



PLN Communications Committee State Report 2018

Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Communications and Marketing & Virginia Cooperative Extension Publications

Overview:

Both the Office of Communications and Marketing and VCE Publications completed its reorganizations prior to the new fiscal year and this year was marked by standing up the new functions and responsibilities of the divergent offices.

Both offices enjoyed success over the last year, assessing what strategic priorities should be tackled and adjusting accordingly. The new structure where all communications and marketing is handled by one office and all VCE publications are handled by another is working well and clients are pleased with the quantity and volume of work coming out of both shops.

CALS Communications and Marketing was fully integrated into our Advancement Office, which includes development and alumni relations. The CALS Communications and Marketing team is responsible for all public relations and marketing needs for the college including academics, research, and Extension. This also includes the management of all of CALS and VCE websites. A new team was onboarded, bringing the total staff to 4. We also had one 30-hour a week position is currently vacant. We hope to fill this position.

VCE Publications it responsible for creating, publishing, and promoting VCE publications and educational resources. There is one fulltime staff member, a part-time administrative assistant, and an intern (15 hour/week). The bulk of the editing and design work is done by contractors.

Department Heads:

Zeke Barlow, director of CALS Communications and Marketing (CALs Advancement)

Lori Greiner, publications manager, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)

Successes

I. Project Name: Agency 229

We overhauled the annual Agency 229 report that goes to state legislators to tell the impact of our work. Instead of it being a magazine-style publication of stories, we instead created a series of essays that looked at big-picture themes (water, health, etc.) We then wrote a small impact story that represented every single county in Virginia and posted them to the web. We created a personalized email for every state legislator that pointed them to their local impact statement as well as tweeted the stories at them. The result was a much more personalized and impactful publication.

- II. Project Name: VCE media relations
Opportunity: Two devastating pests and plants entered Virginia this year – the spotted lanternfly and the hogweed. The discovery of these was a good media opportunity to show how VCE is working to solve issues that matter.
Action: For the SPLF, we worked with VCE specialists and agents to coordinate a news release as well as an animated graphic that shows how the pests spread. We also worked with the Office of Publications to start to create an interactive publication to show how to handle the pests.
Likewise, when the invasive hogweed that causes severe burns and even blindness was found in Virginia, we worked with our local agents and specialists to craft a news release to send out. The result was mentions in countless local media outlets as well as the New York Times and other major outlets.

- III. Project Name: VCE Publications
During the last 12 months, VCE publications produced and updated 306 publications. The author guidelines were revamped and moved to a new webpage. In addition, we launched a digital publication project with a third-party vendor. We had approximately 100 publications digitally enhanced to increase SEO and make them more mobile friendly. These publications will be promoted in early September. We will be tracking them to see if this new format is valued by our clients. In the coming months, we will be providing our authors additional training on creating digitally enhanced content.

8. Outline the three most significant challenges you foresee for your department in the next 12 months:

- I. Problem: Revamping VCE messaging and overall identify
Cause: While many of our traditional stakeholders know of VCE, countless others do not know of VCE or what it could do for them. We want to hone our overall messaging and identity.
Anticipated effects: This is not a short or easy process. It will likely take some time and involved considerable effort across the organization.
Expected action/result: A consistent message that allows us to speak to a wide array of stakeholders and get the results we seek.

- II. Problem: Rebuilding VCE intranet
Cause: We have an old, outdated intranet that needs to be completely updated with a new site. Few folks use it and it is full of outdated information.
Anticipated effects: It will be a learning curve for people to use, but in the end will be a more effective and useful tool.
Expected action/result: We are hoping to go beyond just building an internet that is a clearinghouse for information and documents. We want to create a place for 2-way conversations, information sharing, and collaboration.

- III. Problem: Updating local unit websites
Cause: The 108 local unit websites are maintained by people in the offices. However, many offices' sites are not updated frequently — if ever.
Anticipated effects: People won't revisit a site if it is outdated and has bad information.
Expected action/result: We will continue to hold monthly training sessions on how to update local websites. We do these on a standing day of the month over the internet. We also plan on doing much more intensive training during our winter conference.