

COMMUNICATING FOREST SERVICES



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Prosperous forest

Diversification through Inclusion and Specialisation

THE GUIDEBOOKS IN THIS SERIES:

All guidebooks are produced as a joint effort of the Prosperous Forest – partnership. The main authors of each guidebook are listed below:

WHAT IS A SERVICE?

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Communicating forest services

As a group, forest owners have become increasingly diverse in recent years. With this diversity comes new needs. Previously, services provided to forest owners were mostly based on wood production. Now, however, forest services need to consider the different and changing objectives of modern forest owners. When designing and providing services, the specific needs of each forest owner should be identified from the start. Communication with forest owners must also be adapted as needs change.



Marketing to whom?

Because of this diversity of needs among forest owners, it is not cost-effective to offer the same service to everyone using the same marketing arguments. Forest owners are individuals, and they have their own needs and motives. Service providers should offer personalized services to reach different types of forest owners and fulfil these needs. With limited resources, service providers need to divide their customers into segments.

Finding focus and customers

Segmentation is dividing a broad business market, normally consisting of existing and potential customers, into smaller groups of customers (known as segments) based on shared characteristics. Services are then marketed using different marketing arguments for each customer segment. This allows the effective use of even limited market budgets. For example, a forest owner wanting to focus on making their forest into more of a carbon sink may be open to different kinds of marketing messages than a forest owner interested in maximising financial profit. Even the same service, for example young forest management, can be marketed using different messages and arguments for different customer segments. Segmenting the market can help a company reach and serve its customers better. Marketing messages should be directed to attract customers and trigger them into action. It is important to articulate and communicate why the service or product is needed and the value it provides.



Segmenting the market can help a company reach and serve its customers better.

Testing marketing messages:

The pilot of the project tested sending different marketing messages. The same service (first thinning) was marketed using three different arguments. These were financial argument, an ecological (emphasising climate change mitigation) argument and a control message with no argument. Text messages contained a short text and a link where more information could be found, and they were sent to 300 female forest owners. The forest owners were then interviewed by phone. It turned out that the marketing message without any argument, neither financial nor environmental, was the least effective and least interesting for the forest owners. This shows that it is important to add information to marketing messages to explain why the service or product is important for forest owners.

How to segment a market?

Factors like age, gender, ethnic background, and education level can be used for customer segmentation. Segmentation may not work well if the segments are too broad when segmentation simplifies or generalises too much. For example, it is not given that all female forest owners have the same needs and objectives. More information about the customers is needed to be able to divide the market. Often, segmentation is based on mapping customer needs and preferences. This can be difficult because small forest service companies have limited information about their customers.

Information is the key

Forest service companies often have access to forest-related information, such as the size of forest properties, the age of the forest, and the potential need for forest management. Combining these and other factors are a good way of starting to segment the market. For example, it has been noticed that young female forest owners living in cities are more open to purchasing a first thinning service when

it is marketed with biodiversity and climate arguments. In contrast, financial arguments are more important to older female forest owners living in cities.

Forest service companies typically have close personal contact with their customer base, offering good potential for collecting more detailed information about customer attitudes, motives, and service needs for use when segmenting. It is also possible to utilise existing national surveys on forest owner values.

The advisor's role in advisory services

This diversity among forest owners should be considered when providing the advisory services. It is important to tailor advisory processes to different kinds of forest owners based on their objectives, skills and decision-making models. The advisor is attempting to fulfil the objectives of the forest owner. Are these objectives really the forest owners' own personal objectives or are they society's objectives for how forest resources should be used? It should be noted that forest advisors are a vital part of the advisory services. Even so, the personality, values, attitudes, and behaviour of the forest advisor should not influence what information is provided to forest owners, and how it is provided, since this can impact the success of the advising process.



Respect for the forest owners' own abilities seems to help achieve the desired outcome.

No print for success

It was surveyed during the project that no individual attitude or element alone can fully explain the success or failure of the advising process. Successful advisors can have a wide range of characteristics and still be able to provide quality and useful advice to forest owners. Respect for the forest owners' own abilities seems to help achieve the desired outcome. The more commitment advisors feel towards their employer and the more they feel like they are a part of the advising group in the organisation, the more successful their advising processes are. This also can be connected to job satisfaction.

Personal messages and communication

There are different ways to communicate with forest owners. The best and most effective communication platform can also differ between forest owners and between forest owner segments. The more customised the message is, the more effective it is, regardless of the communication channel. Phone or e-mail (or mail) contact that provides personalised information about customer's forests is effective. This can include such things as maps showing the forest owner's properties and forest compartments to show the type of potential services needed. Making personal contact, however, requires extensive resources.

Instead of individual messages, e-mails can be targeted and sent to specific forest owner segments when the message can apply to a bigger group who likely have the same interests and needs. Text messages can be used the same way. Text messages are a good way of providing brief information. Another option is to include a link in the text message that provides more information, though recipients may not click the link. For this reason, the subject should be clearly explained in the text message and the information provided should be easily accessible.

Find the optimal channels

If the service provider lacks contact information for forest owners or wants to reach new customers, other communication channels are needed. Newspapers and magazines can be used to communicate about services. An advertisement in a local newspaper can be quite effective in reaching local forest owners. There are many newspapers and magazines that target forest owners or others interested in forestry, forest products, nature, or recreation. Buying an advertisement in one of these can be a good way to communicate to and reach new customers.

Online services and social media are a comprehensive and cost-effective way of reaching large audiences. An active and up-to-date Instagram or Facebook page can reach many forest owners (or future forest owners) and allow the company to attract new followers on social media. Social media channels can be also used for targeted marketing, often at a reasonable cost.





Make sure to keep the company's website up-to-date, informative, and accessible.

Include the entire service process when communicating

Today, forest owners often begin searching for information about forest service providers online. Make sure to keep the company's website up-to-date, informative, and accessible. The site should explain the services offered, while keeping in mind the differing needs and objectives of forest owners. Do not assume that all forest owners know what is included in services like young stand improvement or first thinning. For new or unexperienced forest owners, in particular, it is crucial to explain why the service is important, what the financial benefits are and how to conduct nature management. If the company has special expertise or skills, such as the use of continuous cover forestry, nature management, non-timber forest products or climate-friendly forest management, make sure to communicate this to potential and current customers.

Don't let language be a barrier

When formulating marketing messages, be aware that many unexperienced forest owners might be unfamiliar with forestry terminology. Words like stumpage price, mounding or selection cutting should be explained or should not be used to avoid putting off forest owners. Pictures and videos are good way for explaining and visualising services on the websites and social media.

Inclusive communication

The increasing diversity of forest owners calls for more inclusive communication. Forest owner segmentation is a valuable tool in targeting the right group of forest owners. Nevertheless, there are some key aspects to keep in mind for inclusive communication regardless of segment addressed:

■ Ensure accessibility

Consider what language is used, avoid assuming that specific concepts or acronyms are understood by all, and reflect on what culture-specific competence or experience is needed to understand jargon. Are there special communication support needs to be met, such as dyslexia, hearing deficiencies and so on?

■ Avoid reinforcing stereotypes

Avoid stereotypical jokes or comments about different social groups or associating women with traditional feminine traits and men with traditional

masculine traits. Do not assume that everyone you meet is heterosexual and do not make assumptions about knowledge levels based on accents or skin colour.

■ **Inclusive communication is not a checklist!**

Instead, inclusive communication can be understood as a perspective and process rooted in empathy, ambitions for mutual learning and a striving to meet every individual where they are.

Tips for communication:

- Market segmentation helps to allocate a company's limited resources effectively and to communicate to potential customers and forest owners better.
- Defining segments helps in understanding the objectives of different customer groups and targeting communication with arguments suitable for the market segment.
- If segmenting feels difficult, start with the information about your customers that you already have, such as the size of their forest property, the age of their forest or their potential need for forest management.
- Think about your marketing strategy. What would be the best channel to reach your customer segments? What marketing message would your customer segment be interested in?
- Listen to the needs and objectives of the forest owners and respect the forest owners' own expertise.

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