

Communications Pretesting; Pretesting Communication for Family Planning Programs; Measures of Success In a Not-for-profit Publication

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Communications Pretesting; Pretesting Communication for Family Planning Programs; Measures of Success In a Not-for-profit Publication

Abstract

Reviews of "Communications Pretesting" by James T. Bertrand; Presting Communication for Family Planning Programs, by Iqbal Qureshi and D. Lawrence Kincaid; and "Measures of Success in a Not-for-profit Publication," by Willis Rivinus.

Communications Pretesting. James T. Bertrand. Chicago: Media Monography 6, Communication Laboratory, Community and Family Study Center, University of Chicago, 1978.

Pretesting Communication for Family Planning Programs. Iqbal Qureshi and D. Lawrence Kincaid. Honolulu: East-West Communication Institute, East West Center, 1977.

Today's tight budgets, together with increasing emphasis on accountability, pressure agricultural organizations to under emphasize the need for attractive and involving media materials.

One approach to improving materials ranging from public service announcements to pamphlets and training tools is through pretesting. So, although neither *Communications Pretesting* nor *Pretesting Communication* is a "new" book, today's constraints make their content increasingly more important for communicators. Both books focus on conducting pretests, not on managerial issues or theoretical arguments. They are useful guides for the design, development, and utilization of pretests.

The Qureshi and Kincaid book is part of the Professional Development Series on development communication undertaken at the Communication Institute, East-West Center at the University of Hawaii. Covered in the book are the basic principles of pretesting, selection of respondents, methods and techniques, constraints and problems, and ten examples of pretesting communication materials ranging from comic booklets to pictures, radio and television announcements, and symbols.

Because it is somewhat self-instructional as well as being a readable work, *Communication Pretesting* offers lots of opportunities for practicing the concepts presented and for examining specific communication materials.

Bertrand's book is based on earlier work by Fred W. Reed, also of the Community and Family Study Center, called *Pre-Testing Communications: A Manual of Procedures* (1974). Nevertheless, *Communications Pretesting* stands alone. Its ten chapters cover the rationale for pretesting, test design, the conduct and data analysis of pretesting, and the utilization of results to improve programs. Separate chapters cover specific media—radio and television spot announcements, posters, pamphlets, movies. Many other media could be substituted for these with minor adaptations in the design of the pretest.

Even though more could be written on the subject of pretesting, both books taken together enable the novice to design and complete a pretest. Communicators already engaged

in pretesting will find new ideas and a variety of pretesting instruments—ready to use. As “how-to” books, both of these publications should be welcomed by the practicing communication specialist.

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“Measures of Success in a Not-for-profit Publication,” by Willis Rivinus, Folio: The Magazine for Magazine Management (August, 1982).

“Some not-for-profit publications have outlived their usefulness,” says magazine publishing consultant Willis Rivinus. Some publications that operate in an essentially non-competitive environment, he says, are “out of touch with their audiences. Their editors are removed from the practical realities of their constituents. The coverage is obsolete or innocuous.”

What Rivinus terms “measurable editorial vitality” is one of ten areas to probe during a not-for-profit magazine’s annual check-up. Among the other points:

- A magazine may not be intended to make a profit, but consistent losses or cost overruns indicate poor management.
- Reader surveys, letters to the editor and classified and mail order advertising are good measures of reader interest. “People who believe in a magazine use it in a variety of ways,” Rivinus says.
- Level circulation can be deceptive. A not-for-profit magazine may not have direct competitors as a consumer magazine does, but “that doesn’t mean that these readers are lacking for other activities and interests,” warns the consultant with a background in business as well as publishing, editing and circulation management. He advises taking a measure of the “share of the universe.”

“If the universe of members or people actively interested in the field is 300,000 and the publication goes to only 25,000, something is wrong.”

- Printing and paper decisions should be analyzed: “Some organizations adopt an elegant paper because they believe their journals will be treasured forever,” a view that is unrealistic in today’s information explosion. On the other hand, an inexpensive newsprint gives a poor printing image and a poor organization

image. The audience might prefer, and might be willing to pay for, a better-looking product, Rivinus suggests.

His ideas, outlined in the August 1982 issue of *Folio: The Magazine for Magazine Management*, are relevant for editors of 4-H journals, agricultural quarterlies and other publications. Of particular interest is the emphasis on good management.

“The organization and its publications must have concrete goals and objectives: bench marks to measure effectiveness and success; targets to shoot for which will provide motivation and inspiration for the team.” The staff must be as “alive and vibrant, decisive and dynamic as anywhere else in business,” Rivinus believes.

The business side of an educational institution is—and should be—fundamentally different from the business side of a profit-making organization. But management skills are transferable, and many of the measures of success in business can be adapted for communicators in education.

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