

# ***Beginning Marketing Strategies***

## ***Part III – People Marketing***

*By Renee & Barry Prokop  
Black Meadow Suris*

People buy from people. While there are many different types of marketing programs available that do not involve people; business cards, show banners, internet advertising to name a few, at the end of the day somebody will be evaluating if they want to invest their money in your farm and their trust in you. As I have said before, there are some people who love marketing and then there are the rest of us. However, marketing is not really about being bubbly, shaking hands and smiling a lot. It is about being able to communicate information about your alpacas in a clear professional manner. The good news is that, in relative numbers, the alpaca industry is a pretty small group of people and news travels fast about who in the industry is approachable and fair. On the other hand, news travels even faster about those who are not.

In this respect, marketing is a lot like providing customer service. Marketing is all about providing quality service to a person before the sale and customer service is all about providing quality service to a person after the sale. They are just different sides of the same coin. To demonstrate exactly how important marketing is to an alpaca farm, consider the following statistics about customer service that have been reported in a number of different surveys over the last couple of years:

- ***68 percent of dissatisfied customers leave because they perceive an attitude of indifference in the owner, manager or employee.***
- ***A typical dissatisfied customer will tell eight to ten people about their problem. One in five will tell 20.***
- ***It takes 12 positive service incidents to make up for one negative incident,***
- ***70 percent of complaining customers will do business with you again if you resolve the complaint in their favor. If you resolve it on the spot, 95 percent will do business with you again.***
- ***The average business spends six times more to attract new customers than it does to keep old ones.***

Businesses having above average customer service ratings grow twice as fast, have the ability to charge about 10% more, and achieve more in sales. What this tells us is that people and strong communication throughout the marketing and selling process is absolutely critical to your success.

While keeping the pitfalls of customer service in mind, we can develop strong strategies to market our farms. In the first year of marketing, we defined seven laws that must be

followed in order to be successful in marketing alpacas to customers and potential customers.

**Law 1 – Set Expectations:** We were over at our friend’s house the other evening. I went up to the house and rang the doorbell. While we could hear movement inside, no one came to the door. I rang the bell again, nothing. Finally I pushed the doorbell in and held it there. My wife after observing my frustration for a while walked up and knocked on the door. Our host immediately opened the door. I angrily exclaimed, “Why didn’t you open the door earlier, I have been ringing this bell for minutes?” He looked puzzled and said, “Barry, that bell hasn’t worked for weeks.” We plan on buying him a little “out of order” sign for the holidays. As in his example, many people are surprised when people finally do get a hold of them and they are angry or worse yet, they stop trying to get a hold of them and the farm owner is left to wonder why they are not receiving as many calls as they would like. It is important to understand how people will communicate with you and ensure that you are available to respond when they do. As a society, we have learned through technologies like email and cell phones that we can get instant results to our inquiries. If we do not get them, we get frustrated. Frustrated people do not buy alpacas from us. Nor can we always reply to inquiries instantly. Many times this miscommunication is only the result of uncommunicated expectations. If I had seen a sign on the doorbell, I would have knocked. If I had seen a sign on the door that said they would be back in 5 minutes I would have waited. Therefore, if you have any restrictions on your time and availability, note it on the web site, in the phone message or email. Regardless of the circumstances, letting people know when you will be available, how you prefer to communicate with them, what level of service you can provide will go a long way in ensuring that your business relationship gets off on the right foot.

**Law 2 – Be Available:** Violation of this second law is probably one that most people complain about the most in dealing with sellers of goods and services. We left them a message, we sent them an email, we mailed them for a catalog - and nothing. No call, email, or catalog. Buying and selling alpacas is a very “hands on” and interactive type of activity. Very few people will pop on to your web site, see the alpaca that they want and mail you a check. They will want to know a lot of information about your alpacas and farm. You must be willing and available to transfer that knowledge to them. Since you will probably not be the only alpaca farm that they are talking to, your willingness to be there when they are interested, and be willing to transfer that knowledge, may be the difference between people buying your alpaca or the alpaca from the farm down the road. Using Law 1 will assist you to manage expectations and your time. However, we believe that the more time that you are available to spend with a potential buyer to get them comfortable that they have made the best decision, the better your chances will be that the prospect will turn into a customer.



**Law 3 - Be Friendly** – This law is a tough one since being friendly means something different to everyone. However, as I mentioned in the beginning, people buy from people. It is hard for people to buy from grumpy people or people to buy from pushy people. Schedule your time and energy so that you are able to put your best foot forward when interacting with prospective customers. Be interested in learning what they want to buy, how they want to buy it and when. Learn from your prospective customer about their farm plans and issues so that you can assist them to be more successful. Every prospective customer is unique with different levels of alpaca understanding and knowledge. By being willing to explore each other's areas of knowledge and requirements, the more you may find in common.

**Law 4 - Be Informative** – Alpaca owners are always interested in learning more about the care, feeding, and history of alpacas as well as how to better manage their own farm. Being able to be a source of information whether it is direct or indirect will provide a strong connection with the buyer as well as make them more comfortable to be able to come to you with additional questions. While no one can know all there is to know about every phase of the alpaca business; building a library of knowledge will become important since most people will feel more comfortable about buying alpacas from a knowledgeable owner.

Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value.  
~Albert Einstein

**Law 5 – Keep Good Records** – “I don't know” is not the right answer when it comes to providing information about your alpacas. Accurate and clear records are essential to marketing alpacas. These accurate and clear records show that you are not only taking all of the necessary and proper care of your animals but that you have documented them so that there can be no possible mistake in what was given to who when. This ultimately helps the new owner know what treatments have been provided to their new alpacas and helps the vet understand the alpaca's medical history. Having complete records also provides a comfort level for the new owner. They will know the degree of care that you have taken for their new alpaca.

**Law 6 - Marketing begins in the barn** – This law is probably so basic that most people overlook it. When people buy alpacas they are really buying a relationship with the farm that sells them as well. Therefore, the maintenance, upkeep, cleanliness and appearance of your farm (as well as the alpacas) when people visit will be a reflection on how you well manage your business. The following list is a minimum that should be reviewed before a customer visit:

- Medical records out and available
- Animal histories available
- Dung piles cleaned as much as possible.
- Equipment all in working order
- Medical kits neat and clean
- Food in secure and clean containers
- Hay fresh and in reasonable supply

- Fresh water out and available
- Pastures neat and trimmed
- Fences mended

We know that this sounds like a military inspection but whether you like it or not you are going to be competing against other farms for business. Highlighting the fact that you are a clean well-run farm will impress almost any buyer. We know that our farm environment isn't always as "neat as a pin" but when customers and groups visit, it is. We believe that customers will recognize that we have gone the extra mile to ensure that their visit was as important to us as it was to them.

**Law 7 - Know your animals** – The larger the farm the harder this will become, however, if you are a small farm the better you are able to provide all the "unwritten" habits, stories, and trivia about your alpacas. The more this occurs, the more personable they become to the buyer. They cease to be just an alpaca and become an alpaca with a personality and an intangible quality that exists in no other alpaca. Sometimes the decision on which alpaca someone will buy may come down to story.



These 7 laws are just the start to becoming successful but they will provide the foundation for your future in the alpaca industry. As we mentioned in the beginning, marketing is a lot like customer service in reverse. These 7 laws provide a roadmap for you to provide great customer service before the sale by marketing the positive qualities of your alpacas and your farm.

### **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)

