

Module 4.

How can you communicate your transhumance activity

Training units

1. Marketing
2. Networking and cooperation
3. Storytelling and branding

Transhumance is a particular agricultural activity, which draws on tradition and whose functioning is still below the radar to a large part of the population. It is essential to have an appropriate communication strategy which is aligned with the needs of the transhumance practitioner but also responds to the interests of consumers who are increasingly demanding higher standards in terms of product quality, sustainability and animal wellbeing. This module aims to shed light on the steps to follow in order to develop a good communication strategy. The first section is dedicated to marketing, the second one deals with the possibilities of cooperation and networking, and the third one gives guidelines for the elaboration of storytelling and branding plans.

1. Marketing

In the contemporary business landscape, the role of marketing is indispensable. Marketing connects companies with their target audiences in a dynamic and ever-evolving marketplace. It is the secret ingredient that keeps businesses thriving in a diverse and competitive market. Regardless of the product, effective marketing is the passport to success. Europe's market is a melting pot of cultures and languages. Marketing helps bridge these gaps, enabling businesses to speak the language of their target audience. It is about understanding local differences, preferences, and trends, and creating a sense of connection and loyalty to the customers. With a highly dynamic market, trends are evolving rapidly.

Whether it's embracing eco-friendly practices or adopting the latest tech trends, marketing is the compass that guides businesses through the ever-shifting landscape of consumer demands. In the digital age, with the majority of people connected online, an online presence is non-negotiable. Social media platforms, search engines, and e-commerce websites are the new marketplaces, and effective marketing ensures that businesses not only survive but succeed in this virtual ecosystem. It's not just about having a great product, but about making sure people know about it. Clever branding, engaging campaigns, and strategic communication create a unique identity that resonates with the consumers.

Marketing applied to transhumance

Marketing applied to transhumance is undergoing a profound transformation. No longer confined to the conventional exchange of goods, it now involves intricate strategies to link practitioners with consumers. In the agricultural sector, marketing is not only about selling products, but also a comprehensive approach to communicate the story of production, emphasise sustainable practices, and meet the demands of an increasingly discerning consumer base. At its core, marketing involves the strategic planning, promotion, and distribution of transhumance products. From traditional technologies to modern innovations, the marketing process plays a critical role in ensuring the viability and sustainability of transhumance practices. This involves creating effective communication channels that educate consumers about the origin, quality, and methods used in agricultural production.



The rise of conscious consumerism and the demand for transparency in the food supply chain further underscore the importance of marketing strategies that highlight sustainable and ethical agricultural practices. Another driver for the development of the professional activity of transhumance practitioners is the Farm2Fork strategy deployed by the European Union. It is a comprehensive plan aimed at promoting sustainable and healthy food systems across Europe.

It focuses on reducing the environmental footprint of food production, improving food quality, and ensuring fair and transparent supply chains from farm to fork. Marketing can play a crucial role in helping transhumance practitioners adapt to the EU's Farm2Fork Strategy. By effectively communicating the sustainable and traditional aspects of transhumance, practitioners can enhance their appeal to environmentally-conscious consumers. Highlighting the low carbon footprint and high animal welfare standards of transhumance-produced goods can attract consumers seeking eco-friendly options. Additionally, marketing campaigns can educate consumers about the cultural and ecological significance of transhumance, fostering appreciation and support for this traditional practice. Through strategic branding and communication, transhumance practitioners can align themselves with the goals of the Farm2Fork Strategy while maintaining their livelihoods and preserving centuries-old traditions. As technology continues to reshape the agricultural landscape, digital marketing tools and data analytics are becoming integral to the sector.

Virtual markets (e-commerce)

Virtual markets have revolutionised the way companies reach and serve their customers. They are emerging as a crucial way for farmers to effectively sell fresh agricultural products directly to consumers. E-commerce platforms and online marketplaces provide businesses with unprecedented opportunities to expand their reach beyond geographical constraints, while consumers gain access to locally sourced fresh products. The transformative power of virtual markets lies in their capacity to enhance efficiency and alleviate logistical challenges. Technological advancements suggest a future where virtual markets could revolutionise the buying and selling of fresh agricultural products on a global scale.

The shift towards virtual markets requires companies to rethink traditional marketing strategies, focusing on online visibility, user experience, and seamless transactions. The "Open Food Hub" in Ireland stands as a notable example of the potential of online platforms in transforming the agricultural sales landscape. It serves as a digital marketplace where farmers can showcase their fresh products directly to consumers. This platform not only eliminates intermediaries but also promotes transparency and fair exchanges. Another interesting example is ANYFION, an e-commerce platform that markets organic products coming from farms located in the **Greek region of Argolida**. Despite the evident potential, virtual markets for agriculture, especially in the realm of fresh produce, are still in the early stages of development.

One prevailing obstacle hindering the widespread adoption of online platforms for fresh produce is people's reservations or fears about buying such items online. Overcoming these concerns through enhanced trust-building measures and education may unlock the full potential of virtual markets, paving the way for a more accessible agricultural marketplace. However, the use of e/commerce requires careful planning to establish the necessary infrastructure to deliver the product to the consumer.

Social media and its usage

Social media serves as a significant instrument for sharing information and business promotion. This is particularly prominent due to the convenience it offers in providing physical store addresses, enabling people to shop in person. In this digital era, the influence of social media on marketing cannot be overstated. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formally Twitter), and LinkedIn have become powerful tools for businesses to engage with their audience, build brand awareness, and drive sales. Social media allows companies to directly connect with consumers, gather feedback, and tailor their strategies based on real-time insights. Social media has revolutionised various industries, and agriculture is no exception. Even though there is no

specific data on how agricultural companies, farmers and transhumance practitioners use social platforms to market their products, we can gather some information on the usage of those networks as part of the marketing strategies of enterprises. According to the [Digital 2022 Global Overview Report](#), 45% of the reasons for internet use are linked to researching products online, with 95% of websites and apps visited being social networks. The most used social media, after WhatsApp, are Instagram and Facebook, with most internet users aged between 20–29 years old. In 2021, [almost 60% of European enterprises were using social media](#). This represents a more than 20 percentage points rise in just six years (Eurostat, Table 1).

Table 1. Social media use of European enterprises in percentage

Countries	EU	Belgium	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Norway	Slovakia	Spain
2015	37	45	30	38	37	29	37	60	34	40
2021	59	76	61	57	56	48	56	85	45	67

In France and Germany, Facebook (47M and 45M active users, respectively) and Instagram (43M and 42M active users, respectively) are the [social media platform the most used](#).

Selecting a social media platform

When selecting the appropriate social platforms to use, transhumance practitioners need to consider the digital reality of their environment. It is essential to analyse which networks are the most used not only in their country or region, but also among the population that represents the company's main target. In general, it can be stated that the social platforms that arouse the most interest are, on one hand, Facebook among the adult population and, on the other hand, Instagram among young people. TikTok is another platform on the rise, especially among young people. However, its use is discouraged both because of the high effort involved in managing it and because of the video format, which requires a specific communicative language that the transhumance practitioner may not be familiar with. Another issue to consider is the possible use of social media management platforms, which are tools designed to simplify and enhance the management of multiple social media accounts. They provide a central hub for scheduling posts, analysing performance metrics, monitoring interactions, and fostering team collaboration across various platforms.

There is a wide variety to choose from, depending on the functionalities, availability and price range the transhumance practitioner is looking for. Below is a non-exhaustive list of some options:

Buffer. It is aimed mainly at scheduling posts. It works with Facebook, X (former Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Mastodon, Pinterest, and Google Business. The free plan allows to manage three social media accounts at the same time. There is a paid plan that provides more functionalities, such as analytics and interaction with other users, and supports more social media accounts.

SocialPilot. It works with Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, TikTok, Pinterest, Google Business, and Tumblr. It provides full functionality, including scheduling posts and analytics, for a cheaper price.

Hootsuite. It is a paid social media management platform that supports X, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Pinterest. It serves as a comprehensive social media application, offering features for scheduling messages, creating and overseeing potential posts, monitoring diverse inboxes, launching boosted posts, advertising campaigns, and much more.

Sendible. It supports Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Business, YouTube, WordPress, and X. It is also cheaper and includes full functionalities, although it lacks one basic feature for some companies: analytics of their social media accounts performance.

2. Networking and cooperation

In the wild world of businesses starting up, especially in the unique realm of transhumance, collaborating and building alliances is often a key factor to success. For transhumance practitioners linking arms with local producers is a game-changer. It's a win-win scenario where both sides benefit, creating a slick cycle of production and distribution. But it's not just about practicality, it's also a smart marketing move. By teaming up with local businesses, transhumance practitioners not only capture a market, but also ride the wave of authenticity that come with locally made products. It's not just about putting stuff on shelves, it's about connecting with consumers who crave sustainable, "kilometre-zero" products. These alliances are not only a response to a mere need for supply chain cooperation. Collaboration between local producers and transhumance practitioners is also seen in terms of community building, insofar as it creates synergies that benefit the rural environment in which they are located.

Farmers cooperatives and collaboration with local producers

Despite being a mobile and often solitary profession, transhumance practitioners are not isolated elements who can carry out their agricultural activity without the participation of any other person or group. Indeed, they require partnerships with local businesses for the production and processing of those **goods and foods they want to market**. Collaboration is, therefore, a key tool for bridging the existing gap between transhumance practitioners and local producers and other farmers and livestock breeders.

This need for cooperation can be channelled in different ways. On the one hand, through bilateral agreements with local producers and businesses that result in mutual benefit, for example for the outsourcing of processing or for the purchase of raw materials. This is understood to be vertical cooperation insofar as it takes place between actors located in different links of the production chain.

The second way that many farmers and livestock breeders find to respond to, among others, their production needs is through their participation in agricultural cooperatives. This type of cooperation, which is horizontal, takes place between actors in the same sphere of the supply chain. By working together, farmers' cooperatives often achieve greater bargaining power in the marketplace, access to shared resources and services, and enhanced efficiency in the production, processing, and marketing of agricultural products. In most cases, these cooperatives have a local, county or regional scope, so they have direct knowledge of the reality of the farmers who are part of them. Our case studies have compiled a wide range of examples in which cooperation has positively impacted the activity of transhumance practitioners. (See Case Studies **NO1**, **DE2** and **ES1**).

Agricultural organisations

A professional agricultural organisation refers to a specialised entity committed to advancing the interests and well-being of farmers. These organisations play a crucial role in supporting farmers by providing valuable resources, knowledge sharing, and advocacy. Through collaborative efforts, professional agricultural organisations empower farmers with the tools and information needed to navigate challenges, enhance productivity, and ensure sustainable agricultural practices. Moreover, these organisations act as influential advocates, representing farming interests in policy discussions and promoting their cultural and economic significance.

Apart from the larger National organization a varying number of organisations especially devoted to transhumance and shepherding exists in different countries. These organisations serve as knowledge hubs by fostering collaboration and sharing best practices, they empower transhumance practitioners, ensuring the preservation of this traditional farming method while enhancing its viability in the contemporary agricultural landscape.

Please see this list over the main professional organisations for transhumance practitioners in some European countries.

3. Storytelling and branding

Storytelling breathes life into traditions while branding shapes their visual identity. In the world of transhumance businesses, these two —storytelling and branding— stand tall. They not only convey age-old wisdom but also boost homemade products. Exploring these areas unveils how stories connect emotionally and branding visually attracts, making these businesses thrive.

Storytelling

Storytelling holds immense significance in the marketing strategies of agricultural businesses, especially for transhumance practitioners aiming to communicate their activities. Fundamentally, storytelling is the art of conveying narratives that evoke emotions, resonate with audiences, and create connections. In the realm of agriculture, where traditional practices like transhumance often exist, storytelling becomes a potent tool for bridging the gap between heritage and modernity. Transhumance, with its rich history and reliance on age-old practices, is full of compelling narratives. By weaving tales of generational knowledge, the symbiotic relationship between livestock, land, and communities, practitioners can captivate audiences. These stories humanise the brand, creating an emotional bond that transcends mere product promotion. Moreover, in a market saturated with agricultural products, storytelling serves as a cornerstone for product differentiation.

Through narratives highlighting the ethical treatment of animals, sustainable land management, and the preservation of cultural heritage, transhumance practitioners carve a unique identity. This distinctiveness becomes a pivotal factor in consumer decision-making, fostering loyalty and advocacy among a discerning audience seeking authenticity. References to historical anecdotes, personal experiences, or success stories within the community lend credibility and depth to the narrative. Leveraging various tools like social media, visual content, or even direct consumer interactions amplifies the reach and impact of these stories.

Branding

Among transhumance businesses, branding plays a pivotal role, closely intertwined with the power of storytelling. While storytelling captivates audiences, branding serves as the visual and conceptual anchor that amplifies the narrative's impact. It's not just about a logo or a name; it's about encapsulating the essence of tradition, heritage, and sustainability that transhumance embodies. Homemade products derived from the livestock tended by transhumance practitioners are the best example of authenticity. In a society increasingly valuing 'kilometre-zero' goods – products sourced locally and sustainably – the significance of these offerings can't be ignored. The inherent connection between the livestock, the land they graze on, and the skilled practitioners caring for them embodies a **unique selling proposition**. This closeness to the source assures consumers of the quality, ethical production methods, and the reduction of carbon footprint—factors crucial in today's

conscientious consumer choices. Branding becomes the visual and narrative vehicle that communicates these values effectively. Logos depicting pastoral scenes, packaging designs reflecting the rustic charm, and brand stories echoing the generational wisdom behind each product all contribute to differentiation in a crowded market. The use of packaging made from recycled materials, especially if they come from waste generated on the farm itself, is also an important added value in the marketing strategy to be followed by the transhumance practitioner. Indeed, this is not just a commercial consideration, which is highly appreciated by consumers, but reflects the values of the business, among which sustainability must play a prominent role. The integration of branding, rooted in the essence of transhumance storytelling, elevates the perceived value of homemade products, fostering a loyal consumer base seeking not just goods, but a connection to tradition and sustainable practices.

Recommended literature

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