

The Art & Science of Farmers' Market Display

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Learn How to Create Displays that Really Sell

You have a great product and your farmers' market is bustling with shoppers. So why aren't sales as good as you hoped? Having a great product is important, but only if you can successfully attract customers to 'try and buy'. In this publication we review some basic tips for arranging your space, display strategies that work, and a few other marketing tactics that will signal customers you are open for business.

Effective Displays Yield Increased Sales

A good display is a great strategy for increasing sales. An eye-catching set-up is a magnet drawing in shoppers to admire the visual art you have created. Getting shoppers to buy is a lot easier once you have them at your stand. A steady stream of traffic, in and out of your sales area, will attract other shoppers. People are naturally curious; if they see a cluster of people gathering at a particular spot, they will want to know what is creating the interest. Good visual merchandising is not magic. It just requires a little time, a little creativity, and a desire to stand out.



Create a Sense of Abundance

Overflowing baskets of produce invite the customer in and make them want to purchase. The challenge here is to make your display look like a work of art, but one that invites touching. Keep your displays looking full and colorful, but also make them user-friendly. Baskets make great displays, because they make selection easy, without fearing that the whole arrangement will fall apart.



Tip: *Keep a couple sturdy shopping bags around and pass them to shoppers who arrive at your stand with their hands full. People can't shop if their hands are full!*

Baskets are sturdy, travel and store well, and are fairly inexpensive. They also have the added benefit of being easy to keep looking full. If you don't want to put out a whole basket of something, just fill the basket partway with some straw or leaves, or something seasonal, and then place your product on top. The basket still looks full, but with a lot less product. Check your displays frequently and keep your products restocked throughout the entire period that you are selling. Your goal should be to keep everything looking fresh and enticing. Don't give your late shoppers the impression that the best stuff has already been sold and they are stuck with the leftovers.



Make Your Space Customer-Friendly

While abundance is important, you want to avoid creating a space that is cluttered and over-crowded. Don't be afraid to let items overlap a bit, as this helps to create that sense of abundance we discussed earlier, but don't overcrowd your items to the point that buyers won't be able to see everything you have available.

Tip: *Avoid putting too many items down on the ground. Research indicates that shoppers (women especially) don't like having to bend over to reach an item.*

When you are designing your sales space, consider protection from the weather — imagine your space on a hot, sunny day, a cold, rainy day and a windy day — and plan for protection from the elements. Arrange your space so that customers will have room to move around. Place the cash register strategically, so that customers waiting to pay will not be blocking new customers from entering.

Leave plenty of room for you and your employees to restock, freshen up displays and talk with customers

Tip: *With a U-shaped display, many vendors find it easier to take money and make change from a cash-apron rather than having a register. This works especially well if you don't have enough staff to have someone dedicated to ringing up sales and if you are good at making change without using a calculator or register.*

without blocking others from getting to the displays. Make your displays easy to reach so your customers won't have to rely on you to help them.

If you have a narrow display space, usually the best option is to create a linear set-up. Although this keeps the display between you and the customer, it does maximize the display space, while keeping the back side of the display clear for you to restock and move about.

The 3-Dimensional Display

Make the most of your space by maximizing all 3 dimensions — height, width and depth. Use racks to display items that are light-weight, or can easily be stacked. Use depth to your advantage. The average customer will be able to reach at least 2-3 feet into a display without feeling awkward or inconvenienced. Combine depth and height to make the most of small spaces. A display rack does not have to be expensive. A simple wooden rack is relatively easy to make and will last a long time. The benefit of display racks is that your display looks full and allows you to show different sizes of product to give customers an idea of all their options.



While upright racks are very useful for displaying many different types of products, you will want to

make sure that you can anchor them well — especially if you are outside where the wind may be a problem.

Label It!

Make sure your products are clearly marked. Provide cooking and serving ideas for unfamiliar items. Offer samples so customers can see and taste what they will be buying.



Many customers are reluctant to ask the cost of items so make sure that they will have the information without having to ask. Keep your products well-labeled and make sure that labels are attached so they don't come

Tip: *Samples are a great way to educate customers about your products and show off your fine quality. When you are sampling, have labels clearly visible. Keep the area clean and neat — wipe up spills and clear away trash. Whenever possible stay in the area to answer questions. Don't leave the sampling area unattended.*

loose. Be sure that your signs can be read easily from a distance of 3-5 feet. It is a good investment to make attractive labels that are water-proof and rugged enough to stand up to a whole season. It's a lot of work at the beginning, but once they are made,



you'll only have to remember to bring them with you. If you are selling a product that may be unfamiliar to your customers, offer some possible uses right on the label. Don't be afraid to offer advice on how to prepare something, or what other foods/beverages might pair well with the product. Whenever possible, include education as part of your display.

Make Yourself Visible

Be present whenever customers are in the area and wear something that identifies you as the person staffing the area. Be open and welcoming. Take the time to package the purchase up appropriately— this can be as simple as offering to bag the product or it can involve some extra steps to ensure that the product arrives home in good shape.

For example, a farmer, from whom I buy flowers, always takes the time to trim the stems, wrap the stems in wet paper then wrap the bouquet in a plastic bag. That way the flower stems stay moist, but the plastic keeps my bag and my car dry on the way home. This shows the customer that you take pride in your product and that you care about more than making the sale.

Tip: *Make sure your customers can tell the sellers from the buyers on a busy market day. Make sure you and all employees wear hats, shirts, or aprons with your logo. This has the added benefit of keeping your business name in front of the customer. Some vendors find that a particular 'look' works to help them stand out — maybe a funky hat or some eye-catching suspenders. Photos of your farm or your business are also a good idea.*

A main reason that customers come to farmers' markets is to establish a relationship with the people they are buying from. Don't hide behind your display. When you are at the market, you are part of the display. Smile, be friendly, talk to shoppers. Cell phones should be for emergencies only. Avoid clustering with other vendors — there will be plenty of time for chatting when the market closes. Train your staff to follow these same rules and you will see your sales increase.

Tip: *When you get your display set up in a way that works well take some photos and sketch out the basic layout. Add a few written notes, bundle it into a binder or file folder and you, or anyone else, will be able to recreate that winning display easily.*

Let Your Products Shine

When you are designing a farmers' market display remember that your products should be front and center. All other materials — baskets, boxes, table covers, signage — are there to complement the product. When you select awnings, tablecloths, and containers, use background colors that enhance what you are selling. Avoid using colors that clash with your products or send mixed messages to the buyer.



There has been lots of research done on the role of color and marketing and the evidence certainly points to a connection between color, emotion, and consumer behavior.

The good news for you is that you don't need a degree



in color theory. What you need to know is that colors that come from nature are generally good colors and this makes your job easier. When you select colors for table covers, logos, and

packaging, keep in mind that you want to emphasize your products. In general, for food products, select colors in natural earth tones and avoid loud prints and bright shades. For craft products, let your product guide you. Don't be afraid to be creative — we're not encouraging you to be boring here, just to make the surroundings fit the product that you are selling.

Package to Fit

Knowing your customers provides you with important information about how to package your products for the best sales. Some customers will always look for product that is "pre-packaged," weighed, and priced, so they know exactly what they are paying. Other customers will want to select and bag their own from the basket. Find ways to accommodate both types of customer.

You might also try packaging a variety of items together to help customers gain a sense of how to use unfamiliar items. Examples of these bundles might include a stir-fry medley, a soup veggie pack, or a salsa kit. Many farmers have great success with this type of marketing.



Have a "Grab 'n' Go" Section

If your market is an afternoon market, you can expect some customers to stop by on their way home from work. While weekend markets often attract customers who want to spend time wandering from vendor to vendor, carefully selecting items and spending time learning about new products, you will find those same customers may have very different purchasing habits on a weekday afternoon. These customers may be in a hurry, tired, stressed out, and just not in the mood for a lengthy shop. Have some items packaged, priced and

ready for quick sales. For example, a bag of washed salad greens, some pre-made bouquets, pre-cut vegetables, ready-made desserts, breads, and cheeses all make it easy for customers to select, pay, and be on their way in no time.

Final Thoughts

As you review the information provided here, I hope you have caught the underlying message, which is that consumers use a lot of sensory input in making decisions to purchase. Having a great product to sell is necessary, but even a great product is not always sufficient to guarantee sales. If you want customers to fall in love with your product, you first have to get them to notice you. Appeal to as many senses as you can to make that happen and you will win them over. Use your selling space to create a sensory-rich experience for potential customers and you will see

your sales increase dramatically.

While an element of competition between vendors at a farmers' market is healthy, remember that truly successful markets are those where vendors look out for one another and take responsibility for making sure the customer experience is a good one. As you gain experience in direct marketing, you will learn many tips and techniques that work well. Never hesitate to share these strategies



with other vendors. It will make the entire market stronger.

Now It's Your Turn—Plan Your Display

Now that you have reviewed some tips for having a workable, attention-getting display at your farm market, it's time to get your display in shape for the coming season. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Start by sketching out your display area. It will help if you do this on graph paper so you can create the design to scale.
- Make a list of the items that you'll be selling — keep in mind that if you sell fruits and vegetables, you might have less at the beginning of the season and more during the middle and end of the season. Use this list to see how many baskets, boxes, and other containers you will need.
- Make a list of what types of display material you have to work with — tables (length, width, height), baskets (how many, what size), banners, signs, table coverings, racks, stands, etc.
- Make a list of equipment that you will need to have, either in the sales area or nearby — scales, register or cash box, bags or other packaging material, water for misting your plants and veggies, etc.
- Put together a small box with tape, scissors, markers, pens/pencils, paper, etc. for emergency repairs or last minute signs.
- Repair broken table legs; clean or repaint the components of your display; wash banners, tarps, and signs; find appropriate materials to partially fill baskets and boxes
- Set up a mock display. This will give you a feel for how the display will look, how traffic will flow, and where some changes might be in order. Opening day is *not* the best time to discover that your baskets don't fit on the tables you have.
- Consider spending some time making some nice, durable labels for your products and some recipes, or other giveaways, that have your business name on them.
- Make up some information sheets that will provide answers to some common questions and have them laminated so that they will last the season.
- Hire good employees and train them well. Every individual who works at your farm stand should be well-informed, pleasant, and customer-oriented.

There are many more actions you can take that will make your market experience both fun and profitable, but these tips will help get your market display in shape.