

Marketing and Branding Toolkit

A Resource for Specialty
Crop and Value-Added
Food Producers in
Vermont

2024





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Introduction

If you're a Vermont farmer or specialty food producer, you face a multitude of decisions when it comes to marketing and branding your business. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to positioning your business for profitability, growth, and sustainability. Your path depends on your unique circumstances and aspirations. Who are you, and what do you aspire to become? What sets your business apart, and why should consumers and your community care? These are the fundamental questions to consider when crafting your marketing and branding strategy.

In this Toolkit, we will guide you through the process of uncovering and defining the narrative you want to convey in the marketplace. We will offer suggestions on how to effectively communicate that story, as well as how to efficiently reach consumers and boost the popularity of your products.

The Goal of Marketing and Branding:

"Marketing" is the process of paving the way to sell your products in the marketplace. In this toolkit, we use the term "marketing" to encompass all the steps involved in showcasing your products and getting them to market. These steps may encompass advertising, promotion, building relationships, engaging with social media, and distributing products through various avenues such as farmers markets, farm stores, online platforms, and traditional distributors.

"Branding," on the other hand, involves positioning your business in the consumer's mind – it's about communicating "who you are." In this context, "branding" refers to the steps you take to project an image of your business. This includes the design of your logo, promotional materials, website, and the language and storytelling you use to convey the unique role your business plays in the marketplace or community.



Marketing and branding are ongoing endeavors. When a consumer-facing company successfully markets and brands itself, its brand progresses through four crucial stages:

- **Awareness** - When consumers take notice of the brand.
- **Assessment** - When consumers define the brand in their minds.
- **Use** - When consumers interact with, use, or experience the brand and its products.
- **Advocacy** - When consumers are passionate enough about the brand to promote it to others, and the process begins again.

This process reflects the real-life journey of your business and brand in the marketplace. The process forms a continuous cycle that evolves based on conscious decisions about how you want to present your company and the experiences consumers have with your products. Successful marketing and branding helps guide consumers through the phases of awareness, assessment, use, and advocacy, fueling the cycle anew when you reach new customers.

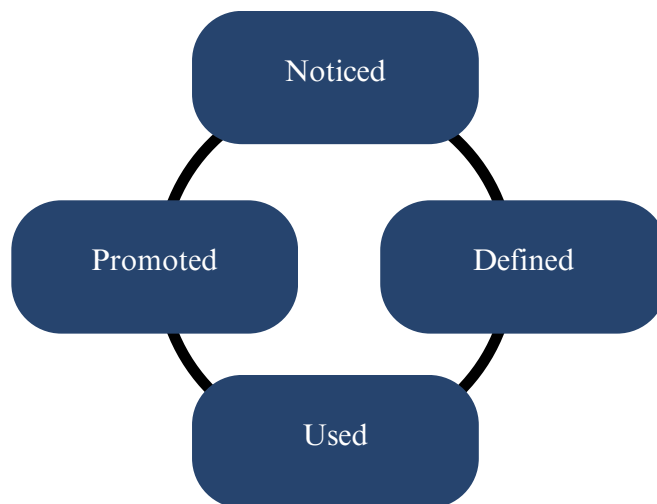


Figure 1: Brand lifecycle in marketplace

Foundation - What Matters Most:

To make the marketing and branding cycle work for your business, you need intention and direction. Before diving into action, you should be able to provide clear and concise answers to the following questions (consider jotting them down):



- **What is your vision?** This is the "why" behind what you do – your perspective on the world and what you find significant about your purpose and role.
- **What is your mission?** Building on your vision, this statement defines what you do, how you do it, and for whom. A mission statement typically follows the following pattern (but these can be arranged in any order): "We ____ by ____ for ____." Example: "Our mission is to grow the highest quality produce for our local community using organic and regenerative farming practices."
- **What are your values?** These principles define what actions your business will take and those it won't, as well as what you choose to promote.
- **How big do you want to grow, and what kind of lifestyle do you seek?** These considerations will drive your approach, investment, and strategies for gaining visibility, encouraging consumers to try your products, and cultivating customer advocacy.

You don't have to, and may not want to, implement every aspect presented in this toolkit. It's meant to serve as a guide, showcasing strategies, opportunities, and best practices for enhancing your business. We want to emphasize the value in learning from your peers as well. Take cues from those who have successfully established a clear brand in the marketplace. We've included a few case studies in this toolkit as examples.

Understanding Customer Expectations:

Before delving into this toolkit, it's crucial to understand what your potential customers seek in a brand. Recall past conversations with customers and consider what successful businesses in your area emphasize. You might even consider hosting open dialogues with customers or participating in larger events like farmers markets to gain insights into your target consumer's expectations. We provide further ideas for tailoring your branding to tell your business's story in "Phase 2: Getting Defined."

Toolkit Organization:

This toolkit is organized into four phases, aligning with the marketing and branding cycle mentioned earlier (refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2 on the next page). For each section, you



will find explanations, best practices, and a list of resources that can assist you in each of these phases.

Phase 1 - Getting Noticed: This section explores the promotional activities your peers engage in to bring their brand to the attention of consumers and potential partners who can help expand their customer base.

Phase 2 - Helping Customers Define Your Brand: Here, we guide you in crafting a narrative that mirrors your mission and vision.

Phase 3 - Getting Customers to Use Your Products and Experience Your Brand: In this section, we catalog various channels for distributing and selling your products, from those you fully control, like your website and farm store, to those you partially or don't control, such as retail stores or distributors.

Phase 4 - Inspiring Customers to Promote Your Brand: This section reviews the promotional activities you can use to elevate your brand's name in front of consumers and potential partners, including other farm stores and groceries.

A Note About What Customers Want to Hear:

Recognize that not all consumers are the same, and some will be more drawn to your brand than others due to personal preferences and values. This is not a reflection of you personally. The more authentic your practices and storytelling are, the more focused your core customer group is likely to become.

The key takeaway is to focus on the consumers most likely to be your customers and cater to their preferences and needs. This will strengthen your brand's appeal, and other potential customers who resonate with your product and message will take notice. To better understand your core customers, engage with them through personal interactions, social media, occasional surveys, or feedback requests.

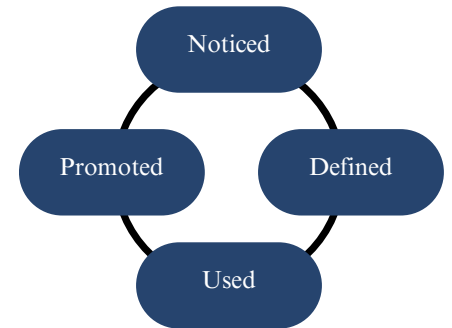


Figure 2: Toolkit organization protocol



Phase 1 - Getting Noticed

The initial and most essential step in making your products and brand known to the world is to create awareness. In this section, we will explore the primary promotional channels available to you and offer guidance on how to access and utilize them effectively.

Promotional Channels:

- Website
- Social Media
- Email Newsletter
- Local Media and Directories
- Business to Business Co-Promotions
- Signs and Displays
- Agritourism
- Sponsorship
- Advertising
- Awards/Competitions
- Trade Shows



Best Practices:

To save time and streamline your efforts, start by creating a monthly marketing and messaging calendar. This calendar will serve as your hub for planning social media posts, newsletter dates, product pricing and wholesale sheet updates, and advertising deadlines. While setting it up will require some initial effort, this template will save you time in the long run, and you can use it each month.

Ensure that all your marketing efforts are cohesive. Avoid delivering different messages on different platforms. Instead, use each channel to connect people to your other channels. For instance, encourage newsletter subscribers to follow you on social media.



Website:

Do I really need a website if I'm on Facebook and Instagram? Yes! Businesses that only have a Facebook page and not a website appear less professional to most consumers. Additionally, social media trends are constantly changing. It's important to have a "home base" that you own. The goal of social media should be to get folks to your website and onto your your mailing list.

Ensure your site reflects positively on you, your business, and your brand. Make it easy for customers to find information about your products, how to contact you, and where to make purchases. Your website can be expanded to include an online shop, initially focused on local pickup and delivery, and eventually expanding to regional and nationwide shipping. Keep it up to date to avoid sending the wrong signal to customers through outdated information.

Website Building Resources: Numerous options are available for building a website, including hiring a professional. However, it's easier than ever to create your own professional websites, complete with e-commerce capabilities. Here are a few websites that provide this service:

- [Squarespace](#)
- [Wordpress](#)
- [Wix](#)
- [GoDaddy](#)
- [Zyro](#)
- [Weebly](#)

Social Media:

When deciding which social media platform to use, it's important to think about your target audience and where they are most likely to spend their time. This [social media fact sheet](#) from the Pew Research Center offers demographic insights on some of the most popular social platforms. It's better to choose one and be consistent than to make many profiles and get overwhelmed or forget about them.



Instagram: Instagram is the ideal starting point for many farms. It is image-centric, so focus on capturing pictures of your beautiful farm, adorable animals, delectable products, or people enjoying them.

Facebook: While Instagram and TikTok are popular social media platforms, many individuals still frequent Facebook first. Create a business Facebook page and update it two to three times per week. You can repurpose content for Instagram and Twitter, but avoid linking them to post simultaneously, as they may require slightly different formatting. Remember to respond promptly to comments on your posts or messages received through Facebook.

Additional Resources: Social Media and Digital Marketing:

- [Udemy Suite of Marketing Courses](#)
- [The Complete Digital Marketing Course for Local Businesses](#)
- [Digital Marketing Institute Courses](#)
- [HubSpot Guide to Social Media Marketing](#)
- [What is Social Media Marketing?](#)
- [How Often to Post on Social Media](#)

Newsletter:

Sending regular newsletters to your customers keeps them engaged and offers opportunities for consistent communication. You can share news about special events, coupons, and even recipes. Newsletter frequency can vary depending on your business size and customer base, going out weekly, biweekly, monthly, or quarterly and adjusting to the season. Make it easy for people to sign up for your mailing list through your website, Facebook, Instagram, or even at your local farmers market. Online newsletter software programs like MailChimp simplify the process with pre-made templates.

Newsletter Resources:

- [Mailchimp](#)
- [flodesk](#)
- [Brevo](#)
- [Constant Contact](#)
- [Canva Newsletter](#)
- [HubSpot: The Ultimate Guide to Email Marketing](#)



Local Media – Press Relations:

Don't forget to reach out to local media when you have special events or new products to introduce. This includes newspapers, television stations, radio, and local food or lifestyle bloggers. They are constantly seeking content and local stories, and are great outlets for amplifying your business's story and community contributions. To make their job easier, learn how to write compelling, newsworthy press releases. Look for interesting milestones to highlight, such as a business anniversary or serving your 1,000th customer. Joining local organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, Tourist Board, or other business groups can increase your visibility and provide networking opportunities with local media and potential business partners.

Co-Promotion with Other Businesses:

Explore co-promotional opportunities with local businesses. It could be as simple as hosting a food truck on your farm during a special event or organizing a picnic event featuring local meat or cheese producers if you are a honey or fruit producer. Collaborating with restaurants is another promising option, as discussed further below.

Signs and Displays:

High-quality, professional signage featuring your name and logo is crucial for attracting customers to your farmers market booth or farm store. Local print shops and national stores like Staples offer sign design and printing services. Online design platforms like [Canva](#) can assist you in creating marketing materials that maintain consistency across various assets, from business cards to banners. Canva can even guide you through creating Instagram and Facebook content.

Agritourism:

Agritourism offers a direct and personal way to connect with new audiences. Ensure your farm is welcoming with clear signage, clean restrooms, friendly staff, and well-defined parking. Look for local "artisan trails" you can join and get listed in local or regional tourism directories like [DigInVT.com](#) or [VermontVacation.com](#). Reach out to hotels with brochures and maintain an ongoing presence in local newspapers. Inviting people to your farm for special



events, tours, and tastings introduces them to your operation and products. Think pick-your-own apple days with local treats - or maple-tasting and recipe workshops. These experiential interactions leave a lasting impression on customers, so ensure you make a positive one.

Sponsorship:

Sponsorship is a way to showcase your products and business while demonstrating support for the local community. It can involve supporting a charity walk, a little league or soccer team, or a school fundraiser. Staffing a booth or providing product samples at events is an effective way to extend your reach (and showcase your values).

Advertising:

Strategically placed advertisements can effectively inform your customer base and introduce your products to new customers. Understand your typical customers to better target them and those similar to them. Start small by advertising in local newspapers, radio stations, or specialty local and regional magazines focused on tourists. Advertising on platforms like Facebook, Google, and other social media sites is another way to reach your target audience. Your posts will appear in the feeds of people who like your business, so begin by reaching out to "friends of friends" or selecting customer demographics based on age and location. Use the resulting data collected by these sites to determine the effectiveness of your advertising efforts and make necessary adjustments.

Awards and Competitions:

Even if your reach is primarily local, gaining recognition from national or international organizations can elevate your profile and enhance your brand. Independent, third-party validation of your product's quality is influential. Search for competitions with entry requirements that you can meet and that are respected by your industry peers, such as the [Good Food Foundation Awards](#) or [sofi Awards](#).

Trade Shows:

If you aim to find a distributor, expand your wholesale accounts, or connect with



institutional buyers, consider attending trade shows dedicated to business-to-business exposure and education. These shows also provide insights into new products and promotional strategies in your industry. Additionally, you can often attend educational sessions.

There are numerous ways to promote your business and products, and your choices will depend on factors like your time, budget, and the quality of opportunities available locally. The key is to plan and consider the combination of promotional strategies that align best with your business's vision, mission, and values.



Phase 2 - Helping Customers Define Your Company

Once you've captured your customers' attention – whether through brand advertisements, Instagram, or your website – you have the opportunity to tell them your story. This narrative, conveyed through words, images, and videos, is the primary means by which your customers decide if your brand deserves further attention and support among the multitude of choices available to them. This is where you engage customers and aim to establish an emotional connection with your products and brand.

How you tell your story is a pivotal aspect of your branding, representing the most powerful element you can control when influencing consumers' perception of your brand. In this section, we offer a guide on how to craft and share the story you want others to spread about your business.

Know and Be Yourself:

The first step in helping consumers understand who you are is to have a clear understanding of your own identity. As mentioned in the introduction, intention and direction in your marketing and branding are vital. Learn how to communicate your vision, mission, and values effectively in various scenarios. In a single sentence each:

- Vision: We are _____ with a goal of _____. Mission: We _____ for _____ by _____.
- Values: We believe _____ are essential to accomplishing our mission.

Example: “We are a small, diversified fruit and vegetable farm with a goal of producing high-quality products in our beautiful landscape for our customers, both now and in the future. We make quality products for our community through responsible land stewardship and cultivation. We believe that this sustainable approach is crucial for achieving our mission.”



These statements and values can be conveyed separately or combined as needed. Different promotional opportunities provide varying levels of space for you to share your story. Below, we outline the most common scenarios and how your company description may differ: the tagline, the elevator pitch, and the one paragraph/one pager.

Create a Tagline:

Condense your business into a single, concise sentence. This tagline may be used alongside your logo or for social media profiles such as Instagram. Here are some local examples:

- **Runamok:** Re-think Maple Syrup
- **Christmas Trees of Vermont:** Make our family farm your family tradition
- **Champlain Valley Hops:** Craft Beer Deserves Craft Hops

Craft an Elevator Pitch:

Prepare a 30-second pitch to succinctly convey your business, encompassing what you do, the reason behind it, and the problem you solve or need you fulfill. This story should be tailored to your target audience and emphasize the compelling motivation driving your endeavor.

It typically consists of 1-2 sentences, elaborating on the tagline's essence.

Examples:

- **Champlain Valley Apiaries:** Champlain Valley Apiaries has been producing high-quality honey since 1931. Gathered by bees from the blossoms of a variety of floral sources, we blend our Vermont honey with other premium honey produced in the U.S. and Canada. Our honey is light in color with a delicious and delicate flavor that has been the favorite of customers for over 80 years.
- **Champlain Orchards:** Our audacious applies are ecologically grown with intention and care - healthier for the soil, healthier for you! Everything we produce is an expression of our family-owned orchards. From our 175+ varieties of fruit to our handcrafted provisions and crisp ciders, we invite you to discover the taste of the Champlain Valley and this beautiful place we call home.
- **Runamok Maple:** Runamok is a specialty foods company focused on creating fun, innovative, and delicious products with quality, natural ingredients.



Maintain a One-Page/Paragraph for Press or Publicity Opportunities:

In the event that you're asked to provide information about your business for a local newspaper or similar publications, be prepared with a few well-crafted paragraphs that build upon your elevator pitch. Here are some examples to guide you:

EXAMPLE

Champlain Valley Apiaries is a 4th generation Vermont family-owned business. Founded in 1931 by innovative beekeeper Charles Mraz, we have been producing delicious Vermont honey for over 85 years. Our mission, along with producing the highest quality honey, is to foster sustainable agriculture and promote the importance of honeybees to our food system. We produce both liquid and raw naturally crystallized honey. The raw naturally crystallized honey is both unheated and unfiltered. Because of this, the delicious flavor and many healthy properties remain intact. Our honey is gathered from a variety of floral sources, primarily legumes such as clover, alfalfa, and birdsfoot trefoil. Bees also gather nectar from trees, dandelion, and goldenrod, among many others. Each barrel of honey we produce is a floral snapshot of a particular area at a given time. The exact makeup of our honey will vary from year to year and even from bee yard to bee yard. In order to keep a consistent product, we blend our Vermont honey with other premium honey produced in the U.S. and Canada. We treat our bees organically, and during the winter, leave hives with enough of their own honey for survival. Throughout the company's history, our methods have been widely known among beekeepers to produce a hardy strain of honeybee that is resistant to disease and thrives even in the harshest of Vermont winters.

Translate Your Story into Images and/or Video to Supplement Your Main Storytelling:

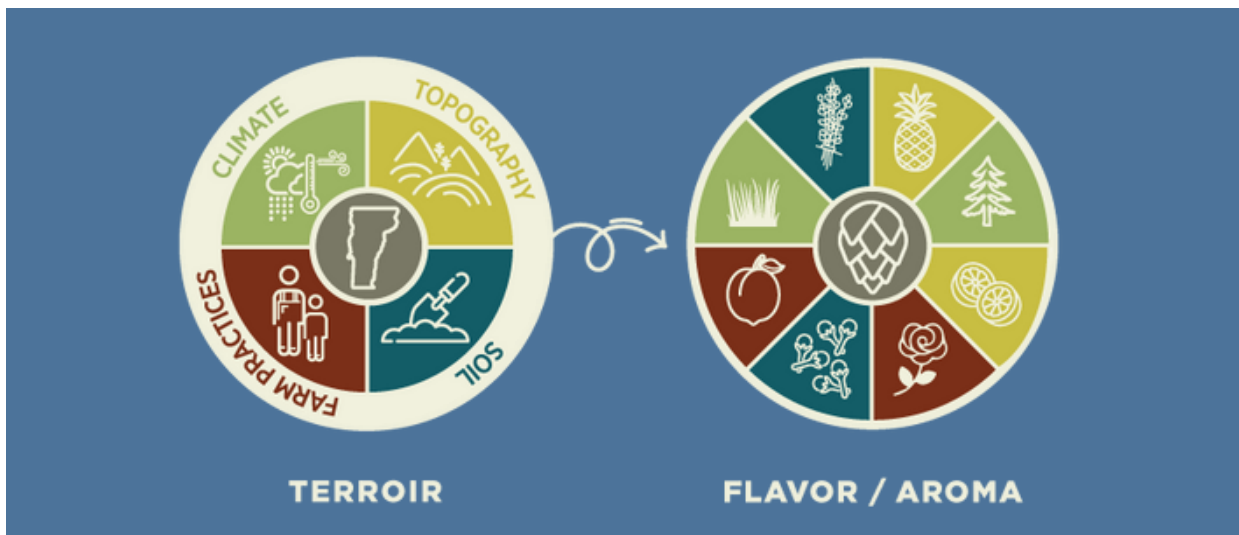
People absorb information in various ways. Some are primarily auditory learners, who grasp concepts through listening or reading, while others are visual learners who thrive on images, charts, and diagrams. Then, there are kinesthetic learners who understand best through experiencing and feeling. To effectively reach a broader audience, it's essential to communicate your story through multiple mediums. There are a few examples on the next page.



Good Heart Farmstead decided to showcase their blue wheelbarrow – one of their most crucial farm tools - in their logo. As a small hillside farm with only a walk-behind BCS tractor, they rely on the wheelbarrow for applying compost to every single bed. They chose the wheelbarrow because they felt it evoked a sense of hard work close to the earth, and they appreciated its inherent simplicity. The logo's fusion of a whimsical font for the farm name juxtaposed with a more conventional font for the location, along with the inclusion of seeds between the words, serves to bridge the practical aspects of their farm work with their artistic and spiritual approach.

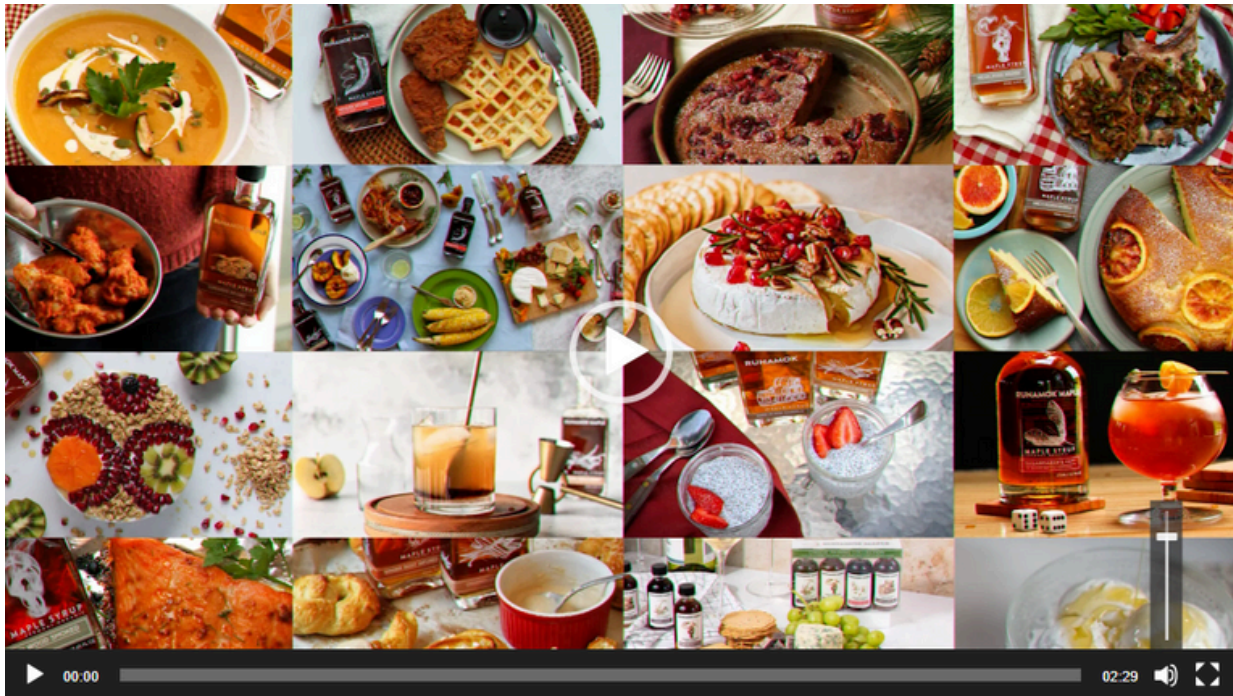


Champlain Valley Hops employs a compelling graphic to illustrate the critical role of Vermont's environment in crafting its distinctive product. One of the graphics draws parallels to "terroir," a term commonly associated with wine, to connect similar concepts with hop cultivation. The diagram clearly delineates a "cause and effect" relationship between different facets of terroir and the resulting qualities of the hops. The vibrant colors in this infographic vividly portray the intricate nature of hop cultivation, emphasizing the potential impact of different terroir combinations on the crop's profile. This graphic exemplifies the effective and engaging use of visual storytelling, shedding light on the uniqueness of this local business.





Runamok Maple features a concise two-minute video on their "[Our Story](#)" page. This video is well-produced and adeptly narrates their business's history and mission. Videos are a potent tool for visual storytelling, offering a humanizing dimension to a business. They allow customers to witness the people and hard work behind the products, fostering a deeper connection with the company. Integrating a video on your website, even if it isn't professionally shot or edited to the same extent, can be highly advantageous. It can spotlight your business's mission, product range, and unique character or history, but most importantly, it should showcase the people and places that define your company.





Phase 3 - Encouraging Customer Product Usage

At this point, customers have become aware of your brand and are captivated by your story. Now your goal is to make accessing your products as effortless as possible, allowing customers to savor your brand and enjoy your products. The emotional connection they form between your brand and their product experience is pivotal.

In this section, we delineate the various sales channels that are likely available to you. These channels are your means of getting products into the hands of consumers, enabling them to experience your products and, ideally, become lifelong customers.

Retail Channels:

1. Online – Ecommerce on your Website

- An increasingly common method for direct sales to consumers is through an online catalog. Numerous website platforms, like Squarespace, WordPress, and Wix, offer modules that enable you to showcase your products and process payments online. While shipping costs and logistics can be a consideration for some products, especially for companies without delivery infrastructure, it's worthwhile for many businesses to explore selling products online, given the growing trend of e-commerce.

2. On Farm – Stores and Farmstands

- Inviting customers to your farm for tours, special events, or product purchases is an excellent way to reinforce your authentic brand. Visitors can witness firsthand how you steward the land and create your products. Offer tours by appointment and schedule special events, including those centered around holidays, seasonal offerings, and new product introductions.
- Tips:
 - Display prominent, easily readable signs that indicate your hours of operation.
 - List your farm store in farming directories, guides, and tourist-focused "trails."
 - Ensure a clean site with parking, restrooms, well-defined rules, and transparent pricing for tours and site visits.



3. Off-Site Retail Stores

- If you don't have your own farm store, or even if you do, consider selling your products through other farmers' stores, especially if your products complement theirs and enhance the overall customer experience. Explore potential collaborations with other farms or businesses to establish retail shops away from your farm, expanding your marketing reach.

4. Farmers Markets

- Farmers markets offer a platform for new or growing businesses to build their brand and foster a loyal customer base. It's an opportunity for customers to sample your products and engage with your brand. As you gain momentum, consider expanding into Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) offerings or restaurant sales.
- Additional Tips:
 - Be approachable and engaging with customers.
 - Provide recipes or food pairing recommendations.
 - Consider bundling items for sale, such as offering bundles with local cheese and crackers to go with your fruit.
 - Ensure a newsletter sign-up sheet is available.
 - Collaborate with other vendors, especially those serving food at the market who can incorporate your products into their offerings.

5. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

- If you enjoy direct customer engagement, consider a CSA program. It offers an early-season cash infusion for planning but comes with the challenge of coordinating deliveries and maintaining product quality.
- If managing your own CSA feels overwhelming, consider partnering with a farm that already offers one with products you don't provide. This allows you to reach more customers without managing your CSA from scratch.
- With the traditional CSA model, a customer purchases a “share” of whatever the farm grows upfront at the beginning of the season. The farm then puts together a box of whatever they have available each week. However, there are some new models gaining in popularity, including the Farm Share model, in which customers pay a certain amount up front at the beginning of the season, and then get to use that credit toward



their choice of products based on what the farmer grows.

- **CSA Best Practices:**
 - Include a mini-newsletter or farm update with recipes in each box.
 - Ensure easy online access for customers to find information and sign up.
 - Explore marketing opportunities with groups like business and neighborhood associations for multiple share deliveries.
 - Prioritize excellent customer service for your CSA members.

Wholesale Channels:

1. Restaurants

- Depending on your product line and marketing goals, collaborating with restaurants can be beneficial. It introduces new customers to your products and nurtures relationships with local businesses. To connect with restaurants, you'll need to understand both chefs and their patrons.
- **Best Practices:**
 - Seek out restaurants that offer daily or weekly specials or seasonal menus suitable for your products.
 - Initiate relationships with chefs you respect and wish to collaborate with.
 - Emphasize quality and consistency. This applies to packaging and delivery as well.
 - Arrange tasting sessions with chefs at suitable times. Avoiding showing up during lunch or dinner service.
 - Encourage restaurants to promote your business on their menu, website, and social media using your logo and website link.
 - Maintain professionalism in invoicing and on-time delivery, with established order deadlines and electronic payment options.

2. Distributors and Wholesale

- Food wholesalers or distributors can facilitate the movement of larger volumes of your products to various businesses and institutions. This option comes with associated costs but can save time on delivery logistics.



- **Best Practices:**

- Ensure you have the required food safety certifications and are meeting all of the distributor's requirements around insurance and liability coverage.
- Discuss packing standards and labeling with distributors.
- Cultivate strong relationships and regularly evaluate your partnership.
- Consider using forward contracts when working with wholesale buyers to plan the season together.
- Explore local distributors like Black River Produce, Provisions International, Upper Valley Produce, Food Connects, and Myers Produce.

3. Food Hubs

- Food hubs function similarly to distributors but offer additional benefits to producers. They connect you to larger markets and provide marketing, accounting, sales, and educational support. Many focus on underserved areas and most in Vermont are non-profits with social missions to support food and agriculture businesses. They may be able to provide valuable support on a range of topics.

4. Grocery Stores

- While grocery stores can be lucrative markets for some businesses, consider selling directly to the public, small country stores, or restaurants before entering the grocery store market. This approach allows you to refine your production consistency and marketing skills to prepare you to take on the volume required by grocery stores.
- **Best Practices:**
 - Target grocery stores that prioritize local products. These are often independent retailers.
 - Contact department buyers to set up appointments and inquire about their local product goals.
 - Determine certification requirements and product liability insurance needs.
 - Ensure timely deliveries, clear labeling, and appealing signage.

5. Schools & Institutions

- Schools and institutions offer many opportunities to sell your products, especially as many seek fresh, local foods. Reach out to them, but ensure your business can meet their high demand.



- Best Practices:

- Contact smaller private schools and district child nutrition services for schools.
 - Reach out to the head chef or food services director for institutions.
 - Plan meetings, bringing pricing sheets and product samples.
 - Dedicate time to building relationships and keep regular communication.
 - Be prepared for potential insurance and certification requirements.
- [Farm to Institution New England](#) is a fantastic resource for breaking into this market channel. Explore their website for case studies and tools to help you succeed.

This diverse array of sales channels provides opportunities to expand your brand's reach and cater to a broad customer base. Each channel comes with its own unique benefits and considerations, so evaluate and select those that align with your business objectives and capabilities. This [Distribution and Wholesale Financial Analysis Decision Making Tool](#) offers a suit of Excel-based models designed to assist with the financial decision making related to product market channel, distribution, and delivery selection.



Phase 4 - Cultivating Customer Advocacy for Your Brand

Sustain Authentic Storytelling:

As we proceed, it's essential to understand that your brand follows a cyclical journey in the marketplace. Customers' initial interactions with your products often stem from their curiosity and interest in what you represent – how they've perceived your brand.

Now, the opportunity arises to solidify a connection with the customer in a way that encourages them not only to enjoy your product but also to actively promote your brand to others.

Customers typically engage in brand promotion for one of two primary reasons:

1. They have a positive relationship with the person they're referring the brand to, and they want to share the joy they've experienced with the product or brand.
2. The brand resonates with their values, reflecting their beliefs about how things should be, and thereby amplifying those values. In essence, the brand mirrors and projects the consumer's self-identity and principles. Nowadays, many consumers endorse brands as a means of conveying what they stand for and what they want others to associate them with (think electric cars, ethically manufactured clothing, or exclusive club memberships).

This implies that the storytelling initiated in Phase 2, where you "define" your brand, continues to evolve in various forms when you're engaging directly with customers or when they're interacting with your products, farm, or retail store. The customer was initially drawn to you based on the story you were already telling through words, images, video, packaging, and more. It's crucial to maintain these elements as naturally and authentically as possible to connect with your current customers.

Foster Trust and Advocacy:

In addition to sustaining your storytelling efforts, we'd like to share another critical aspect of your customer interaction as a final recommendation. Between 2015 and 2017, [The Goodpeople Research Company](#) conducted research on behalf of the [Better Business Bureau](#)



to gain insights into why consumers prefer to buy from one company over another. Their findings identified five key behaviors that build customer trust and encourage brand advocacy, known as the "[5 Gestures of Trust](#)." These gestures are attitudes and actions that any company can adopt on an ongoing basis:

1. **Honest** – Provide customers with the information they need when they need it, in clear and straightforward language.
2. **Transparent** – Share ample information about your company and practices generously, creating a culture of openness.
3. **Proactive** – Anticipate and fulfill customer needs before they even ask, delivering value as a proactive measure.
4. **Humble** – Acknowledge that your success owes much to your customers, employees, family, and community, and express gratitude for their role in your journey.
5. **Equitable** – Strive for fairness in all your interactions with customers, making transactions simple and clear, guaranteeing product quality, and providing unwavering support throughout the customer journey.

Conclusion

In conclusion, remember to perpetuate the cycle. Realize that the most effective way to garner attention and initiate the cycle anew is by having customers actively promote your brand alongside your promotional efforts. We hope this toolkit has been helpful! For a deeper dive into many of these topics, explore our [Marketing & Agritourism Blog](#) and sign up for [The Vermont Ag Bulletin](#) to keep up to date when we release new posts.

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References to products, services, and specific businesses throughout this toolkit are meant to provide examples and are no way meant as endorsements.