

THE DIY

MARKETING GUIDE

for community supported agriculture



*With a handful of people,
some big sheets of paper
and a few pens...*



Soil Association

Contents page

The aim of this guide	2
Before we begin...	3
What is marketing?	5
Step 1: Working out what market you are in	8
Step 2: Doing your market research	11
Step 3: Understanding who your customers are	16
Step 4: Identifying your features and benefits	19
Step 5: Developing your key messages	22
Step 6: Getting your messages across	25
Step 7: Creating your action plan	33
Our top ten tips	35
Don't stop now!	37



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The aim of this guide

This guide is aimed at new and existing CSAs who want to develop a simple, do-able, affordable marketing plan. In developing this guide we have made a few assumptions:

- * You don't have much time to develop a plan
- * You don't have much time to implement a plan
- * You have next-to-no money to spend on marketing
- * You're not sure where to start

With all that in mind, we've come up with what we've called a DIY Marketing Guide. The idea is that a few of you - perhaps a sub-group of your committee/steering group - can work together to come up with effective ways to develop long-lasting relationships with the people you want to reach - primarily new and current customers for your service.

Before we begin...

What thoughts come into your head when you hear the word marketing?

There's a good chance that some of the thoughts that come to mind are negative ones. You might be thinking hard sell, manipulation, creating demand for things people don't need. Or you might be thinking that marketing is something that you'd like to do more of, if only you had a Marketing Manager, or a few thousand pounds in the bank.

With our DIY Marketing Guide, we've set ourselves the ambitious objective of changing your mind about marketing. We would like you to think about marketing as a way that you can develop **long-lasting relationships** with customers. Relationships that make you - and them - feel good about yourselves. Relationships that mean your CSA will still be here in 10 years time. Relationships that make your little part of the food chain a bit more happy and human.

So please read on... and together we'll come up with a DIY Marketing Plan.

A brief word about the words we've used...

We've tried hard to keep the Guide informal and chatty in style - we hope you like it. For the sake of simplicity we've tended to refer to the people you will sell to as "customers" - although you may well refer to them as "members" or something else.

Similarly, we sometimes refer to your "business" - whilst you might think of yourselves as a project, a social enterprise or a CSA. We're not making any value judgments with our choice of words - we're merely trying to make sure the Guide is easy to read!

How to use this guide

It's up to you how you go about developing a marketing plan. However, we'd strongly encourage you to take a collaborative approach. You're far more likely to come up with an effective plan - which you'll then put into practice - if a number of you have been involved in coming up with the ideas at the heart of the plan.

So we'd encourage you to chat amongst yourselves and work out who's interested in coming up with a marketing plan for your CSA. Then, that group can use this guide to come up with a plan, which can be shared with the rest of the people running the CSA. It can then be agreed and put into practice.

How long will it take to develop the plan?

How long all that might take really depends on yourselves. When we deliver a DIY marketing workshop, we run through the plan in one day - but people then need to do detailed work on the plan in subsequent days or weeks.

It's more likely that it will take 3, 4 or 5 two-hour meetings - perhaps spread over a couple of months - with work taking place between each meeting. This guide is presented in a logical, step-by-step way which will help you to decide what to talk about at each of your get-togethers.

The most important thing is to be realistic - be honest with yourselves about how much time you've got - and then commit that time to developing the plan. If you've only got one day - do as much as you can in a day. It's better to do that than commit yourselves to a 3 meetings over six weeks - which you'll all struggle to attend.

About this guide

The guide is based on a tried and tested approach to marketing that Rob Greenland of The Social Business has developed over a number of years. Rob first became interested in marketing during his seven years with a small fair trade co-op which had to work out how to promote itself with a non-existent marketing budget.

Since 2005 he has supported a number of social enterprises to develop DIY marketing plans, through one-to-one work and through workshops. In 2011 he ran a marketing workshop on behalf of the Soil Association for a number of CSAs - and this guide is based on the approach he developed for that workshop.

Rob was a founding member of Swillington Farm CSA in Leeds, and is also a keen veg grower. Family commitments meant he had to give up his allotment, but he still grows plenty of veg in half a dozen raised beds at the bottom of his garden.

What is marketing?

In this section you'll do a couple of exercises which will help you to discuss what marketing is - and what you all think, feel and know about marketing. It can be useful to reflect on this before you start developing your own plan.



Group exercise

Hopefully you've pulled together a handful of people who are going to develop your DIY marketing plan. We'd suggest the following as an opening exercise:

You will need

- * A big sheet of paper (we buy old rolls of wallpaper from charity shops - or lining paper from DIY stores - much cheaper than a flipchart!)
- * A few pens

Start by asking people the question **"What is marketing?"** Encourage people to respond freely - we're looking for thoughts from real people - not answers you might give in an exam. Summarise what people say on a big piece of paper.

Then, ask the question **"What do you think and feel about marketing?"** This is where we get people to consider their response to the word "marketing". What words come into their head? What's their gut reaction to the word "marketing"? Again, note down people's responses on a big sheet of paper.

Once you've responded to these two questions, have a look at the two pieces of paper and consider what you have written down.

Do your own quick analysis of what's been said so far. Are there any key themes? Do you think you've arrived at a good understanding of what marketing is? Were any strong feelings expressed - positive or negative?



Obviously we don't know what themes will emerge in your discussions, but previous experience suggests that your group will have a good working knowledge of what marketing is. There's a good chance that there'll be some scepticism - perhaps even hostility - towards marketing - based on the experiences of marketing many of us have in our daily lives. It's important to acknowledge any such opinions - as we need to make sure that the way you promote your service doesn't end up repeating the same mistakes that others make.

What is marketing?

A couple of common definitions

Once you have talked about what marketing is, it might be worth sharing a couple of definitions of marketing that we've found useful. Here they are:

Marketing is every contact you have with customers, suppliers and staff.

We like this definition because it immediately reminds us that marketing isn't just about flyers, websites and mailouts. It's about every contact - in particular every human contact. And, given that you're likely to have limited budget, it's useful to be reminded that you don't have to be held back by a lack of money.

It's also worth acknowledging here that for most of you, there'll be limited contact with suppliers - and you'll have few if any paid staff - although you'll have plenty of volunteers. The main focus of your marketing efforts will be current and future customers.

Another definition of marketing that we like is:

Marketing is your business seen from a customer's point of view.

This is a slightly more abstract definition, but we like it because it reminds us of how important it is to think about what you do from the perspective of the people that you serve.



It can be helpful to try to think like a customer - and in particular a potential customer. How can you convince people that it's a good idea to get involved with your CSA? A scheme where people pay up front with a promise of produce at some time in the future can be hard for people to understand. Can you see things from a potential new customer's point of view? And how could your marketing overcome any concerns they may have? It can be helpful to think about this kind of thing as you develop your marketing plan.

This opening exercise has hopefully got people talking - and thinking about what they know about marketing. You are now ready to get stuck into coming up with your very own marketing plan.

Now we'll take you, step by step, through developing your own DIY Marketing Plan. How long each step takes really depends on how much time you've got, and how simple - or complicated - your CSA is. We suggest you just make a start - and see how it goes...

Step 1

Working out what market you are in

In this section you'll consider what market or markets you're part of by thinking about what customer needs you're hoping to meet. This is helpful because it immediately helps you to acknowledge that you are part of a wider market – where there's likely to be lots of potential customers, competitors and collaborators.

Market is a word that we're used to hearing in the world of local food. We buy and sell produce at a market. We might take animals to market. We wonder if there's going to be a market for our produce. But what do we mean by a market in this context?

A bit of theory

For our purposes, we can think of markets being defined in two ways:

- * By demand
- * By supply

We're accustomed to hearing about markets defined by demand:

Sales of Fairtrade certified products topped £500 million in 2007

We might also hear markets described in terms of supply:

Supply of electricity and gas in the UK is dominated by "The Big Six" energy firms – British Gas, EDF, E-On, NPower, Scottish & Southern and Scottish Power.



Group exercise

For our marketing plan, it will be useful for us to think of the market you are part of in terms of demand. You'll do this by trying to answer the following question:

What customer needs are you meeting?

As a group, try to answer this question. You might quickly arrive at a consensus - or you might find that you're meeting some needs that aren't so obvious. You may well come up with things like:

- * Local food
- * Traceable food
- * Organic food
- * Feeling part of something
- * Connecting with the land
- * Doing something with local people
- * Being part of the solution
- * Cutting down on food miles/carbon footprint

Discuss the words that you've used, and the needs that you think you can meet - and try to work out which ones are most important.

At this stage it might also be useful to define your market in terms of geography. This is likely to be fairly simple, something like:

- * Harrogate
- * People living within 10 miles of the farm

Now, try to define the market you are in, in one sentence - perhaps something like this:

The market for good quality, locally produced, traceable food in North Devon.



Try not to spend too much time on this. The idea isn't to come up with something that would help you to get a degree in market research. We just want to try to focus, from the start, on the market that you are part of - and the needs that you are meeting. Try to agree something - even if you're not 100% sure about it. Remember you can always change it as you go along.

The exercise will hopefully have helped you to acknowledge that the need you are meeting isn't "the need for a CSA". It's unlikely (but possible!) that people will be sat at home saying "You know what we need round here - a CSA!" But they might be saying "I wish I could buy food from someone I could trust" or "I want to feel connected to where my food comes from". They are some of the needs that hopefully your CSA can meet.

Defining your market - however loose and imperfect that definition might be - will prove very useful as you work your way through your plan. In particular it will make the next step - market research - much more focused.

Step 2

Doing your market research

In this section you'll spend some time considering what you know, what you believe, and what you need to find out about your market, your customers, competitors and collaborators. The steps that follow will be so much easier if you stop to reflect for a while. You'll also think about what that information means to you – and what you will do as a result of what you've found out.

If you were a bit sceptical about marketing, it's likely that you'll be yet more unsure about market research. If you were to ask most people what they think of when they hear the words market research, they'll probably respond with an image of someone with a clipboard accosting you in the street, asking your opinion on this or that brand of washing powder. It's something many of us don't have much time for.

And it's something that you're unlikely to have much actual time for either. The good news is that we're not suggesting that you undertake an extensive market research exercise, at great expense. But we do think it's worth thinking about the following:

- * What do we already know about the market we are in? (facts)
- * What do we believe about the market we are in (beliefs)
- * What don't we know – and what would it be useful to find out?



Group exercise

We suggest you do this, as a group, as follows:

Take a big piece of paper (again, using a roll of old wallpaper is ideal) and divide it up as follows:

	Market as a whole	Customers	Competitors	Collaborators
What we know				
What we believe				
What we need to find out				
How we're going to find out more				
What does all of this tell us - and what are we going to do as a result?				

Then consider each area in turn. It's up to you whether you work left to right (considering what you know about each area, then what you believe...) or from top to bottom (what we know about our market, what we believe about our market etc etc). Or, you can always just talk and put things in the appropriate boxes as you go along!

The point of this exercise is mainly to organise your thinking - and to recognise what you already know between you (which will probably be quite a lot) and what you still need to find out.

Here are a few more thoughts which might help you:

Market as a whole

Start by thinking big – perhaps considering the market for organic/local/traceable produce in the UK as a whole. Then focus in on your particular market – in your geographical area.

You might find you have some gaps in your knowledge – it might be useful to identify someone who can do some further research – for example:

- * **Reading relevant research reports.** A great starting point is the annual Organic Market Report that is produced by the Soil Association. You can find the latest Report at www.soilassociation.org/marketreport
- * **Look online for articles, interviews, etc which might give useful insight into how your market is developing.**

Customers

We'll look at customers in more detail in the next section, but try answering the questions on your big sheet of paper and see what discussion points emerge.



There's a good chance that you'll be able to talk quite confidently about who you think your customers are – but it's worth thinking this through a bit so that you can challenge any assumptions you are making. Customers aren't necessarily all "people like us"! We'll look at customers again in the next stage – the customer segmentation.

Competitors

Sometimes we struggle with the idea of competition in a market where we'd argue that most people are out to do good. But it's useful to acknowledge who else is competing against you. Again, work through the questions on your big sheet of paper, focusing in particular on what you know and believe about people who are competing against you.

Maybe think about the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors. Are there things that they do very well – where it's best not to compete directly? Or perhaps there are customer groups they don't serve very well – where you could do better?



Don't be afraid to do a bit of detective work here. Visit the farm shop down the road, sign up for a month with a box scheme, wander up and down the local produce aisle at your local supermarket. Whether you like it or not, others will be competing for the money and affections of your current and potential customers. So it's important to understand who your competitors are.

Collaborators

Who can you collaborate with to help you to achieve all that you want to achieve? A collaboration might be a long-term partnership - or it could be a short term relationship that achieves a specific goal.



It's worth thinking about who you can collaborate with in order to achieve your goals. In particular, think about who you could team up with to help you to reach more potential customers.

If, for example, you've decided that people who are "keen greens" are one of your target customer groups, then think about how to reach them. Where else do they shop? What groups are they part of? Which community events do they go to?



You might also find that some of the people who you thought of as competitors could actually turn out to be collaborators. Have another look at your list of competitors - is there any scope for collaboration? Of course, it takes two to tango - but at least you can ask them if they fancy a dance!

There are plenty of examples in niche markets where people who are competitors can effectively collaborate to increase the size of the market for everyone. Think fair trade for example - by working together to increase awareness of fair trade - including products sold by competitors - many fair trade businesses have helped to grow the market so that everyone benefits.

The local food producer down the road might initially look like a competitor, but maybe there's more to be gained from trying to work together so that you can grow the market together for everyone's benefit.

Analysing what you've found out

At this stage you probably need a cup of tea, or perhaps even a lie down. Once you've recovered, have a look at your big sheet of paper and open things up for discussion.

Depending on how much time you've got, you might decide that you need to do some more research before you properly analyse your market research. If you've identified things that you need to find out - and if there's time, commitment and resources available to do more research - then agree what needs to be done and come back at a later date. You can then add more thoughts to your big sheet of paper - and discuss your findings with the group.

Alternatively, you may decide that you haven't got time to do more research at this moment in time. If that's the case, now's the time to take the research that you've gathered - and turn it into intelligence.

Research on its own has limited value. What really matters is what you might call market intelligence - information about your market that you act upon for the benefit of your business. So, have a think about what your research is telling you.



What you come up with here really depends on what you've found out whilst researching and thinking about your market. But try to come up with a few actions, or decisions, based on what you've found out. For example, the information that you have gathered about competitors might lead you to identify a particular service that you could offer that they don't.

But remember, this is supposed to be useful to you - so don't just write things for the sake of it!

Step 3

Understanding who your customers are

In this section you'll do some more detailed thinking about your customers. You will do what, in marketing-speak is called a customer segmentation exercise. In other words, you'll think about who your customers are - and organise them into groups that have things in common. The idea being that it's easier to build relationships with identified groups of people - rather than trying to reach everyone all at once.

A customer segmentation - the technical term for what we'll do in step 3 of the DIY Marketing Plan - sounds a bit painful - at least from a customer's point of view! But it needn't be. Instead, it can be a useful, relatively quick exercise to help you to think about who your main current and potential customer groups are.

Why is it useful to do this? It can be tempting to think that your target customer group is "anyone and everyone" - particularly when you're just starting out. But in practice, you're more likely to be successful if you target particular customer groups.

That doesn't mean that you exclude anyone from your business. It just means that you might try to focus your limited marketing resources where they can have most benefit.



Group exercise

This is another exercise you can do as a group. Tear off another big piece of paper from your roll of wallpaper. Grab a few pens and start talking. Try to think about who your current and potential customer groups are - by trying to group customers into groups of people that have things in common.

See how the discussion goes - you might find this quite easy. If so, just try to do a little "pen-picture" of each customer group (with a picture if anyone's artistic!) and if you can, give each group a name. Write a few words about them.

Only you will know who your likely customer groups will be, but here are a few ideas of the kind of groups you might well come up with...

- * Deep-greens - people who are really committed to doing what they can for the environment
- * Foodies - people who love their food and are happy to pay a bit more for tasty food
- * Families with young children - if they can afford it, some will choose organic for their babies and children
- * Transition Town members - you might define a customer group quite specifically...
- * People in [insert name of trendy part of town where there are people with disposable income, where there's a greengrocers but no butchers] who could subscribe to our Meat Box scheme.

If you're finding it a bit more difficult to think about who your main customer groups are, try to think in terms of characteristics like:

- * Income
- * Geography - where they live
- * Motivation and interests - green, organic, local, healthy, community
- * Family status/stage of life - young families, retired people, young professionals...
- * How often they might buy from you



Once you've done this, have a look at what you've written down. Does it give a fair impression as to who your customers are? If you've missed any key groups of customers, write them down now.

Then, do a bit of analysis of what you have written so far. Which customer groups (segments) are currently customers of yours? And which are potential customers? How big is each segment? Are there some customer groups that it would be better to focus your marketing efforts on? Are there others that it might be better to not make such an effort with at the moment - perhaps because an established competitor serves them very well?

As with each stage of this DIY planning process, our aim is to encourage you to have some useful discussions which help you to get clearer ideas about how to market your service. So don't worry if you haven't got time to do a massively-detailed customer segmentation - the important thing is to do as much as you can so that you have a better idea as to who your current and potential customers are. The better you know them, the more chance you've got of building long-lasting relationships with them.

Step 4

Identifying your features and benefits

In this section you're going to take a bit of a step back from marketing – and think about the key features of the service that you'll offer to customers. This is particularly important with any kind of business – like a CSA – which is a bit out of the ordinary. It's important that you can communicate clearly to people what you are offering them – to give them confidence to get involved and spend their hard-earned cash with you. You might well think of this stage as “getting the basics right” – making sure that you are clear about the nuts and bolts of what you will offer to your customers.

Next, we're going to consider two key concepts in marketing – features and benefits.

One way to get your head around what the difference is between features and benefits is to think about how people buy and sell cars. The features of a car might include a 1.6 litre engine. Some people will be inspired to buy the car based on this information. However, what the majority of people will be interested in are the benefits that they can enjoy – thanks to the car's features. So, a 1.6 litre engine offers the benefit of a comfortable motorway journey at 70mph. Most marketing will focus more on benefits – as benefits are what people tend to be most interested in.

That's not to say that features aren't important. It can be particularly useful to tell people about your features if what you're offering is a little bit out of the ordinary. That's certainly the case if you're running a CSA – your features might include payment up front, opportunities to volunteer and specific times to collect produce – all of which will need explaining clearly. That's why it's worth doing a bit of thinking about the nuts and bolts of what you will offer.

Once you've done that, you can start thinking about benefits – what people will get in return for getting involved with your scheme. Some of the benefits will be obvious – access to tasty food for example. But there will be other benefits too – perhaps not directly related to the food you'll produce. For example being part of something, and getting to know like-minded people – might also be benefits that people will enjoy.

At this stage, you might find it useful to have a read through some of the CSA resources on the Soil Association website, including **A Share In The Harvest - a CSA Action Manual**: www.soilassociation.org/communitysupportedagriculture



Group exercise

We suggest you get another big sheet of paper and some pens. Divide the paper in two as follows:

Features	Benefits
Further discussion	

It's up to you how you do this, but we'd suggest starting by trying to list the key features of what you will offer. This can be a useful exercise so we'd suggest spending a fair amount of time on this. You're likely to list things like:

- ✳ How your scheme works
- ✳ Price, payment options
- ✳ Information about collection of produce
- ✳ Opportunities to get involved
- ✳ What people get in return for their money - eg a typical share...



As you're writing down the key features, make a note of any discussion points - particularly if you think something needs a bit more work. For example, in doing this exercise, you might decide that you need other payment options, or that you need to make it clearer to people that produce can only be collected at specific times. Some of this detail is quite boring - but if you get it wrong you can end up with unhappy customers.

Then, have a think about the benefits that people could enjoy from being part of your scheme. Again, see how the discussion goes, but we'd suggest starting by looking at each of the features, and trying to think about each feature from a customer's point of view. That will help you to think about how each feature could benefit a current or future customer. Here are a few examples to get you going:

Features	Benefits
<p>People can help to pick produce from 3pm-6pm on Fridays, and then take their share home. Or they can collect on Saturday morning between 10am and 4pm.</p>	<p>Members can pick up their share of the produce each weekend at a time that suits them.</p>
<p>A full share costs £600 and entitles you to a weekly share of the harvest - depending on availability. A half share is available for £350. The amount of produce available will depend on the seasons. We prefer payment up front but quarterly payment options is also an option. Direct Debit is our preferred payment option.</p>	<p>Various options are available depending on people's needs. A family of four may benefit from a full share - whilst a half share is available to individuals, couples or people who may not be able to afford a full share. Members can spread the cost over the year for a small additional fee.</p>
<p>Members are able to get involved with growing the produce and helping out with other tasks.</p>	<p>Membership of our CSA gives you a chance to re-connect with where your food comes from, and meet like-minded people...</p>



Once you've done some work on this, stand back and have a look at what you've written. Can you identify anything that needs more work? Do any of your features need to be defined more clearly for current or future customers? Or do you need to think a bit more about the benefits people can enjoy as part of your scheme - after all it's not just about the food, is it?

One of the main reasons we encourage you to think about features and benefits is that it helps you with the next step of your Plan - coming up with some key messages.

Step 5

Developing your key messages

In this section you'll focus on what you want to say to current and potential customers. Thinking this through can help you to develop some key messages which you can refer back to each time you want to do some marketing. You can also think about which messages might best suit each group of customers.

We acknowledged right at the start that you're unlikely to have a great deal of time or resources to devote to promoting yourselves. So it's all the more important that you try to make things that little bit easier for yourselves.

One way to do that is to come up with some key messages - whilst all of this is fresh in your mind - so you can use them time and again in whatever marketing materials you choose (that's the next and final step!)

If you were a big business with a marketing team and a few million pounds to devote to marketing, you would probably do the following:

- * Spend lots of money on market research
- * Do a sophisticated customer segmentation - to get detailed insights into who your customers are
- * Tailor the features of your product/service to each customer group
- * Consider the benefits that each customer group could gain from your product or service
- * Develop key marketing messages for each customer group - based on the features and benefits that your research shows that they want
- * Undertake a range of marketing campaigns, with key messages tailored to each customer group

Clearly you're not going to do anything quite so complicated! But let's consider for a moment what's at the heart of the approach we've outlined above - and which we've tried to follow through this plan.

We've encouraged you to think about the market you are part of. Then we've helped you to think about who your customers are. Then we've got you to think about the features of your service - and the benefits that people might enjoy. Now we're thinking about your key messages - and next we'll think about how to get those messages across

The principles are the same - we'll just do it a bit more simply.



Group exercise

Have a look back at the work you've done so far. Remind yourselves who you think your main customers are - then look at what you've written about features and benefits.

Then, get your roll of paper out again, and cut off another big sheet. Divide it up like this:

Key messages	Customers

Start writing down what you think your key messages need to be. To help get you started, look back at your features and benefits - it's likely that a lot of your marketing will consist of a mix of these.

Don't worry about crafting your messages too carefully at this stage, but do try to think about how you might try to get your messages across. What tone of voice are you likely to use? Formal? Friendly? Radical? Talk this through amongst yourselves, and you'll soon come up with a style that's appropriate to you. Our experience with CSAs and other social enterprises suggests that a friendly, informal tone of voice tends to be most appropriate - but you'll decide what works best for you.

Once you've thought about the key messages that relate to your features and benefits, have a think about anything else you need to get across. Again, it won't be perfect at this stage, but make a note of other key messages that you'll need to communicate.

Then, once you're pretty happy with your key messages, have another look at your customer segmentation. Remember what we said about a big business tailoring its marketing to each customer group? Well let's see if you can do the same, but more simply.



For example, if you've identified one customer group to be "committed greens" how might you tailor your message? Might you emphasise food miles and lack of pesticides? Or if another customer group is "young families", might you focus more on food you can trust, or perhaps the opportunities for kids to get involved in your monthly get-togethers?

You need to be realistic here - you have limited resources - but it's worth thinking about how you might tweak your marketing messages to connect with different customer groups. But don't worry, we're not asking you to tell fibs, or bend the truth! We're merely suggesting that different customer groups might respond to different messages - so it's worth bearing this in mind...

Now that you've come up with some key messages, it's time to consider what most of us think of as marketing - how to get your messages across.

Step 6

Getting your messages across

In this section we'll look at what you probably think of as "marketing" – how to communicate with new and existing customers. Having thought things through, you should find it pretty easy to come up with effective ways to get your messages across. Given that you'll have limited time and resources to devote to marketing, it's worth thinking about how to make life easier for yourselves. By coming up with a series of one-liners, paragraphs and more about what you do, you'll make life a lot easier each time you want to communicate with the outside world.

You might be getting impatient by now. Or you might have thought that we should have just got straight to the point – and talked about how to get your messages across on page 1.

We believe your marketing should be much more effective as a result of the thinking that you've done so far. By thinking about who your customers are, and what features and benefits they might enjoy, and then about what you want to tell them, you should be in a position to make much better use of any resources that you can commit to marketing your service.

So what should you do? The short answer is that you should do what's appropriate, doable and affordable. And who are the best people to decide exactly what that is? You are! So here goes...

It's time to cut yourselves another big piece of paper, find those pens and start talking.



Group exercise

First of all, have a think about what resources you can commit to getting your messages across. Do you have a budget you can allocate to marketing? Who has time to commit? Who has expertise they can bring? And is there any way we can bring in other people with time and expertise to help?

Now, start thinking - as freely and creatively as you can. Remember our original definition of marketing:

Every contact you have with customers, suppliers and staff

So what kinds of contact can you think of? As you do this, try to think beyond the obvious - a website, a flyer, a newsletter - even though all of those could well be appropriate. Are there other things you could do which might be a bit more unusual - but potentially more eye-catching and a better use of your limited budget?

To give you a few ideas, here are some things that we came up with when we ran this workshop with a group of CSAs last year. We've organised the ideas into themes:

- * **People-powered marketing - usually the best - and often free or low-cost**
- * **Social media and online marketing - often easy to set up and increasingly important for reaching lots of people directly, effectively and at low cost**
- * **Print - flyers, posters, business cards etc**

People-powered marketing

Word of mouth

Don't underestimate the importance of word-of-mouth recommendation. Obviously it's just about the cheapest marketing ever - and often the most effective. But clearly you can't force people to talk about you. However, you can encourage all your current members, customers and supporters to tell all of their friends about you.

Make it clear to people that you don't have a big marketing budget - and that you'll really value any effort they can make to tell their friends and contacts about you. It's amazing how quickly word can get round...

Run events

A launch event can be a great way to get your message out there. It's also a good way to get some local media coverage - if you get in touch with your local newspaper or radio station they might well come down to find out more - or at least do a story.

And don't stop with your launch. There's every chance that one of the benefits that people will be looking for from involvement with your scheme is the social aspect - the chance to get to know some like-minded people. So don't hesitate in finding reasons to celebrate - your first birthday, harvest, mid-summer, wassailing or whatever! And encourage current members & customers to bring their friends - who, of course, you'll hope to encourage to become customers too.

Endorsements and testimonials

Potential customers often like to know that other people think that you are good at what you do. Try to record nice things that people say about you - and ask them if you can use what they say (either attributed to them, or anonymously) in your publicity materials.

It can be even better if the person endorsing you is famous! If you're lucky enough to count someone famous amongst your customer base, ask them if they'd be happy to say a few words and perhaps get a photo which you could use in your publicity material. When you have next to no budget you need to be creative - and a bit cheeky sometimes!

Remember, they don't need to be really famous - or nationally well-known. It can be just as valuable to work with the chef at the local bistro who's well known locally - or a local Councillor or MP who's known for championing local businesses or green issues. Even better if they have a member of staff who handles their PR, who'll help you get into the local media.

PR

Local media - radio, TV, newspapers etc - are always on the look-out for interesting, local good news stories and there's every chance that you can offer a story to your local media that could get you priceless coverage.

There isn't space in this marketing guide to go into the detail as to how to deal with the media, but it doesn't need to be complicated. Do your research - listen to your local radio station, read your local paper, and watch your local TV news and find out who it would be best to contact. There's no harm in phoning them up and asking who you should send information to.

Try to get some help to write a press release - or do your best yourselves to tell the story that you want to get across.

There is also useful information in the resources section on the Soil Association CSA website about writing effective press releases - search for How to Write a Headline Grabbing Press Release on www.soilassociation.org/csa

Community news and "hyperlocal" sites

Don't underestimate the importance of local networks - and their newsletters. Parish newsletters, village newsletters (and noticeboards), intranets at local workplaces etc can all be useful ways to get your message out there.

Similarly, lots of towns and villages now have a "hyperlocal" website - a site produced by local people with lots of local news. They'll love your story.

Be friendly

Remember what we said about marketing being about every contact you have with customers. If current and potential customers get friendly service, they're more likely to buy from you and recommend you to their friends.

A publicity stunt

It's worth thinking about how you can get some publicity in the local media. The fact that you exist - even though you think you are great - probably isn't enough. Doing something that gets you noticed might well grab the attention of local journalists - or be eye-catching for passing locals. Taking one of your sheep to the Town Hall to have her photo taken with the Lord Mayor might get you a surprising amount of press coverage...

Partnerships

Could you partner up with other organisations that could help you to reach the people that you want to reach? The local Transition Towns group? Friends of the Earth? The primary school down the road that has a local food policy? A GP surgery that's proactive about encouraging people to eat healthily? A running club full of healthy people? A partnership doesn't need to be a complicated commitment - just try your best to think of any mutually-beneficial relationships that you could develop.

A partnership with a local restaurant, café or pub can be particularly beneficial. Sometimes it can be difficult for them to buy from you regularly - but could you explore a Local Food Night or something similar - where they use your produce for most or all of the menu? Or if you have a pig CSA or similar, a restaurant may be interested in buying a whole pig for a special event.

Networking

Face to face contact with other people has to be amongst the best marketing. If there are a few of you on your steering group or committee, perhaps try to share networking opportunities between you. Is there a local green network such as Green Drinks? Or a Transition Town network? Or do local foodies meet up once a month?

Think about which networks it might be useful to be part of - and start chatting to people. Even better if it's the kind of network where people are invited to do a short talk about what they do.

Social media and online marketing

E-newsletter

An e-mail newsletter can be a really useful and cost-effective way of communicating with customers. There are plenty of free or low cost e-newsletter software out there - my local farm, for example, uses Mailchimp.

They tend to be easy to set up - and you can integrate things like your logo and your colour scheme into the template that you use for the newsletter.

Do what you can to encourage people to sign up for your newsletter - and then try to write a newsletter fairly regularly - perhaps once a month. It doesn't need to be long - in fact it's probably better to write a shorter newsletter a bit more often - so that the news is current - and people are more likely to read all of it.

Blog

It's worth considering whether a blog could form part of your marketing. A blog can be a good way of telling stories and sharing news. It's pretty easy to share photos and videos too - both of which can be a good way of getting your message across.

However, it can be time-consuming - and whilst you don't need to be a brilliant writer, it helps if the person maintaining the blog enjoys writing. It's important to be realistic - it would be great if your grower could maintain a blog with details about how things are progressing - but do they really have the time?

Twitter

Twitter is becoming increasingly useful for small businesses as a promotional tool. It's free to use - you just need to sign up for an account and then find the time to work out how to use it (it's pretty easy). Then you need to tweet - in other words send out 140 character messages which you think other people might find interesting.

You can "follow" other people who you find interesting (eg other local people, local food businesses etc) and other people will soon start to follow you.

It can also be a really useful way to share news and link to your website if you have one.

Facebook

There's a good chance that many of your customers will be active on Facebook. Look into setting up a page on there - and have a look at how other businesses use it effectively. It can be a good way to keep in touch with people, share news or promote events or special offers.

Website

Current and potential customers will expect you to have a website. The good news is that it doesn't need to be expensive to set up and maintain a site. There are plenty of low-cost options for setting up a website - your best bet will be to ask around for recommendations. Blogging software - such as Wordpress - is increasingly used to build basic websites - which are likely to be more than adequate for your needs.

The best thing to do is to ask around and find someone who can guide you through setting up a site - it shouldn't be too complicated. You're more than likely to find someone - one of your members or a friend of a friend - who is happy to offer a couple of hours of their time to help you to set up a basic site.

Online videos

It's easy to do short videos promoting your CSA - many smartphones can produce good quality video. You can then upload the video to YouTube or Vimeo. The key is to keep it short - people are unlikely to watch anything that's more than a couple of minutes long. But a short interview with your grower - or with a couple of members saying why they joined the CSA - can be really powerful. Do a google search for "Community Supported Agriculture YouTube" to get a few ideas.

Print and other "physical" marketing

Branding

It could well be worth spending a bit of money on how you look - a logo perhaps, and a colour scheme for your website and other promotional materials. If you have money to allocate to this, consider bringing someone in to work with you on it. But, at least at the start, you might well be able to come up with something yourselves - particularly if you can persuade someone who has an eye for this kind of thing to do something for you.

Flyers

Obviously it can be useful to have information to give out - on stalls, in your local library and in other places where people might pick up information. Have a look at other people's leaflets for ideas - and if you've got a bit of budget see if you can get some professional help. If not, do your best on your computer.

We've seen people increasingly use postcards rather than paper flyers - they can be used in a variety of ways (including leaving some space to write/print a specific message) and can last longer.

As with all printed publicity material, try not to be wasteful. It may not cost much more to get 5000 rather than 500 flyers printed, but do you need that many? Don't get any flyers printed until you've got a clear idea as to how you will distribute them. They'll do no good sat at the bottom of a cupboard!

Ask around locally for ideas on who could design and print your flyers - or look online - printers such as Goodprint have templates for different types of businesses, which might give you a few ideas.

Posters

Again, if you have any budget you could consider whether it would be worth paying someone to design and print a few posters – if you can think of places to put them. But it may be just as effective to do a simple poster yourselves – with information about your scheme, a meeting you're holding, or whatever.

Business cards

Don't forget the basics. It might be handy to get some business cards printed – with basic contact information for your scheme. Don't forget to use the back of the card too – there might well be space for a few words to explain what you do. Ask around about local printers – or look at an online printer like Goodprint, Vistaprint or Moo. Don't be tempted to get too many cards printed – it can take a long time to hand out 5000 business cards!

Mailshots

You might decide that it would be useful to distribute information about your CSA to local people. Clearly the cheapest way to do that will be for you to walk around the area that you want to target, posting leaflets. You could maybe get a number of people involved – with each person allocated an area around where they live. Alternatively, do some research to find out who distributes leaflets locally. Royal Mail are likely to be able to do it – and there may well be other independent distributors too.

Signage and A-frame

It's obviously important that people know where to find you. If you're down a farm track, can you put some signage on the main road? Or can you put an A-frame at the side of the road to point people in the right direction?

It's obviously worth checking whether you need any permission to put signage up.

Step 7

Creating your action plan

Hopefully, by now, you've got a few big sheets of paper with lots of things scribbled on them, and a much better idea as to how you might go about marketing your CSA.

But there's probably some work still to do - including the small matter of implementing your plan! We'd suggest you do the following:

Try to summarise what you've talked about, with particular emphasis on things that you've agreed. So get someone to type up some brief notes on:

- * Any key bits of information you found out whilst doing your market research - or information you still need to find out
- * Your customer segmentation - a reminder of who your current and future customers are
- * The key features of what you offer
- * The benefits that you think you bring
- * The key messages that you would like to get across
- * Your ideas about how to get your messages across

We'd encourage you to write this up as succinctly as possible - you don't need a big, complicated plan. You just need to be clear about what you're going to do.

Your action plan

Now it's time to commit to what you're going to do. We'd suggest doing something like this:

Action	When?	Notes	Who?	Resources required
Set up a simple website	By end of April	Been advised we need to register a domain name, then set up an account with...	Alison knows a bit about this kind of thing and has volunteered to do it	£10 to register domain. £30 for basic website set up. Need receipts - then pay Alison
Produce a recruitment flyer for distribution to local homes	By end of March	Need something quite simple, basic info (look at features/benefits & key messages. Then deliver to homes within a mile of farm.	Dave, Antonia and Simon will lead on this.	Printing costs for 1000 flyers likely to be around £100.

Our Top Ten Tips

If you take nothing else from this DIY Marketing Plan, we hope you'll find the following ten tips useful:

- 1 A marketing plan is better if it's developed together.** Our whole approach is based on the idea that it's good to talk. Get people together who care about your CSA and who want to see it reach more people. Talk through the six steps covered in this plan. We're confident something useful will emerge.
- 2 You need to talk about needs.** All successful businesses meet needs that customers are willing to pay for. Your CSA will be no different. Spend some time trying to work out and understand the needs of your customers. Some needs will be obvious - others will need a bit more thought.
- 3 It pays to know who you are trying to reach.** It's tempting to think that you have two target customers - "Anyone" and "Everyone". Try thinking about who your main customer groups will be - you're more likely to be successful if you can target your marketing at people who are most likely to buy from you.
- 4 Customers buy benefits - but the features have to be right too.** This is why we ask you to think about the nuts and bolts of your service - in other words your "features". If you get these wrong, customers will soon desert you. But it's the "benefits" that will really excite them. Try to think about your service from a customer's point of view - and consider what benefits they may be looking for. If you can offer these benefits, you might end up with lifelong customers.
- 5 Competition isn't necessarily a bad thing.** You might think it'd be ideal if you had no competitors. But that's not necessarily true. Competition can be the sign of a healthy market. The key is to find out how you can compete - by serving people better, or serving particular customer groups. And even better if you can collaborate as well as compete...
- 6 Where others compete, collaborate instead.** It takes two to tango, but at the very least you can make it clear that you fancy a dance! Think about where there may be scope to collaborate with others who can help you to reach your customers. Sometimes you can work with competitors to grow the market together - and you might also find other organisations - campaign groups, neighbourhood groups etc - who can help you to reach new people.

- 7** **Don't let a lack of budget hold you back.** This DIY Marketing Plan was developed precisely because most of us have little or no money to spend on marketing. You have a great story to tell, you have plenty of goodwill and lots more going for you. Think creatively and you'll soon be well known in all the right places!
- 8** **People-powered marketing is the best.** You could spend thousands on adverts, fancy websites and smart flyers - but nothing beats word-of-mouth marketing. If you can give such a good service that your customers do most of your marketing for you, then you'll be well on the way to building a successful CSA.
- 9** **Don't make the perfect the enemy of the possible.** People will always have opinions about your marketing, not all of them complimentary. Given your lack of budget, the flyer you develop, the logo you cobble together or the website you publish are unlikely to be 100% perfect. It doesn't matter! Do your best, review things as you go along and keep improving what you do. The worst thing you can do is do nothing. We can guarantee that no-one will know about you if you do that!
- 10** **Marketing is about building long-lasting relationships.** It takes time to develop relationships. You won't all-of-a-sudden have an effective marketing strategy because you have a logo, or a website, or a piece in the local paper. But if you make consistent efforts to get yourselves out there in front of customers, we are confident you'll be rewarded.

Don't stop now!

We hope this DIY Marketing Guide has given you a few ideas. Hopefully it's helped you to work out how to start building long-lasting relationships with customers - relationships which will mean that you'll keep delivering social, health, economic and environmental benefits long into the future.

Please think of your DIY Marketing Plan as work-in-progress. It won't be perfect, there will be gaps, and there will be things you don't do very well first time round.

But do what you can, and keep improving on what you do. And keep doing it! Don't fall into the trap of thinking that your marketing is done when you get your first positive article in the local newspaper. Just as in rest of our lives, relationships with customers need to be nurtured if they're going to last. So don't let your marketing lose momentum. It might take time, but if you are consistent in your efforts to develop long-lasting relationships with customers we are sure you'll enjoy plenty of success!

And remember, you need to strengthen the relationships with your current customers - as well as finding new ones. Do all you can to keep in regular contact with your current members - so that they stay part of the CSA - and so they do lots of word-of-mouth marketing on your behalf.

One of the best ways to keep improving your marketing is to keep in touch with other CSAs - and learning from any effective marketing that they've done. You're very unlikely to be in direct competition with any other CSAs - so please feel free to learn from and copy other people's good ideas! You can get an up-to-date list of CSAs on the Soil Association website:

www.soilassociation.org/communitysupportedagriculture/localcsagroups
www.soilassociation.org/inyourarea

We wish you lots of success!