



Best Practices To Communicate Extension's Relevance and Credibility

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TAKE A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO WORK YOU'RE ALREADY DOING

1. Identify new approaches to traditional subject matter to promote through the media and social media, such as women (not men) in agriculture careers, niche crop (not row crop) farmers, etc.
2. Tell unique or often untold stories about the people you serve, such as about people from underserved groups. Try taking a more feature approach (as opposed to journalistic) for these stories, and lead with testimonials that parallel the impacts you are ultimately trying to convey. Sometimes seeing a photo and hearing someone else's words can have a significant positive impact on the way the public, legislators and stakeholders view Extension work.
3. Create and share content that is not formal or academic (in the traditional sense) and that people will want to share through the media or social media. Also, make sure content is not largely an ego-boosting exercise for someone in your organization but that it is relevant and interesting to your readers. Doing so should result in more people reading your Extension content, especially from younger audiences.
4. In creating messages that are relevant and strengthen Extension's credibility, remember to create content once, but leverage it in multiple ways for multiple audiences so that you're working smarter, but not harder. There are a wide variety of products, tools, and tricks to this like using a social media management system such as Hootsuite to schedule content, Canva to create graphics, and sharing media coverage for your own stories.
5. Be intentional about authentically integrating diversity and inclusivity in your daily communications, not just for special times like Black History Month or Women's History Month. When you do it regularly, it will become natural and not seem forced.

CHANGE WORKPLACE HABITS

6. Develop SEO best practices to make sure your news rises to the top of a Google search.
7. Work toward generating a culture in your workplace where the communications department has a seat at the table when a new program is being developed, a new grant is being written or just awarded or when new partnerships are formed. This will allow you to "get ahead of the message," and will help ensure Extension's presence, branding and/or

relevancy is not lost during the implementation phase. This approach will also allow you to maximize communication efforts instead of first learning about a new Extension project in the newspaper. Doing so will also mitigate several other issues that usually arise when communications is an afterthought. Make it a point to meet and work with communicators at other organizations who are part of the project so that you can help ensure appropriate credit is given to Extension and that the Extension name and logo is used in the messaging they send out.

8. Be more intentional on how you find stories. Don't rely on others to understand, as we often do, what makes a good story. This means you'll need to find ways to better connect with field staff or those faculty and staff who you don't often see face to face. You could schedule more one-on-one meetings, request them to tag you in social media, ask to join meetings where news is often shared or in any other way position yourself to be more in the path of the newest stories.

9. Consider sitting down with your leadership each year to determine what the priority areas are to focus messages on for the coming year. Develop key talking points and generate stories about these priority areas to drive home messages about these topics. This will help you determine what stories to focus on, help you better set your marketing agenda, and will ultimately result in a more thoughtful and targeted approach to relevancy.

10. Identify partners within the state to share Extension messages with or to piggyback your messaging off of. (Ex. Virginia just announced new impressive agriculture economic impact numbers. VSU began incorporating that economic impact growth in its Extension messaging, stating its Extension efforts have played a role in making those numbers a reality.) One way to do this is to develop/strengthen relationships with other agriculture (or other relevant subject matter) communicators in your state and make sure they receive your messages, know you are a resource for them, and perhaps identify ways you can better work together to strengthen identified messages.

11. To strengthen credibility, respond to all requests (internal and external to your organization) in a timely manner, have sunset dates for publications, make sure the information you share on your website or anywhere else is up to date and accurate, and curate information you may be asked to share to ensure it meets Extension's criteria of being research-based, proven knowledge that the public can trust.

12. Develop techniques for better reaching urban audiences, where your state's larger populations and lawmakers are. Often times, FCS, urban agriculture, and 4-H stories are topics that are relevant to this audience.

13. Identify hot news topics and identify appropriate Extension faculty to pitch to the media as an expert on that topic. Make sure Extension faculty who will be talking to the media have the necessary media training they need to help them deliver the appropriate message, be relevant and credible.

14. Develop and nurture relationships with media and influencers to tell your story. Don't contact them just to pitch a story, but find other ways to engage them in your work.