

SOUND MARKETING FOR BLUEGRASS

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**A COLLECTION OF E-LETTERS
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SOUND MARKETING FOR BLUEGRASS

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This month, we're going to answer some common marketing questions, many of which we have been asked by bluegrass artists, festival promoters, and product marketers.

1. Do I need a website?

Online marketing has now become mainstream marketing, primarily because of the explosive growth of the Internet and the ability of people to connect to it anytime and from anywhere. Every marketing study and expert commentary I've seen suggests that, for businesses, a website is essential. When people search for information about a company, artist, festival, or product, the first place they look is the Internet. If a website's navigation and content are well constructed, that website will rank highly in search results. You want people to visit your website first, because this is where *you* control the content and interactions with visitors. If someone visits a third party website or social media, they can be distracted by ancillary information and comments from others, which lessens the focus they have on your business.

A website presence is not only essential, it should be central to a well-balanced online marketing strategy. Look at the website as the hub of your online marketing. The "spokes" are other sites, including social media networks, that surround and support the hub. Your website should always carry "buttons" that link to the social media you use, and every time you use social media, you should direct people back to your website. Reinforcing both your website and your social media connections has been found to be the most effective way to engage prospects.

Your website should be the primary repository of all key marketing information. There are numerous services available you can use to build a simple website at no cost or very little cost; however, if you are not skilled in website creation, design, and technical implementation, you should invest in professional help. Your website needs to be easy to navigate, appealing in both copy and design, informative, and supportive of your brand. It is absolutely essential that your website be mobile-friendly. It should also include one or more mechanisms to engage your prospects and customers; for example, you can offer information in the form of a blog or a newsletter, along with a free subscription email registration.

A key aspect of creating a website is SEO (Search Engine Optimization). Simply put, SEO is the practice of making certain that your website meets the need of major search engines, like Google and Bing.

A website can also be employed as an effective tracking mechanism for marketing campaigns in a relatively simple manner. Any time you create an online promotion, you should also create a special landing page on your website. You then direct respondents through a unique URL to that landing page to track responses back to the specific promotion.

2. **Should I use Facebook?**

Facebook is the world's largest social network, so if you are going to use social media, you need to be on Facebook. Facebook has made significant inroads into the marketing world, offering marketers the ability to build their own corporate Facebook page and encourage "Likes" and "friends." You can build a page for free, and you can also consider making use of paid Facebook ads in a very targeted and cost-effective way to reach your audience. Marketers use Facebook as a media channel to reinforce the company's mission, distribute product information, and to directly interact with customers.

3. **What other social media should I use?**

Social media networks were originally intended for consumer engagement. Today, though, they have evolved to include many tools for marketers, and users of social networks have become more accustomed to interacting not just with friends but also with companies and brands. For the most part, social media networks are free to join and use, although most of them now offer various paid advertising options as well.

Social media networks are fertile ground for marketers because they can be used to attract and engage prospects and customers in a dialogue. It is important to note, however, that "dialogue" means conversation – so when you use social media, you must take responsibility for monitoring and interacting with others. Also understand that social media engagement in terms of friends, followers, "likes" or any other such measurement does not automatically translate into more prospects or sales; it is the constant cultivation of individuals that turns interest into action.

Listed below are some of the largest and more popular social networks you might want to consider.

Google +

Google + has some unique benefits for marketers, most notably its "Hangouts," which allow live group conversations. Google + is particularly strong in localization, so it could be especially helpful to you if you have well-defined geographic targets.

Twitter

Twitter could be useful to "tweet" about new CDs, festival dates and other news, as well as to research marketplaces and competitors. Twitter can also be used in creative ways, such as holding a live "Twitter chat." Twitter increasingly is used to incorporate links to webpages, photos and videos, and it offers paid advertising.

YouTube

Owned by Google, YouTube is the world's largest video platform. You can create a YouTube "channel" and post video content. That content can then easily be embedded into websites and social media and shared across the Internet.

Pinterest

Pinterest got its start as a network primarily for women to post photos and videos. Some studies suggest Pinterest is more effective than other social media in driving sales. Pinterest also offers paid advertising opportunities.

Instagram

Instagram is a mobile application that allows users to take photos with smartphones, add filters that improve and customize the photos, and then share them with others. Some studies suggest Instagram primarily targets a younger audience.

Snapchat

Snapchat is a video messaging application that is rapidly gaining in popularity with business users. With Snapchat, you send “Snaps” – photos and videos with added text and drawings, if desired – to a list of recipients, who can view them for a limited period of time. Snaps can also be compiled into “stories.”

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the largest business and professional social network. Members can create a profile, build a personal network of connections, post information, join groups, and more. LinkedIn is ideal to make connections with businesses and professionals. You can also use LinkedIn to research people and companies.

What's a hashtag?

A social media phenomenon you can use to your advantage is the *hashtag*. The hashtag is basically any word or set of words (with no spaces between them) preceded by the symbol: #. The effect of the hashtag in the social media world is nothing short of magical.

Think of the hashtag as a powerful way to turn words into searchable subjects or categories. Any time you write a post on Facebook or Google +, create a tweet on Twitter, or pin something to Pinterest, use a descriptive hashtag (“#ilovebluegrass” for example). With a hashtag, your text, photo, or image will potentially be found by someone else interested in that subject or category. This is a great way to extend the reach of your social media activities to new followers and potentially prospective customers.

Answers to more questions next time!

This month we're answering common marketing questions, many of which we have been asked by bluegrass artists, festival promoters, and product marketers.

1. Does email still work?

Despite the popularity of social media and mobile apps, email continues to be one of the most resilient and effective forms of online marketing. Marketing research demonstrates this time and again.

You can build an email list of customers and prospects through online promotions, blog subscriptions, collection at events, etc. (Always make sure you ask an individual for permission to add his or her email address to your list.) Your email list becomes a valuable marketing asset of addresses to which you can send email newsletters, promotions, offers, and other marketing messages. Several email marketing services will maintain your email list and allow you to send emails and create email newsletters for little or no cost.

2. What should I know about mobile?

Predictions for this year and going forward indicate usage of mobile devices will continue to skyrocket. You therefore have to assume that many prospects and customers are viewing your website and social media on smartphones and tablets. This has two main implications. First, everything you do online must be “mobile-friendly.” Your website, for example, must use “responsive design,” a type of design that ensures a website can adapt to any device. Second, you have to think like a mobile consumer. Website navigation should be simple and clean, content should be easy to read and comprehend, photos and videos should load quickly, and forms should be easy to fill out. Mobile users of the Internet expect to be able to consume information quickly and across numerous platforms.

Bluegrass marketers can also make use of “mobile marketing,” particularly when you want to reach prospects and customers with marketing messages that are relevant to their current locations. For example, text messages can be effective in driving traffic to festival destinations.

3. How can I take advantage of video marketing?

Video marketing is one of the key trends for 2016. Consumers expect video to be part of their online experience. Video quality has dramatically improved; as a result, video usage is commonplace across all devices, including smartphones and tablets.

When you think about it, video marketing and bluegrass should be a perfect marriage. What better way for a bluegrass performer to promote a new CD than with a video clip of a live or studio performance? For festival promoters, video of past festivals can convey the atmosphere and excitement of an event to prospective ticket buyers. If you sell bluegrass instruments, you can use video to offer up-close demos and even provide video instruction.

You don't have to spend a lot of money on video production, either. Low-cost videos that are authentic and genuine can be just as effective as elaborate video ads.

If you invest in video marketing, you want to be sure your video is viewed by the right audience. An ideal choice, of course, is *Bluegrass Today*, which precisely targets your audience. You can easily embed video clips into banner ads on *Bluegrass Today*, and link directly to a longer video on your website. This way, you'll be combining video, a highly popular medium, video, with the bluegrass industry's leading online publication. Then supplement your *Bluegrass Today* banners by linking to and promoting your video on your website, Facebook, and YouTube.

4. How can I do effective marketing without spending a lot of money?

The primary mode of marketing – online marketing – can be accomplished with a very modest investment. Once you secure a domain name and build a simple, effective website, you are on your way. Publishing a blog, employing social media, and creating videos can be done inexpensively. When you build an email list, you can mail to that list periodically with the help of email marketing services that cost little to no money. (MailChimp.com, for example, is free up to 2,000 subscribers.)

You can supplement your online marketing with public relations, or PR, as well. PR is essentially the practice of developing contacts with the right people who work for media channels and exposing them to your story (and then getting them to tell your story). These days, largely because of digital media, media channels have expanded exponentially, from traditional print and electronic media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television to online newspapers, newsletters, magazines, websites and blogs. As a result, there are far more media contacts and media channels – and far more PR opportunities available to you than ever before. PR doesn't cost you any money – the coverage is free, as long as you are willing to put in the time to develop media contacts and provide them with information they can use to publicize your music, bluegrass festival, or product.

5. I'm in a band. How do I get our new album reviewed and create “buzz” for my band?

Make sure your release is the best it can be! Are you really ready for your album to stand the test of critical reviews? If so, you are ready to tell others about it. Bluegrass artists and music professionals, along with radio DJs, are the real influencers who can make the difference in whether your new release gets exposure. The bluegrass music business is not huge: everybody in bluegrass pretty much knows everybody else, so make sure you know them and they know you.

When contacting DJs, always put your best foot forward. Show them a lot of love and respect! After all, they're the ones who make the decision whether or not to give your music airplay. While sending your music electronically may be convenient and inexpensive, *most DJs still like to have a physical CD*. If you have to keep your costs down and can't afford to send complimentary CDs to every bluegrass DJ, at least send out CDs to the top bluegrass DJs. You can find a comprehensive listing of bluegrass DJs on *Bluegrass Today* here: <http://bluegrasstoday.com/broadcasters/>

There are a number of things you can do to create “buzz” for your band:
Invest in a great album cover.

The cover itself is very important, because the image will be seen over and over again, both on physical copies and in digital media. It pays in the long run to get a

professionally photographed and designed cover so DJs and fans will take you seriously.

Make sure you are visible online.

It is vital that you have an online presence *before* you release your album. In addition to a website, you should be active on social media. Having a Facebook page is virtually mandatory for music marketers, and other social media can help increase visibility and engagement. It is also wise to make sure you have a presence on

Bluegrass Today.

Get your existing fan base involved.

Your current fans are your best customers for your next album. You should let them know about a new album well before its public release. If you have an email list of fans, send them an upbeat email newsletter about the album. In addition to email, you can get the word out via your website, social media, and on tour.

Tell the “bluegrass public.”

Make sure as many bluegrass fans as possible know about you and your upcoming album. A PR professional can help you by writing an effective press release for your album, developing a solid bio, and getting some top-notch publicity photos. But even if you do it yourself, make sure to get your name and music out into the marketplace in as big a way as possible.

6. **I run a bluegrass festival. What’s the best way to promote it?**

Here are the primary methods for promoting a bluegrass festival:

Reach out to previous festival attendees. Ideally, you have collected their emails and have been occasionally keeping in touch with them. Attendees of past festivals should receive “advance notice” emails from you about the upcoming festival. Also engage these previous attendees via social media. Encourage them to sign up early (you might even provide a modest discount on tickets to recognize their relationship with you). And use them as a kind of sales force by asking them to tell family and friends about the festival.

Utilize Bluegrass Today. Make sure your festival is listed in the Festival Section of *Bluegrass Today*, and consider advertising as well. Not only does *Bluegrass Today* perfectly target bluegrass fans, you can be very precise with your advertising. Using geo-targeted ads by radius, you can actually set a radius for your online advertising and dramatically increase your reach and efficiency.

Take advantage of festival talent. Each of the performing artists appearing at your festival has a fan base. These fans will surely want to know where they can see their favorite artist, so be sure to get your talent to fully support your marketing efforts. Provide them with creative materials they can use to promote the festival via their own means. Encourage them to be “festival ambassadors” and collaborate with you to make the festival a success.

Work your local market. Although some very well known festivals can draw a national crowd, most bluegrass festivals center around a specific geographic area, usually within a 200 to 400-mile radius of the festival location. Concentrate your primary marketing activities here, saturating local newspapers, radio, and television stations,

contacting relevant bloggers and websites, and distributing posters and flyers to appropriate retail and public locations.

Inform media and industry contacts, including DJs. These folks need special treatment; they will want to know the details of your festival in an organized format - think "who, what, when, where, why." They will appreciate gaining access to an online media kit that includes a press release, along with details about the line-up of talent, including biographies and photos, facts about the venue, festival logos, and photos/videos of past festivals. Speak with the DJ of your favorite local bluegrass program, and/or the advertising department at your local radio station for ideas and rates. Remember, everyone wants free publicity, but paid advertisers almost always receive first consideration and often times are bonused additional spots and on-air mentions.

One of the most under-utilized marketing methods by small businesses is public relations, or PR. This month, I'd like to share some of the "secrets" of PR with you so you can use PR effectively when you market your music, festivals, or bluegrass-related products.

Many small marketers think PR is only for the big guys. Not so! Big guys were small once – and many of them went from small to big in part by making smart use of PR.

PR is essentially the practice of developing contacts with the right people who work for the media and telling them your story (and then getting them to tell your story). These days, largely because of digital media, media outlets have expanded exponentially, from traditional print and electronic media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television to online newspapers, newsletters, magazines, web sites and blogs. As a result, there are far more media contacts and media outlets – and far more PR opportunities available to marketers than ever before. PR doesn't cost you any money – the coverage is free, as long as you are willing to put in the time to develop media contacts and provide them with information they can use to publicize your music, bluegrass festival, or product.

So how does a bluegrass marketer take advantage of these opportunities? As with anything else in business, there is a trade-off: You can do the bulk of the work yourself, which will take an investment of time, or you can pay someone else to do the work. While there is no guarantee of coverage, the investment you make in PR can pay off big.

At its best, PR is practiced by professionals who know how to execute sophisticated public relations programs and integrate them with other marketing initiatives. If you are not able to afford a PR professional or agency to support your efforts, you can do an effective job by using a basic do-it-yourself approach to PR that I will describe here.

Develop a list of media contacts.

PR begins with researching individuals in the media who should know about your music, your festival, or your product. Your first task is identifying every media outlet that is relevant. Obviously, you will want to be sure you include any bluegrass media, especially *Bluegrass Today*, as well as DJs who cover bluegrass music. You can find a comprehensive listing of bluegrass DJs on *Bluegrass Today* here: <http://bluegrasstoday.com/broadcasters/>

You should also consider all forms of media in relevant geographic markets (local and regional for festivals, and also national and even international if you're an artist or bluegrass product marketer).

Once you develop a list of the specific media, you'll need to dig deeper and obtain the names and email addresses and/or phone numbers of the appropriate contacts at each media outlet. Look for a contact – a writer, reporter, blogger, or editor – who is most likely to cover bluegrass music. At larger media outlets, find the name of an assistant or associate editor in charge of an area that is most closely aligned with bluegrass music (usually entertainment or the arts). Contacting more than one person at a larger organization is fine. Try to get email addresses and, if possible, direct phone numbers for each of these individuals. Most of this information should be available online.

Then check your list twice! It is very important to spell names correctly, get the correct titles, and be sure the email addresses are accurate. Media people do move around from organization to organization, so be sure to keep your list updated.

Now that you have your list of media contacts, what is the next step you should take? That's what I'll talk about next time.

Last time, I discussed how to develop media contacts as part of using public relations, or PR. Now let's talk about what to do once you have a list of media contacts.

Develop your “pitch.”

Media contacts want information that is directly relevant to their readers, viewers, or listeners. The most important question to answer is: **Why does this particular audience care about your story?**

The answer to this question should come in the form of a “pitch” – a compelling reason why the media contact should want to devote precious space to bluegrass music and, more specifically, to you. In the best case, a pitch should be slanted to a particular media outlet.

Winning pitches can take many forms. Here are a few examples:

- If you're an artist, is there something about you or your band that you can leverage? Examples: Where you are from, what awards you have won, endorsements by bluegrass legends, and so on.
- If you promote a bluegrass festival, what can you say about it that will have an impact? Examples: How many fans has it attracted in the past, what kind of business did it bring to the local community, what did merchants have to say about it, and what artists will be appearing. Tip: *Bluegrass Today* gets lots of notices from festival promoters with their talent lineups. We simply can't set a precedent by mentioning one because then we'd have to mention them all. But if you have a unique backstory about your festival, or a truly newsworthy event that will take place, then it has a better chance of getting covered.
- If you sell bluegrass products, is there a compelling human interest or unique aspect to your business? Examples: Are you a woman or minority business owner, do you donate part of your profits to charity, do you have product testimonials from bluegrass artists, or are your products hand-made.

A pitch doesn't have to be lengthy – a few paragraphs will do – and it can be sent via a personal email. Its primary objective is to elicit interest on the part of the media contact. Following up on a pitch to see if there is an interest via email or phone is a good idea – persistence, as long as it is professional and polite, can pay off with busy media people.

Always be prepared with additional information.

Once you generate interest from a media contact, you want to be prepared to provide that individual with additional information right away. As an artist, you should have a press kit prepared that includes a press release for your album, a comprehensive bio, and some professional publicity photos. As a bluegrass festival promoter, your press kit should include an overview of the festival and relevant information, such as facts about the venue, dates, ticket prices, artists and bios, photos of past festivals, festival logos, and ticket ordering information. Whether you're an artist or festival promoter, it is a good idea to convert printed press kit materials into an online format, adding videos when possible.

It is not uncommon for media contacts to run stories provided by marketers, so if you can write a good story (or know someone who can), it might very well get placed. Bloggers are also receptive to running guest posts. If the content is of good quality and well written, media people are perfectly willing to have others do the work for them!

Here's the bottom line when it comes to public relations: The coverage you receive from media outlets is free, but it comes at a price. That price is the time you spend building a media contact list, developing relationships with them, creating compelling pitches, writing stories for the media when appropriate, and always having additional information available when you get a request from the media.

PR can be hit or miss, because you never know when the media will show an interest, and you never know when or if a story will appear. But when your music, festival, or product is publicized in a media outlet that reaches an audience of bluegrass fans, it will all be well worth the effort.

This month we're going to visit an old marketing friend – email. Mark Twain said, “The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated,” and the same is true of email.

Despite the explosive growth of social media and texting, email is far from dead; in fact, it remains very popular with consumers who want information from companies. In a consumer survey [<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/article/chart/how-consumers-prefer-to-receive-promotions>] conducted by e-marketing research firm MarketingSherpa, 60 percent of respondents said “subscribe to receive email” was *the leading way* they wanted to receive regular updates and promotions from companies in which they are interested. In contrast, only 20 percent of consumers said they wanted to be invited by companies to follow their brands on social media – even though social media marketing is the top choice of marketers. Obviously, there is a disconnect between what consumers want and what marketers want to give them!

The point is that email should continue to be one of a bluegrass marketer's primary means of marketing products and services. When compared with other marketing methods, email is inexpensive, can be easily targeted, and can be highly personalized. You can build an email list from any number of sources, including customers, website inquiries, festival attendees, subscriptions to newsletters or blogs, and so on. Just make sure that you always offer someone the ability to opt-out of receiving email.

At a recent MarketingSherpa Summit, leading marketers reinforced five key tactics to make better use of email marketing:

1. **Continue to assess mobile emails.** “It's important to always test” emails in a mobile environment.
2. **Incorporate the right social media for your brand.** Selecting the right social media for your specific brand is essential – and not all social media is appropriate.
3. **Adjust email templates.** Testing and adjusting templates can affect results; in particular, revised newsletter templates can make a difference.
4. **Keep your email database clean.** Cleaning invalid contacts, re-engaging inactive contacts, and segmenting lists all have big paybacks.
5. **Optimize customer lifetime value.** Turning a name on a list into a “loyal and engaged subscriber” makes your email marketing work harder. One marketer indicated that “By acting during the early phases of the customer journey with a series of onboarding emails with a membership incentivized structure, they were able to drive behaviors correlated with customer quality. These behaviors include commenting, rating and anything that keeps them interacting on the site.”

Read the entire MarketingSherpa article [<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/article/case-study/5-email-tips-tactics-from-summit>] for specifics on each of these key tactics.

The bottom line is email is alive and well – and it should be an integral part of your bluegrass marketing program. Next time, I'll discuss some specific email formats and their uses.

This month we're talking about email marketing. As I said last time, email remains very popular with consumers who want to get information from companies. If you are going to use email marketing regularly, I suggest you work with an email marketing service that specializes in small business. These services provide email list management, email templates, and email distribution at a very reasonable cost.

Here are several ways you can use email to market to your customers and prospects.

Email series

An email series is an effective method of keeping customers informed about a new album release, an upcoming festival, or special product offers. A series of emails is also a great way to provide customers with educational information in small bites. For an album, you might send a first "teaser" email to fans in advance of the release, a second email when you release the album, and a third email with positive reviews and tour dates when the album has been out for awhile. You can use this same strategy for a festival: Send an email to past attendees and prospects several months prior to the festival, another right before the festival, and a third to thank attendees for coming with advance notice of your next festival.

Email newsletters

The email you're reading right now is a good example of an email newsletter. Email newsletters are sent out periodically to customers and prospects. Newsletters can feature educational, non-promotional information (like this one), or they can be more sales-oriented in nature. Email newsletters that have content readers regard as valuable tend to have high open rates, and they also are a great way to build a subscriber list.

Email tickets

Email is a natural for festival tickets. Festival promoters who use online ticketing can acknowledge orders and send tickets with barcodes via email, which cuts down on the need to send tickets by mail or hold tickets at the door for attendees.

Email order processing

Email is the most efficient way to acknowledge an order for a product and then keep a customer informed about the order. Email can be used to tell a customer when an order is received and when it is shipped. It can also be used to follow up on an order and ask a customer to post positive feedback online.

Email blog post notices

If you write a blog, you can encourage readers to subscribe to it and receive notices of your blog posts by email. This ensures that your customers and prospects will always know when your latest post is published. Most email marketing services can automate this process for you.

Email surveys

You can use email to do a quick survey of your customers, or you can invite customers via email to take an online survey. Surveys provide you with valuable insight into customer opinions about festival venues, customer service, and product offerings. Surveys are a proven way to generate healthy response rates from customers.

These are just some of the ways you can make use of email. For some excellent examples of email marketing campaigns, [check out this article from HubSpot.](http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/email-marketing-examples-list)

[\[http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/email-marketing-examples-list\]](http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/email-marketing-examples-list)

I'd like to start this month's topic with a few questions. See if you know the answers. (Don't look ahead!)

1. Which advertising medium has the broadest mass reach among all media while simultaneously offering narrow targeting capabilities?
2. Which advertising medium reaches 91 percent of all Americans 12 years of age or older every week?
3. Which advertising medium consistently reaches a large percentage of every age group all year long?
4. Which advertising medium features the ability to gain a consumer's attention for anywhere from 7 to 16 hours per week, every week?
5. Which advertising medium has impressive crossover, whether a consumer is at home, at work, or even driving?

The answer to all five questions is the same: The advertising medium is **radio**.

Surprised? Radio is so ubiquitous, we sometimes take it for granted. But radio has massive penetration and as a result, it is a highly efficient, effective advertising vehicle – even more valuable today because of its evolution into digital platforms. Radio is an ideal medium for bluegrass marketers who want to target local, regional, and even national audiences.

Radio is not only a healthy medium, it is enjoying significant growth. Traditional AM/FM radio continues to grow, but it has been enhanced by digital, streamed radio. Listening to radio on the road is an important reason for radio's continued growth, and as consumers purchase newer cars, they have even more radio listening options. A [recent study](https://pandoraadvertising.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/pandora-and-edison-in-car-study.pdf) [https://pandoraadvertising.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/pandora-and-edison-in-car-study.pdf] conducted for Pandora by Edison Research indicates 9 out of 10 people who commute by car listen to radio, and streaming AM/FM radio and streaming Internet radio are gaining in popularity.

Radio advertising is also growing. In February 2016, for example, [radio advertising spending](http://radioink.com/2016/03/17/report-radio-ad-spending-increased-22-in-february/) increased [http://radioink.com/2016/03/17/report-radio-ad-spending-increased-22-in-february/] 22 percent over the same period a year earlier. That growth was actually *higher* than digital media during the same period (21 percent).

What makes radio so desirable as an advertising medium? Here are some of the more compelling factors:

Popularity and portability

Radio is popular with just about any audience, just about everywhere they go. Radio stations tend to specialize in particular kinds of music or talk, so every station attracts a specific type of listener. Radio is unmatched for portability – people listen at home, at work, on vacation, and while driving in their car.

Cost-effective

Compared to other media, radio is downright inexpensive. You can be very selective with which stations you choose. Production costs are far less than television and even online media; radio stations will sometimes produce ads without charge to gain your business. Chances are you'll be able to afford greater frequency with radio than with any other medium.

Immediacy

Radio ads can be produced and run very quickly. Your radio ad (or "spot") can be heard several times during the day, encouraging an immediate response. You can reach your target audience close to the time and location of purchase, whether they're buying in-store or online.

For additional facts about radio's benefits, visit the Radio Advertising Bureau's website.
[\[http://www.rab.com/whyradio/\]](http://www.rab.com/whyradio/)

Next time, we'll take a look at how to plan a radio advertising strategy.

Last time I discussed the benefits of radio advertising. Now let's look at the basic steps you should take to plan a radio advertising strategy.

- 1. Choose the best radio stations.** Obviously, stations that play bluegrass music should be your first choice. (If you're a festival promoter or a retailer with a geographic restriction, you'll also want to select stations with your geography in mind.) An easy way to start the station selection process is to refer to the list of bluegrass broadcasters on *Bluegrass Today*: <http://bluegrasstoday.com/broadcasters/> If you want to reach a national bluegrass audience, you might consider advertising on the national bluegrass program, "Into the Blue,®" which reaches more than 100,000 listeners on 158 commercial radio stations throughout North America: <http://www.bluegrassradio.com/page9/advertising.html> (Disclosure: Terry Herd, the host of "Into the Blue," is also a founder of *Bluegrass Today*.)
- 2. Decide on a timeframe.** Radio advertising is most effective when it takes advantage of immediacy and frequency. If you're an artist with a new record, it's best to advertise as soon as the record is first released. (As an aside, January and May through August tend to be the best times to release a new album.) If you're promoting a festival, advertise on radio in the festival's target geographic area up to a week before the festival. If you're promoting a product, come up with a special offer that is good for only a limited time and encourage listeners to respond during that time. Radio ads (known as "spots") should be run frequently, even several times a day, to get the best results.
- 3. Work with stations to determine a schedule and budget.** Radio station sales reps are used to working with small businesses. They can advise you on the optimum media buy. Typically, radio stations can offer you "flights" (scheduled times when your spot runs) or "ROS" (run of station; the station decides when your spots run). While flights are more expensive, you get to choose the more popular times for your spot to run. The budget also needs to include creative production. Often, a radio station can offer production of your spot at a reasonable cost, and sometimes even at no cost if you buy enough airtime.
- 4. Create your radio spot.** You can produce your spot with the station or use an outside service. Often, one of the station's on-air personalities can do a fine job reading your copy. Depending on the station's requirements, your budget, and the creative approach, you may be producing a few different spots to fit 15-, 30-, and 60-second segments. A 30-second spot generally shouldn't have more than 85 words and it should focus on a single thing you want the listener to do. Sometimes, on-location or live interviews can add to a spot's intrigue. Every spot should have a call to action at the end that includes a phone number, street address, or web address. Make absolutely sure you are ready to handle any response the spot might generate.

If you target your radio advertising wisely and follow the strategy outlined above, you should find radio advertising to be a very effective medium for bluegrass marketing.

This month I'm going to tell you all about blogs. The concept is simple enough: A blog is essentially nothing more than a webpage that is periodically updated. The big question for bluegrass marketers is whether a blog is worth your time.

Let's start with some basic facts about blogging. Marketers who use blogs find them to be very effective, and blogs are generally highly valued by information seekers. Inbound marketing firm Hubspot cites several key statistics [<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/business-blogging-in-2015>] about blogs:

- Blogs are the 5th most trusted source for accurate online information
- Companies with blogs get 97 percent more links to their websites
- Marketers who use blogs generate 67 percent more leads than those who don't use blogs.

A blog offers you the ability to share current information, quickly and efficiently. When you publish a blog that's associated with your website, it can increase visitors and webpage views; in addition, search engines like blogs because they tend to have fresh non-promotional content, so your site ranking can go up. Blogs also provide you with a natural way to build an email list, because if you post interesting information, people will want to subscribe to your blog.

What can you blog about? That depends on the primary focus of your bluegrass business. As a performing artist, it makes sense to blog about your albums and appearances, of course, but you can also share your personality with your fans through a blog by telling stories, talking about other music you like, sharing your favorite recipes, and so on. Blogs are even more effective if you engage your fans in a dialogue.

If you promote a bluegrass festival, blogging is a good way to offer attendees a running commentary about past and upcoming festivals, including up-to-the-minute announcements of performers who will be appearing. Any bluegrass business owner can use a blog to share periodic information about products and services. And keep in mind that you aren't limited only to text and photos for blog content – video blogging is becoming increasingly popular.

In general, blog posts should be written in a friendly, folksy, informal style. It's best to use a personal "me-to-you" conversational approach, almost as if you're writing a letter, rather than something that sounds like a corporate brochure. Content that is for the most part non-promotional tends to be more effective than a sales pitch, although it is appropriate to mention a product or service somewhere in a post. Length can vary from as few as 350 words to 1,000 words or more; people will read longer blog posts if the content is compelling and interests them. Adding at least one photo with every blog post is a good idea. It is also a wise practice to include links to other sources within blog posts.

As for frequency, that depends largely on how much you have to say. While blogging weekly is an ideal frequency, posting to a blog as little as once or twice per month can still be an effective marketing technique that engages customers and prospects.

Those are a few of the basics of blogging. Next time, I'll discuss some blogging platforms and useful blogging tools.

This month we're discussing blogs. Last time, I reviewed the basics of blogging. Now I'd like to tell you about leading blogging platforms, as well as share some useful blogging tools with you.

The first thing you should do is determine if you want to integrate a blog with your website. In most cases, a blog designed for business rather than personal use should be integrated with a website, because, from a marketing perspective, a website and blog naturally reinforce one another. As I mentioned last time, an active blog also tends to help improve the ranking of an associated website.

Depending on how your website is structured and hosted, you may already have the ability to add a blog to your site. If not, there are numerous blogging platforms available; some are designed especially for stand-alone blogs, while others are full-fledged content management systems that can be used not just for blogging, but to build and manage entire websites. These are a few of the better-known blogging platforms in alphabetical order:

Blogger [<http://www.blogger.com>]

Blogger, operated by Google, is free and easy to use, and it even includes hosting at no cost. However, the platform is generally regarded as "lightweight" and restrictive in terms of its design and technical capabilities. As a result, Blogger is more often used for personal rather than business blogging.

Squarespace [<http://www.squarespace.com>]

More than a blogging platform, Squarespace is a robust solution for building and hosting a website. One of its distinct advantages is ease of use, from design through posting content. Squarespace offers numerous design options and technical capabilities, including e-commerce. Pricing is based on a monthly subscription, though, so if you only use Squarespace for blogging, it could get expensive.

Typepad [<http://www.typepad.com>]

Typepad is a blog-only platform that has sufficient design options and technical capabilities as well as blog hosting included. It is not quite at the level of sophistication of WordPress (see below), but it is easier to learn than WordPress. Typepad offers the ability to produce multiple hosted blogs for one subscription price.

WordPress [<http://www.wordpress.org>]

WordPress is the most popular blogging platform; in fact, as much as 25 percent of all of the websites in the world are built with WordPress. It is a very powerful, highly customizable content management system that will likely have everything you need, including multiple design options and superior technical capabilities. As you might expect, there is a learning curve, especially if you are new to blogging. You can install the program for free from WordPress.org on your own web server, or you can purchase hosting from WordPress.com.

Depending on your needs, other platforms that may be worth checking out include: Blog.com, Drupal (content management), Joomla (content management), Tumblr (microblogging), Weebly (full websites), and Wix (full websites).

Blogging Tools

Numerous blogging tools (many free) are available to make blogging easier and faster. Rather than list them here, I've provided links to a few articles that describe some of the top tools available to bloggers:

100+ Blogging Tools for 2016 [<http://www.shoutmeloud.com/blogging-tools-mega-collection.html>]

21 Essential Free Blogging Tools [<http://www.successfulblogging.com/tools-for-bloggers-free/>]

14+ Tools for Bloggers [<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/14-plus-tools-for-bloggers/>]

Best of luck with your blog!

We're half way through the year, and now is a good time to take stock of what's happening in social media, an area that continues to attract more and more marketers.

One of the most comprehensive studies of the use of social media by marketers is the "2016 Social Media Marketing Report," published in May by *Social Media Examiner*.

<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/> Its content offers valuable insights into many aspects of social media usage. The report surveyed over 5,000 marketers, the majority of whom (52 percent) were in the United States. The largest group that took part in the survey (38 percent) works for small businesses of 2 to 10 employees, followed by self-employed marketers (23 percent). Eighteen percent of respondents work for businesses with 100 or more employees. More than half (65 percent) of the respondents focus on marketing primarily to consumers, while 35 percent target primarily businesses.

Here are some of the key findings:

- An overwhelming majority (90 percent) of respondents say social media is important to their businesses. However, only 41 percent say they are able to measure the ROI of their social media activities. Eighty-one percent of marketers say they integrate social media with traditional marketing activities.
- The two leading benefits of social media for marketers are (1) increased exposure and (2) increased traffic. More than half of marketers who have been using social media for at least two years say it has helped to improve sales.
- Facebook continues to be, by far, the most important social media network used by marketers: 55 percent of respondents said it was the most important platform, followed by LinkedIn at 18 percent. (B2B marketers, however, rank LinkedIn as slightly more important than Facebook.) Two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents say they plan on increasing their marketing on Facebook. Even so, more than one-third (35 percent) of respondents are not sure if their Facebook marketing is effective.
- YouTube is growing in popularity; 63 percent of marketers say they plan to increase their use of YouTube for marketing, but Twitter has seen a decline in planned usage since the 2015 study. Other social media on an upward usage trend are Instagram and Snapchat.
- When it comes to paid social media advertising, 87 percent of marketers say they regularly use Facebook ads, while 39 percent report they regularly use Google ads. Usage of paid ads in other social media drops dramatically after that.
- Types of content used in social media are increasingly visual: 74 percent of marketers use visual assets, and 60 percent use videos. Live video is starting to grow in usage, with 14 percent of marketers using it. When marketers were asked to select the single

most important form of content for their businesses, blogging and visual content were virtually tied (38 percent vs. 37 percent respectively).

Next time, I'll share some more statistics, plus what they mean to bluegrass marketers.

Last time, I cited statistics about the marketing use of social media from the “2016 Social Media Marketing Report,” published in May by *Social Media Examiner*.

[\[http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/\]](http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/) Now I'd like to share a few statistics from the report concerning future plans of marketers and discuss their implications for bluegrass marketers.

First, let's look at changes in the planned usage of social media by marketers in the near future. In terms of specific social media channels, the percentage of marketers who plan to increase their marketing usage is as follows:

Facebook – 67 percent

YouTube – 63 percent

Twitter – 61 percent (a decline from 66 percent in 2015)

LinkedIn – 61 percent (a decline from 66 percent in 2015)

Instagram – 57 percent (an increase from 52 percent in 2015)

Pinterest – 42 percent (a decline from 51 percent in 2015)

Google+ – 35 percent (a decline from 52 percent in 2015)

Snapchat – 16 percent (an increase from 7 percent in 2015)

Vine – 11 percent (a decline from 15 percent in 2015)

What insights can you apply from the above statistics? For one thing, they tell you that Facebook and YouTube are, if not the most effective social media, certainly the most popular. This bodes well for bluegrass marketers; Facebook is a “must have” that will more than likely help you reach bluegrass fans, and YouTube is an ideal medium to promote music videos of artists, feature festival performances, and demonstrate instruments. Instagram and Snapchat are the only other two social media networks that appear to be gaining in marketing usage; however, you'd have to test using these networks to see if they are appropriate for bluegrass marketing.

What about how marketers plan to change their future content activities? Here are the percentages of marketers who plan to increase their marketing usage in particular content types:

Video – 73 percent

Visuals – 71 percent

Blogging – 66 percent (63 percent for consumer marketers; 71 percent for business marketers)

Live video – 39 percent

Podcasting – 26 percent

Perhaps the most important insight you can gain from these statistics is the fact that video in particular seems to be an increasingly important form of content for social media marketing. Video is the leading form of content relative to increased marketing usage, but even more stunning is the substantial marketing interest in live video, which is a new content option

that is just emerging in social media. This should tell you that, as the future unfolds, video is likely to be the content of choice for bluegrass marketers who use social media marketing. And, as I discussed in the June edition of *Sound Marketing for Bluegrass*, blogging continues to be a good tactic for marketers.

In closing, I want to bring your attention to a provocative article that details a few of the “dark secrets” surrounding social media marketing:
<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/275365> This article could help you avoid some of the more common misconceptions and make better use of social media marketing.

This year's IBMA World of Bluegrass takes place from September 27 through October 1 in Raleigh, North Carolina. The activities will include the IBMA Business Conference (Sept. 27 – 29), the International Bluegrass Music Awards Show (Sept. 29), the Wide Open Bluegrass Music Festival (Sept. 30 – Oct. 1), and the Bluegrass Ramble, featuring over 200 performances at local club venues in downtown Raleigh.

Bluegrass Today will be reporting throughout the week of World of Bluegrass and exhibiting at the IBMA Business Conference. We'd love to see you!

The World of Bluegrass offers an exceptional opportunity for bluegrass marketers to reach bluegrass enthusiasts, make contacts, and market your products, so we thought it would be helpful to provide you with some ideas for making the most of this landmark event. This email newsletter covers marketing tips specifically for exhibitors at the IBMA Business Conference. The next email newsletter will cover tips for World of Bluegrass attendees.

1. Before the Conference

You'll need to finalize all travel, delivery and booth logistics, make sure all materials and presentations are available, and know when and where to arrive for booth set up. From a marketing perspective, you should be prepared before the conference as well:

Create and practice your "elevator pitch."

An "elevator pitch" is a concise statement about what makes your business special. (The term is derived from the notion that someone should be able to effectively describe their business in a minute or two – how long it takes to go from the top to the bottom of an office building in an elevator.) Your elevator pitch should be compelling and engaging. What are the most important things you think someone should know about your business? Practice and keep refining your pitch until it's second nature. "Customize" your pitch on the fly to make it even more relevant to the person you're addressing.

Consider making an offer at your booth.

A lot of exhibitors give away promotional items to generate awareness and goodwill. However, your marketing investment is probably better spent on an offer that is designed to generate qualified leads or sales for your business. Is there something tangible you can offer that will entice a prospect to want to know more about your product or service, or even make a purchase at the conference or soon afterwards? Maybe a special conference discount, a free item with purchase, or a buy one-get one free offer would be appropriate. If you need to order an item of some kind, leave plenty of time to do so. Whatever you consider offering, relate it to the conference and use a deadline for responding to your offer to encourage prompt action.

Establish a follow up process in advance.

A big mistake exhibitors tend to make is not being prepared to follow up appropriately after the conference is over. Establish a simple follow-up process that allows you to separate your

inquiries from your orders, and to further identify qualified leads. You will want to handle all orders first (promptly) and then follow up with qualified leads – prospects who should receive special attention. Only when orders and qualified leads are taken care of should you follow up with other booth attendees. Figure out in advance how you will handle order fulfillment and how you will communicate with prospects so you'll be ready to hit the ground running when you return from the conference.

2. At the Conference

Be sure your brand is well represented at the conference. All of your marketing materials should have a consistent look and feel. Quality of printing is important. Prep any booth personnel on how to be cordial and professional. Use your elevator pitch, but make sure you also listen to prospects and respond to their needs. Be ready to take orders and collect contact information from booth visitors. If you can qualify prospects at your booth and capture their information on a contact form, so much the better.

3. After the Conference

Implement the order and lead fulfillment process you established prior to the conference. Follow up promptly with all booth visitors, filling orders first and prioritizing top prospects. Your top prospects should become part of an on-going cultivation program: Communicate with them periodically in an attempt to further qualify them and turn them into customers. (This would be a great time to launch or refresh an email newsletter, or to start a blog.) Also do an assessment soon after the event is over, while details are fresh in your mind. Evaluate your booth, your materials, your overall approach, and the number of orders and leads generated so you know what you could do better in the future.

Next time: Tips for attendees.

Last time, I discussed some marketing tactics to support exhibiting at the IBMA Business Conference, taking place during the World of Bluegrass, September 27 through October 1 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Now let's consider what you should be thinking about as a World of Bluegrass attendee.

Get Your “Elevator Pitch” Ready.

I talked about the elevator pitch in my last email from the perspective of a conference exhibitor, but it's just as important to have an elevator pitch as an attendee. An “elevator pitch” is a concise statement about what makes your business special. (The term is derived from the notion that someone should be able to effectively describe their business in a minute or two – how long it takes to go from the top to the bottom of an office building in an elevator.) Your elevator pitch should be compelling and engaging. What are the most important things you think someone should know about your business? Practice and keep refining your pitch until it's second nature. “Customize” your pitch on the fly to make it even more relevant to the person you're addressing. You never know if the person you meet as an attendee will also turn out to be a good prospect.

Invest in Good Quality Business Cards.

A business card remains the primary person-to-person contact medium despite today's movement to digital marketing. Don't skimp on the quality of your business cards, have plenty on hand and distribute them liberally. A business card can do much more than just deliver basic contact information. You can make it work harder for you in any number of ways. For example, use the back of the card to include a version of your elevator pitch or to list important points about your product or service. Or consider using a business card with an extra flap that includes a business overview or even a photo. Maybe you could try orienting your business card vertically instead of horizontally so it stands out. And don't forget to include URLs for your website and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as an email address.

Take Notes at Conference Sessions.

If you'll be attending the IBMA Business Conference, you will probably choose some sessions that could have a direct impact on your business. Sometimes, just an idea or two that you hear at such sessions can turn out to be worth the price of the entire conference. That's why it pays to take notes. Bring along a slim notepad, take notes on your smartphone or tablet, or download a free app such as “Voice Recorder” to record sessions. Pay attention to statistics or interesting points you hear at conference sessions, companies you might want to research later, people's names and numbers, information about prospects, action items for when you return, and so on. Taking notes will help you do a more effective marketing job following up after the event and recalling key things about it.

Make Smart Use of Your Time.

As a bluegrass marketer, there are good business reasons for attending World of Bluegrass. Think in advance about the best ways to get the most out of attending. If you're exhibiting, how can you maximize your investment? Which conference sessions would be the most valuable to attend? Can you arrange meetings with business associates, suppliers, or top prospects? Can you make media contacts or connect with bluegrass promoters and artists? What do you want to learn? Who do you want to meet? Which exhibitors are important to see? How can you use your time at the event to make contacts and generate business? And of course, enjoy yourself and hear some great music, too!

A Final Point...

World of Bluegrass is the single largest bluegrass event of the year, so even if you are not planning to attend, you can use it to your marketing advantage. Think about ways to wrap marketing promotions around the event. Consider these ideas: Put out a special email newsletter, blog about World of Bluegrass, make a special offer good only during World of Bluegrass, and so on. This is a great opportunity to tie in your marketing with a high-profile annual event that perfectly targets your audience.

At the end of this month, IBMA's World of Bluegrass takes place in Raleigh, North Carolina. As I discussed in the August edition of *Sound Marketing for Bluegrass*, the World of Bluegrass is a key annual event that offers bluegrass marketers the opportunity to reach bluegrass enthusiasts and make contacts. Previously, I covered marketing tactics to support exhibiting at the IBMA Business Conference and ways to be most productive as a World of Bluegrass attendee.

This month, I'll use the World of Bluegrass as a kind of launching pad for next year, because the fall is an ideal time to be thinking about your marketing plans for 2017. First let's talk about promoting festivals and concerts. Next time we'll discuss promoting your music as a performing artist.

As a festival promoter who is planning to attend World of Bluegrass, you should be on the lookout for performers and their representatives who might be a good fit for your event. You should make contact with vendors, suppliers and potential sponsors who could be valuable business partners. In addition, seek out any sessions or discussions about festival promotion, especially those that cover marketing trends.

One of the important trends you may hear about is "omnichannel" or "multi-channel" marketing. Another one is mobile marketing. These two trends are essential to understand for effective bluegrass festival marketing in 2017.

Multi-channel marketing

Multi-channel marketing is basically implementing a marketing plan that takes into consideration the fact that bluegrass fans, like all consumers, rely on more than one channel to get information. Years ago, a festival promoter's media options were typically limited to local newspapers, radio, and direct mail. Now the mix has completely changed because digital media has become dominant. Your options today are more likely to include a mix of both traditional and online radio, local cable television, email marketing, and a healthy dose of online advertising (with *Bluegrass Today* as one of your best audience targeting options). Videos are proven to be especially effective in the multi-channel era.

Multi-channel marketing increases the complexities, however. Now your messaging must work effectively across many media. This makes it very important to have a strong festival brand that remains consistent regardless of the media you employ. Adam Kirr, a folk and bluegrass festival marketing director, writes on LinkedIn [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/marketing-folk-bluegrass-festival-6-branding-lessons-adam-kirr>] that a bluegrass festival needs to "speak in a genuine voice... you're exposing a defined personality to your audience." He also makes a compelling case for being a strong local brand: "We would be absolutely nothing without community support... We make every effort we can to show our community love, which includes supporting local companies like Believe in Music, sponsoring or hosting other local events, building relationships with local leaders, providing value opportunities on tickets, giveaways, respecting the community

by serving quality content, replying to comments and shout-outs, having fans in our creative assets, creating the Bluegrass Academy (new this year!), and more.”

Mobile marketing

Multi-channel marketing acknowledges that bluegrass consumers use several channels. Mobile marketing recognizes the emerging preference for mobile devices. The reality is that bluegrass fans literally carry their music (and in many cases their lives) around with them on portable devices. Tablets and smartphones are ubiquitous – and that means a festival promoter must be able to deliver marketing communications optimized for mobile devices. Think about your marketing process from start to finish, including taking and fulfilling ticket orders, in the context of a mobile world. The more mobile-friendly the better!

Next time: 2017 promotion strategies for bluegrass artists.

At the end of this month, IBMA's World of Bluegrass takes place in Raleigh, North Carolina. As I discussed in the previous email newsletter, the World of Bluegrass is a kind of launching pad for next year, because the fall is an ideal time to be thinking about your marketing plans for 2017. Last time I talked about promoting festivals and concerts. Now we'll discuss promoting your music as a performing artist.

As a bluegrass performer who is planning to attend World of Bluegrass, you should be on the lookout for promoters of bluegrass festivals, disk jockeys, record company representatives, and other industry professionals who might help you advance your career. In addition, seek out any sessions or discussions about marketing your music that might help you do a better job of self-promotion next year.

Once you've made those contacts at World of Bluegrass, *follow up* afterwards! As an artist, you may feel somewhat uncomfortable promoting yourself, but understand that you are, in effect, a business selling a product (your music). For that business to flourish, you need fans, of course, but you also need a support network of people who can help you market your music. Personal connections can make it possible for you to grab a spot in a bluegrass festival lineup or get airplay from a bluegrass disc jockey.

When it comes to marketing, the reality is many bluegrass artists put the majority of their time and effort into making a recording while marketing gets short shrift. Veteran music artist/producer Johnny Dwinell writes on the Disc Makers Blog, <http://blog.discmakers.com/2016/03/15-music-marketing-mistakes-indie-artists-make/> "Sadly, MOST indie artists spend every dollar of their precious, limited financial resources making the record and zero dollars marketing it. If they do spend any money marketing, it is horribly misspent and proportionately upside down.

"Good music has rarely, if ever, found its own audience 'organically,'" continues Dwinell. "Somebody, somewhere, somehow was putting the artist's work in front of the right group of people to create a little fire in the grassroots."

This is why it is so important to use your contacts to gain as much exposure to the bluegrass public as possible.

Dwinell also suggests that music artists don't always ask the right questions: "Too many of you are asking yourselves 'How can I get my music to the right industry people so I can make it?' or 'How do I get my shot at fame?'"

"The questions indie artists should be asking are: 'Who is my audience? Where can I find them? How can I connect with them? What can I do to get them to seriously listen to my music with an open heart and mind? Where can I learn the right questions to ask? Where can I learn the answers for the right questions?'" In his blog post, <http://blog.discmakers.com/2016/03/15-music-marketing-mistakes-indie-artists-make/> Dwinell goes on to offer some good sources of information.

In addition to appearances at festivals and getting radio airplay, performing artists need to take full advantage of digital promotion which, thankfully, is very cost-effective. *Bluegrass Today* is ideally suited for online advertising because it perfectly targets the bluegrass listening audience. Other digital marketing tactics should include a website with a mechanism to order albums and a solid social media presence, particularly on Facebook and YouTube. It also makes good marketing sense to find ways to collect fans' email addresses so you can communicate with them on a regular basis.

In the end, the difference between bluegrass performers who make it and those who don't is not just their talent – it's the brand awareness and product sales that result from marketing their music.

I want to share a startling statistic with you: By the end of 2016, digital advertising is expected to take over the top spot from television advertising. The respected online research firm eMarketer projects [<https://www.emarketer.com/Article/US-Digital-Ad-Spending-Surpass-TV-this-Year/1014469>] that digital advertising will reach \$72.09 billion vs. \$71.29 billion for television advertising by year's end. If this projection holds, digital advertising will represent almost 37 percent of the total media spending in the U.S. In addition, eMarketer reports that 2016 will be the first year that display ads will outpace search in terms of U.S. digital spending.

The rise of digital advertising as the media leader is a remarkable and even historic event. For decades, television has never been displaced as the king of advertising. The latest research confirms what I've been writing about for several years: Consumers have not just become accustomed to online media, **they prefer it**. This makes a very compelling case that digital advertising should be a major part of every bluegrass marketer's marketing strategy in 2017.

So where do you begin? Consider this month's *Sound Marketing for Bluegrass* a digital advertising primer.

Let's start with how to plan a digital advertising campaign. In bluegrass marketing, digital advertising is most often used to promote a festival, an artist's album, or a specific product or service, such as musical instruments or music lessons. Obviously, you should design a campaign to advertise one of these things for a defined period and at the appropriate time (in the case of a festival, well in advance of the actual date). Placing a digital ad typically requires a very short lead time, so you can have an ad up and running almost immediately after submitting it.

Depending on the media outlet selected, digital advertising can be very targeted. Of course, the most targeted and efficient medium to reach bluegrass fans is *Bluegrass Today*. Display ads, also called "banner ads," can be geo-targeted to cities, states, or regions of the country. Ads can rotate throughout the *Bluegrass Today* site or appear only on select pages. Ads can also appear in the *Bluegrass Buzz* email newsletter that goes out 5 days a week to the most focused, motivated fans and industry insiders. A variety of ad sizes are available (leaderboard, skyscraper, and rectangles); they can be purchased based on the number of ad impressions. Use the handy [Bluegrass Today ad cost calculator](http://bluegrasstoday.com/bannercalculator/bannercalculator.htm) [<http://bluegrasstoday.com/bannercalculator/bannercalculator.htm>] to determine a campaign that meets your needs. You can also request a free media kit here: <http://bluegrasstoday.com/advertising/>

Budget permitting, you can supplement your advertising on *Bluegrass Today* with ads in major online media with broader coverage. For example, bluegrass marketers with an active Facebook page might consider testing Facebook ads. Facebook ads can be targeted by demographics, location, and interests. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/business/products/ads> for more information. Similarly, if you actively use other social media, such as Twitter or Pinterest, look into the advertising programs they have available.

Another option is advertising through Google. Google offers two programs that might be of interest: Google Display Network and Google Ad Words. With the Google Display Network, you can place your ad on a variety of news sites, blogs and other online sites and Google manages the ad program for you. Visit <https://www.google.com/ads/displaynetwork/> for more information. Google Ad Words offers you the ability to place text ads on the Google search engine. Visit <https://www.google.com/adwords/> for more information. In either case, you can choose specific criteria and control costs by putting a cap on the cost per click or lead generated.

Finally, if selling music or bluegrass products online is of interest to you, consider leading ecommerce platforms such as Apple's iTunes and Amazon. With Amazon, for example, you can sell directly through Amazon's website or even set up your own online store, and then advertise your own products and other bluegrass products via the Amazon affiliate program. As an Amazon affiliate, you will receive a percentage of all sales you make via promotions you run on your web site or blog (you will even get paid for selling your own products).

Next time: Creating effective digital ads.

Last time, I discussed planning a digital advertising campaign and choosing online media. Now let's talk about what it takes to create an effective digital ad.

First consider the size of the ad. Ad prices vary based on size, placement, and number of impressions.

We'll use *Bluegrass Today* as an example since it is typical of a website that offers various display ad sizes:

Leaderboard (728 x 90 pixels; large narrow horizontal rectangle that always appears at the top of a page)

Skyscraper (120 x 600 pixels; large narrow vertical rectangle that typically appears in the right or left column)

Mini Rectangle (220 x 90 pixels) and Large Rectangle (300 x 250 pixels); rectangles typically can appear anywhere on a page.

Note: *Bluegrass Today* has "Artist Packages" available for artists and labels offering discounts and free graphic design services based on the ad campaign purchased.

Budget is always a consideration in selecting an ad size, but creative execution is just as important. If you are promoting a festival, for example, you may need a larger ad to highlight the dates, location, and marquis artists. A medium size ad might work well for promoting a product or service. If you are promoting a new album, you may find that a smaller ad can be effective.

Whatever the size, keep in mind that a digital ad should be engaging and enticing. In addition to compelling copy, design and graphics (possibly even embedded video), the most effective digital advertising includes a **call to action**. Think about what you want the person who sees your ad to do. For example:

- A festival ad should encourage a prospective attendee to click through to learn more and purchase tickets.
- An album ad should encourage a prospective fan to click through to sample a few songs and purchase the album.
- A product ad should encourage a prospective customer to click through to get specific details about the product and purchase it.

In every case, it is a good idea to create a web "landing page" for a digital ad. This makes it possible for you to tailor the content of the page to the ad, as well as to measure the response to the specific ad. The landing page should be designed to capture an individual's contact information and offer something of value in return, such as a subscription to a free email newsletter. The landing page is also a good place to include video. If possible, the landing page should encourage the individual to purchase right from the page. You might consider making a special offer, such as a discount, and using a deadline as an added incentive to make a purchase sooner rather than later. Landing pages that are integrated with

a digital ad campaign tend to be much more effective than directing an ad respondent to a website's home page.

To get the most out of your digital advertising investment, make sure you have set up a method for fulfilling orders and qualifying and following up on ad responses. Acknowledge orders immediately and fulfill them promptly. Add new customers to your database for future promotions. Keep track of individuals who express interest but do not make an immediate purchase. Reach out to these prospects via email in an effort to cultivate their interest.

The right online media choices, combined with an effective and compelling digital ad, will almost certainly result in leads and sales for your bluegrass business.

This month, I want to discuss the somewhat mysterious world of “Search Engine Optimization,” better known as “SEO.” Some marketers get anxious whenever anyone mentions SEO, because it often involves technical terms. It’s true, the basis of SEO is somewhat technical, but bear with me and I’ll try to keep things simple. It will be well worth your while to have a basic understanding of SEO, because it isn’t only search-related, it also can have an impact on the quality of your website.

Let’s start with a simple definition. Search Engine Optimization is a type of marketing that enables you to improve the visibility of your website or blog in search engine results. It uses both creative and technical means to help increase awareness, improve rankings and drive website traffic. The creative aspects are nothing more than words – but they are very well chosen words. These words have labels: they’re called “keywords” and “meta tags.”

Before we define those terms, let’s talk about what SEO can accomplish. Your website or blog is just one of billions on the Internet. The good news is your site fits into a narrow category that immediately identifies with an audience, namely bluegrass fans. But even as a bluegrass site or blog, you need to be found on the Internet. Your customers may know how to find you, but what about prospects? More often than not, they’ll use a search engine, such as Google. The concept of a search engine is easy to understand: You enter a search term and, instantly, you get many pages of results. The real secret to search results, however, is **ranking**, or where your site appears on the results page. The websites that make the best use of SEO are the ones that rise to the top, or get the highest rankings.

Why is this important? Because most people who search stop looking after a few pages, so if your home page ranks high enough to be on the first page of results, your website has an excellent chance of drawing more traffic.

One simple way to influence your page ranking is to ensure that your website pages include **keywords** – the actual words that people type into the search engine’s search box. Some of these keywords will be very obvious; for example, all bluegrass marketers should use the word “bluegrass” on every page of a website. Other specific keywords that relate to your area of bluegrass, such as “bluegrass festival,” “bluegrass artist,” or “banjo” might also be appropriate.

There could be other keywords, though, that are not as obvious but just as important to include because they are used by bluegrass fans to find websites like yours. The best way to figure these out is with the help of a free online tool, such as Google’s Keyword Planner [<https://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner>], Keyword Tool [<http://keywordtool.io/>] or Wordtracker. [<http://www.wordtracker.com/>] Once you discover the keywords that are most popular with bluegrass fans, you can include them on your home page and other pages throughout your site as appropriate. Be sure, however, to use them in a natural context. Also, do not repeat them excessively on each page, because overuse of keywords is a red flag to search engines.

Keywords are useful in another way: They help your website or blog visitors navigate your site more easily. That’s why many website builder and blogging tools have a way for you to

enter “keyword tags” which become searchable terms within your website. These tags act as a kind of electronic index system so website visitors can quickly find what they are looking for.

Now that wasn't so bad, was it? Next time, we'll turn our attention to another aspect of SEO – meta tags.

Last time, I began a discussion of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) by talking about keywords. Now we'll take a look at "meta tags" and "meta descriptions," which are a bit more technical than keywords.

Meta tags and meta descriptions fall into a category known as "meta data." Meta data is basically data that describes other data. Meta data is used by search engines to determine the relevance of the content of a webpage. The difference between keywords and meta data is that meta data has certain technical restrictions; meta data has to be written in HTML, put in specific places on a webpage, and adhere to a maximum character count for search engines to locate and use it.

Let's start with meta tags. A "tag" in HTML appears as a description but does appear on the webpage; it is something only recognized by a search engine. One type of tag that's important is called a "title tag." This is the title of a page and it appears at the top, or head of the page. The title page should include a specific description of the page in simple, searchable words. Another type of tag is the "robots meta tag." This tag should be used with great care – it tells a search engine you *do not want* the page it appears on to be indexed by a search engine (meaning it cannot be found). It can also be used to indicate which links on a page should be followed or not followed.

The meta description may be the most important of all meta tags. In an article for the leading marketing site, Marketing Profs, Matt Press writes, [<http://www.marketingprofs.com/opinions/2016/30749/you-may-be-overlooking-the-most-powerful-marketing-tool-at-your-disposal>] "The meta descriptions for your Web content could be just about the most powerful marketing tool at your disposal. You're almost certainly underusing meta descriptions, yet they won't cost you a thing." A meta description is crucial because it literally informs a search engine exactly what a page or site is about. The description can include keywords and it should be well written, but it should not exceed 160 characters. The better the description, the better the ability of the search engine to classify your page accurately. If your description is inaccurate, it might actually be rewritten by a search engine, which would interpret the content of your site.

The meta description is not only essential to a search engine, it also influences site visitors, because it is the meta description itself that appears in search engine results. Again, if the description is well written, potential visitors will click through to your site – and nowadays, getting clickthroughs actually helps your site rise in search engine rankings. Search engines use sophisticated algorithms to determine the ranking of a webpage, and clickthroughs are a factor. These are reasons why it is well worth the time and effort to make sure your meta descriptions are top notch.

As Matt Press discusses in his article, [<http://www.marketingprofs.com/opinions/2016/30749/you-may-be-overlooking-the-most-powerful-marketing-tool-at-your-disposal>] "all your meta descriptions should be unique." He lists several techniques in writing meta descriptions that he says are used by

major brands, such as teasing people with a clever hook, including an offer or discount, including relevant keywords, mentioning a free download and more.

Keywords, discussed in the last email, are not as technically restrictive as meta tags. Meta data must be employed properly and be written in HTML. If you are not using a website builder or blogging tool that makes it easy to use meta data, or if you do not feel comfortable with HTML, it may be advisable for you to seek outside assistance with this area of SEO.

In addition to keywords and meta data, there are other aspects of SEO that can make a real difference when it comes to your ranking by a search engine. Remember that SEO is not just a technical concept – it is a way to make your website or blog a more effective and powerful marketing asset. Here is a helpful source that outlines other SEO basics:

<https://searchenginewatch.com/2016/01/21/seo-basics-22-essentials-you-need-for-optimizing-your-site/> In addition, you could consult an SEO expert... just search the Web for additional information.

This month I'd like to give you some insight into key marketing trends that will affect bluegrass marketers in 2017. You will have a greater opportunity for marketing success next year by being aware of these trends and understanding how to leverage them.

Trend 1: Customer-centric Marketing

There has been a growing emphasis in the past few years on customer-centric marketing, and that is likely to continue and intensify in 2017. What this means is that your marketing program should revolve around the customer, and more specifically, each individual customer. Some marketers have coined the term "H2H" or "Human to Human" marketing to highlight this type of marketing, because it emphasizes making a strong emotional and personal connection, from one human to another.

As a bluegrass marketer, you already have a solid basis for a relationship with a customer in the love you share for bluegrass music. Music naturally evokes emotion, so your customer marketing already has a built-in emotional connection.

There are several ways you can take advantage of customer-centric marketing next year. Build on the emotional connection by sharing stories about artists, songs, festivals, instruments and more in a conversational, informal voice. Demonstrate you understand your customer by relating to his or her individual likes and needs. Personalize all communications to the extent possible. Cultivate customer relationships by staying in touch periodically using email newsletters. Provide loyal customers with preferential treatment and special offers. Dedicate yourself to excellent customer service. Make any experience the customer has with you memorable and positive. Build lasting relationships and make customers feel special. Ask customers to become brand ambassadors and tell their friends and family about you.

Whether you're an artist, record company, festival promoter, or you market bluegrass products, build your own fan base and keep them involved with you.

Trend 2: The Mobile Customer

Nothing has had a more profound impact on marketing than mobile devices. You should recognize that everything you do needs to be "mobile friendly." Your website, blog, email, and other electronic communications must be just as easily viewed and consumed on smartphones and tablets as on traditional computers. In 2017, you'll need to be confident you can market your music, festivals, and products across all device platforms. The ordering process for CDs, downloads, and tickets must be seamless.

In the retail and festival world, location-based marketing will also become increasingly important. More and more consumers use their mobile phones to compare prices, order merchandise, and receive offers while they are in stores or at other specific locations. Bluegrass festival promoters in particular could make innovative use of mobile location-based marketing.

Emerging as part of the mobile consumer trend in 2017 will be wearables such as digital watches and the Internet of Things, which allows a broad range of devices to be interconnected. Think about how you might be able to innovate in these areas or at least be ready for them as they gain in popularity.

Trend 3: The Move to Video

Consider this startling statistic: In excess of 7 billion videos are viewed daily on Facebook and YouTube alone. One survey conducted last year [<https://animoto.com/blog/business/video-marketing-cheat-sheet-infographic/>] suggests that four times as many consumers prefer watching a product video than reading about the product. This same survey indicates that customers are almost 50 percent more likely to read email newsletters with links to video.

The bottom line is that a huge shift in content consumption is taking place, and the shift is from text to video. As I've written about before, bluegrass marketers are in the enviable position of promoting something that lends itself very well to the video medium. Obviously, bluegrass artists and record companies can make use of video marketing, but so can festival promoters and marketers who sell bluegrass instruments or merchandise.

It's important to note that videos should be authentic and "down home" – they don't need to be highly professional and expensive to produce to be effective for bluegrass marketing. Interesting and engaging content will always rise to the top.

More trends next time.

Last time I talked about three trends that will affect bluegrass marketers in 2017:

Trend 1: Customer-centric Marketing

Trend 2: The Mobile Consumer

Trend 3: The Move to Video

Here are two more important trends to be aware of for the coming year.

Trend 4: Analyzing the Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing

According to the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), [<https://thedma.org/blog/data-driven-marketing/7-trends-that-should-shape-your-2017-marketing-budget/>] 70 percent of companies are still not collecting data from social media channels, even though social media is expected to grow to 24 percent of marketing budgets within the next five years.

In 2017, marketers will probably reach a tipping point in social media marketing. In recent years, social media marketing has enjoyed rapid growth; you are probably already making use of social media networks such as Facebook, Google+, and Pinterest. Bluegrass marketers, like other marketers, recognize that social media can be very effective in customer engagement; however, they are beginning to understand that getting people to communicate and interact is just one part of the marketing picture. The real challenge for marketers with social media is now clear: They need to collect data about its usage to measure social media's effectiveness in generating qualified leads that ultimately convert to sales.

Writing for *Entrepreneur*, [<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/246085>] Jeff Foster says marketers need to first create measurable objectives for social media marketing: "Focus on the S.M.A.R.T. strategy for goal setting to ensure your objectives are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time based. ... In all cases, these objectives should be directly tied to your business goals, and they should be achievable. Otherwise, they're just wishful thinking. Also, make sure your objectives are time limited."

As you proceed in 2017, be diligent in learning how to measure, analyze and assess your social media marketing efforts.

Trend 5: Embracing Digital Marketing

It is no accident that all of the trends I've discussed rely on digital marketing as a platform. The evidence is overwhelming: Digital marketing is not only here to stay, it has supplanted traditional marketing. Digital marketing, which includes online advertising, video marketing, search marketing, and email marketing, should be the basis of every bluegrass marketer's marketing strategy in 2017.

As I reported in October, by the end of 2016, digital advertising is expected to take over the top spot from television advertising. The respected online research firm eMarketer projects [<https://www.emarketer.com/Article/US-Digital-Ad-Spending-Surpass-TV-this-Year/1014469>] that digital advertising will reach \$72.09 billion vs. \$71.29 billion for television advertising by year's end. The latest research confirms what I've been writing

about for several years: Consumers have not just become accustomed to online media, **they prefer it.**

Every marketer, large and small, is embracing digital marketing. That's why we are excited to announce in this email newsletter that, for 2017, *Bluegrass Today* will undergo a major revamping to take full advantage of today's rapidly evolving digital scene. With the new *Bluegrass Today*, you will have more opportunities than ever to market your music, festivals, products and services, directly to bluegrass fans, via the industry's leading source of bluegrass news.

Bluegrass Today "2.0" has been completely rebuilt from the ground up. The new website will provide you with a wealth of new features, including a completely revamped Business Directory and Event Directory where you can list your events for free, as well as your band, business or services. Several new features have been added, including the ability to easily print our industry standard airplay charts, communicate with others in our discussion groups and more. Plus, the site is now fully mobile friendly, providing ease of viewing across all platforms.

Bluegrass Today looks forward to working with you to make 2017 your most successful marketing year ever!

Happy New Year! This is a particularly happy year for *Bluegrass Today*, because on December 13, 2016, we launched a new version of our website, rebuilding it from the ground up. With the new *Bluegrass Today*, you'll have more opportunities than ever to market your music, festivals, products and services, directly to bluegrass fans, via the industry's leading source of bluegrass news.

To make sure you make the best use of the new site, we'd like to take you on a brief "tour" of *Bluegrass Today* and show you its great new features and benefits. As you read this email, you might want to refer to www.bluegrasstoday.com to follow along.

First, take a look at the brand new home page. Whether you're using a desktop computer, tablet, or smartphone, you'll notice that the home page is responsive to your device. The site is now mobile friendly to provide ease of viewing across all platforms.

The main navigation for the site is simple and clean – you can find news, charts, events and directories quickly and easily. The primary area of the home page will give you the latest bluegrass news with stories that rotate or scroll; you'll always see the start of each story, and you can simply follow the link to read more. The latest bluegrass music news also appears in a prominent position.

Take a good look around and you'll see that other essential information, such as a listing of the latest events, is easy to find. Features you've come to know and love, including Bluegrass At Large and Opinion/Humor, are also easy to find.

One of the great new features of the new *Bluegrass Today* is the easy access you'll have to our industry standard weekly and monthly airplay charts. You can access these charts directly from the main navigation, and you can easily print them as well.

The two areas we're improving significantly are the Events and Business Directories. These directories have been completely revamped to make it easy for you to add events and business listings, as well as to do quick searches. We'll soon be adding advanced search functions to these directories.

Events and business listings are free. Simply register on the site to gain access to the Events or Business Directory forms. For events, just choose from the categories indicated: Broadcast Events, Club Shows, Concerts, Educational Events, Festivals, Music Camps and Workshops. Then complete all the appropriate information, include an image if you wish, and submit the form. We encourage you to add your festivals and events in your local area as early in the year as possible.

List your business in the Business Directory using the form provided. Any bluegrass-related business, including artists and record companies, can be listed free of charge. Choose the appropriate business category and then complete the information, again including an image if you wish, and submit the form.

At the present time, we have added a new commenting system on *Bluegrass Today* to make it easy for you to join in any discussions. A major revision to our discussion forum is planned for the future.

If you have any comments, questions, or concerns about the new site, please visit Support [<http://bluegrasstoday.com/support/>] to contact us.

Next time: How to get the most out of marketing with the new *Bluegrass Today*.

Last time, we took a brief tour of the new *Bluegrass Today*. Now I'd like to share some ideas with you for how to make the most out of marketing with *Bluegrass Today*.

The easiest way to begin using *Bluegrass Today* for marketing right away is to take advantage of the free listing services. As mentioned in the previous email newsletter, events and business listings are free. Simply register on the site to gain access to the Events or Business Directory forms. Then complete all the appropriate information, include an image if you wish, and submit the form.

You should add your festivals and events in your local area as early in the year as possible. Festival promoters, record companies, and artists are welcome to add events. Any bluegrass-related business, including artists, can be listed free of charge in the Business Directory. Be sure to list your business under the proper category because you never know when a bluegrass fan will want to look you up!

In addition to adding events and creating a listing for your business, you should actively engage in commenting and discussions on *Bluegrass Today*. This is an excellent way to interact with other bluegrass enthusiasts, make contacts, and gain visibility. In the near future, we'll be revamping our discussion forum, which will facilitate even more interaction.

You are also encouraged to consider advertising on *Bluegrass Today*. Did you know that the site averages about 44,000 visitors each month and generates about 169,000 page views? What's more, the click-through rate for ads seen on *Bluegrass Today* is nearly *3-1/2 times higher* than the national average. That means your ad will be seen and potentially responded to by your perfect audience.

When you advertise with *Bluegrass Today*, you can set an advertising budget you feel comfortable with, because your media buy is based on the number of ad impressions. Design your own ad or *Bluegrass Today* will design it for you. Flash and animated GIF ads can be accommodated. Banner ad delivery can be customized to your needs, and you can target your ads to geographic areas, including city, state, DMA and country. You can also supplement your advertising on the site with ads that appear in the email newsletter sent free to every registered user.

Artists, record companies, festival and concert promoters, instrument makers, music instructors and others find *Bluegrass Today* to be a perfectly targeted, very effective medium to reach bluegrass buyers. There is no better way online to target bluegrass fans than *Bluegrass Today*!

For further information about advertising opportunities with *Bluegrass Today*, visit <http://bluegrasstoday.com/advertising/>. Complete a short form and you'll receive a complimentary Media Kit that shows you all ad sizes and pricing options. You'll also gain access to a handy banner rate calculator designed to help you plan your campaign according to your budget and visibility requirements.

With its recent re-design and additional new features being planned this year, *Bluegrass Today* is sure to become even more popular and valuable to bluegrass fans than it has been in the past. Now is the time to make the most of your bluegrass marketing with *Bluegrass Today*!

This month, I want to offer you some tips on how to develop a sound digital marketing strategy. But first, let's take a look at a few current technology trends from the respected Pew Research Center: [<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/>]

1. About three-quarters (77 percent) of Americans now own a smartphone. According to the Pew Research Center, “growth in smartphone ownership over the past year has been especially pronounced among Americans 50 and older.”
2. Almost three-quarters (73 percent) of Americans report that they have broadband service at home. Some 80 percent of U.S. adults are online shoppers, with 79 percent of them purchasing something online, and 51 percent of them using a cellphone to make a purchase. While 64 percent of Americans prefer buying from physical stores rather than online, 65 percent of them say when they want to buy something, they compare physical store prices to online store prices and choose whichever option is cheapest.
3. Today, 69 percent of U.S. adults are social media users. While social media is especially popular with younger adults (86 percent usage among 18- to 29-year olds and 80 percent usage among 30- to 49-year olds), growth among older age groups is significant: 64 percent of adults age 50 to 64 and 34 percent of adults 65 and over use social media. The usage by adults 65 and over has more than tripled in six years.
4. The growth of tablet computers has skyrocketed. Over half (51 percent) of Americans own a tablet computer, up from just 3 percent in 2010.

Let's overlay the above technology trends onto some basic audience information about bluegrass fans, based on data from Simmons/Experian research:

- There are close to 19 million bluegrass fans and consumers in the U.S. About 56 percent of them are between the ages of 25 and 54.
- At least 60 percent of bluegrass fans have an Internet connection in their homes. Bluegrass fans are 39 percent more likely to spend 5 hours or more per week online than the average consumer.

You can see a fairly seismic shift in the past six years toward what has been referred to as the “always on” connected consumer. With a large majority of Americans carrying smartphones, being connected via texting, email, and the Web is easy.

The explosive growth of online video has contributed to smartphones and tablets becoming legitimate alternate entertainment devices, in some cases replacing television. There is a growing trend showing that consumers are using their smartphones and tablets to evaluate products, compare prices when they walk into retail establishments, and shop online.

It is even more likely that bluegrass fans in particular, with their keen interest in bluegrass, are becoming mobile listeners of bluegrass music. They're also using their smartphones and tablets to buy albums, festival tickets, and merchandise online.

This is the digital landscape we currently inhabit. In many cases, digital media has replaced traditional media, as consumers choose to get their news and entertainment via online channels rather than through traditional print channels. Next time, I'll look at how, with this landscape in mind, you can work to develop a sound digital marketing strategy.

Last time, I shared some key technology trends in combination with examining some of the characteristics of bluegrass fans. Now let's use that data as a basis for discussing how to develop a sound digital marketing strategy.

Trends in marketing generally follow trends in technology. As a result, marketing to bluegrass fans is likely to be more effective and efficient when you rely on digital methods and media. In developing a sound digital marketing strategy, you want to look at a number of factors:

The Value of Your Current Customers

Your current customers should be one key focus of your digital marketing. Many marketers make the basic mistake of taking their customers for granted. Take a look at how you communicate with and treat your customers. The easiest way to stay in touch is via email:

- Do you capture every new customer's email address and send a welcome email to new customers?
- Do you maintain an email list of your customers and keep it up to date? Do you use your email list to communicate with customers via an email newsletter or other regular email communications?
- Do you make special offers to your customers to thank them for their business? Do you ask customers to refer family and friends to you and reward them for referrals? Bluegrass fans are especially receptive to telling others about performing artists, festivals, and bluegrass products and services that they like.

The Challenge of Acquiring a New Customer

It is always challenging to acquire a new customer. You are competing with other entertainment for the customer's dollar. Keep in mind that it is often well worth the investment to spend more initially to acquire a new customer because, over time, the customer will pay you back with multiple purchases and loyalty, as long as you show that you value the customer. A timeless, tried-and-true formula known as "AIDA," which stands for **Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action**, can help you understand customer acquisition. How can you create awareness and interest so that a prospective customer has enough of a desire to take action?

If you're an artist, you'll need to find ways to create buzz with DJs to get airplay. You should consider advertising options with *Bluegrass Today*, which could include an ad inside the DJ Radio Survey, on *Bluegrass Today*, and in the Bluegrass Buzz newsletter. You can also reach out to your existing fan base via social media to help spread the word about a new album.

If you market a bluegrass festival, you'll need to reach the bluegrass fans most likely to come to your venue. You should actively market the festival to past attendees via email and social media. You can offer early bird discounts and ask fans to tell their family and friends about your festival. You should also consider placing a geo-targeted ad on *Bluegrass Today* and one in the Bluegrass Buzz newsletter that links directly to your festival website. And of course, don't forget to list your festival on *Bluegrass Today's* events page free of charge.

If you sell a bluegrass product or service, you want a prospective customer to do business with you because you have the best combination of quality, price, and service. The most critical contact with a customer is the first one, so be sure to make the most attractive offer you possibly can and over-deliver on service. Consider using a price incentive to acquire a new customer, such as free shipping on the first order, or offer a free gift. Ask existing customers to make referrals. Consider placing an ad on *Bluegrass Today* and in the Bluegrass Buzz newsletter that links directly to a new customer offer webpage.

Remember the Digital Landscape

As marketers, we are all functioning on a new playing field called the digital landscape. Your customers and prospective customers are viewing your website and reading your emails on mobile devices, so make sure your digital communications are mobile friendly. Make sure, too, that you direct inquiring customers to specific webpages with forms that capture the appropriate information.

If you take online orders, make sure your ordering process is secure, intuitive, and responsive. When you use social media, concentrate on the few social media networks your customers use, and be sure you always read and respond to customer comments. And don't forget the power of video as a marketing tool. Video is especially effective in showcasing bluegrass artists and depicting the excitement of a bluegrass festival.

A while ago, I wrote about the growth of radio and how bluegrass marketers could make the best use of radio advertising. This month, I'm going to depart from my typical discussion of marketing to share a perspective on the future of radio. More than any other medium, radio has an enduring effect on bluegrass fans. But there are big changes coming to radio that all bluegrass marketers need to know about.

Last month, the North American Broadcasters Association ([NABA](http://www.nabanet.com/)) [\[http://www.nabanet.com/\]](http://www.nabanet.com/) held a symposium on the "Future of Radio and Audio." The new FCC Chairman, Ajit Pai, made remarks at the symposium, some of which bear mentioning. "Each week, 93% of Americans over the age of twelve still listen to the radio, which is about the same as a decade ago, and the decade before that, and the decade before that," he said. "That's over 245 million Americans. And they aren't just listening to the radio just to catch a single from Adele. They are listening on average for twelve hours a week... The enduring popularity of radio amidst so much technological disruption is truly striking..."

Pai went on to say that, while the future of digital media is being defined by three forces, namely "social, local, and mobile," radio *is already* social, local, and mobile. He also voiced his commitment to radio, indicating as an example that the FCC has taken steps to help improve the ability of AM stations to grow their audiences with a set of regulation reforms. In addition, Pai spoke about the fact that the majority of smartphones contain FM chips, but only about 44 percent of them are activated in the United States. Contrast that with 80 percent activation in Mexico. Pai believes activating these chips to allow smartphone users to access FM radio directly through their smartphones could eventually be more desirable and efficient for consumers than digital streaming.

Another interesting development at the NABA symposium concerned digital radio. The NABA announced support for a voluntary North American Digital Radio Standard. An accompanying white paper describing this Standard noted the following about digital or "HD" radio:

"HD Radio technology improves audio quality: consumers receive sound quality equal to or better than (depending upon bit rate) analog FM. The potential for CD-like sound quality for over the air services is possible. HD Radio signals are much less prone to interference than existing analog signals as well, leading to cleaner audio.

"HD Radio technology increases choice: through the multicasting capability, digital FM broadcasters are able to offer multiple audio channels over a single FM frequency. The new audio channels, known as HD2, HD3, etc., offer consumers new, diverse, targeted content. Multicasting has led to an explosion of programming creativity, with formats such as dance, garage band, gospel, bluegrass, jazz, comedy and indie rock. A greater selection of audio choices has expanded listener appetites for new music. These new audio sources are often referred to as "infinite shelf space" and radio needs these additional channels to meet a more diverse consumer taste in music."

Next time, I'll talk more about the importance of digital radio and digital streaming to bluegrass marketers.

Last time, I shared some information from the “Future of Radio and Audio” symposium sponsored by the North American Broadcasters Association ([NABA](http://www.nabanet.com/)). [\[http://www.nabanet.com/\]](http://www.nabanet.com/) I want to continue my discussion of digital radio, also known as HD radio, since it has direct relevance to how bluegrass fans listen to music.

You’ve probably noticed that radio stations are starting to mention their HD equivalent stations, such as “HD2” and “HD3” on air. In addition to superior sound quality, HD radio offers new services and interactivity to engage and entertain radio listeners. For example, stations can display text information such as artist, song title and station call letters on the radio’s screen. In addition, music tagging for HD Radio technology is possible, enabling consumers to purchase music they hear on the radio through on-line music stores. Station logo and cover art image support are available through the HD Radio feature known as “Artist Experience.” Through Artist Experience, the listener is presented with an image-rich enhancement to their listening experience. Commercial announcements may also be enhanced with client logos and product images.

With a Digital Radio Standard in place, the NABA suggests that other advanced services could be available to consumers, including an electronic program guide and store-and-replay functionality.

According to the NABA, “since all local radio station dial positions can remain the same, the HD Radio system requires little or no change in well-established consumer behavior. Consumers purchasing HD Radio receivers will simply tune to their favorite programs and stations and enjoy the digital upgrades in quality, choice and services automatically as stations transition from analog to digital.”

Now let’s consider digital streaming of music. According to IFPI, [\[http://www.ifpi.org/facts-and-stats.php\]](http://www.ifpi.org/facts-and-stats.php) the international organization representing 1,300 record companies worldwide, “digital became the primary revenue stream for recorded music in 2015, overtaking sales of physical formats.” The organization reports that streaming is the industry’s fastest growing revenue source; from 2010 to 2015, revenues have grown more than four times. Streaming accounts for 43 percent of digital revenues, with downloads accounting for 45 percent of digital revenues. Some 68 million people paid for a music subscription in 2015, an eight-time increase over 2010.

Think about HD radio, the eventual activation of FM chips in smartphones, and digital streaming in combination. All three of these technological advances have “digital” in common. In fact, the digital delivery of music is keeping pace with the digital revolution in marketing that I have been discussing each month in *Sound Marketing for Bluegrass*.

These technological developments suggest very exciting times ahead for bluegrass music. Bluegrass fans will increasingly have access to superior quality music on their mobile devices, whether they are smartphones or tablets. They’ll not only be able to listen, they’ll be able to make purchases directly from these devices. What does that mean to you? As a bluegrass marketer, you will be in a position to reach the emerging digital bluegrass fan, anytime and anyplace, in just the way that fan wants to hear from you. *Bluegrass Today* will be there every step of the way to help you take advantage of the new digital consumer!

This month, we're launching a new series featuring successful bluegrass marketers. We'll start with Silver Dollar City's Bluegrass & BBQ Festival, which runs from May 4 through 29, 2017 in Branson, Missouri. This year's all-star lineup includes Ricky Skaggs, Rhonda Vincent, and the Grascals.

To learn about the festival's marketing program, I spoke with Lisa Rau, Director of PR and Publicity for Silver Dollar City Attractions, and D.A. Callaway, Entertainment Manager and a multiple-time winner of the Bluegrass Promoter of the Year Award.

The Bluegrass & BBQ Festival is different from most bluegrass festivals in two important ways: First, the event is a month-long extravaganza featuring top bluegrass bands, about 65 of them each year, coupled with some of the best barbecue anywhere. Second, the festival is held within Silver Dollar City, an 1880's theme park celebrating the heritage of the Ozark Mountains region that attracts some two million guests annually. In fact, the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival is one of eight world-class festivals held at Silver Dollar City.

As you might imagine, Silver Dollar City has a high-powered "marketing machine," as Lisa Rau calls it, to promote the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival, which began in 2005. But the roots of the festival go back much further; it was actually an outgrowth of the Mountain Folk Music Festival that started in 1975. With that kind of history, Silver Dollar City management could continue to refine the festival and come up with a winning formula that added great food to great music and extended the festival over almost a full month. Today, average attendance on a typical day of the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival is around 10,000 guests, and some bluegrass fans come several days in a row. Attendees are either Season Pass holders, or they pay a daily admission.

With any major bluegrass festival, there are national and regional components to marketing, and Silver Dollar City takes advantage of both. Nationally, the organization has built a relationship over many years with two major bluegrass media outlets, *Bluegrass Today* and the national bluegrass radio program, *Into the Blue*. (Note: Terry Herd, who hosts *Into the Blue*, is also a principal of *Bluegrass Today*.) The relationship has evolved into a promotional partnership that is symbiotic: The Bluegrass & BBQ Festival reaches national and even international audiences through perfectly targeted media, while the festival itself becomes a part of the promotion and programming. For example, two of the *Into the Blue* radio shows are broadcast from backstage at festival venues.

The integration of *Bluegrass Today* advertising with *Into the Blue* programming has worked extremely well. This year, for the first time, Silver Dollar City is a "title sponsor" of *Into the Blue*. "We believe good partners in reputation-building with a fine product on both ends is a win-win," says Lisa. "I love when Silver Dollar City is mentioned as a presenting sponsor. The editorial third party endorsement of *Bluegrass Today*, allowing us to stamp our title on their product – that is an honor."

Silver Dollar City also makes use of a range of traditional and online media. The website, www.silverdollarcity.com, promotes the entire festival program, while social media, including Facebook and Twitter, is used to support the festival itself and specific performances. Silver Dollar City boasts over 279,000 Facebook followers and close to 300,000 “likes.”

Not surprisingly, the core audience – 300,000 Season Pass holders – loves music. These guests receive a colorful direct mail newsletter four to five times annually as well as email reminders about the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival and other festivals. The organization is now using CRM (Customer Relationship Management) to learn more about the preferences of individual guests.

D. A. Callaway points out that marketing is as much about building one-to-one relationships with both the bands and guests as it is about media. “We’re in the parking lot, greeting the performers when they get off that tour bus,” D.A. says. “We make them feel welcome right away. We want to make this their home for the time that they’re here.” That is one of the reasons performers love playing at the festival, and they enthusiastically help spread the word about it; bands frequently ask for festival flyers to distribute at their shows. D. A. adds that the park’s technical crew is exceptional; as a result traveling musicians are really happy about the sound quality. This, too, reinforces the festival’s top-notch national reputation.

Next time, we’ll look at how Silver Dollar City serves the community and takes advantage of regional marketing.

This month, we're featuring Silver Dollar City's Bluegrass & BBQ Festival, which runs from May 4 through 29, 2017 in Branson, Missouri. To learn about the festival's marketing program, I spoke with Lisa Rau, Director of PR and Publicity for Silver Dollar City Attractions, and D.A. Callaway, Entertainment Manager and a multiple-time winner of the Bluegrass Promoter of the Year Award.

Last time, I discussed national marketing for the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival. Now let's take a look at how the festival serves the bluegrass community and the Branson area. In addition, we'll see how Silver Dollar City takes advantage of regional marketing.

A unique aspect of the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival that builds on community within the bluegrass field is the festival's "KSMU Youth in Bluegrass Band" contest, now in its sixteenth year. The contest, held in conjunction with public radio station KSMU-FM, encourages young musicians to participate, perform, and potentially win cash prizes. Last year, twenty bands from eleven states entered the contest. D.A. says the contest is "very exciting because it's a pipeline of developing talent. That's exactly where we want to be... we want to be part of who's next." Obviously, this type of competition also helps keep the interest in and love for bluegrass music alive. The performance by winning bands is a popular event during the festival.

KSMU's involvement in the contest is just one of the ways the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival supports the Branson community and achieves local publicity. Within a 200-mile radius, Silver Dollar City actively promotes the festival on radio stations, in newspapers, and on television stations that reach out from the north (Springfield, Missouri area) to the south (Fayetteville, Arkansas area). On the opening day and during the opening week of the festival, as many as a dozen radio remotes take place. D. A. and other staff members spread out across a geographic grid, bringing performers to these remotes, where the bands do interviews and might even play some music. "You seldom see that kind of force supporting a festival locally," says Lisa. As mentioned last time, Terry Herd, host of the national bluegrass radio program, *Into the Blue*, also does broadcasts from the festival.

To supplement the national promotion of the festival, Silver Dollar City saturates the region (southwest Missouri, south central Missouri, and northwest Arkansas) with targeted outreach that includes a video showcasing the kickoff of the festival, television coverage and digital media support. Lisa says they have lots of "boots on the ground" in Branson. Brochure racks in the community are sure to have festival-specific promotions visible, and hotel clerks receive information about how guests can order tickets.

Select local retailers get involved as well; for example, merchants who sell barbecue grills might offer specials and host guest chefs as a tie-in to the "BBQ" part of the festival. This results in additional media coverage and publicity for the festival.

And then, there is the very real impact of Silver Dollar City itself. As one of Branson's major attractions, the theme park has great local brand awareness and a stellar international

reputation of its own. This adds to the credibility of each and every festival. The people of Silver Dollar City – they're called the city's "citizens" – make a huge difference. "The culture here is important," says Lisa. "We're a family, and every single person who works here is encouraged to leave their mark, make a difference, be part of it." Having a dedicated workforce is another aspect of what makes Silver Dollar City and the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival successful.

In 2011, the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival was named Bluegrass Event of the Year by the IBMA (International Bluegrass Music Association). Year after year, it continues to lead the nation as the largest single bluegrass festival. Other bluegrass festivals have even followed its lead in adding a BBQ component.

Despite this ongoing success, Silver Dollar City doesn't rest on its laurels; rather, it is always seeking ways to make things better as it looks ahead to the future. Long a bluegrass and gospel music enthusiast, D.A. continues to attend lots of festivals and shows. "It's a good way to see who's who, who's hot, and who everybody's talking about," says D.A. "We've got to know those things. That keeps our festival fresh, too." That is why D.A. searches out new talent and builds personal relationships all around the country. It's one more contributing factor to what makes Silver Dollar City's Bluegrass & BBQ Festival so special.

This month, as part of our series about bluegrass marketers, we're going to visit with Trinity River Band. This family band from Callahan, Florida has made a big name for itself in bluegrass, all through its own efforts. I spoke with Mike Harris, "fearless leader" of the Harris family, aka Trinity River Band.

It all started by accident, when twelve-year old Sarah Harris, who loved to sing, wanted to learn how to play the guitar. Her younger brother Josh then wanted to learn the banjo. Pretty soon father Mike (guitar, vocals), mother Lisa (bass, vocals), and children Sarah (mandolin, vocals), Joshua (banjo, resonator guitar, vocals) and Brianna (fiddle, vocals), started to play together as the Harris Family. After four years of enjoying the experience, Mike and Lisa made the decision to leave their careers and pursue their dream full-time as the Trinity River Band. It has now been almost a decade of touring, producing seven albums, and winning multiple awards, and they've never looked back. "There's no greater blessing to do what you love with who you love," says Mike.

Trinity River Band is not just a family band, it is a family business. Mike ran his own business previously and had extensive sales experience, so he decided early on that the band would do everything they possibly could themselves. The reasons were pretty simple: "In the beginning, we couldn't afford going outside," says Mike. "But we also wanted to maintain control and make sure our resources were well spent." So the band not only manages its own marketing and bookings, it also started its own record label, Orange Blossom Records, and built a state-of-the-art recording studio.

Mike recognizes that many bluegrass bands have to hold other jobs while playing their music, but Trinity River Band approaches their music as a full-time business. The family typically works six days a week and sometimes has to be driving to a performance venue on the seventh day. Everyone has a specific task, whether it's making phone calls, booking performance dates, keeping up the website and social media, or even working in the recording studio. "We don't always get to rehearse as often as we'd like," Mike says with a laugh.

Trinity River Band also has to fight the negative perception of being a family band – sometimes taken less seriously in the business – and being from northeast Florida, not exactly well known for bluegrass music. Once DJs and fans hear their songs, however, those perceptions quickly fade away.

Trinity River Band learned early on never to sacrifice quality. For example, the band uses the best studio equipment and the highest quality graphics to brand itself. It also produces the best quality CDs for airplay. "We want to make a professional presentation, so we put a quality Orange Blossom label on every CD, and we send it in a transparent holder with a letter to DJs," says Mike. "Why should a DJ listen to it if the outside doesn't look good?"

As for marketing, Trinity River Band started out by focusing on the methods that would be the least expensive and provide the widest exposure, and that remains the strategy today.

That means the two primary means of the band's marketing are social media and promoting their albums directly to radio DJs.

The band has an excellent website (<http://www.trinityriverband.com>) where they sell their music and merchandise, an active Facebook page (over 13,000 followers) and a Twitter feed (close to 800 followers). They have also started to use Instagram to attract a younger audience. Social media is used for general marketing and also to promote their appearances at festivals and shows. Mike says for specific concerts, he uses Facebook advertising targeted to certain demographics. He finds it has an excellent ROI.

Next time, we'll take a closer look at how Trinity River Band promotes its music to both radio DJs and fans.

This month, I'm writing about Trinity River Band, a family band from Callahan, Florida that has made a big name for itself in bluegrass, all through its own efforts. I spoke with Mike Harris, guitar player, singer and "fearless leader" of the Harris family, aka Trinity River Band.

Last time, we talked about how the band operates as a business and discussed some of its general marketing efforts. Now we'll look at the importance of marketing to both radio DJs and fans.

Mike believes that the biggest key to the band's success has been Trinity River Band's airplay on national radio – and that can only happen by getting their music into the hands of radio DJs. The band actively communicates with DJs via telephone and email. "It's the DJs who have the ability to disseminate our music to the largest spectrum of people," says Mike.

As mentioned previously, DJs receive high quality branded CDs from the band's own record label, Orange Blossom Records, which records other artists as well. Just as important, says Mike, is the band's use of *Bluegrass Today* to reach DJs. "*Bluegrass Today* has a unique way of marketing directly to DJs," says Mike. "There's a level of credibility gained with advertising on *Bluegrass Today* and being associated with other leading performers."

Advertising with *Bluegrass Today* pays almost instant dividends with DJs, says Mike. They listen to Trinity River Band's music and that encourages them to give it airplay. Mike is convinced repeated airplay is one reason their album, "Better Than Blue," including the Spirit Awards Song of the Year winner "A Sinner's Prayer," became so popular. "Things We Do for Dreams," their most recent album, had two #4 songs and one #1 song on the *Bluegrass Today* charts. Now, *Bluegrass Today* has become "an indispensable part" of promoting Trinity River Band's music, says Mike. When the band releases new music, Mike schedules four to eight weeks of an advertising package with *Bluegrass Today*.

Marketing to fans is the other part of the band's success formula. The band uses Facebook as its main social engagement tool and also reaches fans via email marketing. But one of the primary keys to engaging enthusiastic fans is something Mike says the band learned from their friend Rhonda Vincent. "We go out and meet the fans before we play," says Mike, "and we stay around afterwards for hours. We spend time engaging with people – that's something a lot of other bands don't do." Being approachable and authentic has made a big difference in terms of attracting a loyal following and getting to know people everywhere they go. "We also have a high energy show," says Mike, "so we gain a lot of new fans when we perform live. We sell a lot of CDs at our performances."

Still, Mike admits that Trinity River Band can do better when it comes to fan marketing. "We did a little market research from the stage at a show," Mike says. "We asked how many fans heard of a particular song of ours and a lot of hands went up. When we asked how many fans knew we recorded that song, fewer hands went up. And when we asked how many fans had seen us perform live before, even fewer hands went up." Mike realized that fans recognize their songs but don't necessarily associate them with Trinity River Band. To

him, that means the band needs to do more video of its performances. “We need to use Facebook Live, and we need to make better use of high quality video in general,” says Mike. Later this year, the band will produce its first professional music video.

That attitude – to keep learning from their fans – is typical of Mike Harris and Trinity River Band. They are always looking for ways to delight fans, improve their marketing, and strive to be the best. For Trinity River Band, it’s all part of being in the bluegrass music business.

This month, as part of our series about bluegrass marketers, we're going to take a look at Mill Town Music Hall in Bremen, Georgia. Located off Interstate 20 about an hour west of Atlanta, Mill Town Music Hall opened in January 2012 and has been a home to quality entertainment ever since.

I spoke with Steve Bennett, Mill Town's general manager, who told me that, from the very start, the concept was to present top-notch performances in a family-friendly, alcohol-free venue. Mill Town Music Hall is a first-class entertainment venue, from the seating and amenities to the sound and lighting. The Music Hall is not just a place to hear great music; it is also a vibrant part of the community, where church services are held twice a week and youth groups are welcome. In fact, Mill Town Music Hall has been directly responsible for helping improve the economy of the small city of Bremen.

Mill Town Music Hall prides itself on offering a variety of entertainment. A look at their current calendar is proof: They boast performances by such artists as Chubby Checker, Gene Watson, The Oak Ridge Boys, and Billy Ray Cyrus. While these are all premier acts, the core audience, says Steve, is primarily interested in older country music. Bluegrass music fits nicely as a genre, but since the venue is not exclusively used for bluegrass concerts, it takes specialized, targeted marketing to promote the bluegrass shows.

Early on in Mill Town Music Hall's existence, bluegrass was included in the mix of entertainment. However, back then, promotion was more reactive, says Steve. "In the early days, we bought advertising kind of late, especially when we had seats to fill at the last minute for particular shows. Now we're trying to do a better job of planning the promotion as part of our overall strategy."

Late this year and early next year, Mill Town Music Hall will host three impressive bluegrass shows: Rhonda Vincent and Daryle Singletary on October 19, The SteelDrivers on November 10, and Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver on January 13. This presents Mill Town with the opportunity to begin promoting the shows together, several months in advance, so bluegrass fans know about them well before they occur.

As with any bluegrass venue, marketing for the performances needs to reach fans in the immediate area as well as regionally. Locally, Mill Town Music Hall advertises in local newspapers; in addition, the newspapers run articles written by Mill Town that serve to promote both the venue and the shows. These "advertorials," which often include a photo, result in effective publicity at the local level. Mill Town also reaches out to local radio stations; there is no bluegrass station in the immediate area, but there is a classic country station that can be used to promote the bluegrass performances.

Also effective locally are promotions done by the artists themselves. For example, at a prior performance by Rhonda Vincent, the bluegrass star did an informal video, showing her walking around her bus, the dressing room and backstage. She talked about how much she enjoyed performing at Mill Town and asked people to come to the show. The five-minute

video was posted on Facebook and Steve is confident it resulted in some last-minute buzz and ticket sales. “When people see the artist at the venue, it just raises the excitement,” Steve says. When quality video of live performances is available from artists, it is used to promote the upcoming shows on YouTube and Facebook.

Next time, we’ll discuss how Mill Town Music Hall makes use of social media and *Bluegrass Today* to promote its bluegrass shows.

This month, I'm writing about Mill Town Music Hall in Bremen, Georgia. I spoke with Steve Bennett, Mill Town's general manager, to learn how the venue promotes bluegrass shows.

Last time, I discussed Mill Town's local marketing for its bluegrass shows, including the use of promotional videos by performing artists. Now we'll take a look at the entertainment venue's digital and social media marketing, plus its use of *Bluegrass Today*.

To promote its shows, Mill Town Music Hall sends out email blasts to about 11,000 email newsletter subscribers, targeting the emails to appropriate audiences. Through its excellent website, [<http://miltownmusicahall.com/default.php>] Mill Town Music Hall promotes upcoming shows on the home page and makes it easy to order tickets online. Links to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Pinterest are displayed at the top of every page on the site. While Mill Town makes use of all of these social media networks, Steve says the Facebook page, which has over 11,000 followers, is the most active social medium for marketing. In fact, Mill Town makes effective use of targeted Facebook ads, particularly to fans of the performers that are well known in the bluegrass arena. These fans are likely to be top prospects for Mill Town's bluegrass shows.

Performers themselves will often supplement show promotions by mentioning the dates of their appearances on their websites and Facebook pages. In addition, Mill Town Music Hall's performances will often be promoted by other regional digital media. The *Southern Travel Guide*, for example, has posted photos of Mill Town performances on its Facebook page. Steve has found that bluegrass fans will travel to see top performers; they are just as likely to come from a few hundred miles away as from the local area.

The advertising medium Mill Town depends on the most for promoting its bluegrass performances is *Bluegrass Today*. "That's the first place we go when we have a bluegrass show to market," Steve says. Mill Town places banner ads on the site using geo-targeting (ads served up to specific geographic areas) to reach bluegrass fans with more precision. That makes Mill Town's ad buy very efficient. He adds, "One thing I love about *Bluegrass Today* is I get weekly figures for how many people are viewing our ad and how many are clicking through. I get more detailed information from *Bluegrass Today* than from anybody else. I know I'm getting a bang for my buck."

Steve is also satisfied with the personal attention he receives from *Bluegrass Today*. "They follow up to make sure we're happy, that we're seeing the results we want and how that turns into ticket sales. I've been really pleased with that."

When it comes to promotional incentives, Steve believes it is important to maintain quality and integrity, so he is not in favor of offering discounts on tickets. "We don't want to create the impression that we slash prices a couple of weeks before a show, even if it hasn't sold out," he says. In the past, however, Mill Town has offered a modest discount – \$5 off a

ticket purchased through *Bluegrass Today* when a promotional code is used. This provides a meaningful way to track the relationship of advertising to ticket sales.

Bluegrass continues to be a promising music genre for Mill Town Music Hall, and the potential is there for adding more bluegrass shows in the future. “We’re taking it slow,” Steve says. “We look at every show on a case by case basis to see the response.” One thing is certain – whether it’s bluegrass, country, Southern gospel, or even pop, Mill Town Music Hall always aims to create a first-class, memorable experience for its guests.

In the last three months, I have written about bluegrass marketing from the perspective of a bluegrass festival, a bluegrass venue, and a bluegrass band. I interviewed:

- Lisa Rau and D.A. Callaway, who are responsible for Silver Dollar City's Bluegrass & BBQ Festival in Branson, Missouri
- Steve Bennett, general manager of Mill Town Music Hall in Bremen, Georgia
- Mike Harris, "fearless leader" of the Trinity River Band, based in Callahan, Florida.

This month, I'd like to highlight the lessons learned from these three bluegrass marketers.

Let's start with the bluegrass festival and bluegrass venue. As you may recall, Silver Dollar City's three-week long Bluegrass & BBQ Festival featured an all-star lineup that included Ricky Skaggs, Rhonda Vincent, and the Grascals – about 65 bluegrass performers in all, coupled with some of the best barbecue anywhere. The festival was held within Silver Dollar City, a theme park in the Ozark Mountains region that attracts some two million guests annually. Bluegrass & BBQ is an outgrowth of the Mountain Folk Music Festival that started in 1975.

We can extract a few important marketing lessons from this information: First, this festival is distinctive and unique in that it runs over an extended period of time and features top talent. These two factors, length of time and great artists, have the potential to draw a large audience from near and far. Second, the festival is held at an enticing venue known for music festivals (there are eight of them). Finally, the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival has a long history and, as a result, a solid, on-going reputation as a top-notch festival. From a marketing perspective, this enhances its credibility in the eyes of bluegrass fans, who know the festival is well worth the trip and the price of admission.

Like Silver Dollar City, Mill Town Music Hall offers a variety of music shows, not just bluegrass, but the core audience is primarily interested in older country music, so bluegrass music fits nicely as a genre. When Mill Town offers bluegrass concerts, it does so with the same attention to quality as Silver Dollar City, featuring leading bluegrass artists. Mill Town has also been home to bluegrass concerts for many years so, as with the Bluegrass & BBQ Festival, there is strong awareness among bluegrass fans for Mill Town's bluegrass shows. This year, with three bluegrass shows scheduled for October, November, and January, Mill Town Music Hall will promote the shows together, several months in advance. The lesson here is: Even if you are a general performance venue, use specialized, targeted marketing to promote bluegrass shows to a bluegrass fan base.

Silver Dollar City and Mill Town Music Hall recognize the value of local and regional marketing. Bluegrass fans are a committed and engaged group, so it is not unusual for them to travel several hundred miles to see and hear their favorite artists. Silver Dollar City actively promotes Bluegrass & BBQ on local radio and television stations and does numerous radio remotes on opening day and during the festival. Silver Dollar City also developed a relationship with a local public radio station, KSMU-FM, which sponsors the "KSMU Youth in Bluegrass Band" contest each year. Mill Town Music Hall makes effective

use of local newspapers that run “advertorials,” or articles promoting the shows. Also effective for Mill Town locally are promotions done by the artists themselves. In addition, Mill Town Music Hall makes excellent use of targeted Facebook ads, particularly to fans of the performers that are well known in the bluegrass arena. These fans are likely to be top prospect for Mill Town’s bluegrass shows.

When it comes to reaching beyond the local area, Silver Dollar City and Mill Town Music Hall both rely on *Bluegrass Today*. For this year’s Bluegrass & BBQ Festival, Silver Dollar City integrated *Bluegrass Today* advertising with promotional sponsorship of the national bluegrass radio program, *Into the Blue*. The editorial endorsement of *Bluegrass Today* was an added benefit. Mill Town Music Hall employs *Bluegrass Today* to place banner ads using geo-targeting (ads served up to specific geographic areas) to reach bluegrass fans with more precision. This makes Mill Town’s ad buy very efficient.

Next time, we’ll take a look at lessons learned from promoting a bluegrass band.

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- Mike Harris, "fearless leader" of the Trinity River Band, based in Callahan, Florida.

Previously, I highlighted lessons learned from promoting Silver Dollar City's Bluegrass & BBQ Festival and Mill Town Music Hall's bluegrass shows. This time, let's talk about lessons learned from marketing a bluegrass band.

Trinity River Band from Callahan, Florida is a family band made up of the members of the Harris family: father Mike (guitar, vocals), mother Lisa (bass, vocals), and children Sarah (mandolin, vocals), Joshua (banjo, resonator guitar, vocals) and Brianna (fiddle, vocals). Because it is a family band, Mike, who previously ran his own business and had extensive sales experience, decided to run it as a full-time family business. The band not only manages its own marketing and bookings, it also started its own record label, Orange Blossom Records, and built a state-of-the-art recording studio.

One lesson from the Trinity River Band's approach to marketing is loud and clear: Never sacrifice quality. The band uses the best studio equipment to record and the highest quality graphics to brand itself. As for marketing, Trinity River Band focuses on methods that are the least expensive but provide the widest exposure: social media and promoting their albums directly to radio DJs.

An active Facebook page, a Twitter feed, and Instagram are all part of the mix, along with an excellent website [<http://www.trinityriverband.com>] that both promotes the band and is used for online sales. The band uses Facebook as its main social engagement tool and also reaches fans via email marketing. But one of the primary keys to engaging enthusiastic fans is something Mike says the band learned from their friend Rhonda Vincent. "We go out and meet the fans before we play," says Mike, "and we stay around afterwards for hours. We spend time engaging with people – that's something a lot of other bands don't do." Being approachable and authentic has made a big difference in terms of attracting a loyal following and getting to know people everywhere they go.

Still, Mike admits that Trinity River Band can do better when it comes to fan marketing. "We did a little market research from the stage at a show," Mike says. "We asked how many fans heard of a particular song of ours and a lot of hands went up. When we asked how many fans knew we recorded that song, fewer hands went up. And when we asked how many fans had seen us perform live before, even fewer hands went up." Mike realized that fans recognize their songs but don't necessarily associate them with Trinity River Band. To him, that means the band needs to do more video of its performances.

Mike believes that the biggest key to the band's success has been Trinity River Band's airplay on national radio – and that can only happen by getting their music into the hands of radio DJs. The band actively communicates with DJs via telephone and email. "It's the DJs who have the ability to disseminate our music to the largest spectrum of people," says Mike.

Trinity River Band also produces the best quality CDs for airplay. DJs receive high quality branded CDs from the band's own record label, Orange Blossom Records. Just as important, says Mike, is the band's use of *Bluegrass Today* to reach DJs. "*Bluegrass Today* has a unique way of marketing directly to DJs," says Mike. "There's a level of credibility gained with advertising on *Bluegrass Today* and being associated with other leading performers."

Advertising with *Bluegrass Today* pays almost instant dividends with DJs, says Mike. They listen to Trinity River Band's music and that encourages them to give it airplay. Mike is convinced repeated airplay is one reason their album, "Better Than Blue," including the Spirit Awards Song of the Year winner "A Sinner's Prayer," became so popular. "Things We Do for Dreams," their most recent album, had two #4 songs and one #1 song on the *Bluegrass Today* charts. Now, *Bluegrass Today* has become "an indispensable part" of promoting Trinity River Band's music, says Mike. When the band releases new music, Mike schedules four to eight weeks of an advertising package with *Bluegrass Today*.

The key bluegrass band marketing takeaways from Trinity River Band are:

1. Maintain a high quality brand image.
2. Use social media and personal appearances to engage your fan base and create enthusiasm.
3. Cultivate DJs by treating them specially.
4. Use *Bluegrass Today* to gain credibility with DJs.

IBMA's "World of Bluegrass" [<https://ibma.org/world-of-bluegrass>] takes place from September 26 through 30, 2017 in Raleigh, North Carolina. The IBMA calls it "A week of bluegrass like no other," and that it is! The activities will include the IBMA Business Conference, the International Bluegrass Music Awards Show, the Wide Open Bluegrass Music Festival, showcase performances, youth events, and the Bluegrass Expo.

Bluegrass Today is proud to tell you that we will be receiving the Distinguished Achievement Award at this year's Awards Show!

The World of Bluegrass offers an exceptional opportunity for bluegrass performers, festival promoters, and marketers to reach bluegrass enthusiasts and make contacts, so we thought it would be helpful to provide you with some ideas for making the most of this landmark event. This email newsletter covers marketing tips specifically for exhibitors at the Bluegrass Expo. The next email newsletter will cover tips for World of Bluegrass attendees.

1. Before the Expo

You'll need to finalize all travel, delivery and booth logistics, make sure all materials and presentations are available, and know when and where to arrive for booth set up. Be sure to test all systems, including computers, to make sure everything works to your satisfaction. From a marketing perspective, you should be prepared before the conference as well:

Create and practice your "elevator pitch."

An "elevator pitch" is a concise statement about what distinguishes your business. (The term is derived from the notion that someone should be able to effectively describe their business in a minute or two – how long it takes to go from the top to the bottom of an office building in an elevator.) Your elevator pitch should be compelling and engaging. What are the most important things you think someone should know about your band, festival, or bluegrass business? Practice and keep refining your pitch until it's second nature. "Customize" your pitch on the fly to make it even more relevant to the person you're addressing.

Consider placing an online ad and making an offer at your booth.

Consider placing an ad on *Bluegrass Today* or in the "Daily Buzz" email newsletter to promote your presence at the Expo. Also consider making an offer at your booth. While a lot of exhibitors give away promotional items just to generate awareness and goodwill, your marketing dollars are probably better spent on an offer that is specifically designed to generate qualified leads or sales for you. Is there something tangible you can offer that will entice a prospect to want to know more about your band, festival, product or service, or even make a purchase at the Expo or soon afterwards? Maybe a special Expo discount, a free item with purchase, or a buy one-get one free offer would be appropriate. If you need to order a promotional giveaway of some kind, leave plenty of time to do so. Whatever you consider offering, relate it to the Expo and use a deadline for responding to your offer to encourage prompt action.

Establish a follow-up process in advance.

A big mistake exhibitors tend to make is not being prepared to follow up appropriately after the Expo is over. Establish in advance a simple follow-up process that allows you to separate your inquiries from your orders, and to further identify qualified leads. You will want to handle all orders first (promptly) and then follow up with qualified leads – those prospects who demonstrated a high level of interest should get priority. Only when orders and qualified leads are taken care of should you follow up with other booth attendees. Figure out in advance how you will handle order fulfillment and how you will communicate with prospects so you'll be ready to hit the ground running when you return from the Expo.

2. At the Expo

Be sure your brand is well represented at the Expo. All of your marketing materials should have a consistent look and feel, and all of your marketing copy should sound like it came from one unified brand. Quality of printing is important. Prep any booth personnel on how to be cordial and professional. Use your elevator pitch, but make sure you also listen to prospects and respond to their individual needs. Be ready to take orders and collect contact information from booth visitors. If you can qualify prospects at your booth and capture their information on a contact form, so much the better. Also use the Expo as an opportunity to network and make key business contacts. You have made a significant promotional investment in having a presence at the Expo, so make the most of your investment.

3. After the Expo

Implement the order and lead fulfillment process you established prior to the Expo. Follow up promptly with all booth visitors, filling orders first and prioritizing top prospects. Your top prospects should become part of an on-going cultivation program: Communicate with them periodically in an attempt to further qualify them and turn them into customers. (This would be a great time to launch or refresh an email newsletter, or to start a blog.) Also do an objective assessment soon after the Expo is over, while details are fresh in your mind. Evaluate your booth, your materials, your overall approach, and the number of orders and leads generated so you know what you could do better in the future.

Next time: Tips for World of Bluegrass attendees.

Last time, I discussed a number of marketing tactics for exhibitors at the Bluegrass Expo during the IBMA's "World of Bluegrass," September 26 through 30, 2017 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Now let's consider what you should be thinking about as an attendee to any of the World of Bluegrass activities or events.

Get Your "Elevator Pitch" Ready.

I talked about the elevator pitch in my last email from the perspective of an Expo exhibitor, but it's just as important to have an elevator pitch as an attendee. An "elevator pitch" is a concise statement about what distinguishes your business. (The term is derived from the notion that someone should be able to effectively describe their business in a minute or two – how long it takes to go from the top to the bottom of an office building in an elevator.) Your elevator pitch should be compelling and engaging. What are the most important things you think someone should know about your band, festival, or bluegrass business? Practice and keep refining your pitch until it's second nature. "Customize" your pitch on the fly to make it even more relevant to the person you're addressing. You never know if the person you meet as an attendee will turn out to be a good prospect, or someone who can benefit your business in some way.

Invest in High Quality Business Cards.

It is amazing how important a little business card can be – but that business card remains the primary one-to-one personal contact medium for conferences and shows, even with the dominance of digital marketing. Don't skimp on the print quality of your business cards. Have plenty on hand and distribute them liberally. A business card can do much more than just deliver basic contact information. You can make it work harder for you in any number of ways. For example, use the back of the card to include a version of your elevator pitch or to list key qualities of your band, festival, product or service. Or consider using a business card with an extra flap that includes a business overview or even a photo. Maybe you could try orienting your business card vertically instead of horizontally so it stands out. Some marketers even put a "QR" code on their cards that can be scanned for additional information. And don't forget to include URLs for your website and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as an email address, on the card.

Take Notes at Conference Sessions.

If you'll be attending the IBMA Business Conference, you will probably choose some sessions that could have a direct impact on your business. Sometimes, just an idea or two that you hear at such sessions can turn out to be worth the price of the entire conference. That's why it pays to take notes. Bring along a slim notepad, take notes on your smartphone or tablet, or download a free app such as "Voice Recorder" to record sessions. Pay attention to statistics or interesting points you hear at conference sessions, companies you might want to research later, people's names and contact details, information about prospects, action

items for when you return, and so on. Taking notes will help you do a more effective marketing job following up after the conference and recalling key things about it.

Make Smart Use of Your Time.

There are good business reasons for attending World of Bluegrass whether you're a bluegrass performer, festival promoter, or product or service marketer. Think in advance about the best ways to get the most out of attending. If you're exhibiting at the Expo, how can you maximize your investment? If you're attending the conference, which sessions would be the most valuable for you? Can you arrange meetings with business associates, suppliers, or top prospects? Can you make media contacts or connect with bluegrass promoters and artists? What do you want to learn? Who do you want to meet? Which exhibitors are important to see? How can you use your time at the event to make contacts and generate business? (And of course, enjoy yourself and hear some great music, too!)

A Final Point...

World of Bluegrass is the single largest bluegrass extravaganza of the year, so even if you are not planning to be there, you can use it to your marketing advantage. Think about ways to wrap marketing promotions around the week. Consider these ideas: Place an ad on *Bluegrass Today* or in the "Daily Buzz" email newsletter congratulating one or more of this year's awards recipients and relate it to your own business; for example, maybe a performer who won an award will be appearing at your bluegrass festival. Put out a special email newsletter related to World of Bluegrass, blog about World of Bluegrass, or make a special offer good only during World of Bluegrass. This is a great opportunity to tie in your marketing with a high-profile landmark event that perfectly targets your audience.

What is the first brand that comes to mind in the category “cola soft drinks”? What is the first brand that comes to mind in the category “Internet search”? One more... What is the first brand that comes to mind in the category “smartphones”?

Chances are you and a lot of other readers of “Sound Marketing for Bluegrass” answered Coca-Cola to the first question, Google to the second question, and Apple to the third question. The reason is that these brands have something marketers call “top of mind awareness.” Basically, that means a certain brand is the first brand you think of in a particular product category.

It’s no accident. Coca-Cola, Google, and Apple are three brands that have achieved top of mind awareness in their categories because they are undisputed category leaders. More than that, they are brands that have such high awareness they would come to mind as top brands even *outside* their categories. That’s why it is no surprise that these brands were ranked the world’s three most valuable brands [<http://interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2016/ranking/>] in last year’s “Best Global Brands” report published by the leading international branding agency, Interbrand.

So this month’s topic is **top of mind awareness**, and how to achieve it. Now I recognize that it would be unrealistic to compare brands with the global awareness of Coca-Cola, Google, and Apple to a brand in the world of bluegrass, such as a bluegrass artist, a bluegrass festival, or a bluegrass-related product. But the basic marketing principles employed by these three brands are the same for any brand, and a bluegrass marketer can apply those principles on a smaller scale.

In some respects, bluegrass marketers actually have it easier than Coca-Cola, Google, and Apple. Why? Because you need to reach a much smaller audience that has a highly specialized interest, namely bluegrass. Experts call this “niche marketing” – marketing to a very specific audience that you can identify and cater to with targeted, individual, personalized marketing communications.

The first principle to achieving top of mind awareness is: Identify your target audience.

Every bluegrass marketer wants to reach bluegrass enthusiasts, of course. Depending on your specific sub-category in bluegrass, however, you can refine your target audience even further. For example, as a performing artist, you can concentrate your marketing efforts on people who are already your fans. You need to maintain fan loyalty by keeping in touch with them on a regular basis. You should also ask them to be your champions and help promote your music to a wider audience. In addition, you can reach out to fans of other bluegrass performers.

As a festival promoter, you can target previous festival attendees and encourage them to spread the word about an upcoming event to family and friends. You can target bluegrass

fans geographically. You can also enlist the assistance of performing artists appearing at your festival to target their fan base and promote their appearance at your festival.

As a marketer of a bluegrass product, you can target current and past customers. Make sure they have all the information they need about your product, and also inform them first of any new products or special offers. Ask your customers for referrals, because they can often be your best source of new business. Target potential customers by offering information of value or a new customer purchase incentive, such as a product discount or free gift with purchase.

To develop top of mind awareness with your target audience, an important overarching concept is **consistency**. You must maintain consistency in terms of:

- the frequency of contact you have with your audience
- the way you present your brand to your audience
- the quality of your marketing message, and
- the quality and timeliness of your follow up.

You achieve top of mind awareness when a customer believes he or she is important to your brand, and when a prospective customer regards your brand as superior to others in your category.

Next time: How media plays a key role in top of mind awareness.

This month, we're talking about "top of mind awareness." As I mentioned last time, top of mind awareness basically means a certain brand is the first brand you think of in a particular product category. Previously, I discussed the first principle of achieving top of mind awareness, which is: **Identify your target audience.**

Here's the second principle of achieving top of mind awareness: **Take full advantage of the reach, frequency and impact of media.**

Let's define those terms...

Reach is how many people your marketing message reaches a single time.

Frequency is the number of times you reach those people with your marketing message.

Impact is the effect your marketing message has on the people you reach.

Media is the delivery vehicle for your marketing message.

Top of mind awareness is best achieved using a media strategy that maximizes reach, frequency, and impact. Marketers who achieve top of mind awareness do so with a media strategy that keeps them in front of their target audience for the long term.

As a bluegrass marketer, you have a number of media choices that can sometimes be bewildering. The growth and popularity of digital media has made the media world even more complex. The good news is that digital, or online media, tends to be very cost-effective – you can *reach* your target bluegrass audience with considerable *frequency* to achieve the desired *impact* at a reasonable cost.

Bluegrass Today, coupled with the *Bluegrass Today Daily Buzz* email newsletter, is the most targeted online bluegrass medium with the greatest reach among bluegrass enthusiasts. Bluegrass marketers who schedule frequent *Bluegrass Today* advertising enjoy the highest impact in the bluegrass market. These marketers are likely to be the bluegrass brands that achieve top of mind awareness.

Other media that can help bluegrass marketers achieve top of mind awareness include:

- social media that reaches bluegrass fans, particularly Facebook (along with targeted Facebook ads)
- advertising on bluegrass and country radio stations
- advertising on the national bluegrass radio show, *Into the Blue*
- promotions and publicity that result in coverage by media most likely to reach bluegrass fans.

If budget allows, it is often a good strategy to achieve broad penetration of the bluegrass audience by using a number of media in combination.

Remember, the same principle noted above applies to all of the media just mentioned if you want to achieve top of mind awareness: You need reach, frequency, and impact.

The third principle of achieving top of mind awareness is: **Be a leader all the time.**

What this comes down to is recognizing the responsibility of being a top brand in the bluegrass world. What do top brands do? They:

- know their customers, delight their customers, build a strong emotional bond with their customers, and provide exceptional customer service
- exude quality in everything they do: brand image, product quality, follow up and order fulfillment, etc.
- be a brand that is the envy of every other brand in your category.

Achieving top of mind awareness is not easy – but the effort is worth it. Not only will you become the leader in your category, you'll see that leadership position pay off in the positive, direct impact it has on your business.

One of the more challenging aspects of marketing, for large and small marketers alike, is marketing ROI (Return On Investment). The renowned retailer John Wanamaker (1838 – 1922) famously said, “Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don’t know which half.” Of course, you want to be sure your marketing investment is not wasted either, but how do you really know? This is an especially difficult question to answer today, because there are so many more marketing channels than in John Wanamaker’s time.

Answering the marketing ROI question becomes easier if you define the specific criteria you want to measure. In the business world, these criteria are called “Key Performance Indicators,” or “KPIs.” Here’s the basic definition of a KPI: It is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively you are achieving certain critical objectives. In a recent article for MarketingProfs.com, [<https://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2017/32701/the-top-5-kpis-marketers-need-to-measure-and-how-to-measure-and-improve-them>] Juuso Lyytikka identifies “the top 5 KPIs marketers need to measure.” I recommend you read the entire article, which does a great job of explaining how to measure and improve each of the KPIs. (Free registration for MarketingProfs is required.)

In his article, Lyytikka includes “Marketing ROI” as one of the top five KPIs. He writes that marketing ROI “can be fairly difficult to measure. The more complex your marketing mix, the more touchpoints there are to consider. You must also think about when to measure results. The impact across your efforts will take variable amounts of time.” Lyytikka identifies the four “most common methods” of measuring marketing ROI: Single attribution, multi-touch attribution, test groups, and marketing mix modeling. The article explains each of these in detail, so I won’t go into that here. I do want to mention, though, Lyytikka’s advice for improving marketing ROI. He says measuring ROI should not be based on “vanity metrics,” such as social shares or Facebook “likes,” and that data should be analyzed “before, during, and after every marketing activity.” He goes on to say, “Measure every aspect of the marketing mix over time and attribute revenue to all stages of the funnel. Then, use the insight you derive to focus on the right channels – those that bring the greatest returns.”

There are important lessons for bluegrass marketers in Lyytikka’s comments about marketing ROI. One lesson: You should be prepared to measure things that matter. For example, if you place advertising with *Bluegrass Today*, you want to be able to measure the ad response. Clicks on the online ad are one key measurement, but to get the most out of your investment, you should also be measuring conversions – prospects who go beyond the first click and take a second more qualifying action. Once someone clicks on your ad, can you attribute the next action they take to that ad? To find this out, your landing page for the ad should be designed to capture a prospect’s action. If you’re a festival promoter, that landing page might direct prospects to the lineup of performers and further information about the festival. There should be a form prospects can complete for more information, or you could send them directly to a ticket order page. If you’re an artist, that landing page should direct prospects to a page where they can sample your music and then order your CD.

Another lesson relates to the concept of “before, during and after.” Using the above example, it would be useful to measure online activity at three stages: Before you place an ad, while the ad is running, and after the ad runs. Analyze the impact of the advertising to see if it increases response over the “before” stage and if you are still getting response from the ad during the “after” stage. All of this information will contribute to achieving a better marketing ROI.

Next time: Other important KPIs you should measure.

Last time, I discussed marketing ROI, an important KPI (Key Performance Indicator) marketers need to measure. While marketing ROI is critically important, there are other KPIs that you, as a bluegrass marketer, should be aware of. I will again reference the article by Juuso Lyytikka for MarketingProfs.com, [<https://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2017/32701/the-top-5-kpis-marketers-need-to-measure-and-how-to-measure-and-improve-them>] in which he highlights what he believes are “the top 5 KPIs marketers need to measure.” They are:

1. Customer Lifetime Value
2. Customer Acquisition Cost
3. Marketing ROI
4. Traffic-to-Lead Conversions
5. Lead-to-Customer Conversions

I suggest you read Lyytikka’s article in its entirety for explanations of each of these KPIs (free registration for MarketingProfs is required). Here, I am going to concentrate only on the first two KPIs mentioned by Lyytikka, Customer Lifetime Value and Customer Acquisition Cost. These KPIs really get to the heart of why marketing is important in the first place: to help acquire and retain customers.

“Customer Lifetime Value” is a measurement that tells you how much a customer is worth while they remain your customer. By analyzing the right data, you can determine when someone becomes your customer, how much they buy from you during each transaction, and what that customer’s value is to you over time. It is also useful to know how often a customer buys from you and, ultimately, how long that individual remains your customer. All of these data points contribute to knowing the Customer Lifetime Value.

Why is Customer Lifetime Value important? For one thing, it will help you identify your most valuable customers and, once you do, you might want to segment them and treat them specially. For example, your very best customers might deserve VIP tickets or special discounts. Another reason Customer Lifetime Value is important: You could use this data to test a customer loyalty program and determine if it has a positive impact on the frequency and amount of customers’ purchases over time.

“Customer Acquisition Cost” measures how much money you invest to acquire a customer. You determine this cost by dividing the total cost of acquiring customers by the number of new customers acquired during a particular period of time. Often, the cost to acquire a customer is higher than the cost to retain that customer over time. That’s because, typically, a customer who has purchased from you once will purchase from you again without a costly effort on your part to retain and renew that business. Acquiring a new customer, however, is a different story, since that customer has never done business with you before.

Why is Customer Acquisition Cost important? It tells you how much money you need to invest to get a new customer. If that cost seems too high, Lyytikka has some good

suggestions for improvement in his article; among them, “conversion rate optimization” techniques such as “analyzing your messaging” and “clear calls to action,” particularly on your landing pages. Lyytikka points out that “the higher the conversion rate, the lower your CAC [Custom Acquisition Cost] (and the more revenue you generate).” He also believes “encouraging word-of-mouth” is another way to lower your Customer Acquisition Cost.

KPIs, such as Marketing ROI, Customer Lifetime Value, and Customer Acquisition Cost are essential ways to not just measure the effectiveness of your marketing efforts, but help improve your efforts by analyzing available data. I hope this month’s edition of “Sound Marketing for Bluegrass” has been helpful in explaining the importance of marketing KPIs.

How much do you really know about your prospects and customers? In-depth knowledge about the individuals who may be interested in becoming customers, or about customers themselves, is elusive. Most marketers do a reasonably good job of collecting the most basic data, such as name, address, phone number, and email address. But that data tells you little about interests, interactions, and purchasing criteria – and those are the pieces of marketing intelligence that are the most valuable to marketers.

Here are some of the things you might really want to know about prospective customers:

- How can you best reach prospects with your marketing message? What media strategy would be the most effective to use?
- If prospects are inquiring about your product, how did they find out about you?
- What interactions have they had with you prior to making a purchase?
- What do they need to know to make a purchase? How can you facilitate that purchase?
- What is the conversion rate of prospects to customers? What actions can you take to increase that conversion rate?

Here are some of the things you might really want to know about your customers:

- How long have they been customers?
- Do you have lapsed customers and, if so, why did they stop purchasing from you?
- How often do current customers purchase from you?
- What do they purchase?
- What is the average amount of money they spend with you?
- What do they like or dislike about your offerings?
- How satisfied are they with your customer service?
- Would they recommend your product or service to others?

Another way to look at this marketing challenge is to view it in terms of *customer motivation*. According to MECLABS, a research organization that is the parent of the publication MarketingSherpa, “Motivation is the single most important factor when it comes to affecting conversion. You can’t change something as intrinsic to your customers as motivation. You can, however, gain an understanding of it.”

An intriguing post [<https://sherpablog.marketingsherpa.com/b2c-marketing-2/five-questions-understand-customer-motivation/>] in the MarketingSherpa blog shares some valuable insights into five questions to ask so you have a better understanding of customer motivation:

1. Where is your customer in the thought sequence?
2. Where is the traffic coming from?
3. What conclusions do your prospects need to make before buying?
4. What are their pain points?
5. What do they value?

If you could have a conversation with every one of your prospects and customers, you would be able to learn a lot of this information, but that is not feasible. Still, imagine how valuable it would be to have such insights.

You should know that even leading marketers struggle with getting answers to the above questions. According to recent research, [<https://retail.emarketer.com/article/your-customers-think-you-know-what-theyve-been-buying/59e787c3ebd4000aa48d8e89>] 60 percent of brand marketers report that a lack of customer willingness to share data is part of the problem. In addition, 42 percent of brand marketers say they lack integration between data collection apps, and 20 percent do not even have the technology necessary to collect online customer data.

Sometimes, these marketers rely on solutions such as CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems to analyze their prospects and customers. However, CRM systems can be costly and complex. So what are some of the ways you can gain prospect and customer intelligence and put it to good use?

That's what I'll talk about next time.

Last time, I wrote about some of the things you might really want to know about prospective customers and customers. I also listed five questions you should ask to have a better understanding of customer motivation. Now let's talk about some of the ways you can gain prospect and customer intelligence and put it to good use:

1. Audience research

There is a wealth of research available on audiences, and that is an excellent place to start. If you have an understanding of the bluegrass audience in general, you will be more likely to be able to hone in on the needs and wants of your prospective customers and customers. Research statistics about the bluegrass audience are available from the IBMA. [<https://ibma.org/press/archives/get-know-your-customer-simmons-research-bluegrass-audience>]

2. Prospect feedback

Being aware of prospect feedback provides you with immediate, relevant insight into the interests of prospects. Bluegrass prospects may provide their specific feedback to you in the form of comments or inquiries via your website or your social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets. They might also use email, direct mail, or the phone to contact you. You should always respond promptly to prospect feedback you receive directly, and you should encourage a dialog with each prospect until you answer the inquiry or sufficiently address the comment. You can also get more general feedback from prospects who may leave comments on the social media of other bluegrass artists, festivals, or product marketers.

3. Prospect qualification questions

A great way to learn more about a prospect is to ask the individual to answer questions designed to qualify their interest. The questions can help identify specific interests and timeframe for purchase. If you provide a valuable incentive, such as a free gift or a discount on the first order, the prospect may be willing to provide you with answers to questions that will help you do a better job of following up with the right information and potentially lead to a better lead-to-sale conversion rate.

4. Customer feedback

To maintain open lines of communication with customers, it is always a good idea to encourage feedback. You can learn quite a bit just by asking a few pertinent questions. You may have noticed that often, when you call a large company's customer service phone number, a representative will assist you and then ask you to stay on the line to answer a few questions about the quality of the call. This is a method to generate immediate feedback to determine if a customer's needs are met during the call. You can use a similar strategy with your bluegrass customers by looking for opportunities to seek feedback. For example, you could ask a few questions in an email reply to a customer, or you could include a brief questionnaire when you fulfill an order.

5. Customer surveys

An excellent way to learn more about your customers is to simply make an effort to ask them questions via a survey. A customer survey is one of the best methods for gaining customer intelligence. Customer surveys are known to generate high response, and a prize or incentive of some kind can boost response even higher. Surveys can collect general information, identify specific needs, or determine the level of customer satisfaction. Survey tools such as Survey Monkey [<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>] and Survey Gizmo, [<https://www.surveygizmo.com/>] which are inexpensive, make it easy to create and send interactive surveys via email or web links. Responses are collected in an automated fashion so you can quickly analyze the results. Both Survey Monkey and Survey Gizmo offer lots of guidance on creating effective surveys.

6. On-site questionnaires

On-site questionnaires are particularly relevant for bluegrass festival marketers. Answers to questions about an individual's demographics (age and gender, for example), the amenities of the event festival-goers are attending, and suggestions for future events can be very valuable in assisting your marketing efforts. You can distribute the questionnaires at the event and ask for them to be returned at the close of the event. Using a drawing for a prize is a way to encourage higher response.

These are some of the techniques you can use to gain insight into your prospective customers and your customers. The more insight you have, the more effective your marketing efforts will be.

We're on the cusp of 2018, so it's a good time to see where marketing is headed and how it will impact bluegrass marketers in the coming year. Here are eight of the most significant trends to be aware of in 2018.

1. The “customer journey” reaches maturity.

Marketing experts have been discussing the concept of the “customer journey” for a while now, and it is likely that 2018 will be the year when this idea fully matures. So what exactly is the customer journey? Here's what Google, arguably one of the world's leading marketers, has to say about it:

[\[https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/data-measurement/machine-learning-customer-journey/\]](https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/data-measurement/machine-learning-customer-journey/)

“Today's leading marketers identify customer intent at all touch points along the journey. There are powerful signals to consider—search intent, videos viewed, content read across the web, and more. This creates an exciting opportunity for marketers to assist customers and offers unparalleled insight when trying to engage a target audience.”

What does this mean for bluegrass marketers? You need to adopt the mindset of *interacting* with your prospective customer or current customer at various points in the customer journey instead of merely *transacting* business. Think about it this way: Customers no longer approach the buying decision in a linear fashion. Instead, they navigate through websites and social media networks, seek information from a variety of sources, evaluate products and services based on interactions with companies and their competitors, and validate their opinions with input from others. The customer journey is highly individualized and complex, and a marketer never really knows exactly when a customer is ready to make a purchase decision. As a result, it is important to develop a relationship with each customer, and to provide them with both rational and emotional reasons to do business with you.

2. Content rules the day.

In 2017, there was a massive movement by non-traditional media giants such as Amazon, Hulu, and Netflix to develop original content to attract and retain viewers. There has been a similar movement on the part of leading marketers who have learned that original content is what prospective customers and customers want. This factor brings a whole new dimension to marketing, because it puts a premium on content creation. A lot of that content is centered around storytelling. Forbes views the storytelling concept this way:

[\[https://www.forbes.com/sites/billeehoward/2017/10/18/trends-marketers-entrepreneurs-2018/-60d0844a3c5f\]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/billeehoward/2017/10/18/trends-marketers-entrepreneurs-2018/-60d0844a3c5f)

“You must tell [customers] the stories they crave to hear, and provide the moments that they seek to feel connected and emotionally engaged. This significant paradigm shift has led to an economy predicated on engagement and experience and has paved

the way for an era of digital marketing driven by strategic, digital marketing analytics rather than naked creativity...

Today, organizations that use artful storytelling to create winning experiences are the ones who are leading our new era of collaborative commerce forward – and moving product, improving engagement and retaining employees.”

This is why content will be an essential part of marketing in 2018.

3. Mobile, mobile, mobile.

According to the Pew Research Center, [<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/28/10-facts-about-smartphones/>] over three-quarters (77 percent) of the U.S. adult population say they own smartphones. More importantly, adults of all ages are using their smartphones, and in some cases tablets, as true mobile connectivity devices. As the Pew Research Center points out, mobile devices have transcended calling and texting and are now important for a variety of activities, including searching the Internet, online shopping, and much more. The fact is mobile devices are now integral parts of consumers’ lives, and they expect companies they do business with to recognize this.

It is critical as a bluegrass marketer to ensure *everything* you do has a mobile component. For example: Is your website mobile friendly? Do you offer text notifications? Is it easy to order products or festival tickets via a smartphone?

4. Social media becomes a marketer’s best friend (or worst enemy).

There is no avoiding it: If you don’t have a strong social media presence, you are at a competitive disadvantage. At the very least, a marketer must have an effective Facebook page that is kept current and enables customer interaction. Facebook also offers marketers unique opportunities, such as targeted ads, live video, and messaging, that can drive new business.

In addition to Facebook, bluegrass marketers should consider whether other social media, such as Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, etc. should be part of a total marketing program. And, of course, it’s important to take advantage of the social media elements of *Bluegrass Today* by listing all events and creating a free listing in the directory section.

Customers actively engage with brands via social media and expect brands to be responsive. Social media can be your best friend if you use it wisely for customer engagement – or your worst enemy if you overlook its influence and neglect to respond to comments, concerns and questions.

Next time: Four more marketing trends for 2018.

This month, I'm covering eight of the most significant marketing trends to be aware of in 2018. Last time I discussed the customer journey, content marketing, mobile marketing, and social media marketing. Here are four more trends:

1. Influencer marketing makes its mark.

Influencer marketing is a hot trend, often interconnected with social media marketing. Just a year ago, a [Forbes article](https://www.forbes.com/sites/ajagrawal/2016/12/27/why-influencer-marketing-will-explode-in-2017/-4d1de36420a9) [https://www.forbes.com/sites/ajagrawal/2016/12/27/why-influencer-marketing-will-explode-in-2017/-4d1de36420a9] cited research about influencer marketing, indicating that 84 percent of marketers said they planned on executing at least one influencer marketing campaign in 2017. Basically, influencer marketing involves engaging influential celebrities, journalists, bloggers and others who agree to mention or promote a product or service.

A great example of how influencer marketing applies to music is [this case study](http://mediakix.com/2016/04/marketing-case-study-coachella-2016/-gs.Gz_19Tg) [http://mediakix.com/2016/04/marketing-case-study-coachella-2016/-gs.Gz_19Tg] of the Coachella Music and Arts Festival. At Coachella 2016, three different brands – American Express, Revolve Clothing Company, and Live Lokai – used strategic influencer campaigns to reach attendees at this world-class festival. Live Lokai is the smallest of the three brands. Live Lokai wanted to promote their bracelets to festival attendees, so the company decided to partner with traditional celebrities and digital influencers. They collaborated with celebrities and social media influencers who wore their bracelets and promoted them via engaging content. While Live Lokai was not a high-profile brand at the start of Coachella, they became a much talked-about brand at the festival due to the influencer campaign, which reached over 40 million people and generated over 2 million “likes.”

2. Video marketing comes to the forefront.

The impact of video as a marketing tool can be seen just in the explosion of YouTube: This digital video network boasts over a billion users with some 30 million visitors *each day* watching nearly 5 billion videos daily! Bluegrass marketers have an exceptional opportunity to take advantage of the video marketing trend because music and video are natural partners. Video is an ideal medium to feature instrumental instruction, highlight a band's newest CD, or promote a bluegrass music festival. It's easier than ever to produce video and include it as part of a marketing program. Video can even be used as an enhancement to your advertising on *Bluegrass Today!*

In 2018, video will become all the more powerful as a marketing medium with new technologies being deployed, including live video streaming (see [Facebook Live](https://live.fb.com/) [https://live.fb.com/] as an example), 360 video (in which a video surrounds a viewer with a 360-degree perspective that the viewer can control), and VR video (“Virtual Reality” video that immerses viewers in highly realistic digital experiences using special glasses). Maybe you can put some of these new techniques to good use.

3. Instantaneous customer service becomes an expectation.

The digital world has done marketers a lot of good, but it has also brought with it a new set of expectations from customers. In becoming more demanding and more impatient, consumers have generally raised the bar for customer service. Customers now expect companies to respond almost instantly to inquiries, and ship and deliver orders immediately (hence the popularity of overnight and even same-day delivery). You'll notice an increasing number of websites now offer automated chat functionality; these sites utilize "chatbots," which automate online conversations with customers so marketers can be more responsive to their needs. Expect chatbots to become increasingly popular [<https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-marketing-trends-2018/>] in 2018:

"Chatbots give brands the chance to interact quickly with their audience in a way that feels personal. As bots become smarter and more human-like you can customize your brand voice and send personalized messages directly to users. Facebook reported that they now see 100,000 monthly active bots on Facebook Messenger, offering a whole new platform for marketers to connect with audiences."

What are some of the ways *you* can be more responsive to your customers in 2018?

4. Authenticity wins.

This final trend for 2018 should be encouraging to bluegrass marketers since you are largely an authentic bunch! There is a growing emphasis on brand authenticity, in part because brands are always under scrutiny in this 24/7 connected consumer environment. Unfortunately, brand blunders spread like wildfire, particularly via social media, which can damage a brand's reputation and credibility. That's why it is essential for a brand marketer to represent the brand honestly and be open and transparent when it comes to interacting with customers. Writing for *Forbes*, Ashley Deibert shares four excellent suggestions [<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2017/05/26/why-authenticity-in-marketing-matters-now-more-than-ever/-2381bef87982>] for how to be an authentic brand marketer:

"1. Remember that honesty is (still) the best policy. 2. Show 'em what you know – and that you care. 3. Stay true to the brand. 4. Be clear, direct and calm." Ashley concludes: "In the long run, taking the time to build an authentic foundation and a community of brand ambassadors will help establish and maintain this authenticity, even through turmoil."

I hope you found the eight trends I've shared with you of interest, and that you can apply them to improve your marketing in 2018.

About Bluegrass Today

[Bluegrass Today](#)® is the first online destination within the bluegrass music world to combine extensive news coverage with the most useful aspects of the social media revolution.

About “Sound Marketing for Bluegrass”

Bluegrass Today publishes “Sound Marketing for Bluegrass,” a twice monthly email newsletter especially for bluegrass marketers. This informative newsletter offers marketing wisdom about branding, creative, testing, analysis, social media, online advertising, and more. This eBook is a compilation of the newsletters from 2016 - 2017.



“Sound Marketing for Bluegrass” is written exclusively for **Bluegrass Today** by Barry Silverstein, a nationally known branding and Internet marketing expert. Barry teaches an [online branding course](#) and is the author of numerous branding and marketing books and [eGuides](#).

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