

National Extension Brand Value Executive Summary
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Overview

This research was initiated to determine National Extension Brand Value and recommend how to leverage that image with stakeholders and the general public. Interviews were conducted throughout the United States including Puerto Rico and territories. 2000 interviews were conducted on-line among the general public; 4471 interviews were conducted on-line with Extension Stakeholders (a mix of employees, volunteers and clients).

Summary of Findings

Current Extension Branding: Research findings confirm that Extension must focus on improving overall awareness and branding:

- Among the general public, there is low aided awareness of Land-Grant Universities, Cooperative Extension and State Extension Programs; aided awareness is much higher for the 4-H Program
- Even those that have heard of their State Extension Program are not that familiar with what it offers; very few people know that their State Extension is part of a National Network
- Since awareness and usage of Extension is even lower among younger people and those living in urban areas, Extension must take action to maintain/increase its relevance to the American public

Extension Brand Potential: Research findings suggest that Extension has huge potential to improve brand value:

- Among the general public, there is broad consumer agreement on the importance of different types of programs Extension offers – people clearly supports the type of work Extension does
- Most people have even sought information/help in one or more of the areas Extension covers, however, they use sources other than Extension when seeking help – Extension has the opportunity to close this gap
- When people unfamiliar with Extension are told about what it offers, most people are interested in using Extension information/programs in several different areas – the Extension “promise” does have broad appeal
- Those people who have used Extension are very satisfied with the information/help they got – Extension delivers on its promise to its Clients
- Other Extension Stakeholders (Employees/Volunteers) also have strong positive perceptions of Extension programs/services – Extension therefore has a dedicated resource it can leverage
- Promoting the association between State Extension and the “National Network” (Universities sharing knowledge and jointly developing programs) can help improve general public perceptions of their State Extension program

Improving Brand Value: The research investigated key questions regarding Extension – “What should Extension stand for?”; “What should it deliver/communicate to the American public?” Findings provide insights on several steps Extension can take to improve Brand Value:

- Among both the General Public and Extension Stakeholders, there is consensus that Extension should stand for being a “trustworthy” source of information/programs. “Expert Review” of program content – as done by Extension – can help reinforce the validity of information being provided. Also very important, is delivering “current/reliable” information – staying at the forefront of existing knowledge in an area. These characteristics of Extension, along with the knowledgeable and committed staff that deliver programs, can form the basis of a “communications platform” to improve brand value
- From a programmatic perspective, the research shows that Extension is strongest in Agriculture, Youth Development and Gardening programs. Since consumer needs – especially younger people and those in urban areas – also cover several other areas, Extension will need to look at how some of its other programs can be augmented. Exactly how this needs to be done will depend, of course, on the specific situation and needs of each State Extension program
- From a program delivery perspective both General Public consumers and Extension Stakeholders indicated that “convenient access” to information/programs is very important. The research findings also show that people are very interested in using multiple ways (in-person classes/help being one of them) to access Extension programs

Next Steps

Copernicus Marketing Consulting Research submitted their final report and presented it to the directors and administrators who attended the National Extension Directors and Administrators meeting held February 16-19, 2009, in New Orleans, Louisiana. After completion of the program, which was videotaped and now posted at www.aplu.org in the Cooperative Extension Section, directors and administrators did small group work that resulted in the following action items being taken by the task force at their face-to-face meeting held in March 2009:

- Form a professional development Community of Practice with Co-PIs from the existing task force to support continuity and use of the existing research.
- Develop a toolkit with the purpose of providing branding tools and tactics for Extension professionals and staff to use in promoting and building Extension’s brand value and to strengthen the link between the 4-H brand and the Extension brand in each state, nationwide. The toolkit would be focused around four areas that include learning, practices, tools and templates, and messaging. It would also include a sharing area for users to post their own ideas or successful new methods for consideration.
- Work with the System Marketing and Communication Initiative to share positive, timely stories that would enhance the brand value of Cooperative Extension.
- Continue to work with Copernicus to explore opportunities to collaborate with them on the creative development, implementation, and the branding initiative. Some services have been offered; others may require additional funding.
- Develop follow-up communication for directors and administrators that would summarize the recommendations from the research study, provide an update of how the task force will be using the ideas that were suggested, and encourage them to stay alert for the next phases of use of the research.

Final recommendations from the Marketing and Communications Task Force are being prepared for ECOP consideration.