

Organized Symposium: What Should Be Extension's Mix of Products?

“Why face-to-face contacts and relationships are still important”

by

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- Two key attributes distinguish many successful agricultural economists from their colleagues: a problem-solving orientation and development of long term relationships with the clientele they serve.
- Relationships develop when mutual respect emerges from successful informal adult learning activities and initial face to face contact. Relationships are reciprocal in that they are built on mutual respect and trust.
- Trust is something that requires competence. It is something that must be earned over time. Successful extension agricultural economists are often invited to develop clientele relationships only after they have provided an effective and relevant program that has helped the clientele.
- Confidentiality is important in developing and maintaining relationships with clientele, leaders, and policymakers. Trust without confidentiality is unlikely to occur long term.
- Building strong relationships will help the agricultural economist to gain greater access to information, greater understanding about the client's problem, circumstances and parameters, better ways for serving the clientele, and greater access to opportunities for providing educational content. In turn the relationship helps the client gain a higher level of understanding that is useful in making more successful decisions.
- Most research projects and secondary data resources often only answer a fraction of the relevant questions that must be answered by decision-makers faced with complex agricultural, community, or policy oriented problems. In many cases the research assumptions made may not be relevant for the unique decisions and circumstances of the clientele.

- Agricultural economists with strong clientele relationships are often expected to go the extra mile in (1) gaining access to the best information for sound decisions on the questions that generic research often does not answer, (2) having decision-relevant parameters for the decision-maker, and (3) putting the relevant information into an educational format that is useful and understandable for the unique circumstances of the clientele decision-makers.
- Without clientele relationships, the agricultural economist is at risk of misfiring with the wrong information, misunderstanding the decision context, and providing misperceptions of the problem faced by the clientele.
- With clientele relationships come expectations that the agricultural economist is on call and will be consistent in the way that problems are analyzed and the way that assistance is provided. In turn, relationships can be useful in generating clientele support for research and extension programs.
- Relationships are time-consuming and there is some likelihood that the amount of time required to maintain some relationships may exceed the limits of what the institutional policy or administration may advocate.
- E-communication tools represent another approach that can be used to efficiently develop and maintain relationships that can share relevant information on a more timely and low cost basis. However, learning relationships are likely to be stronger if they are built on a combination of face to face and electronic communication rather than electronic communication alone.
- Relationships may contribute toward generating funds through voluntary membership dues, newsletter subscriptions, and fee based services. Clientele groups benefiting from strong and effective relationships potentially possess greater willingness to pay--all else constant.
- The identification of institutional arrangements that build on areas of compatibility between high-trust relationships and fee-based services would appear to be an important element in maintaining budgets and successful outcomes for sustaining the land grant university mission.



Expanding Opportunities Provided by Electronic Media

Gary Schnitkey
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AAEA, 2003



1. Electronic Versus Personal

- Electronic not a substitute for personal
- Meetings tied to electronic distribution increase awareness of electronic
- Electronic causes personal contact (email and phone)



2. More of the Same

- Need to address relevant topics
- Simplicity and clarity has high value
- **Writing is critical**
- Publicity/marketing is needed



3. Audience Changes from Electronic

- Increases geographical scope
- More specialist, less generalist (targeting)
- Completeness becomes more important
- Groups more value than individual



4. Content Changes Because Electronic

More importance on:

- Simplicity
- Design and layout
- Tool development



5. Electronic Challenges

- Applications and presentation styles still evolving
- Funding an issue
- Administration, especially extension, need consideration

Fee-based Services - Compatibility and Complementarity with Other Extension Products



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- Serves off-farm food and agribusiness firms
- Founded 1986:
 - Funds/resources for more traditional extension had been cut/reduced
 - Clientele was changing
- Operates on a for-fee basis:
 - Cover all costs of programming
 - Generate a surplus

Why?



- Off-farm firms have education and research needs
- Off-farm firms hire students, and engagement helps keep channels open and teaching programs relevant
- Off-farm firms sponsor research
- Provides resources and materials for more traditional clientele

Why Fee-based Programming?



- Fiscal reality: only way to do programming in some cases
- Serve audiences not served by public funds
- Provide resources for non-fee programming
 - Staff
 - Materials
 - Equipment
- Provides 'market test' of value
- Increases 'value' of activity?

Challenges/Issues



- Not every audience can/should pay
- What costs are fees covering?
 - Out of pocket?
 - Program development?
 - Support staff?
 - Instructional staff?
- Transitions can be an issue
- Expectations likely change with level of fee

Challenges/Issues



- May change nature of client relationship
 - More 'business-like'?
 - Deeper and richer?
- A fee-based 'program' requires continuity, on-going funds, staff
- Funding challenge is obvious: primarily short term projects
- Risk capital hard to source to fund risky, potentially innovative, creative work

Challenges/Issues



- Extension vs. Consulting
 - Where do you draw lines?
- Fee vs. Non-fee
 - Where do you draw lines?
- Leverage is key:
 - Using fee-based activities as a foundation for serving other audiences
 - EICP
 - CRM

Some Observations



- Fiscal reality can clarify issues
- Alternative 'fee' models:
 - Full fee
 - Sponsorships
 - Scholarships
 - Partial cost recovery
 - Others
- Don't underestimate 'sales' investment required

