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Time is money

LESS TIME ONLINE WITH BETTER RESULTS

WITH THE INCREASING accessibility of high speed Internet access in rural Ontario, the web has quickly become a business tool many producers can't live without. The question becomes, it is making you money by speeding up business transaction times and providing information right when you need it? Or has the information overload become overwhelming and frustrating?

"The key to making the Internet work in business is customization," says Kevin Marriott, a grain and oilseed farmer from the Petrolia area. "To make the best use of my time, I have saved shortcuts to the information within the sites that relate to my local farm."

Marriott has highlighted five websites that are key to his business: Barchart.com, AgricultureOnline.com, the US National Weather Service, DONCast and local radio.

TRACKING THE MARKETS

Barchart.com is a tool for tracking all markets including currencies, equity markets, energy stocks, grains and livestock. There is a lot of information on the main page at www.barchart.com but once you begin the process of narrowing in on the details that affect your business it becomes a powerful tool. The easiest way to customize this site is to click on the word "futures" on the top tool bar, then select "full list" from the menu under the date. This will bring up a page

that will include all of the information pertinent to your farming operation and allow you to dig deeper by selecting individual commodities from the list to review in detail.

There is also the option to completely customize the site to only show you futures information and stocks you would like to track on a daily basis. Select "my quotes" from the upper menu bar and enter your email address to begin. This tool will allow you to add symbols for the commodities you track and add them to a customize list that will always be on the site when you provide your email address.

SHIFTING THROUGH THE NEWS

With Barchart set up and the markets updating on a 10 minute delay, take a break from hitting refresh and sign up for the daily newsfeeds from Agriculture Online at www.agriculture.com. Their news feed service offers a free daily email containing all of the news stories relevant to your area of interest whether it is crops, markets, livestock or agribusiness headlines. This will allow you to focus on business transactions online while being assured you are receiving the most up to date agricultural information through your email.

When a subject piques your interest, there are discussions on a broad range of topics found on the www.agriculture.com website which provide a good cross section of rural opinion from across North America. You can click through links to stories in your email and gauge public opinion on an issue by scanning the comments left by other farmers. Many farmers use this tool to discuss the impact of political decisions, market swings and impending weather on their farming businesses.

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WEATHERING THE STORM

The US Weather Service is a site that can take some time to learn. Once you have pinpointed your farm on the weather maps and become acquainted with the terminology and visual layout of their maps, their weather prediction models can be quite accurate. The main page may be complicated but start at this link - www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov - for the Climate Prediction Centre from which you can go further into the site to see their six to 14 day outlooks. Marriott claims this weather prediction tool has been accurate most of the summer and continues to provide far more accurate predictions than most local weather forecasts.

If you are collecting weather data on your farm with a rain gauge or other, more sophisticated instruments, to assist in agronomic decisions Marriott advises taking the next step and signing up for DONCast online at www.weatherinnovations.com. This tool works best when customized with farm-collected data and it has saved Marriott money each of the last three years.

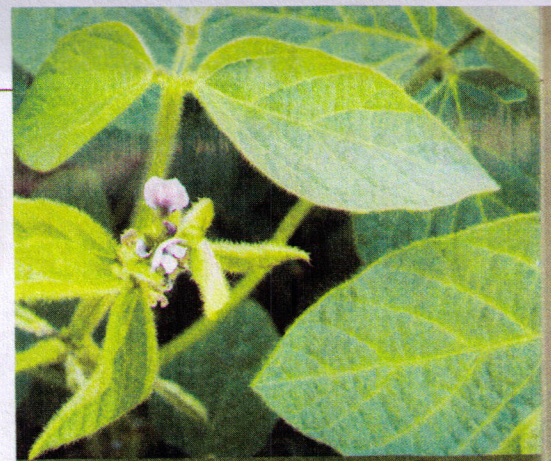
"I customize DONCast by entering in weather information directly from my farm and complimenting it with local weather

station data. While my neighbors were spraying these last three years, I followed the DONCast recommendation not to spray and saved myself money on fungicide all three years without any significant fusarium damage," claims Marriott.

KEEPING IT LOCAL

Also on the local front, Marriott suggests staying in touch with local radio even when away from the farm. It is important to be aware of the issues affecting your local community and this may be difficult when not within range of the local radio station while on holiday or travelling to meetings. Most radio stations now offer streaming radio online and podcasts. You have the choice of listening to live programming online or downloading community news to your iPod or phone. With access to local radio programming when you have the time to listen ensures local political or business meetings and announcements aren't missed.

Bookmarking or creating shortcuts to areas within websites with the information you need on a daily or weekly basis will save you hours of time that can be better be spent farming. ●



FARMING THE INTERNET

There are lots of valuable websites online that can help farmers with many aspects of their operations. Here are just a few that farmers might find helpful:

www.gfo.ca

Find all sorts of information about the new Grain Farmers of Ontario organization and the grain industry.

www.barchart.com

Use the customization options to track only the commodities that are of interest.

www.agriculture.com

Agriculture Online offers a free daily news service where you can get customized news sent directly to your email inbox.

www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov

The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Centre website can be a little daunting at first. But taking time to understand the maps and the jargon can be very helpful when accurate weather information is important to farming operations.

www.weatherinnovations.com

Find DONcast and SPRAYcast on this website. DONcast provides farmers with an accurate prediction of DON levels in wheat enabling them to make better spraying decisions. SPRAYcast helps determine and notify producers when weather conditions are good or bad for spraying.

