



In 1810, the mayor of New York City, DeWitt Clinton, proposed what many considered to be a delusional idea—digging a canal by hand 363 miles long through the wilderness that would create the first transportation route between the eastern seaboard through the Appalachian Mountains to the western interior. However, the project lacked a critical element—special hydraulic cement to prevent water seeping out of the canal and lock system. So a young canal employee named Canvass White traveled at his own expense to England to learn what he could about the technology. On returning, he experimented with native materials and hit on a compound that worked. The Erie Canal opened early in 1825 after just 8 years of construction and cut transportation costs by about 95%, securing New York’s economic prosperity.^{1,2}

This story of a vision, a plan, the right technology, hard work, and eventual success, serves as a framework for understanding how to select and use digital media to market alpacas. “Most of us claim to make logical decisions,” says Zig Ziglar in *Selling 101*, “but the reality is we generally make emotional decisions.” This is even more the case with digital technology because we don’t really understand how things work, so we tend to just do what everyone else does and hope it will do the trick, or at least relieve our fears of being left behind. When you understand the role digital media plays in your overall marketing plan, your choices will become more focused and applied with better results.

A Vision

Getting into alpacas is a bit like marriage - relatively easy and compelling to get into but hard to make it successful. Behind every alpaca farm there are dreams about what will hopefully be achieved and strategic marketing is critical in that success. And since digital media is now so central in marketing, it is no wonder that it can be so confounding. DeWitt Clinton’s canal idea may have been ambitious but he had a plan and made it happen.

A Plan

It is important to understand that digital media (anything that is created, stored, transmitted, and consumed in digital format) does not make sales happen on its own. Rather it facilitates and multiplies your efforts in the overall sales process commonly known as the Sales Funnel. The concept is simple: start broad and wide getting lots of exposure, then channel prospects to your farm—online or in person—where they can be engaged in a sales presentation and your farm’s brand, and finally converted to a sale. This process has to have breadth, depth, and, most importantly, be a complete, uninterrupted system from beginning to end. As in the case with Canvass White’s hydraulic cement, you will find potential customers seeping away to other farms if you don’t have the right technology in the right places to direct them successfully to *your* farm—and keep them coming back!

Right Technology

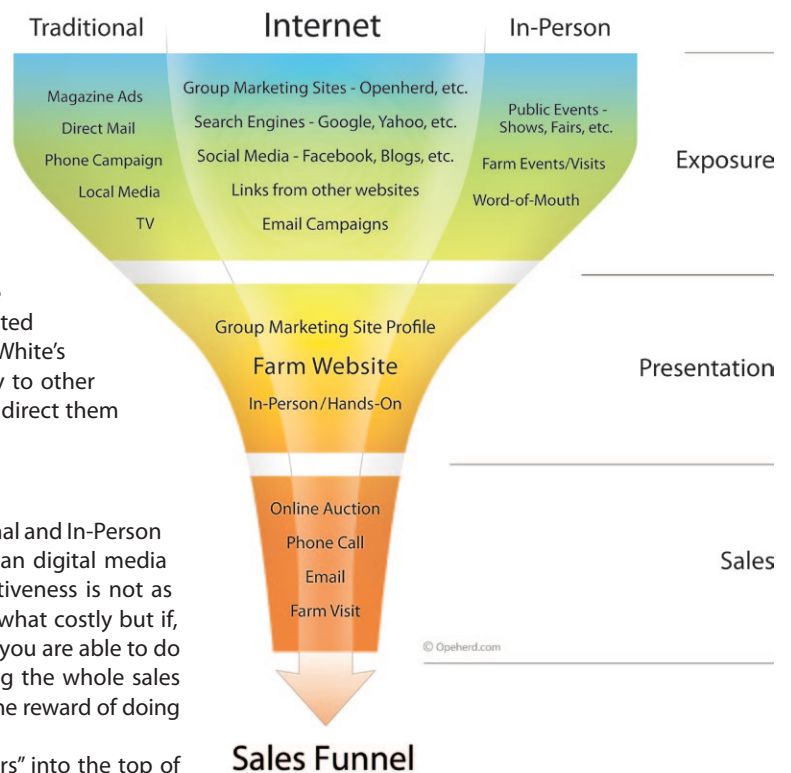
Since we’re dealing with digital media, I’ll just touch on the Traditional and In-Person categories: Traditional media tends to carry a bit more weight than digital media but it is generally more costly, timelines are longer, and its effectiveness is not as measurable. In-person contact can be time-consuming and somewhat costly but if, for example, you are participating in a show, the advantage is that you are able to do a sales presentation with your alpacas present, which is like doing the whole sales funnel in one step! Word-of-mouth is gold! It’s powerful, free, and the reward of doing what you do excellently and consistently over time.

Let’s start at the top of the Sales Funnel: The most basic “feeders” into the top of your funnel are **links from other websites** to your pages. Links can be placed by request, such as on fellow breeders’ websites, but are usually added automatically when you are active on forums, special interest or social media sites, if a website does a write-up on your farm or you have an interesting article, unique resource, or products/services that others are compelled to link to from their websites.

Social media goes a step beyond a one-way link from another website because your comments, photos, and links are posted onto your “friends” pages and then their friends’ pages. While this kind of activity might appear to be idle chit-chat, it is a very powerful form of social marketing. The old adage, “people do business with people they like” is key here.

Blogs are part of the realm of social media but are mostly the work of a single author posting news, updates, commentary, photos, etc. While this may seem, again, to be a time-consuming indulgence, they can get you listed in search engine results because you are writing about subjects that people are searching. Once someone hits your blog page, it’s an easy click over to your sales list!

Special Interest Websites, such as Ravelry.com, can be great places to network with knitters and advertise your fiber. However, you’ll need your own online store to list and sell products. Etsy.com is a very popular website that provides storefronts for selling hand-made crafts but requires a



Sales Funnel

dedicated investment of time and effort, and, a good product line to make it worthwhile.

Search Engines: In an AOBA's 2009 Member Survey, those researching alpacas for the first time said that they used internet search engines (Google, Yahoo, etc.) and individual farm websites by very similar high percentages—82% and 80% respectively.³ However, because search engines usually display only one link for any given website, if you're relying on a group marketing site, which can represent thousands of farms, to get your farm directly into search engine results, this is unlikely to happen. Visitors have to make their way to your farm indirectly via search or directory pages and can easily browse away to another farm. On the other hand, if you have your own farm website that is properly optimized for search engines, you are far more likely to be directly listed in search engine results. This puts your farm just one click away (see diagram to right), engages visitors in your identity and sales presentation and makes it less likely they will browse away to another farm.

Group Marketing Sites, such as Openherd.com, are highly specialized search engines for browsing the largest selection of alpacas, farms, and other resources, and generate the busiest marketplaces (relative to number of members) for advertising to other breeders. Along with features such as online stores to sell alpaca products, group marketing sites offer sales list presentation and management systems superior to what individual farms can afford and the ability to automatically display them on your personal farm website. This is a good example of how technology is used effectively to multiply your efforts by editing in one place with two sites being updated simultaneously. Because of the importance of having a personal farm website, as noted above, we recently took this idea a big step further by providing members with a complete farm website that is connected to their member account, giving them the benefits of being on both a group marketing site and having their own farm website, with updates made in one place. While we're talking about group marketing sites, it is interesting to note that online auctions encompass all three stages of the Sales Funnel—exposure, presentation, and sales all in one.

Email campaigns ("email blasts") are both a form of exposure and sales presentation because they take a good amount of the sales presentation to the recipients' inboxes rather than relying on them to come to you. Email campaigns can be tracked to see who opened them, what they clicked on, etc., are highly effective, measurable, and affordable but depend on having a well developed list of email contacts, which can be gathered from farm events, promotions, website signup forms, etc.

Other digital media such as PDF brochures, digital photos of your animals/fleece/products, videos, etc. are important in marketing but are used in conjunction with other digital media, such as email or being uploaded to a website where they can be viewed/downloaded by a visitor.

Hard Work

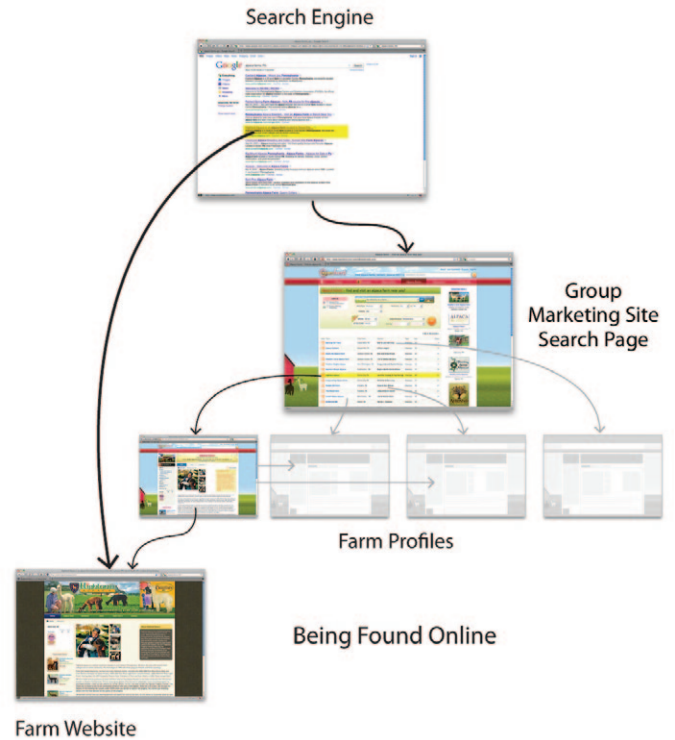
In *Selling 101*, Zig Ziglar says that there are three key steps to selling: 1. Appeal to the emotions ("wow! look at that!"); 2. Back up the emotions with logical reassurance (solid information and reasons for buying); 3. Prompt for a decision ("Call-to-action"). Creating appealing, complete sales information and keeping it up-to-date, along with all of the other digital marketing activities we've covered, takes constant, hard work over time. As mentioned earlier, digital media can facilitate and multiply your efforts but it can't replace them.

Summary

DeWitt Clinton understood a very simple truth: the commerce was out there, it just wasn't flowing to New York. So he figured out a plan, employed the right technology, worked hard in a consistent direction, and succeeded in diverting prosperity to his city rather than letting it go elsewhere. Success takes time and perseverance but you can do it!

References:

1. Bill Bryson, *At Home - A Short History of Private Life*, Doubleday, 2010.
2. Erie Canal, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erie_Canal.
3. AOBA member survey, *Alpacas Magazine*, Autumn 2009 issue, pp. 239.



Glossary

Social Media: Websites or applications that are firstly social in nature, rather than commercial, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, etc.

Blog: A blend of Web and Log. A public journal where regular entries share news, commentary, photos, etc.

Domain: A distinct place on the web that contains a series of web pages or resources, such as www.mapaca.org.

URL: Stands for Uniform Resource Locator. A standardized address format for pages and resources on the internet. <http://www.openherd.com/join/> is a URL to our Join page.

Email Campaign: Sending mass emails to a managed contact list typically using an Email Service Provider (ESP), such as iContact, Constant Contact, etc.

PDF: Stands for Portable Document Format. File type that can be saved out of most publishing programs that doesn't require recipient to have original software to view & print.

Join Openherd Today!

Openherd.com is the industry's largest alpaca marketplace with over 2400 farms represented. Openherd gives you the tools to easily and effectively market online and network with other breeders. Basic membership is free with paid plans that include an online storefront, your own instant farm website, online auctions, and more, all managed in one place!

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