

Online Service Boosts Sales For Small Farms

You could say Desiree Nelson heard about Grapevine Local Food Marketing through the grapevine. She and her husband already had a website and were working with an online direct marketing company. Their friend recommended Grapevine to them, and they discovered it was a perfect match for what they needed.

"If I had to pick one thing they did for us, it was search engine optimization for better visibility on Google," says Nelson. The firm also designed a custom GrazeCart website that enables customers to shop online easier, learn what's new on the farm, and read about farming practices. The site was streamlined for both new and existing customers.

It paid off. "We have more new customers every month than we ever had before," says Nelson. "When I ask how people found our farm, it's mostly all internet searches. Our customers rave about how easy the website is to use."

Nelson's word-of-mouth experience is what has taken Grapevine from a one-woman shop with a 50-mile radius in northwest Indiana to a nationwide service with a dozen associates and growing.

"I had burned out working after 17 years in the marketing industry when a farming friend asked me to help her out," recalls Sarah Highlen at Grapevine. "I helped her advertise on social media, and her business tripled. The original plan was to do social media and advertising for farms within driving distance of my home, and it took on a life of its own."

Highlen quickly realized she could work with farms around the country, and today she does.



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Highlen and her staff began helping clients understand and work with services like GrazeCart, Shopify, Square Online, Squarespace Circle and more. They continued doing websites, advertising, drip email, search engine optimization, graphic design, text message marketing, and other marketing-related work.

Currently, Grapevine works with more than 40 farms, has launched 85 websites, helped 15 non-profits, and claims more than 100 satisfied local food clients. In addition to farmers, the firm has worked with food hubs, local food businesses, and government entities across the U.S. and Canada.

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Lend-A-Hand is a swinging arm mounted on the back of the tractor to keep hydraulic hoses and electrical lines out of the drawbar and PTO.

They Make Products To Solve Farm Problems

Springfield Ag Products is a farmer-run business in Manitoba that aims to connect agriculture workers with attachment tools that boost productivity.

"We started making products for our own use and posting them on our Instagram page," says current manager Curtis Hofer. "More guys started asking and inquiring about them. We hadn't intended for it to grow this much when we started, but we've been blessed with great success in that regard."

The metal fabricating facility specializes in innovative, custom attachments for tractors and other farm equipment. They're designed for anyone working in the farming sector of the agriculture industry, from the small farmer to large equipment dealers.

Springfield Ag's bestselling product is the Lend-A-Hand for Case Quad Tractor, New Holland, and Versatile tractors. It's a swinging arm mounted on the back of the tractor to keep hydraulic hoses and electrical lines out of the drawbar and PTO. Matched with the company's Hose Saddle, it works to clean the lines running from the tractor to the implement. "It's the only product of its kind on the market," says Hofer. "Only one that I've seen anyways."

A close second is the Pipe Drain, a tube with funnels used to drain the oil in the mid-rollers and idlers all at once. This tool makes it a lot easier and quicker to service tractors.

Springfield Ag currently employs eight full and part-time employees, and upwards of 98 percent of the company's products are shipped out, either to dealers or directly to customers. "Some of the products we're making have been around for several years now, but some are as new as 3 years ago,"



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says Hofer. "We keep innovating and trying to improve them every chance we get to better suit our, and more importantly, our customers, needs."

Beyond the company's standard products, Springfield Ag is open to requests. Says Hofer, "If any farmers have custom products that they would like to make happen and don't know where to go to have them made, we'd be happy to help them out. Even though we mainly focus on our Ag Products line, we're also a metal fabricating facility."

Interested readers can email or visit the company website, where most products can be purchased online.

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Hacks Develop Into Farm Business

Malcolm MacLean has been hacking stuff since he was young. The first modification he recalls was adding duct tape tabs to his rubber boots to pull them on. Fast forward to 2023, and Malcolm's Ranch Hacks Facebook page has 19,000 followers and has drawn millions of views.

"As far back as I can remember, I've modified and built things," says MacLean. "At 9 or 10, every time my dad went to the local dump, I'd hop on and look for bicycle parts to build 3-wheelers or chopper-style bikes. By the time I was 12 or 13, I was picking up lawn mower and dirt bike parts, rebuilding and selling them."

MacLean credits his farmer/rancher grandfather as an inspiration. "He believed that a person should be able to do everything for themselves, from mechanics to welding, to carpentry," recalls MacLean.

Malcolm's Ranch Hacks grew out of his constant desire to do tasks faster and more efficiently. He and his veterinarian wife began posting his tools online. With the help of an area welder, he's starting to fill requests for the tools he's made or modified.

Some of MacLean's most popular hacks include a farm jack post puller kit, a hammerhead fence plier, and a combination wire cutter/staple puller.

Several of his hacks involve high-lift farm jacks. The post puller has a U-bracket that slips around the post. A second U-bracket with a choke chain to loop around the post slips over the lift plate. Jacking it up lifts the post out of the ground. Another high lift jack has its lift



MacLean's "contraption" is a cow path variation of a powered wheelbarrow using wheels from an old motorbike and quad.

plate modified with a flat steel plate and chain hook. That jack's original base was replaced by steel tubes in an H-design to spread weight over a wider area.

MacLean's horseshoe barbed wire gate post grabber is a major upgrade from traditional wire loops. It consists of a horseshoe around the post with a second horseshoe welded to it for leverage. Springs linked to the first horseshoe wrap around the end post of the fence line.

His "contraption" is a cow path variation of a powered wheelbarrow. The in-line wheels are mounted to a platform for carrying chainsaws, supplies and other tools. The drive wheel is off an old Rokon 2-WD motorbike. The rear is off an old quad.

"I bought a little 77cc gas motor at Princess Auto for about \$120," says MacLean in a video. "I put a gear reduction box on it to bring it down about 6 to 1. Then I slowed it down even more with a small sprocket on the

gearbox and a bigger sprocket on the drive wheel. With the gear reduction, I don't have to run behind it, plus it gives me the lugging power I need for steep hills."

MacLean went with direct drive chain drive instead of a centrifugal clutch for reduced maintenance. It also lets him use compression braking downhill. Starting is easy too. He put the throttle and kill switch at the handlebar end. When he wants to go, he gives the cart a push and compression starts the motor.

"I welded some horseshoes on each side to carry T-posts into tough areas," says MacLean.

Followers wanting to buy a particular tool should direct message MacLean via his Facebook page. He assures followers that the welder who fulfills orders does a better job than he did on his original hacks.



Horseshoe wire gate post grabber works better than traditional wire loops.

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