, while 16.7% (n=18) said they are somewhat involved. No

respondents marked being rarely involved or never involved in communicating with their customers. The following question asked if communicating to customers through marketing was either extremely important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important to the vitality of their company. Nearly 69.5% (n=75) said that it was extremely important. An additional 22.2% (n=24) said that it was somewhat important, while 6.5% (n=7) said that it was not very important to the vitality of their company. Finally, respondents were asked about what type of audiences they focus on when developing advertising. Of participants, 75.0% (n=81) said that they focus on both rural and urban audiences. Also, 83.4% (n=90) said they focus on their local and county-wide community.

The last question that pertained to the communications and marketing strategies utilized within the farm markets surveyed was “My company spends the following percentage of our annual income on communicating to people outside of our business:” with the choices for answers being listed as less than 1%, 1-5%, 6-10%, 11-15%, 16-20%, 21-25% and more than 25%. If the answer was more than 25%, respondents were asked to write in an estimate of their percent. Data analysis showed that 72.2% (n=77) of the businesses spend less than 5% of their annual income on communications. An additional 14.8% (n=16) spend less than 10% of their annual income on communications, while only 2.8% (n=3) respondents checked that their business spends between 21-25% of their annual income on communications. No respondent answered that their company spends more than 25% of their annual income on communications (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage of Annual Income Spent on Communicating to People Outside of the Business



Objective 4: To identify what networking and educational tools and resources agri-tourism businesses are using to improve the success of their business

The networking and educational tools and resources used by agri-tourism businesses were defined by respondents' answers to questions asked in the middle section of the survey (Figure 7). Each question was given two lines where respondents, if answering yes, could describe their personal experiences.

In regards to networking, respondents were asked questions about membership in organizations and attending conferences. Approximately half (50.9% or n=55) of the respondents stated that they were a member of an organization that brings together agri-tourism business owners for networking and educational opportunities. When asked if they have attended conferences in Ohio on agri-tourism or direct farm marketing, 62.0% (n=67) of respondents said that they had. Of the Ohio conferences attended, the following were written in most often: Ohio

Christmas Tree Association conferences (8.3% or n=9), Ohio Produce Growers and Marketers Association conferences (7.4% or n=8) and the Ohio Fruit and Vegetable Growers Congress (4.6% or n=5). However, only 33.3% (n=36) of respondents said that they had traveled to states outside of Ohio to attend conferences on agri-tourism or direct farm marketing. Respondents traveled as close as Pennsylvania and Michigan and as far away as California and Canada to learn about agri-tourism.

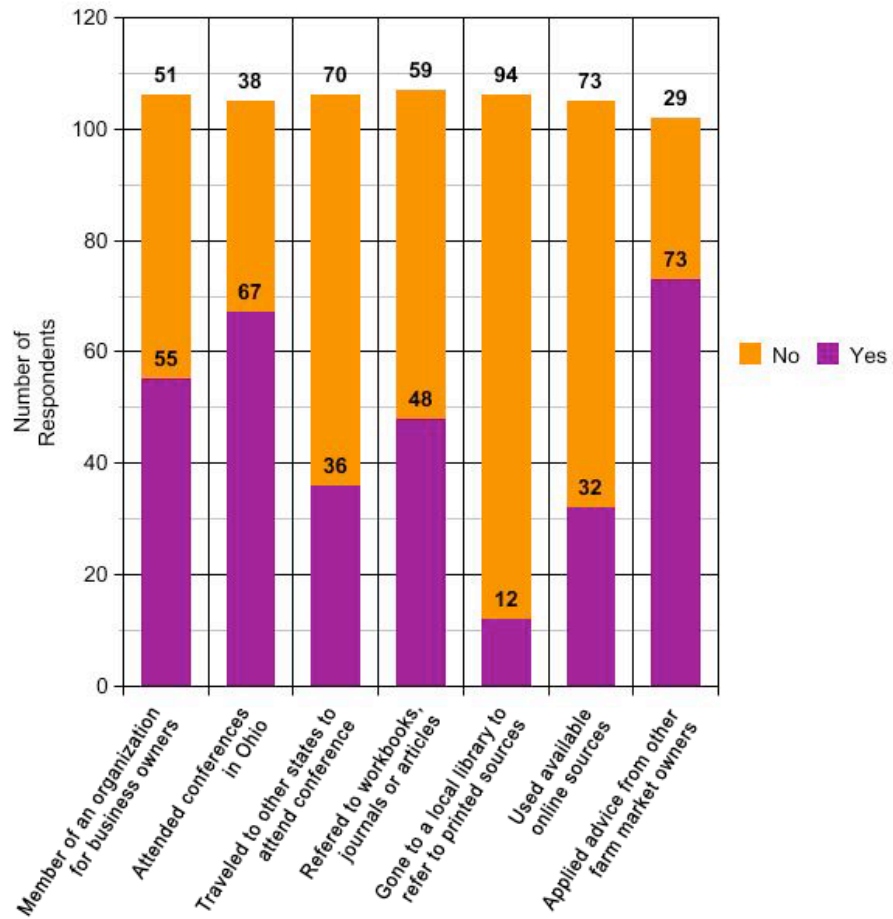
When respondents were asked about using educational tools and resources to improve their success, they provided the following data according to the survey. Less than half (44.4%, n=48) said that they have referred to agri-tourism workbooks, handbook, journals, or articles to improve the overall success of their company. Of the 35 respondents who wrote in answers, only four described using items published by The Ohio State University Extension, while Ohio Farm Bureau, and Ohio Department of Agriculture were each mentioned once as being utilized as a resource.

Exactly 87.0% (n=94) of respondents said that they do not go to the local library or use printed sources, including books, journals, or magazines to refer to communications and marketing strategies that could be used within their company. On the other hand, when asked if they use available online sources, including agri-tourism Web sites, and communications or marketing improvement software to advance their company, 29.6% (n=32) said that they do, versus the 67.6% (n=73) that do not. Of the 22 respondents who wrote in answers, only one described using The Ohio State University Extension. In addition, Ohio Farm Bureau, Ohio Proud, and Ohio Department of Agriculture were each described once by different respondents.

Finally, when respondents were asked about applying advice from other farm market owners and/or employees to improve the success of their farm market, 67.6% (n=73) said that

they do. The respondents most commonly described that the experiences of others, both positive and negative, influenced the business choices made at their venues.

Figure 7: Business Owners Use of Networking and Resources, by Type



CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The study's data was collected using responses from a survey sent to Ohio agri-tourism business owners in November of 2008 and returned through February of 2009. The survey asked questions regarding the demographics of the agri-tourism business, the operation of its communications and marketing departments, and the methods of advertising utilized to attract consumers. Of the 304 surveys mailed, 108 were returned for data analysis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze what advertising and marketing methods agri-tourism businesses in the state of Ohio are using to promote their products and services. An additional purpose of the study was to analyze the demographics of Ohio agri-tourism businesses, along with what resources they are using to learn about advertising and marketing strategies. The study is narrowed to companies located in Ohio that were defined as agri-tourism businesses by the following: any for-profit or non-profit business that uses agriculture as a form of entertainment or that attracts attention to agricultural goods and services by offering an experience unlike what can be found in a grocery, supermarket or shopping mall setting.

Objectives

Despite similar research in other states, no data has been presented that specifically describes agri-tourism business in Ohio and the marketing strategies they are currently using.

Four objectives were used as guidelines when composing the survey and conducting data analyses. These objectives were:

1. To define the types of agri-tourism businesses that currently exist in the state of Ohio by location, size, gross income, and type of product or service offered;
2. To determine what advertising agri-tourism businesses throughout the state of Ohio are using to promote their products and services, and their perceptions of these advertising methods;
3. To establish how the communications and marketing departments within these agri-tourism businesses operate, including who operates them and what their budget is;
4. To identify what networking and educational tools and resources agri-tourism businesses are using to improve the success of their business

Limitations of the Study

The mailing list for the survey was composed from a random sample of 928 businesses that had an address listed on one of the following Web sites: Ohio Proud's Find a Farmers Market (<http://www.ohioproud.org/searchmarkets.php>); Discover Ohio (<http://consumer.discoverohio.com/searchresults.aspx?category=92>); and the Ohio Bed and Breakfast Association (<http://www.ohiobba.com/searchproperty.asp>). If a business was not listed on one of these Web sites, they were excluded from the study. Due to time and funding restraints, the researcher could only do a random sample of 304 businesses, removing hundreds of Ohio agri-tourism businesses from the study. In addition, of the 304 surveys that were mailed, 108 of them were returned (35.5%). Due to this these findings are not generalizable past those

who responded, but they do shed light on how these companies view marketing and communication.

Analysis of Data

Frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. This was done using SPSS PASW Statistics 17.0 software. An analysis was done on the data that related to the objectives of the study, which were outlined in Chapter I.

Key Findings and Implications

Agri-tourism is a growing and expanding sector of the agriculture industry in the United States. The purpose of this study was to find out what advertising and marketing strategies are being used by agri-tourism businesses as well as what networking and educational resources business owners are utilizing to improve their success. The following discussion divides the key findings and their implications according to the objective they are most closely related to.

Objective 1: To define the types of agri-tourism businesses that currently exist in the state of Ohio by location, size, gross income and type of product or service offered

Almost half (42.6% or n=46) of the respondents' businesses were located in northern Ohio. This could have resulted for a number of reasons. First, the mailing list could have been biased in the fact that it sampled more businesses in the north than any other region. Second, more businesses from the north have their addresses registered with the Web sites that were used as a database for this study. Third, the result could be reliable. If there are more agri-tourism businesses operating in northern Ohio than any other region, the data could be accurately predicting the actual population. The northern region of Ohio is an area rich in wineries and bed-

and-breakfasts. Respondents living the high tourist area of “Amish Country” could also place themselves in this section, so it is very likely the case that this area does have more agri-tourism than other parts. Further data that takes an inventory of every agri-tourism enterprise in Ohio would show why the data from this study resulted in almost half of the businesses being in the northern region.

The total annual income data revealed that 55.6% (n=60) of the agri-tourism businesses bring in less than \$50,000. This data implies that the agri-tourism businesses operating in Ohio are smaller businesses that may not be designed to make large profits, but instead only supplement additional incomes. The inventory done on Tennessee agri-tourism businesses by the Center for Profitable Agriculture (Bruch and Holland, 2004) showed similar results to this study, with 38% of 273 agri-tourism businesses having less than \$25,000 in annual gross sales.

Data analysis regarding how far customers travel to visit the businesses demonstrated that a majority (84.3% or n=91) of consumers are traveling less than 24 miles. Consumers are rarely traveling long distances, with only 2.8% (n=3) respondents marking that their largest share of customers travel over 100 miles to visit their operation. This result implies that customers who live or work close-by are familiar with the business and the area. It also shows that the customers may be loyal to the company or its owners, and that they may trust its local reputation. In addition, this data shows that the trend of an increased emphasis on “buying local” may be growing on consumers.

In a similar context, 79.4% (n=85) of respondents said that they are very familiar with their customer base. A minority of 1.9% (n=2) said they were not familiar with their customer base. This result reiterates the idea that many of these agri-tourism businesses are small, have a good local reputation and respect their customers. According to the Page and Fearn study (2005),

consumer fairness, which includes trust and consumers, is one of the three main dimensions of corporate reputation. If the respondents foster a familiarity with their customers, they are more likely to have a good corporate reputation.

The final result for objective 1 is the data regarding what type of entertainment of service is offered at the businesses sampled. Roadside stands and markets (41.7% or n=45), u-pick operations (39.8% or n=43), and agricultural food and craft shows (25.9% or n=28) topped the list, while zero respondents marked rodeos and swimming. In relation to the Center for Profitable Agriculture study at the University of Tennessee Knoxville (Bruch and Holland, 2004), these results are very comparable. Their study showed that 48% of Tennessee agri-tourism businesses offered an on-farm retail market, while 43% offered on-farm concessions and 26% offered a pick-your-own. This data shows that the most popular type of service deals with food and food products, one of the largest commodities in the world. This may mean that consumers are most willing to travel to an agri-tourism business when it offers some type of food product or show, making these businesses the most successful and the most popular to operate. It could also show that food-related agri-tourism is the easiest type of service to offer, since food is abundant and cost-efficient (it does not require an excess of supplies or maintenance).

Additionally, rodeos are most likely least popular because Ohio is not known for ranch-style farm operations, and swimming at an agri-tourism business is probably not popular with consumers (due to the presence of community and private swimming pools and the fact that Ohio's climate only allows for swimming for three months out of the year).

Objective 2: To determine what advertising agri-tourism businesses throughout the state of Ohio are using to promote their products and services and their perceptions of these advertising methods

The most utilized advertising methods were newspaper advertisements (68.5% or n=74), business Web sites (52.8% or n=57), and roadside signs (51.9% or n=56). For business owners, newspaper advertisements may be easy, familiar and (because they are typically small businesses) locally-targeted. The half of the businesses that do operate Web sites may be knowledgeable, from outreach resources or their own experiences, on how beneficial Web sites can be to their consumers. Web sites are known to be long-term, quick, and reliable methods of advertising for consumers. The half that do not operate a Web site may not know how to set one up, or they may not believe the benefits are the worth the cost and time of maintaining one. These individuals may also live in remote areas where only dial-up is available, and may not see it's value for their local audience. In addition, the frequent use of roadside signs suggests that business owners like the convenience of them. Roadside signs are maintained by users, at no to low cost, and often last for years once made. They are also easy to alter or rotate, and their use operates on the business owner's schedule (unlike a newspaper advertisement).

Television commercials (4.6% or n=5), online blogs (5.6% or n=6), personal Web sites (5.6% or n=6), and media kits (5.6% or n=6) were the least utilized marketing strategies. This data suggests that, for agri-tourism businesses, television commercials may not be cost-effective, or easy to develop when they are trying to reach local consumers. Online blogs are relatively new to the media mix, and therefore many owners may lack familiarity with using them (preventing them from seeing any benefits to using this method). In addition, the low percentage

of respondents who use personal Web sites and media kits demonstrates that many of the businesses do not have them or need them, due to strong dependence on more familiar methods.

The Likert scale evaluation data resulted in nearly every mean ranging from 2.80 to 4.01. This illustrates that the respondents' attitudes toward all the defined advertising methods are neutral. This could be for a number of reasons. First, the overall opinions may differ so much that, when averaged, they came out to a neutral score. This could be because marketing is generally considered on a case-by-case basis (i.e. what works for one company may not for another). Second, the respondents may not have been sure of their feelings, and therefore chose the simple answer of "3." Third, the Likert scale questions were at the end of the survey. Respondents may have been tired or in a rush, and therefore answered neutral instead of considering the question with more thought. It is interesting to note that respondents indicated an average of 4.1 on effectiveness of roadside signs and billboards, while all other media were neutral. This could indicate why this is such a popular method with these business owners.

The final questions for objective 2 asked about the best marketing strategy respondents had ever used or seen used. Twenty-two respondents answered "word-of-mouth." This could mean that many of them are relying on the businesses reputation to speak for itself. It could be the case that in these rural areas, people tend to trust the word of their neighbor over other forms of communication and the business owners capitalize on that. A recent study of crop producers sources for farming information in Ohio indicated that farmers trust interpersonal communication (the word of people in their community and at their local mill) more than other sources (Hall & Rhoades, 2009). They also may utilize this strategy because they cannot afford to pay for other strategies, or because feedback from their consumers makes this claim for them.

Objective 3: To establish how the communications and marketing departments within these agri-tourism businesses operate, including who operates them and what their budget is.

A significant portion (62.0% or n=67) of the respondents said that the owner is the individual in charge of communications at their business. Only 2.8% (n=2) respondents said that they had hired someone to specifically be in charge of their communications and marketing. This is a key finding, because it shows that many of these business owners may not realize the benefits of hiring a specialist in the field of communications. It illustrates that having employees working in other areas of the business may be taking priority over marketing. In addition, when combined with the data showing the low total annual incomes, it could suggest that these businesses cannot afford to hire an employee for such a position.

Data analysis also showed that the businesses' current advertising methods were typically targeting both rural and urban audiences and local and county-wide communities. Seventy-five percent (n=81) said they focus on rural and urban audiences, versus just one or the other. This implies that agri-tourism businesses are looking to attract a diverse range of customers, and that their marketing strategies need to be designed to do that (in terms of content and medium used). Also, 83.4% (n=90) said that they focus on advertising to local and county-wide communities, with only 9.3% (n=10) focusing on the state-wide community. This suggests that respondents are looking at cost-efficiency and choosing the range of their marketing strategies. While a Web site is accessible to everyone, a newspaper advertisement may only be accessible to the local area. It could also demonstrate that respondents rely on word-of-mouth to gain consumers beyond the local community. They may believe that if they gain the respect of local consumers, then word will travel to those outside of the area. In contrast, the population for this sample included

information taken off of the following Web sites: Ohio Proud's Find a Farmers Market; Discover Ohio; and the Ohio Bed and Breakfast Association . These businesses are included in these lists, but may not realize the value of their outreach programs to advertise their business.

Finally, data for objective 3 reviewed how much of the total annual income business owners were spending on communications. A majority of 72.2% (n=77) of the respondents said they spend less than 5% of their annual income on communications. The income data from objective 1 showed that a majority of businesses make less than \$50,000. From these two sets of data, it can be assumed that a majority of the businesses are spending less than \$5,000 a year on communications, which includes marketing and advertising. When considering the rising cost of advertising, this is a very small amount. Many of the businesses are using roadside signs and word of mouth to generate business, two methods that are extremely low or no cost.

Objective 4: To identify what networking and educational tools and resources agri-tourism businesses are using to improve the success of their business

While approximately half (50.9% or n=55) of the respondents are members of a networking and educational organization, half of the respondents are not. This could suggest that 50% of business owners do not see the benefits in being a member of an organization. They may feel that they do not have the time to attend meetings or conferences, or they may not want to pay the fees associated with being a member of some organizations. In addition, while 62.0% (n=67) of respondents attend conferences in Ohio, 33.3% (n=36) attend conferences out-of-state. Many of the respondents who attended conferences out of state traveled as far away as California, New Mexico, Texas, and Canada. This data suggests that some agri-tourism business owners value networking and educational opportunities, even when they must travel great

distances to receive it. In post hoc visual analysis it can be noted that many of the companies use information from national member organizations or programs implemented in other states. This begs the question of what can Ohio associations do to better help these local companies grow?

Of respondents, 11.1% (n=12) said that they have gone to the local library or used printed sources to refer to communications and marketing strategies that could be used within their company. On the other hand, 29.6% (32) said that they use available online sources to advance their communications and marketing. This suggests that business owners are twice as likely to use a resource if it is online versus having to go somewhere to get the printed document.

Four questions related to what resources agri-tourism business owners were using to improve their business. Each of these questions provided two lines (per question) to describe the resources they used. Of the 75 written responses combined, The Ohio State University Extension was only mentioned as a resource seven times. Ohio Farm Bureau was only mentioned as a resource two times, and the Ohio Department of Agriculture was only mentioned two times. This suggests that, although a lot of education and helpful material has been published by these outreach organizations; many respondents are not accessing it.

Implications of Key Findings

Individuals who work closely with the agriculture industry, especially agricultural communicators, outreach program directors, and government employees should take special note on specific details in this study.

The typical profile of an Ohio agri-tourism business is as follows. They are small businesses, with limited total annual profits. Their consumers are usually from the local community, allowing business owners to be very familiar with their customer base. Most of the

agri-tourism businesses in Ohio handle food products as part of their service or entertainment. While some may be involved in a member organization, others may not be. Agri-tourism business owners are more likely to travel to a conference in Ohio versus out-of-state, but if traveling out-of-state, there does not appear to be a restriction on the distance they are willing to travel.

In regards to utilizing resources, a majority of agri-tourism businesses are not using them. If they do, the materials they are looking at are most likely online. Therefore, this study suggests it may be more profitable for outreach programs and government agencies to disseminate their resources and educational materials via the internet versus spending money to print them. Because of the low number of people using these resources, the following could also be considered. Are these resources being marketed properly themselves? The data, which showed low use of documents created by The Ohio State University Extension, the Ohio Farm Bureau, and the Ohio Department of Agriculture, illustrates that a significant number of respondents either do not know about the resources that are currently available, or they do not care to use them. Because outreach programs and government agencies operate on small budgets, it is important that the audience they are targeting is being reached and using the resources that are designed for them. If they are not, then one of two things should be considered: (1) is there a break in the line of communication between outreach program and the business owners or (2) are these programs not needed because business owners are not using them? Further studies that focus specifically on the use of resource materials could answer these questions.

In regards to communications and advertising, agri-tourism businesses are doing the following. Many of the owners are running the communications and advertising themselves, versus having the job assigned to a separate individual. They are also utilizing the most cost-

effective and convenient strategies of marketing, with many of them relying mainly on word-of-mouth to expand consumer traffic. They are spending less than 5% of their total annual income on their advertising, and they are focusing mostly on local, rural/urban audiences. This study suggests that unique programs or workshops that teach business owners the importance of communication could be useful to agri-tourism businesses. These new programs could stress the development of new and innovative marketing techniques that would help enhance the current growth of the industry. The low use of online blogs illustrates business owners' unfamiliarity with new social media tools. This is most likely due to a lack of educational materials regarding social media. Workshops can be offered to teach owners how to use online tools and how to develop business websites.

Ultimately, it is suggested that two things be done in order to capitalize on the possible growth opportunities that currently exist in agri-tourism. First, communicators and marketers of outreach programs and government agencies (such as Extension programs) should re-evaluate how well their products are reaching the audiences they are attempting to target. Second, outreach and member organizations (from local to state-wide) should consider hosting workshops for agri-tourism business owners that focus not only on the importance of marketing their business, but also on transforming from everyday methods of marketing (newspapers, Web sites, signs, etc.) to more innovative forms that could attract that attention of a new, more diverse audiences.

Educators in communication and agricultural business programs need to emphasize to students the importance of successful marketing when looking to grow and continue a small business like a farmer's market. Since many of the respondents did the marketing themselves,

agricultural business students should be encouraged to take marketing and communication classes to build skills in advertising content and design.

Since this is a small sample in one Midwestern state, further studies should look at other agri-tourism areas to see how they compare to the findings of this study. Other research that could be beneficial would include business owners' skill level in developing marketing materials, and a study of consumers to see how they learn about such companies. Finally a study of business owners should be conducted to find out their information needs and how organizations like Extension and Farm Bureau can provide that information.

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