

Bear Path Farm Compost **By Bill Obear, Bear Path Farm**

Bill Obear operates Bear Path Farm in Whately, MA. Bill has been producing compost for 14 years. His farm produces about 2,000 cubic yards per of compost per year for bulk sale (\$ / cubic yard). Bill has developed a very successful “word of mouth” business. Existing customers, nurseries, garden centers, garden designers, landscapers and farmers all refer their friends, neighbors and customers to Bear Path Farm as an excellent source of compost. Bill’s commitment to quality product, service, and communication have made his compost business successful year after year.

Word of Mouth Marketing Concepts For Compost Producers

1. **Always produce a quality product.** Your customers do not want to use compost that is contaminated with trash (such as plastic), has a foul odor, has not cured properly etc. If you consistently produce a quality product, your customers will consistently recommend you to their friends, neighbors and associates. The reverse, of course, is true – poor quality compost results in negative advertising. This is very hard to overcome.
2. **Develop a website to showcase your compost operation** as well as other farm products that you’re marketing. A good website has several beneficial purposes:
 - a) It gives your compost business a professional touch.
 - b) It gives you the opportunity to answer many of your customers’ questions, e.g.: - What materials are used to make your compost? Has it been tested? Do you deliver? etc.
 - c) Customers are driven to your website simply because they like to search the web for things they are looking for. Remember customers are not only looking for products – they are looking for information. The information on your website should be clear, concise, interesting and fun to read. Good photos are a plus. Also when a new customer calls, you can and should direct them to your website for specific information – directions to your operation, compost nutrient analysis etc. This is a good sales / marketing technique.
3. **Develop a brochure describing your compost product and operation.** Brochures can be mailed to potential customers, dropped off at garden centers, dropped off and mailed to nurseries (potential customers), given to farm operators, and should accompany the invoices you present your customers who are likely to share your brochure with a friend or neighbor.

4. **Service is an important component of the compost business** and covers many areas – returning phone calls, answering customer’s questions, reliable delivery etc.
- a) It is extremely important that every phone call you receive (whether an order from a past customer or a new inquiry) be returned ASAP. Customers love quick responses. You don’t want your business to develop “contractoritis”. i.e., having a reputation for taking a long time to get back to people. Everybody’s busy. Your customer’s time is just as important as yours.
 - b) Your customers are likely to have a number of questions when they call. And these questions can take some time to answer. You are now considered by your customers a compost and, to some extent, gardening expert. How much compost do I need? Do you know of anybody who sells loam? I’m building some raised beds for my vegetable garden – how much compost should I mix with soil? Is your compost organic? Who around here sells fruit trees? The questions are endless. So be patient and answer them to the best of your abilities or refer a customer to somebody else with more knowledge in a certain area. No matter how little compost your customer might be looking for, remember that they have many friends who one day might be customers of yours.
 - c) When delivering bulk compost to your customer’s home, farm or jobsite, be on time (or call if you’re going to be late) and try within reason (particularly for home gardeners) to dump the compost where the customer wants it. Again this is service. It might take a little extra time, but people appreciate that and they will tell their friends. However be very mindful of the various delivery pitfalls e.g. Power lines, tree limbs, septic systems, heavy wet soil etc. If an alternate drop site looks better make your customer aware of a better option. Customers appreciate your knowledge and concern about their property.

Running a successful compost business is not that difficult if you pay attention to important details. Word of mouth marketing is by far the best and least expensive form of marketing. Every customer deserves the same attention no matter how much or little compost they end up purchasing. In some cases a new customer might not purchase anything right away, but if you answer their questions and are courteous and direct them to your website -their friends will.

The website for Bear Path Farm is: www.bearpathfarm.com

Bill can be reached at: 413-665-2894 or cell: 413-320-1262