



February 2023

Marketing Changes for Specialty Mushroom Growers in 2020

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In a previous *Smart Marketing* article, we described some of the results of a specialty mushroom grower survey. In this article, we want to describe some marketing efforts used by growers during the pandemic in 2020. We want to thank the growers for providing this valuable information which benefits their industry and helps us develop future research and education for growers.

Digital technology offers several useful marketing tools, and growers used some of them as new ways to market their mushrooms during the pandemic in 2020.

Over half of our growers had a website and were on social media before the pandemic. During 2020, an additional 12% additional growers started using these marketing media (Table 1). But more respondents added other marketing tools. These included developing an online store, delivery service, pre-orders for pickup, or shipping services. These services are much more difficult to start, develop, and manage and we admire those who are using them.

Table 1. Marketing Tools Used before and during 2020

Marketing Tool	Used before 2020 Pandemic	Added during 2020 Pandemic	Total Used
<i>% of respondents using</i>			
Social media	68.6	11.7	80.3
Website	63.6	14.4	78.0
Online store	23.9	19.3	43.2
Delivery service	23.1	22.7	45.8
Pre-orders for pickup	17.8	29.1	46.9
Shipping service	12.8	5.4	18.2

To find out whether these efforts were successful, we asked growers whether these changes made in 2020 would be kept as part of the business. Many are keeping their added marketing features, including a website, an online store, and pre-ordering capability for pickup. Here are some of their comments which provide us with a window into their experiences with these tools:

- "I will keep all the new changes as they have become what my customers expect as well as easier for me to conduct business."
- "We'll keep all of them. We realize that increasing our fulfillment options has made our business much more resilient."
- "The online pre-orders for pickup at the farmers market have been great and will continue."
- "I will keep all the added features, except I will probably stop offering delivery."
- "We are keeping delivery because Square is not charging us, but delivery requests have decreased recently."

We feel that for some, these added efforts likely have increased transaction accuracy, added customers, and increased sales to current customers. Those who didn't want to shop the market in person might have shopped online and picked up their items. Whatever the reasons, they clearly worked for some of our producers.

Delivery is not for everyone. High labor and transportation costs might not be recovered from delivery charges. This is an issue for grocery retailers as well. They have not been able to charge enough for delivery to pay for the service and need to supplement the delivery fees with increased product prices and advertising fees. However, some growers are using value-added products to increase farmers market sales and find shipping easier for the stable products.

Final thoughts

We want to thank the growers for providing this valuable information which benefits the

specialty mushroom industry and helps our program improve and support our research and education for growers. Many supporting resources are available at www.CornellMushrooms.org, including growing guides, webinar recordings, and information on marketing, regulations, and other aspects of running a specialty mushroom enterprise.

Research acknowledgement

This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under sub award number ENE19-156-33243.

Click on our report [Specialty Mushroom Grower Survey Report](#) for the full results.

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