

# Beginning Alpaca Marketing Strategies Part II – Marketing In Action

By Renee & Barry Prokop  
Black Meadow Suris

Marketing - some people love it, and some people hate it. However, whether you are on one side of the fence or the other, it is a necessary activity for any successful business. In the previous article we talked about developing items that will brand your farm in the marketplace. After this has been accomplished, we still need to communicate them into the marketplace.

There are a number of ways to communicate to/with prospective customers. Some of them are easy, others harder and more technical. Some are inexpensive while others can become quite pricey. We will go through each of these alternatives to understand what is available. This is by far not an exhaustive list since people are coming up with new and creative ways everyday to communicate their message.

In each of the examples that are given below there can certainly be variations on the theme. You will find that your marketing campaign will start to take on its own personality – and that is great. However, one should make sure that everything that is being communicated is consistent with their ability to follow through. The worst tactic anyone can take is to try to be something they are not or promise something they cannot deliver.

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## Welcome To Black Meadow Suris

Home News At Black Meadow Education Upcoming Events Alpacas For Sale Herdsires Photo Gallery Our OnLine Store Our Country Store About Us

**Black Meadow Suris**

Black Meadow Suris goal is:  
To provide the highest quality Suri Alpacas to a growing industry.

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**Alpaca Website** – We talked before about creating a farm name and matching that farm name with a web address. Web addresses are easy to purchase. One can go to a web site such as [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com) and try different addresses. The site will be able to tell you which ones are available. If you have ever purchased personalized license plates for your car, it is the same process. While we are talking about cars, in many states the Department of Motor Vehicles have .com license plates. This would be another way to get the same message out about how to

reach you – put your web address on your license plate. Once you have a web address you can then create your web site and your email addresses. In most cases, the internet

site provider where you purchased your web address will also provide web site hosting services. This simply means that while your web site can be accessed by anyone, anywhere, anytime, it is physically located on your provider's computers. The hosting provider will offer a set of tools so you can manage your site. Creating a web site can be as simple or as complicated as you want it to be. The hosting site may provide the tools that you need to create a simple web site, you can purchase web development software like Microsoft's Frontpage or Adobe Dreamweaver to develop your own web site or you can purchase the services of someone who specializes in creating web sites for businesses. However, at a minimum you should have basic information about your farm, your alpacas, and how to reach you.

**Email address** – Everyone today seems to have an insatiable passion for sending emails. While it is no substitute for personal interaction, it is a great and quick tool to communicate. In most cases when you purchase web hosting services you can get email boxes and addresses associated with that web address. As an example, if your web site address was [www.blackmeadowsuris.com](http://www.blackmeadowsuris.com), you could also have an email address like [suris@blackmeadowsuris.com](mailto:suris@blackmeadowsuris.com). The hosting provider will provide you with a way to access the email box and manage it. If you do not have a web site you can still develop a memorable email address. There are many free email systems like Yahoo, MSN, and HotMail that will allow you to create an email address for free. While it will not allow duplicate email addresses, you could incorporate your farm name into the address. Maybe [blackmeadow@yahoo.com](mailto:blackmeadow@yahoo.com)?

**Business cards** – Business cards should include your logo, farm name, tag line, farm address, phone number, email address and web address. They are a great low risk, low cost way to leave information about your farm with anyone interested in talking more about alpacas. We carry our business cards everywhere we go since you never know where you will run into people that are interested in alpacas and in raising, breeding, and selling alpacas. We think of business cards as a way to allow others to think about your elevator pitch and get back to you in a way that is most comfortable for them. We prefer business cards that are created with enough information so that the person can communicate with you but not so much information that they feel that you have told them the whole story. Think about leaving some white space on the card (maybe on the back) in order to write notes to remind the other person (or ourselves) what we talked about or information that they were interested in receiving. We try to never rely on our or the other person's memory if possible. Since it is always difficult to know where your next sales lead will come from it is critical to pass your business cards out. Think of them as a "hot potato". I have handed them out at alpaca shows, lodge meetings, the grocery store, and yes, even in elevators! Hand them out!

**Introduction postcard** – A person that we know once complained that business was so slow. I asked her, "And what do you attribute this to?" She sighed and said, "I guess it's because I'm never open." Well, in starting an alpaca farm, nobody knows that you are open either. You have to tell them. One way to do that is to decide who you would like to know that you are open for business and mail them an introduction card. You can also email them but I think that most people will retain an introduction card longer than

an email. [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com) has a quick design tool that you can use; you can create something in Microsoft Word or have the postcard professionally created. It can include everything on your business card and more. You can put your elevator pitch on it as



well as farm and alpaca pictures. The names and addresses can be collected from a variety of sources. Search the Internet for other local alpaca farms, look on alpaca association websites or even contact magazines like *American Livestock*. American Livestock has a service where they will take your postcard and mail it out to their subscribers. However, they will not give you their list due to privacy restrictions (which is an

excellent policy). They will even create your postcard from scratch. So whether you create something yourself or have it done, it is a simple process to start to announce that you are open for business.

**Newspaper announcement** – Many local newspapers will run a press release or business announcement free of charge. *Look in the local paper for examples of the style and the information that is included in them. Model one after it and sent a press release to the newspaper complete with a color and black & white picture.* Alpacas stir more interest and curiosity than opening a dry cleaner store since one does not run across an alpaca farm on a daily basis. One area that we continue to explore is getting a feature written about us as a human-interest story. Another way to generate media interest is to host visits that will be of interest to the local community. Host a visit by the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H Club, or an elementary school. These visits accomplish two objectives. They give you broader exposure in the community while also potentially linking you up with future customers.

**Car Signs** – Magnetic car signs are another way to let people know that you are in the alpaca business. We have one on each side of our Chevrolet Blazer. We even thought about buying a Blazer to match the colors of our logo but then we knew that we were going a little over the top! We even make a point of parking in a corner space so that more people see the sign. The sign was created by taking our business card and have it blown up to the right size. We provided a copy of the business card and the logo graphic file to *Signorama*. They took care of the rest and provided us with a camera-ready copy to approve before producing the sign. *Signorama* can also produce painted-on car and windshield signs.

**Shirts & Pins** – If you've got it, flaunt it. Like the car sign, you are trying to get the word out that you are in the alpaca business. If people see you in an alpaca farm shirt complete with logo, they are more likely to ask, "Tell me more." I was actually riding on the metro and had on a shirt with an alpaca farm's name on it. As I stood there someone next to me started talking about how beautiful alpacas were. It took me a second to

realize how they knew that I was in the alpaca business but after that we had a great conversation and exchanged – you guessed it, business cards.

**Associations** – As Willy Sutton once responded to the question, “Why do you rob banks?” His answer was, “That’s where the money is.” Alpaca associations, by their very nature, are where people go in the alpaca industry to give and receive information. An essential part of marketing is to be seen where the buyers are and associations are a great place to be seen by participating and interacting with them. Whether you are on a committee, list your farm information on the association web site, or just belong in their directory, it is one more place where you can be reached. The more active you are the better and more exposure you will get.

**Alpaca Shows** – Alpaca shows are a lot about winning ribbons and a lot about networking. If there is a choice between purchasing two equal alpacas from two equal farms for the same price and one has accumulated more blue ribbons then we would guess that the blue ribbon alpaca would be the one that was sold. Even though they may be alike in all other aspects. An alpaca with winning credentials is more marketable than an alpaca without credentials. With that being said, it is important for your marketing program to get out to the shows and validate that you have high quality alpacas. It will help your alpaca sales and your farm’s reputation. Another reason to attend the shows is to see first hand what marketing activities are working for other farms and include them in your plan for the future. Another important point about alpaca shows is that this is a place where you will also find prospective customers. The challenge is to balance the show ring and the marketing ring. At a number of shows we have attended they has been nobody at the booths to talk about their alpacas and answer questions. They are all out winning ribbons. Balancing winning ribbons and marketing at show events, while difficult and exhausting, may also produce an interested future customer.

Eighty percent of success is showing up. ~Woody Allen

**Internet Advertising** – There are a number of ways that one can advertise on the Internet. One can create a banner ad, which will appear for a certain length of time at a certain cost. If you have already created a business card, introduction postcard, or other type of graphic then you can possibly use that. Most of the ones that we have seen are

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glitzier than ours and maybe more eye catching but it depends on your style. The web sites to place a banner are only limited by your imagination, but again, you will want to place your banners where people that are interested in alpacas will tend to migrate to. Other farms, associations, and alpaca product sites are good locations to start. What we have been exploring more are sponsored search links like ones offered on Google and Yahoo. The sponsored search links provide you the ability to make your web site and message more visible to people that are using these search engines to find out information about alpacas. This is particularly important if you have not had your web

site up for very long. The search engines tend to rank search results based on a number of factors which include: the number of hits a web site receives, keyword use, and number of sites that are linked to yours. As a new web site it would be difficult to get high visibility if these factors are taken into consideration. By creating a sponsored link you are placing your search result near the head of the pack. Now, of course, you are going to pay for that privilege; however, it is a great way to jump-start your farm web activity.

**Magazines & Newsletters** – Everybody has something to share. Whether you are starting a farm or maintaining an existing herd, the search for more information and better ways to manage a farm is ongoing. If you have had trouble finding information about a certain topic and/or had to learn how to do something on the farm the hard way; share your experiences and results with the rest of the alpaca community. In that way, everyone learns from your experience and you get credit for helping other farm owners. One great outcome of any marketing program is to become known in your industry as a positive and forward thinking farm. In addition, the article or newsletter piece can then be added to your web site.

Marketing is an adventure! There are many ways to approach it and we hope that there are a few ideas here that you may want to try. One important caution though is to be careful what you wish for. The more marketing you do, the more calls, visits and email you will get. Your future reputation will rely on your quick and courteous response and whether you follow through with commitments that you have accepted. Remember, marketing is only the beginning!

### **About the Authors:**

*Renee and Barry Prokop have created and developed Black Meadow Suris to provide a diverse collection of suri alpacas. We have a passion for quality customer service and friendliness. Come experience the power that a small dedicated farm can bring to your breeding program! Services that we provide include long and short term agisting, breeding services, and alpaca sales. We also are opening two stores; one online and the other at the farm. Renee and Barry operate Black Meadow Suris just outside of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Fredericksburg is located in the rolling hills just below the falls of the Rappahannock River and halfway between the two Civil War capitals , Washington, D.C. and Richmond, VA.*

*Renee, who is no stranger to the farm, will manage the day-to-day operations of Black Meadow Suris. Both Barry and Renee will continue to explore, learn, and communicate better ways that they have found to manage their growing farm.*

*To find out more about Black Meadow Suris, call us at 703-764-9077; email us at [Renee@prokops.com](mailto:Renee@prokops.com) or visit us on the web at [www.blackmeadowsuris.com](http://www.blackmeadowsuris.com)*