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Absolutely Ament

By Ross Ament, ATPI President

Can They Find You?

Trends are an interesting thing. Any marketing person worth their salt knows to study and follow the trends of the people they want to attract. What is a trend? One definition is: A trend is something that becomes popular within mainstream society over a relatively long period of time (more than a few years). It is the direction of a sequence of events that has some momentum and durability. The number of people involved in a trend and its duration will determine whether it's a "fad", a "craze", or a macro trend. A fad is a trend that dies down significantly within a few years.



One of the current tourism trends is that visitors are deciding to travel at the last minute. That could be for a day, weekend or longer (although another trend is for shorter stays). So, the consumer is probably taking the path of easiest information for travel, destination and activity ideas. Which, of course is all influenced by the internet.

So, how easy is it for the consumer to find your business? Is your website listed with your local convention and visitor bureau (cvb)? Is your ATPI membership status current and is your website listing on the ATPI website, www.agfun.com accurate? Have you scheduled a meeting with your local cvb office to discuss how you can further stretch your visibility? Have you considered one of the social media like Facebook or Twitter? That decision is best made with great research and guidance from several reliable sources.

After the consumer has found you virtually, how easy is it to find you, actually? With all that is discussed about proper directional signage, I am still amazed at the lack of easy to read guides.

Back to trends vs. fads for a minute. With the growing number of agritourism businesses across the country and around the world, agritourism is definitely a trend that is here to stay. Another trend from the marketing experts is that consumers are looking for genuine, value-added experiences. That is definitely the foundation of the best and long lasting agritourism businesses. So, as you grow your agritourism business or destination, are you building long lasting trends or short lived fads?

National Small Farm Conference

The 5th National Small Farm Conference -- "Roadmap to Success for Small Farmers and Ranchers"-- will be held September 15-17, 2009, at the Hilton Springfield and the Prairie Capital Convention Center in Springfield, Illinois. The conference will provide you with an opportunity to share new ideas in research, extension and outreach and to strengthen collaboration and partnership among your colleagues that are working to support small farmers and ranchers.



Please mark your calendars for the 2010 Illinois Specialty Growers & Agritourism Conference to be held in Springfield January 6-8th. ATPI will hold their annual meeting during the conference on January 7th.



Illinois State Fair 2009 Agriculture Day August 18th

Agriculture and Illinois agriculture, which is featured throughout the fair, is highlighted this year on Tuesday, August 18th. Grand champion junior livestock including the barrow, steer, wether, poultry trio, and rabbit trio are auctioned at the Governor's Sale of Champions. The best of Illinois processed foods are also auctioned at the Commodity Auction on this day. Other highlights include: Open Beef, Goat, Swine, & Sheep Shows; Draft Horse Show; Harness Racing; Auctioneer Bid Calling Contest; Draft Horse Hitches; Cutest Little Farmer Contest; ITPA Truck and Tractor Pulls.

Please join us in celebrating Illinois Agriculture on this exciting day at the Illinois State Fair!



The conference registration fee (\$250) will cover costs for a registration packet, two breakfasts, two lunches, one reception, one dinner, conference tour, and refreshments at breaks. The Tuesday evening reception will feature an entire menu of local foods, while the other meals and breaks will include some local food items. After August 25, the registration fee will be \$300.

You can register for the conference online at <http://www.conferences.uiuc.edu/smallfarm> or you can pay by check, money order, or purchase order. Fax registration to University of Illinois Conferences and Institutes at 217-333-9561 or mail to Small Farm Conference, Cashiering Office, University of Illinois, 162 Henry Administration Building, 506 S. Wright Street. Urbana, IL 61801.

Farm Progress Announces New Broadcast Unit

Farm Progress Companies, the largest U.S. agricultural media company, has announced the addition of a new broadcast business unit providing radio, television and enhanced Web programming for the agricultural market.

Max Armstrong, who was the keynote speaker at the 2008 Specialty Growers and Agri-Tourism Conference, will join Farm Progress in a full-time position as Director of Broadcasting. Armstrong is one of the nation's most widely recognized and respected ag broadcast journalists. His exceptional on-air personality, experience and talents have given his broadcasts exposure to millions of farmers, ranchers, and consumers for more than 30 years.

Farm Progress' new broadcast unit will be an important information resource for producers and empowers ag marketers with multiple new and highly synergistic producer-reach tools. The broadcast offering includes syndicated radio, television and Web programming, enhanced show marketing opportunities and additional producer-reach enhancements.

Additional information, please contact Farm Progress Companies at:
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Little did Robert and Joyce Lawlor know in the early 1970's what their passion for winemaking would bring... acres of rolling farmland hosting 22 different specialty grapes, 60,000 gallons of wine per year, 40 wine varieties, three tasting rooms and 30+ years later and many cherished friendships. The Lawlors are proud to have created a family legacy... that now spans three generations.

Robert & Joyce Lawlor dreamed of starting their own family winery and decided to take a winemaking class in Cedar Rapids. Daughter Christine Lawlor shared her parent's passion and accepted the challenge to become a winemaker. Christine and her parents launched Christina Wine Cellars in McGregor, Iowa in 1976. A few years later, they opened a second winery in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Continuing with the success, the Lawlor family saw an opportunity to open a third winery in Galena, Illinois.

Upcoming ATPI Elections

ATPI will be holding our annual meeting in January in conjunction with the annual Specialty Growers Conference. Elections for board members and officers will be conducted during the meeting. If any members are interested in actively participating in the election process, please contact John Pike at jpike@illinois.edu.

They called upon Christine's brother, Scott, and his wife, Karan, who had been working in Colorado and California, to move to Galena to help with the project. And this is where the Illinois story began and continues today!

Today, Galena Cellars produces, bottles, and cellars a variety of wines using grapes, juice, and fruit grown in their own vineyard and imported from across the United States. The wine list changes seasonally and always offers classic dry wines such as Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, their best-selling Oktoberfest, semi-dry and semi-sweet wines, a selection of fruit wines, and dessert Ports. And in 2008 alone, numerous wines won awards at the State, Regional and National competitions.

At their three (3) locations, wine tastings are offered to guests, allowing experienced staff to assist visitors to find the perfect wine for their tastes. Explanations are offered on the various grapes used when bottling, pairings with food, and even tips for serving, cooking and more. The Vineyard offers lodging options where guests can experience overnight stays in the country. It is also available for special events, festivals, weddings, receptions and more.

In addition to hosting their own signature events, you'll find Galena cellars featured at the majority of civic and community activities. Whether being a sponsor, donor or committee members, the Lawlor family and Galena Cellars have been a strong community partner for decades and work tirelessly on civic betterment initiatives.

National Value-added Agriculture Conference Highlights Agritourism

The 2009 National Value-added Agriculture Conference was held June 2-4 in Moline, IL. The annual conference serves a primary audience of technical assistance providers who assist farmers, ranchers and rural communities in a wide variety of value-added endeavors. While the majority of attendees work for the Extension service across the country, others from state departments of agriculture, USDA and industry also attended.

Topics for the conference are chosen as a result of clientele need and interest as identified by conference organizers and past participants. Agritourism, Local Food Systems and Business Development were the topics of discussion in the breakout sessions for 2009. Agritourism sessions covered various aspects of agritourism development from across the country. Presentations can be accessed at:

http://www.agmrc.org/national_value_added_agriculture_conference.cfm.

Ross Ament's presentation about the formation, successes and challenges associated with ATPI was a highlight of the program! A number of other states are either considering or are in the process of forming their own statewide agritourism association and ATPI's history is playing a role in the process. Justina Boggio (Boggio's Orchard and Produce) from Granville gave an interesting presentation about her family's agritourism operation as part of a Producer Panel and John Pike also gave a presentation with Iowa State Extension counterpart, Marsha Laux. An opening reception was hosted by ATPI Partner John Deere at the John Deere Pavilion.

While it is easy to get caught up in the day to day operations of your farm and agritourism operation we should all keep in mind that agritourism is an important and growing segment of the agriculture industry. The fact that agritourism was featured at a conference of this type proves that we are part of something big that is getting bigger every day. As a side note, liability issues and signage regulations appear to be challenges for agritourism producers across the nation, not just here in Illinois!

