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Design to Strategy: Basic Steps for Social Media Content Creation

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Direct farm marketers, value-added agriculture entrepreneurs, and agritourism operators seeking to establish and grow their social media marketing efforts may be unsure of where to begin when it comes to creating content for social media.

The number of available user-friendly, low-cost content creation applications is constantly growing. Platforms such as Canva and Adobe Express now put valuable content creation tools into the hands of direct farm marketers who are seeking to create images or graphics for social media on their own.

This fact sheet provides a checklist of basic steps to consider before and during your social media content creation. These steps will help you focus your efforts, develop an image, and write a caption to effectively reach your target audience on social media.

Checklist of Basic Steps for Social Media Content Creation

☐	**1. Complete the Six-Point Social Media Content Considerations Worksheet (CPA Info # 443). This worksheet will help to:** • Focus your content creation on meeting your target customers' needs, desires, and values. • Ensure the content is consistent with your overall brand. Access this worksheet online at https://tiny.utk.edu/SixPtSocMedContent
☐	**2. Choose the tools or applications you will use to design the image.** • Design tools could include Canva or Adobe Express. • Applications could include Adobe Illustrator or Adobe Photoshop.

☐	**3. Determine which social media platform(s) you will post the content to when complete. Consider which platform(s) your target audience will be most likely to engage with and the type of content you are preparing.** • Gen X users (born 1965 -1980) prefer social platforms in the following order (starting with most preferred): Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, then TikTok. • Millennial users (born 1981 - 1996) prefer: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, then TikTok. • Gen Z users (born 1997 – 2010) prefer: TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, then Facebook. However, note that there are outliers to these trends. Not EVERY Gen Z is on TikTok, just like not EVERY Millennial uses Instagram. Your niche or target demographic may be unique to this data.
☐	**4. Ensure the image or file is appropriately sized for the social media platform(s) you have chosen before adding elements.** Various design tools can do this for you. (Hint: Canva has templates already sized for social media platforms in their Template database.) • Instagram square posts should be 1080 x 1080 pixels. • Facebook landscape images should be 1200 x 630 pixels. • Facebook portrait images should be 630 x 1200 pixels. • Facebook cover photos should be 851 x 315 pixels. **Will this content be posted across multiple channels?** Images or designs optimized for Instagram can be posted directly to Facebook without any additional editing. However, if an image is sized for another platform (such as a Facebook cover photo), it will not be legible when posted to Instagram. This will result in an image being "cut off" due to inappropriate sizing. A good rule of thumb is to use an image size of 1080 x 1080 (a perfect square), as this image can be posted across multiple channels (Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, etc.).

☐	**5. Consider your design's visual hierarchy (the organization of your content by importance – what you want the reader's eye to notice first) as you begin adding elements to the image.** Increase the visual hierarchy of a design by incorporating: • Differing shapes or objects (the eye naturally groups similarly shaped objects together. Varying shapes promote distinctions among elements in a design.) • Differing alignment of elements (this changes the position of the elements on the page or design). • Contrasting element sizes (the eye is more likely to focus on larger elements or text first and then move to the smaller elements on the page). • Changing colors to differentiate elements (colored elements are more likely to catch the eye first compared to black and white). • Grouping of elements (elements in a group or pattern will draw the eye first over elements not grouped together).
☐	**6. Consider the eye-tracking pattern needed to view your design on the social media platform your audience will be using.** The human eye uses visual hierarchy to assign a pattern to the way that information and text is read. Common eye-tracking patterns include F or Z patterns. • The way your audience views Facebook on a desktop computer (more text, smaller or less visuals) versus Instagram on the app (more visuals, less text) might call for a different eye-tracking pattern. • For more text-heavy designs or posts, consider an F Pattern (the Instagram desktop site could be read in this manner). • For designs or posts with more visual elements, consider a Z Pattern (following the zigzag shape of the letter Z – the Instagram smartphone app could be read in this manner).
☐	**7. Consider the amount of positive and negative space present or absent around an element.** Space directly impacts the readability (how easily a message can be absorbed) of a design. For example, a cluttered image may be harder to read or understand. Find balance between the positive space (focus of your design) and the negative space (white area around the focus or an element) on your image.

☐	**8. Consider implementing Color Theory into your design process.** Color can impact your audience's emotions and perception of a design. See some color considerations below: • The primary colors are red, yellow, and blue. When mixed, primary colors create complementary colors. • Complementary colors are green, orange, and purple. These can be mixed to create six tertiary colors. • On the color wheel, colors directly opposite from one another are complementary (such as orange/blue or red/green). • Analogous colors are side-by-side on the color wheel (three in a row). Red, orange, and yellow are three analogous colors. When using an analogous color scheme, one color will dominate, one will provide support, and one will accentuate details. • Triadic colors form a triangle shape on the color wheel and are equally spaced at the three points around the triangle. These colors are very bright. **Explore color theory and color palettes using Adobe Color:** https://color.adobe.com/
☐	**9. If adding text to the design, choose your typeface or font family.** • The typeface that you choose can impact the way your design is received by the audience. • For more modern designs, consider a **Sans-Serif typeface.** Arial and Calibri are commonly used sans-serif fonts. • If seeking a classical or distinguished look, you may consider a **Serif font**. A commonly used serif font is Times New Roman. Notice the tails or serifs present on the Serif text versus the Sans-Serif font shown above.
☐	**10. After an individual font is chosen from your font family, consider other factors impacting the text on the image such as:** • **Kerning**: adjusts the space between specific letters – lengthening the kerning space between letters in a word could look like th i s (only the space between the letter "i" has been adjusted).

	• **Tracking**: the space between each letter in an entire word – extending the tracking space in a word looks like t h i s (additional space has been added between each letter). • **Leading**: the space between lines of text – adding more leading space in between lines of text can look like this (notice that an extra paragraph space has been added after each line). These factors affect the readability (how easily the message or intent can be absorbed) by the reader, as well as the legibility of the text (how easily it can be read). Be sure to check for any accidental spaces or unnecessary lines in your text to ensure maximum legibility.
☐	**11. Review your image's design and edit as needed.** Revisit your completed Six Point Social Media Content Considerations Worksheet. A. Does the image meet the intended Primary Purpose? B. Does the image aim to "speak to" your target audience and their needs, preferences, and values? C. Does the image contain a call to action (or are you planning to include that in the caption instead)? D. Is the image consistent with your brand/the voice and image you want to portray? Check and recheck the spelling and grammar of any text included. Does the image represent effective design principles?
☐	**12. Download or save the image from the design tool or application to your computer using the correct file type for the social media platform you will be uploading it to later.** • Instagram images can be either JPEG or PNG file formats • Facebook recommends using JPEG files for best quality Image files can be saved in a variety of formats, including JPEG and PNG formats. You can identify the file format by viewing the file name. To view your file name, hover over the file with your cursor, right-click the image, select properties, and view the file name. It should appear as either "image.png" or "image.jpg".

	Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) is the most common image format. Cameras often format photos in JPEG, which is compressed to store and access images more easily. Portable Network Graphics files (PNGs) are used more for graphics and logos than photographs. PNGs are also used for graphic design files, as they allow for transparent backgrounds.
☐	**13. Draft the caption or text that will accompany the image when posted.** • Review your completed Six-Point Social Media Content Considerations Worksheet to focus your efforts. • Consider using a word processing program such as Microsoft Word to draft the message so you can quickly draft, edit, and save the file. • Utilize a spell-checking tool such as Grammarly or Microsoft Word to ensure there are no spelling or grammar errors. • Consider using a few important hashtags. Avoid using too many hashtags or hashtags that do not resonate with your niche. • Consider tagging or using the @ symbol to tag relevant brands or accounts in your post. You should only tag accounts that you are familiar with in your caption. Avoid tagging followers or unfamiliar pages, as this could indicate to your audience that you are "promoting" that account.
☐	**14. Review your drafted caption to ensure that your text and messaging are appropriate for the target audience, intended purpose, and chosen platform.** • Is your call-to-action (CTA), such as "click here," "sign up now," or "share your thoughts in the comments," clear? • Is your copy consistent with the brand voice or tone you want to portray? • Review all details to ensure accuracy (e.g. dates, times, locations, phone numbers, addresses, product information, prices, etc.). • Check the spelling and grammar of the text before finalizing.
☐	**15. Congratulations! You are ready to post or schedule the image and caption on your planned social media platform(s).**

Additional Resources

There are additional content design resources available to direct farm marketers seeking to expand their toolset and knowledge. Consider the following resources to learn more:

- Canva Design School - https://www.canva.com/designschool/
- Learn Adobe Express - https://www.adobe.com/learn/express?locale=en&learnIn=1
- Grammarly - https://www.grammarly.com/
- Interaction Design Foundation - https://www.interaction-design.org/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwj4K5BhDYARIsAD1Ly2oFw8i7T1RX5pli8pF8mr5-oqXrfT-yaNMZO7Q8xWpqcCBzAUAGnNgaApphEALw_wcB
- Adobe Color Palette Generator - https://color.adobe.com/



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