

Workshop Title: Promote to Build Your Farm Business (Part 1 & 2)

Speaker & their title: Roger Snowdon, Media Magic (NB)

Executive Summary: During this session, Roger Snowdon used examples from the audience to illustrate the point that every farm business has stories that can be sold and promoted to the media. It is wise to identify these stories, so that you can be proactive about using the media to expand the public profile of your farm business. Rodger also provided examples of how businesses have sold their success stories to the media, and also gave examples of how to do “damage control” through the media in the case of bad news stories.

Detailed Notes

Knowing how to promote yourself to the media can be a key component in the success of your farm business. Don't wait for the media to come to you. Perform a communications audit to identify stories that might be of interest to the media.

Roger facilitated a mini communications audit using examples from session attendees. Attendees were instructed to write down things about their farm businesses that were unique, or made them stand out from other businesses.

Some examples from the attendees included:

e.g. One farmer is collecting and processing chaga mushrooms. This could be a lifestyle story, or a business story. The story might be interesting to the media because of our health-obsessed culture, and because of the cancer-fighting claims that have been made for chaga.

e.g. A very young farmer, who grew up on a farm and is now expanding the family business. Sell this story as a feel-good, family tradition and public interest lifestyle story.

e.g. A farmer who markets her organic meat to oil rig workers through her father. This story has good visuals, which are an important part of success in promoting through the media.

e.g. A farmer who grows hops for Picaroons. The hop yard is the only one in the region. Promoting the farm is also promotion for Picaroons. Cross-promote whenever possible. There are good visual potentials to this story, as hops vines are monstrous and most people probably have little idea about how they grow.

e.g. An attendee works at a wellness centre that runs a community garden

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contest every July. The garden is in a First Nations community and is supported by a diabetes initiative. The group discussed the possibility of using Diabetes Day as a reason to sell a community garden story to the media. Always look for ways to turn special days, events and current events to your advantage.

When you have completed the communications audit consider whether you have the human and non-human resources to make your stories public. How will you go about it? Do you have the money, time and people necessary to promote what you need to promote? Are you doing anything newsworthy? Even if it is not newsworthy, maybe there is something worth promoting to your customers. You may not be able to promote your business right away, but the audit gives you something to work toward.

Snowdon used the example of Maple Leaf Homes to illustrate the point that successes promoted in the media can lead to future successes. Maple Leaf Homes won a contract to build pre-fab homes for Attawapiskat. They also won an award for energy efficiency in home construction. The company was interested in breaking into the northern mining camp market and so used the Attawapiskat contract as a reason to promote their “arctic” expertise.

As much as media attention can be a boon to your farm business. Sometimes media attention is unwanted. Snowdon used several non-farm related examples of businesses and politicians doing “damage control” well. The salient points to be taken from these examples included considering the power of visual language and storytelling, as well as the importance of considering what your main messages are and how they will be perceived by the public.