

Extension Press

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Recommended Citation

Bickers, Jack (1971) "Extension Press," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 54: Iss. 4.
<https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.2080>

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Extension Press

Abstract

Summary of the discussion sessions on Extension Press, discussion leader, Jack Smith.

Extension Press

Discussion Leader, JACK SMITH, Alabama

OPINION/POLICY LEADERS — *Jack Bickers, Tennessee*

How are you reaching opinion/policy leaders in your state? Some answers to that question and other comments by discussion group members:

"We have a low-income rural project with people who have 15 or so acres of land and work off the farm. The idea is to encourage them to establish a feeder pig project. We work in conjunction with OEO and other agencies. OEO is working to set up a marketing cooperative for feeder pigs. The extension press role is to relate the story to the public . . . telling people that these different agencies are helping low income people earn more money. This type of press role also helps gain the attention of the state power sources." — *Woody Upchurch, North Carolina.*

"We cannot afford to abandon production agricultural information. But we must do a better job of interpretative reporting — telling leaders and nonagricultural people what agriculture means to them. One thing we can do is encourage the ag econ specialist to help us interpret what agricultural statistics mean to the non-farm audience." — *George Bevard, Illinois.*

"We conduct press days for the legislators. We take aides and family members who participate in the nutrition program to tell the legislators directly about the program and what it means to them. Legislators dig into this and ask many questions. We have also conducted tours where legislators can visit the families at home." — *Mary Mahoney, Texas.*

"It's hard to find opinion leaders anymore. There are many groups — agribusiness specialists, herbicide people, and others — who influence farmers. This is no longer strictly a role of the extension agent." — *Jack Bickers, Tennessee.*

"We had 1,000 people attend a homemaker conference to hear a panel of nutrition aides and nutrition specialists talk about the Expanded Nutrition Program. I fed additional information to a metropolitan newspaper editor who attended the meeting. The result was a front page feature story which reached 250,000 people." — *Jean Shipman, Oklahoma.*

"Two years ago Alabama county extension agents began sup-

plying feature stories on extension projects to *Mr. County Commissioner Magazine*, a monthly publication that goes to members of county governing bodies — the folks who control the purse strings on extension appropriations in the counties. The schedule is for each of the state's 67 counties to have a story in the magazine once a year. That means we have several stories in each issue, usually about a half dozen, with more in some months. Each story carries with it a picture of an extension agent, a county official, and local citizens. The items are written and pictures made by county staff members. Our office edits the stories and then we send them to the publisher. It's been a worthwhile project for us. We feel it's done a great deal to sell local opinion/policy leaders on the value of extension programs." — *Kenneth Copeland, Alabama*.

GATEKEEPERS

Keeping in tune to the needs of gatekeepers these days means answering one big question by those of us working with the press: What do we do about the growing number of papers printed offset? The Georgia staff probably has done more than any other in developing camera-ready copy for offset papers, and Virgil Adams, who has been involved in much of that work, was asked to report to the discussion group. His comments:

"We have 200 weekly newspapers in Georgia. About 150 are offset. This is almost a complete reversal of five years ago. In another five years we believe 100 per cent of our weeklies will be offset—or out of business.

"Our experience with camera-ready copy began in December 1969 with our animal health column. We added a straight news story from time to time and were completely camera-ready several months ago after our secretaries had developed the capability and confidence to operate the equipment.

"While camera-ready copy is going real well in the weeklies—we estimate that our coverage in weeklies has increased 25 per cent—we are backing off on the dailies. The dailies don't like it. They are more particular about heads and copy matching their particular style. In addition, not many of them are offset and copy editors and linotype operators don't like to work with printed copy. So we are going back to serving dailies with regular copy.

"We are using 9-pt. Century type on a 10-pt. base and are set-

ting copy 10½ picas wide. This pretty well matches a majority of the papers. We added headlines later at the requests of many weekly editors.

"As for photos, we send glossy prints. We are using an Itek 12-18 platemaker which allows us to use an 85-line screen on our pictures. Putting the "dots" on the picture saves the editor a step. All he has to do is cut and paste as he does with our headlines and news copy.

"We find very little difference in cost between regular copy and camera-ready. In fact, we may be saving a little money on paper.

"In the beginning we had the following IBM equipment: Selectric composer, magnetic tape reader, composer console, and Model V keyboard. All of this was in our duplicating and mailing center. If purchased, the cost would be about \$17,000. Since then we have installed in our information office an IBM Model IV magnetic tape Selectric typewriter with reverse search, code conversion, and composing compatability. The price of this unit is about \$10,500. We didn't buy, but are renting this equipment from IBM.

"After setting the copy on the IBM composer we shoot the original on Itek and then run enough copies for all our weeklies on a 1,250 multilith offset.

"We think camera-ready is the only way to go with weeklies. And we believe that in five years we will be going back to camera-ready for the dailies, too. The days of letterpress printing are numbered."

Virgil's camera-ready report brought such comments as, "This forces you to be good, because it's not easy for editors to change copy."

"What about the pre-punched tapes that many of the dailies are using from the wire services? Should we be looking toward this for dailies?"

And on the other side of the picture: "Doesn't this (camera-ready copy) sometimes result in extending a story over its news value, sometimes simply sending out trivia to promote the university? Don't we have a certain responsibility to help upgrade the levels of newspapers in our states?"

The consensus was that we do have a certain amount of public relations work to do for our universities, but that it is not our

function to help reduce newspapers to the quality of publicity sheets.

One member of the group lamented that the idea among some of us in AAACE seems to be that high quality crap is better than low quality crap. "But," he declared, "crap is still crap!"

Another comment: "We need to think about what our mission is. We sometimes measure our performance on volume and we should change to measuring it on quality."

Does sending out "trivia" stories hurt us with editors? The consensus was that too many such items might mean that all our stories end up in the wastebasket, but if editors are accustomed to receiving good material from us, they might run a "trivia" item—which might be important to an administrator—as a favor.

Del Dahl told of the University of Illinois' agronomy report as an example of providing timely, "non-trivia" information to Illinois dailies. "We don't look at dailies as a way to reach farmers with research," he said. "However, we do provide them with background information." The agronomy report is sent weekly. Each Tuesday, the Illinois staff calls the six area agronomists in the state for information. Then their mailing to the dailies on Wednesday gives a rundown on what's going on in agriculture all over the state, including such items as weather, what farmers are doing, and insect problems. The copy is written in an informal, conversational style.

HOMEMAKERS

Nellie McCannon's findings surprised most people in the extension press group. The consensus: We're operating more in the dark than we should be. More research is needed in this area of trying to determine just what the homemaker audience needs and wants.

Of particular concern to the group was low income homemakers. "We must continue studying how to reach disadvantaged homemakers. We editors should keep in closer contact with agents," were the comments of one group member. Another noted: "It's just not feasible to reach some audiences with mass media, except perhaps radio and TV in the case of low income homemakers."

One problem in writing about low income homemakers: identifying them as low income or disadvantaged without actually putting those labels on them. One suggestion: Don't call them

low income or disadvantaged, but write your story in a way that will carry that implication.

A general suggestion: "To find out what homemakers want, talk with women's editors—not managing editors."

One complaint: "Too many specialists borrow from *Better Homes and Gardens* or other publications, and they don't even bother to change the wording!"

RURAL DISADVANTAGED

Consensus of the discussion group was that the disadvantaged can't be effectively reached with mass media printed matter. Rather, suggested as our roles as communicators were:

1. Tell the story to the advantaged to gain their support and create an awareness of what is happening.

2. Help agents and specialists select the right media and techniques in reaching the disadvantaged.

3. Help convince the advantaged that the disadvantaged are their **personal** responsibility, rather than simply letting the government take care of it.

4. Help reach opinion leaders within the community and convince them that the disadvantaged are a community problem.

"I can't see much hope in reaching them (the disadvantaged) directly with printed media," summarized one group discussion member. "I see us in more of a public relations role than an educational role."

Ted Holmes of Louisiana reported on a study he made in two parishes in which he surveyed the heads of rural households. Fifty-eight per cent of the rural families in the two parishes had incomes of less than \$3,000 in 1960. Ted used 10 level-of-living indicators in his study: running water, indoor bathrooms, gas or electric heat, air conditioner, washing machine, clothes dryer, food freezer, telephone, television, and automobile or truck.

Sixty per cent of the families had fewer than seven of the indicators. (However, in one parish 74 per cent of the families had a working TV set. In the other parish 88 per cent had TV's.) Of the 60 per cent who had fewer than seven of the indicators, 23 per cent received a farm magazine, 16 per cent a general magazine, seven per cent a weekly newspaper, and 11 per cent a daily newspaper.

Ted's conclusion: You really can't expect to reach these people through the printed media. Louisiana, he said, has begun doing

nutritional type messages on rhythm and blues radio stations. Similar spots are on Saturday morning TV to reach children with nutritional messages. Louisiana is trying to train its own staff (Extension) to communicate with these people.

In Oklahoma, Extension has trained Head Start leaders in communications (newswriting). One result was that the leaders helped Head Start children prepare a newsletter which was carried home. In many cases the children read the letter to the parents.

AGRIBUSINESS

Comments of the group indicated a healthy relationship between agribusiness and extension press, but some possibilities for improvement were suggested.

Commented Fletcher Sweet of Tennessee: "We have maybe missed a bet by not paying more attention to agribusiness. In 1965, we were host for the National Grassland Conference and Field Day. I called on a lot of agribusiness people for help. I discovered that I was getting practically everything I asked for, and I was embarrassed that I couldn't think of more groups to call on. We ought to be cultivating our relationship with agribusiness all along."

It was noted that extension editors have provided services to agribusiness as circumstances presented themselves, and not necessarily on a weekly basis.

"When they need to communicate to their members we should help, and we should help interpret what they do to the general public," was one suggestion.

Examples were cited to show that extension editors in several states are doing just that. Banking concerns (such as Farm Credit Banks) were using extension information in their publications. Home service advisors for utility companies depended on extension information. Agribusinesses are very much a part of extension mailing lists. ("But maybe we need to be more selective in sending stories they're interested in," said one group member.)

In some states, mailing lists developed according to categories (by commodities) make it easier to get the right type of story to the right agribusiness.

From the other viewpoint, extension editors in the discussion group said they'd like to see agribusiness hire more interns to work in communications. A big need was cited for more com-

munications research results. "This is one of our weakest areas, and we'd like to see you people share your findings with us," one group member told Fred Jones.

YOUTH

Make more use of rock radio stations.

Encourage specialists and agents who work with youth to write in a modern idiom.

Give a songwriter the four H's and let him go with it.

Let the kids have a bigger hand in planning their own programs.

Thus went the suggestions in the extension press group on how to more effectively reach the youth audience. And there were differences of opinion. Example: "We don't do programs for the kids, we do them for ourselves. Why not let the kids do the programs for themselves?" A case in point was where three drug converts—rather than police—took part in a drug seminar for youth.

But the question was raised: "How much of this can we give our stamp of approval? We can't just completely turn everything over to the kids."

Participants in the discussion session suggested that newspapers, particularly dailies, were not the best methods of reaching youth. A case in point was from Alabama where editors of the larger dailies turned down an offer by an extension specialist to write a column aimed at youth. The Alabama editors' summation: youths wouldn't read such a column. They don't like to be singled out as a "different," and besides, said one editor, they don't read the paper much anyway, except for Dear Abby, and then only when an item deals with sex.

Members of the group generally agreed that more use should be made of radio, particularly the rock stations. And there was a suggestion that a 4-H song, using the Head, Heart, Hands, Health approach, might be written and recorded.

It was suggested that the press group's biggest contribution might come through training and encouraging 4-H specialists and agents to better communicate with the youth they work with.

Also suggested was training youth who would in turn communicate with other youth. For example, it might mean appointing

4-H Club reporters rather than electing them. That well-thought-out proposal came from Virgil Adams of Georgia.

Said Virgil: "I cannot recall a single instance where a 4-H reporter carried out the duties and responsibilities he was charged with in those impressive installation ceremonies."

He recommended selecting one reporter—on the basis of ability and interest in journalism—for each club, one for each county, one for each district, and one for the state. They would progress up the ladder as their ability and interest warranted and would be trained by extension news editors.

He suggested that the reporters at the club and county levels be appointed by the county agent-chairman. At higher levels, appointment would be by a personnel board, hopefully with the extension news editor as chairman along with possibly some journalism professors or newspaper people who are in a position to know the boy's ability to report.

At the club and county levels, Virgil visualized development of newspapers or newsletters that would give the reporters an opportunity to actually perform their duties and practice their journalism skills. The county editor would have a 4-H story in his county paper each week and would condense, edit, and re-write the local club papers for the county paper.

The district reporter would operate on an area basis, visiting and working with daily newspaper people within his district, perhaps funneling more important county stories to these dailies.

The state reporter, said Virgil, would hopefully be the best newsman of the bunch and would edit a state 4-H publication. The district reporters would be members of his staff and county reporters his correspondents.

"We would anticipate," said Virgil, "that many of these people who start out in 4-H as club reporters and stay with it for eight or 10 years will be in a position to earn many journalism scholarships. They would later work for newspapers and magazines all over the world. And they would never pass up an opportunity, as an adult journalist, to write news stories and features about 4-H, and when they become editors they wouldn't hesitate to assign members of their staffs to 4-H events."

Virgil said he feels that at least one full-time extension editor—not a 4-H leader—would be needed to initiate and supervise such a program.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Dr. Robert Soileau, Louisiana Extension specialist in work with the aging, describes four retirement life styles:

1. Continue same work pursued in career, full or part time.
2. Devote life to hobbies.
3. Become involved with other retirees in a "subculture of the aged."
4. Do nothing.

His research **still in progress** indicates that retirement activities depend upon the way you were reared (socialization) and the degree of your social participation during work years, said Ted Holmes of Louisiana, who summarized the findings.

Soileau is interviewing retired men in four income categories to determine the amount of participation in 31 possible leisure time activities. Interviewees are scored on each activity while working and while a youth at home.

With a possible cumulative score of 102 on reading of books, magazines, or newspapers (if all interviewees read frequently), low group has actual cumulative score of 62 for reading while young, 64 while working, 61 while retired. Only nine per cent changed reading habits from working days to retirement; all of these read less in retirement.

In high group, 100 per cent read frequently in early and career days, and still do. Social participation level of this group is high. Most are members and officers in organizations, several write, and all are "up to their ears" in activity.

Low group has cumulative score of 78 for TV watching before retirement, 97 after retirement (total possible = 102). Forty-seven per cent have increased frequency since retirement.

Most retirees in the high group watched TV before retirement. Not one interviewed so far has changed his viewing frequency since retirement.

Some implications: Writers may not be able to communicate with many low-income aged. Best potential audience may be young and working groups, who need to establish wholesome life styles that will extend into retirement.