

Extension Marketing: Building a Successful Local Extension Marketing Campaign¹

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This EDIS publication, focusing on the foundations of marketing communications, is the first of a five-part EDIS publications series on developing marketing campaigns for your local UF/IFAS Extension program. This series includes publications on campaign planning and audience analysis development; integrated marketing; creative; social media and news media strategies; and budgets and evaluation.

Foundations for Building a Successful Extension Marketing Campaign

Due in part to a national trend toward urbanization, many members of the general public have become disconnected from the agriculture industry and the Cooperative Extension Service (Alberts, Wirth, Gilmore, Jones, & McWater, 2004; King & Boehlje, 2000; Warner, Christenson, Dillman, & Salant, 1996). Therefore, Extension agents must use effective communication and distribution methods in order to best inform, motivate, and service their clients (Hogan, 1994).

However, with the change in the diversity of the clientele and with the proliferation of readily accessible online information, finding the most effective communication vehicle is becoming increasingly difficult. Researchers have pointed out that the days of Extension as a sole-source provider of information are gone (King & Boehlje, 2000). As a result, Extension professionals are being encouraged to **market** their programs to let target audiences know about important educational activities and events (Chappell, 1994). Indeed, communication skills have been included as part of the core competencies necessary for Extension agents (Harder et al., 2010). The success of an Extension program not only includes communicating interesting and relevant content, but also relies on communicating with the public in a way that creates awareness, stimulates interest, and, in the end, engages involvement by targeted clientele. But if you have never marketed an Extension program before, **how** do you do it?

That is where this series of EDIS publications comes in. The **purpose** of these EDIS publications is to provide you with the tools you will need to tailor messages,

media, and methods to best market and promote your local Extension programs.

The original idea for this EDIS publications series grew from the results of a 2005 master's thesis in the University of Florida Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (Telg, Irani, Hurst, & Kistler, 2007). The study investigated what Florida Extension agents do to promote and market programs in their counties. A total of 175 people responded in this study, for an overall response rate of 54.18%. Specific results pertaining directly to these EDIS publications include the following:

- A majority of respondents used **word of mouth** 16 times or more in a year to market their programs and activities, especially to current "traditional" Extension clientele. With the general public, however, Extension agents were most likely to use **news releases**.
- Overall, respondents believed marketing Extension programs was a necessary part of their job, and found it to be rewarding. Respondents also found the marketing process to be difficult.
- Finally, respondents noted that they were confident in such tasks as writing and designing a newsletter, writing a newspaper column, and writing a news release, but felt much less confident in establishing a marketing and promotional program. In other words, agents knew how to develop individual marketing/communication "pieces" (news release, posters), but did not have the knowledge or skills to put the pieces together into a marketing "whole."

A follow-up study in 2016 surveyed 114 Florida Extension agents (Ruth et al., 2016). Extension agents indicated a high degree of willingness to participate in public engagement training related to using social media to promote their Extension focus area.

In these publications, you will walk through the marketing/promotion planning stages from audience analysis through evaluation. The major topics covered in these publications will help you market your local Extension program:

- Campaign planning and audience analysis
- Integrated marketing
- Creative, social media, and news media strategies
- Budget and evaluation

A "quick reference guide" of major points is provided at the end of each publication. You will also be able to reflect on these topics by answering the "Applying the Concepts" questions.

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