



Marketing Magic by Julie Wassom

Finding and reaching your customers can be your greatest challenge. Marketing is an essential part of any successful business, and raising alpacas is no exception. Make your farm or ranch stand out from the crowd.

■ Making Your Website an Effective Marketing Partner

Faster than the speeding Roadrunner, the Internet has become a primary way prospects move from information gathering to readiness to buy. AOBA reports continual increases in potential alpaca buyer use of the Internet for industry investigation, finding farms to visit, and the purchasing process.

Is it important for your alpaca business to have a presence on the Internet? Absolutely! Whether you choose an individual website featuring your farm only, or a commercial site that hosts separate pages for many individual farms, having a website is an essential marketing tool for attracting today's alpaca buyers.

As you design or refine your website, you will get a greater return on your investment if you make it more than an online brochure that merely educates visitors about your farm and your alpacas. It must also be a marketing and business tool that will help you generate inquiries, sell alpacas

and breedings, and serve your customers and other referral sources.

What will make your website a more effective inquiry generator? How can you structure your site so the search engines will find you? What are the best techniques for driving qualified prospects to your website?

For answers to these and other questions about website marketing, I interviewed two Internet marketing experts. Anita Larson is an Internet marketing speaker, author, and consultant who fuses common sense with technology and believes in the powerful, global effect of a great website. Her company, The Web Muse, helps businesses attract ideal clients to their websites. Heather Lutze is the owner of Lutze Consulting, a firm offering search marketing services, including PPC, SEO, and social media. Heather, an authority on search engine strategies, is author of *The Findability Formula*. Their responses confirmed many of my recommendations for effective site marketing and added several more tips.



Julie: Why should every alpaca breeder have a website?

Anita: Because more and more people are using the Internet to search and the Internet constitutes a large percentage of their search. Many people want to see something visual before making contact, and a good website can give them that.

Julie: Are commercial sites as effective in generating response as personal sites?

Anita: Though commercial sites can have good search engine placement under their own domain name, your farm will have better search engine optimization under its own domain name. You cannot market your web name behind another site's name, because your farm will not have any specific keywords or meta descriptions, so the search

Your site visitor needs to be able to figure out your site goal in no more than five seconds.

engines will not be able to locate you within the commercial site. If you are on a commercial site, provide a link to your personal site.

Julie: *When an alpaca breeder is designing a personal website, what are some key considerations that will cause the site to more effectively help the breeder market his alpacas and fiber products?*

Anita: First, determine who you are trying to reach. What is the goal of the site? What do you want to have happen? Do you want it to educate or generate inquiries or sell? Build your site around that. Your site visitor needs to be able to figure out your site goal in five seconds. The Home page of your website is the most critical, and not just to look pretty or be educational. Also, it's important to design a site that is interactive. Link to other pages. Give the visitor something specific to do. They might download an article, subscribe to your newsletter, or go to a sales list. Also, keep it current. Get old dates off the site. Visitors will immediately leave and surf if your site is out of date.

Author's note: Prospects perceive that if you are neglecting your site, what else are you neglecting in your business?

Julie: *What specific elements of a website tend to cause visitors to stay on the site?*

Anita: You want people to take action as soon as possible. They might sign up for a farm event, subscribe to your

newsletter, view births at your farm, or contact you with specific questions.

Put three to five bullets on the Home page with clickable text links. People tend to scan your Home page, and if they see something they like, they'll stay. If you want them to look at photos of animals for sale, type the link in blue text and underline it, so they can click on it to go directly to that page.

Julie: *What causes "stickiness," or draws visitors back to a site again and again?*

Anita: The site has to change frequently. I recommend that right up front you have your programmer incorporate something that changes regularly, as often as one time per month. This could be the date, which will make the site look current. Or it could be a random photo. Rotate five or six photos, so each time a visitor returns to your site, there's a new photo on the Home page.

Another way to get them back is to offer resources. This could be a brief description and links to fiber mills, veterinarians, vendors, industry associations, etc. Make sure these links are pop-up windows, so your visitors automatically return to your site. Also, attempt to get reciprocal links, so visitors from other related links can at least send an e-mail request to you for further information.

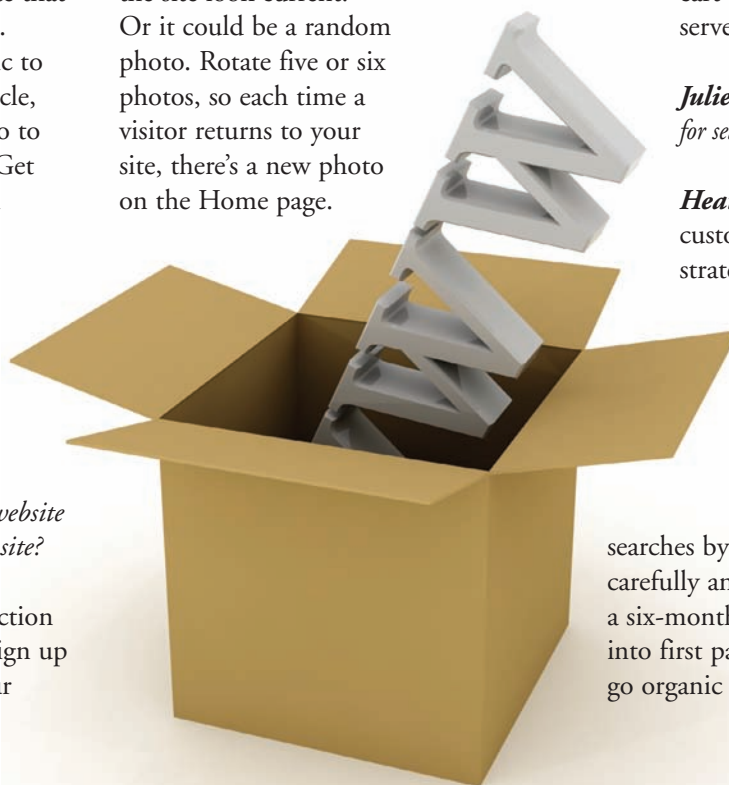
Julie: *These are great tips. Do you recommend breeders have virtual fiber stores, so visitors can buy on-line?*

Anita: Yes, for select fleece and fiber products. If you have a store, you can promote that you are always open on-line. It's simple to make your site an e-commerce site. Keep your shopping cart up to date. Use a secure server for credit card purchases.

Julie: *What are the best techniques for search engine optimization (SEO)?*

Heather: First, know how your customers search. Then be strategic, picking one or two related keywords for each page. There is a free keyword tool, <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>, which is a live database of Google

searches by keyword. Pick keywords carefully and don't rush. SEO can be a six-month project before you break into first page placement when you go organic (versus Pay Per Click).



Anita: Use good keywords in your title bar, which may not be visible on your screen. Keywords, meta tags, and meta descriptions need to be different on every page. These are behind-the-scenes, but will be found by the search engines. Your indexing should not be the same on all the pages of your site. Pick key words that most define your business. Use words that your prospects will put in, such as *raising alpacas, livestock investment, or lifestyle change. Also include your geographical location.*

The top three search engines today are Google, Yahoo, and MSN. While people are still surfing with their favorite search engine, there is a trend toward more online referrals. These referrals are coming from social media, well-written business blogs, and link exchanges with relevant, non-compete sites.

Julie: *What are some tips on choosing good keywords?*

Heather: There are three buckets of keywords. First are those entered into a search engine by the web surfer seeking information. This person might put in the word “alpacas.” Second are those words entered by people who are actively shopping. They might put in the words, “white female alpacas.” Third are the words entered by the person who is ready to buy. This prospect might insert words, such as “white Accoyo female alpacas in Colorado.” You must know your target customer’s path to purchase and select your keywords accordingly.

Anita: Use keyword phrases of two to five words. Many visitors will type as many as five words into search engines. Separate keyword phrases with commas.

Julie: *How can alpaca business owners learn exactly what words their qualified prospects are using to search online?*

Heather: The site, www.spyfu.com, gives you a range of bids and how many times a specific keyword or phrase is being searched.

Julie: *Where should keywords appear on a site to help the search engines find you?*

Heather: Be clean and don’t cross contaminate your keywords. Assign words by page. Use a limited number of targeted, highly related keywords in title tags and distributed in page body copy. Visitors are using search engines for focused, targeted, relevant search engine results.

Anita: In addition to behind the scenes placement such as title bars, meta tags, and meta descriptions, the first paragraph of text is also crucial. Search engines pick you up based on key words in your first paragraph.

Julie: *What are your thoughts on Pay Per Click (PPC) versus organic methods of search engine optimization?*

Heather: PPC has gotten a bad rap. Why pay for visitors who search for a keyword phrase? Most people want a valuable search result without scrolling, and they decide in seconds whether or not they will select your site to visit. PPC can mean you are findable on page 1.

There is a competitive range of how much site owners are paying for a keyword phrase in a paid search. Words range between 38 cents and 98 cents for first position. The more specific and targeted your keyword phrase, the fewer searches it will get, so it can cost less per search while giving you more qualified site visitors or those closer to buying. Do your homework before you commit to SEO.

Julie: *What is the easiest way for non-technical breeders to check site statistics?*

Anita: Sign up for Google Analytics. This is a free and accurate statistics tracking tool. Then ask your web company to install the script on your site. The script is not visible to anyone. The definitions of the terms are in Google Analytics, making it simple to understand the terminology. Unique Visitors, Page Views, and Referring Sites are the top three areas to review. Some web hosts also provide site statistics.

Review your pages at least quarterly to see where your traffic is going on your site. If there is no action on a page you want to keep on your site, put something on that page to call visitors to action.

Heather: Google Analytics. By adding a small bit of HTML code to each page of your site, you can compare PPC and organic page search statistics. Site statistics can also give you an indication of whether or not your site is giving people what they expect to find. Most people will stay on a page no more than 30 seconds before they leave if they do not find something to hold them there.

Julie: *How often do you recommend that an alpaca business owner review his web statistics?*

Heather: Monthly. The Google Analytics program walks you through important areas to review. For instance, if you have a high bounce rate on 80% of your site, it is time to redesign it.

Anita: I suggest you review your pages at least quarterly to see where your traffic is going on your site. If there is no action on a page you want to keep on your site, put something on that page to call visitors to action. A breeder could add the option to view a video of something like a birthing or a shearing demonstration, or a barn tour photo gallery. These add visual appeal to a static page.

In addition, include some links that visitors can click on to go to other pages. Consider changing the name of that particular page, so if it's currently named *Our Alpacas*, for example, change the page name to *See Our Alpacas in Action* or *View Our Alpacas* or *Live WebCam of Our Alpacas* or something that's more descriptive or intriguing to encourage people to click on that page.

Julie: *How often should a website be updated?*

Anita: At least quarterly, remove old events, new births, holiday hours, or anything that is outdated. Whenever you have new events or resources, update your site, then notify current or potential clients of your new items. Encourage people to bookmark pages in your site and check back as they are updated frequently. On a regular basis, mark your calendar to review your website every quarter, add new photos, change text, etc.

Julie: *What traditional marketing activities should alpaca breeders do to direct prospects and customers to their website?*

Anita: How many people are going to find out about your website off-the-web before they are online? Print your web address and e-mail on every piece of paper and promotional material that leaves your farm office. Your web address and e-mail address should be on business cards, brochures, letterhead and envelopes. The recipients of these items may not know you have a website and will be prompted to take a look. If they know about your website, maybe they haven't been back to visit for awhile, and will place your business card by their computer as a reminder to check it out. Postcards, labels, lettering of your web address on your vehicle, post-it-notes, and note cards are more places to put your web address.

Author's note: I also recommend you add your website address to your e-mail signature. Make it a hyperlink, so recipients can link right to it. You can also add it to the end of your voice mail message with a phrase such as, "Meanwhile, please visit our website at..."



Julie: *What are ways breeders can use their website as a business tool, in addition to an advertising and educational tool?*

Anita: A great way to pre-qualify potential clients that visit your website is to add a *FAQ* or *Alpaca Facts Quiz* or an *About The Process* page. This will help fine-tune the types of clients who will contact you about alpacas or products. To develop your own *FAQ* page, think of the top questions your ideal customers ask you. Browse your e-mails for the most commonly asked questions and your responses. When people are shopping for alpacas either on or offline, the *FAQ* can help draw them to you.

Julie: *What else is important in website marketing?*

Heather: Have clear calls to action beyond *Contact Us*. Tell the visitor what you want them to do on that page, such as *Watch My Video* or *Sign Up for my Newsletter*. Remember, your website can be a place to help you build a relationship with your prospect before she is ready to become your customer. The analogy I like to use is that you don't ask someone to marry you

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without dating him; users don't want to buy your product or services without trusting you are a good fit with what they need. So be obvious. Also, stay very focused with your site. Use solid keywords and good, action-oriented website design. Make sure you are proud of your website before you start driving people to the site through traditional marketing or social media marketing such as Twitter.

Anita: It's important to have a good working relationship with your web company. Ask what's new that may enhance your website? Technology is advancing as you are reading this article.

Look at your website at least once a week and ask yourself, "What would improve it?" Check out your com-

petitor's websites to see what they are doing and what you might do differently.

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Also visit this article's featured guests, Anita Larson at The Web Muse & Co, www.thewebmuse.com, and Heather Lutze, at Lutze Consulting, www.heatherlutze.com for additional information. Anita can be reached at (303) 791-9539 or info@thewebmuse.com, and Heather at (303) 841-3111 or hlutze@lutzeconsulting.com.



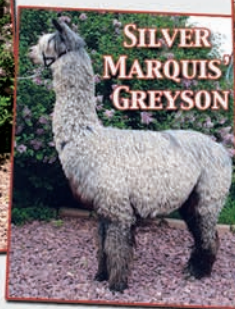
Website marketing is an essential tool to add to your chest of effective methods to market your alpacas, breedings, and fiber products. When combined with a solid traditional marketing program, a unique, focused, compelling website can be a vehicle that draws your prospects

and customers to you again and again until they buy, and an excellent way to make your marketing job easier. Make your website your marketing partner now so when potential alpaca buyers are racing the Internet highways to investigate, shop and buy, you and your farm do not get left in the dust.

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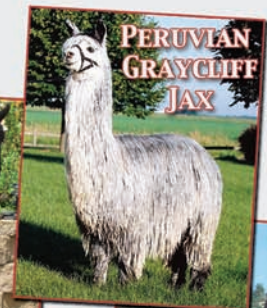
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