

## Web Conferences in Extension

**Greg Mills, Livestock Officer – Industry Development; Industry & Investment NSW**



Web conferences are a tool seeing increased use in extension activities. While not yet mainstream many extension officers see the potential of web conferences to help deliver extension messages within tightening budget environments. As with any new technology there is some trepidation about launching into this new frontier. This article gives a quick overview of web conferences and aims to encourage more people to give webinars a try in their extension activities.

A web conference uses the internet to show visual content of a presentation, while the audio component is provided via a concurrent teleconference. This allows people to participate in a meeting from their home or office anywhere in the world. The presenter can show a PowerPoint® presentation, or by sharing their computer desktop, demonstrate software and share other information such as diagrams or photos. With the concurrent teleconference, participants can listen to

the presenter, and ask questions, in real-time as they see the presentation changing on the screen. Participants can also use the text based chat facilities of the web conference systems to provide comments and ask questions.

This interaction between presenter and participants, combined with the low operational cost, make webinars a methodology worth considering in extension programs. Information in web conferences can also be recorded and content can become a longer term resource for internal use or made available on websites.

As web conference systems are web based there is no need to invest in any specialised capital equipment. The presenter and participants require only a computer, broadband internet connection, webcam (optional) and telephone. The bandwidth requirement for web conferences is small, with any broadband connection adequate to participate. While these systems do function on dial-up

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## Web conferences in Extension (continued)

connections, in practice the download delay involved makes it difficult.

A quick Google® will reveal a number of web conferencing providers. Webex® and GoToMeeting® are the two common systems used in extension activities, but there are many more. A number of teleconference services also now provide web based meeting and conferencing systems as an add-on function to their teleconferencing facilities. Some free systems are also available but functionality and support services need to be considered if using these systems. As many people are new to web conferences, using a system with a strong support and training system is essential to make things run smoothly from the start.

Web conference services can be accessed on a cost per use basis or cost per month under a service agreement. Pricing is usually based on cost per participant per minute, which may be separated into visual and teleconference components. This allows users to use the web based system for the visual content, but use in-house teleconference systems for the audio content.

The audio component of a webinar can be delivered via the telephone or VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol).

If using VoIP the audio is transmitted over the internet via the computer's sound card and the user's speakers and microphone or headset. This is a cheaper option and may cost as little as 3 cents per minute. VoIP often creates a slight delay in the audio due to the time required to convert the audio to a digital signal and back again. This delay is not an issue when the presentation is only one way, but if the presentation requires interaction between the presenter and the participants this delay becomes distracting and makes interaction very difficult.

When talking to people who have bad experiences with web conferences, it is often due to the poor audio experience associated with using VoIP. If the web conference is to involve some level of discussion, experience suggests that a telephone teleconference works much better than VoIP. The additional cost of using telephones is often warranted. Some web conference systems allow a combination of telephone and VoIP dial-in that gives additional flexibility to balance cost and audio quality.

While people often think of web conferences as scheduled meeting involving a larger number of people, web conferences can also

become a key part of daily extension activities. Web conferences can be one-one-one and can be started as needed when talking to clients or colleagues on the telephone. The more advanced web conference systems provide one-click desktop icons to start a web conference immediately. While talking on the telephone it can take as little as 2-3 minutes to start a web conference with the person you are talking to and share material from either person's computer. This makes web conference technology a great collaborative tool or a quick way of sharing photos, data, charts and other relevant information. You can also display programs, such as decision support tools and spreadsheets, in real time.

When you start or schedule a web conference the people you invite to the meeting will receive an email invitation with a hyperlink to the meeting and instructions on how to join the audio conference. The key to the success of a web conference is the ability to customise this invitation. If your participants are unfamiliar with web conferences you may wish to include more detailed instructions in your invitation. When selecting which web conference system to use, the ability to customise the invitation to clients is a key criterion. Participants tend to be more comfortable with the technology and have a positive experience if they can join the meeting without any trouble.

Many web conference providers have free trials of their systems and have online training and support systems. When you first start in web conferences you can open the systems and use most of the facilities without inviting anyone to the meeting. Once you have an understanding of the basics you can invite one or two colleagues and become more familiar with the technology before launching into larger internal meetings and meetings with your clients. This ability to step into web conferences and build your comfort level as you go makes this a relatively easy technology to master. Once you become confident with web conferences you can also use this technology, combined with a data projector and speakers, to bring in a remote speaker to a meeting.

Web conferences have a role in many extension programs as extension officers already have access to the required equipment, there are significant cost advantages and there is an ability to start small and developed skills over time.



*As web conference systems are web based there is no need to invest in any specialised capital equipment.*

# Save Time and Money with Web Conferencing



**John James, Principal Extension Officer and eExtension project leader  
DEEDI, Queensland**

Face-to-face meetings are undoubtedly better for building trust and relationships than electronic alternatives, especially for initial meetings. However, we don't always have the resources of time and money to sustain multiple meetings, particularly when long distance travel is involved.

So after we've had the first face-to-face interaction, web conferencing is a good option for further meetings. This may be for work groups, project teams or even workshop participants. While you still have the participants together in the face-to-face meeting, show them how easy it will be to join the web conference with a live demonstration. Using a data projector, show them the invitation email they will receive, and the various steps they will follow to get into the web conference. This makes it so much more likely that their first online experience will be a good one.

There are many web conferencing providers and the prices vary from free to relatively expensive. Just remember that in life you generally get what you pay for! So if it is a relatively informal group meeting and you can use computers that are not protected behind a strong firewall, then a no or low cost solution (like [www.dimdim.com](http://www.dimdim.com)) may well be a good option. However, if you work in government and security and bandwidth considerations are important,

then you may consider using a solution like Cisco WebEx ([www.webex.com.au](http://www.webex.com.au)), the world's number one web conferencing solution. An example of a mid-range solution would be Citrix GoToMeeting ([www.gotomeeting.com](http://www.gotomeeting.com)).

We at DEEDI are using WebEx and while the cost of 55 cents per minute per participant is about double the cost of standard tele-conferencing, it is certainly much cheaper than flying a group of people together to meet in person.

I have calculated that on average, a one hour web conference with ten participants from regional centres around Queensland can save the following:

- 60 hours of travel time (approx \$6000 in associated salaries),
- over \$2500 of airfares and
- over 3 metric tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

So the \$330 WebEx cost (10 people x 60 minutes x 55 cents) is an environmentally friendly, easy-to-use option that can save you almost \$10,000.

While you are charged \$33 per hour per person, you can easily connect regional meeting rooms as single connections. That way a group of people can share the one computer connection and view the screen with a data projector and talk/ listen with a tele-conferencing phone.

We have used that approach to "beam in" specialists from America and Europe to give interactive presentations to our staff located in multiple regional centres. We are finding that often the world-leading specialist doesn't charge us for the one hour of their time, and despite the fact they usually have to be awake at unusual hours, they really enjoy interacting with an Australian audience.

We are receiving positive feedback from industry members, who no longer need to drive long distances to interact with our staff. As one person commented "This was my first webinar and I am very impressed. What a great training tool. We can have access to experts from any location – no travelling involved, so saving time and money, plus it is easy to interact. Please do more!"

I believe that the more we can interact with people (before, during and after) a learning activity such as a technical workshop, then the more likely it is that the participants are going to adopt the innovations we are suggesting. Often it is too costly to do that face-to-face, so web conferencing is one electronic option you should consider.

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## FROM THE EDITORS



In this edition we are building on the eExtension theme with articles about web conferencing. APEN hosted a web conference in late March which attracted participants from all over the country as well as New Zealand. It was a great way to deliver information to audiences in different geographic areas – all at the same time!

Should it be web conference or webinar? These days with the breadth of meaning that often follows technology, it can be both. For this edition however, we came down on the side of web conferencing after considering that webinars are a bit more specific in origin being seminars on line, while web conference is more generic as in its use to describe a teleconference.

Articles in this edition show us how to go about delivering a web conference, what are the costs and benefits as well as issues to consider when hosting such an event. We also feature articles

on how audiences and presenters feel about using this medium and how this can be improved.

Other articles in this edition include a very comprehensive report on podcasting with practical details that would enable you to start tomorrow if you wished and an article about information services to small landholders in Victoria.

With an eye to the future...Gerry participated in a teleconference with Tracey Gianatti, Susan Hall, Austin McLennan and David Bicknell in late May. That session was a very sound first step to having APEN become the owner of a most modern and premier member networking 'capability' using Web 2.0 tools. A significant opportunity for APEN and we look forward to seeing that unfold.

Happy reading  
**Kate and Gerry**

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# Lessons of a First-Time Learner- 10 key things to focus on to be effective

*Kiri Broad, Beef Extension Officer, DEEDI, Queensland*

*I had attended a web conference (Webex) only once when I was first given the task of hosting one. Being computer and internet literate helped, but it really depends on how user friendly the online system is. I learnt a lot and have noted the main points I have taken away to work on for next time which I hope will help you the first time around.*

- **Start Early**

There are no practice areas within Webex, so I went to the online tutorial to learn about the different functions within the webinar. This was very useful, as well as setting up the webinar early so that I could change the settings and look into each setting to see what was best.

- **Set up an email distribution group**

Or put the addresses online in the conference system if it allows you to, so they will send the invites and reminders for you. I didn't use this, but when I do it again I will try this as it might take some of the legwork out. I found we needed to constantly remind people about the event to gain interest, so emailing was an easy way to do this.

- **Use different media to advertise**

The hardest part I found was trying to get producer participants involved when they had never heard of the technology before. I used community newsletters and other such publications to make sure we got it out to as wide an audience as possible. I also included other contacts in the industry who could distribute it to their own client base.

- **Keep logon simple**

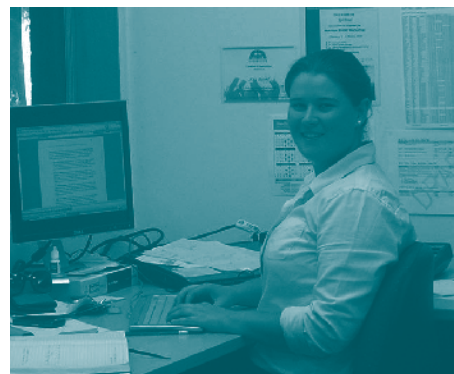
In Webex there was an option for people to register prior to the event or simply put their name and the password in on the day. We chose the latter as we were expecting a lot of first time participants and thought it would keep things simple. We could see everyone's names and had no feedback saying it was too hard.

- **Set a time that suits the intended audience**

Our team tried a breakfast webinar at 7:30am. We thought this would suit producers while they ate breakfast and wouldn't keep them from work. The producers who attended gave us positive feedback.

- **Sit in on a webinar prior to the day**

Either as a participant or with someone who is presenting. The second option is ideal if available as then you can see how it works



before attempting it yourself. It's quite daunting using the program for the first time on the day you are to give the presentation, which is what happened to me and some of the controls were unknown to me e.g. pointers for presenting graph data.

- **Mute everyone**

It seems simple, but it can get quite loud when people are at home and doing other things while listening in. Make sure you let everyone know about this. Also, see how the speaker feels. Our presenter asked for verbal feedback during the presentation which wouldn't work if everyone was on mute! Next time I will use the feedback buttons in the online window.

- **Give a brief tutorial before starting**

On such things as the hand symbol for asking questions, feedback symbols if the presenter wants feedback during the presentation, chat and anything else you wish to make known. It is also a good icebreaker when people first log on.

- **Have a question ready**

This was suggested to me by a colleague as question time was slow to start but went well once initiated. So it could have been useful to have someone ready to get the ball rolling.

- **Ask for feedback**

Follow up on the conference with presenters and participants. This is how I gained the most knowledge in what to try next time around.

*The hardest part I found was trying to get producer participants involved when they had never heard of the technology before.*

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# Closing the Gap

**Krista Cavallaro, A/FutureBeef Manager, AgriScience Queensland  
DEEDI**

Web conferencing, esurveys, ebooks, blogs, wikis, SMS – the options can be overwhelming, especially for those who aren't on the edge of that latest IT wave. It seems just when you finally get the hang of one technology or product, before you can say 'iberry', the next one is clamouring for your attention.

New technologies certainly have a place in service delivery but only if they are well targeted and meet the needs of the intended audience. They do offer a useful alternative, closing the gap, where funds and geography exclude people from meeting face-to-face.

The catch is how to balance the obvious benefits of some of these technologies with developing the skills of individuals – information deliverers and receivers – so they can be used successfully.

For DEEDI's FutureBeef team, delivering web conferences for clients is still relatively new but with some 30 beef extension staff located around Queensland, using eTechnologies is a way that we can complement the work being done on ground. Most of our team interact with the beef industry through producer groups, workshops, field days and producer demonstration sites. While these approaches are our primary means of service delivery there is definitely a place for eTechnologies.

Integrating these into a service delivery strategy requires support from management and passion from those individuals charged with driving this adoption. We are very fortunate to have had this over the past 12 months and the momentum is growing.

While our department is keen to increase online service delivery, it still takes people with the vision to get the ball rolling and John James, Principal Extension Officer and Gerry Roberts, Extension Specialist, already had eTools-related projects underway (e.g. Leading Sheep). We were all excited about the possibilities of options like web conferencing and esurveys and following research with the FutureBeef team, we knew they were open to the idea of exploring the use of eTools.

It was important that team members could see the value in this technology for themselves. To this end, we designed an internal series of webinars, called The FutureBeef Muster, for our beef extension officers and other internal staff. These one-hour webinars are held on the same day and time each month and feature presentations from RD&E staff in particular

discipline areas of interest, such as applied nutrition, reproduction and genetics, and applied grazing.

How did we know what times to run these and topics of interest? We used eSurveys. These are also used at the end of each webinar so we can evaluate if these activities are meeting the needs of our audience – so far, the response from staff has been very positive and supportive.

Not only do staff get value from the content, bearing in mind they are joining the webinars from around the state, they also have access to speakers and topics that they would not have had in the past. Using webinars to complement face-to-face professional development days is one of the ways we aim to improve communications between our RD&E teams in our business unit.

Each time team members join one of our FutureBeef Muster webinars they are not only increasing their exposure to and use of this technology they are also building up confidence. We are now in a phase where we can encourage staff to use eTools within their project team to reduce travel or as a follow up for face-to-face meetings.

One way I 'walk the talk' is by holding a monthly web conference with the FutureBeef team leaders (based in Longreach, Roma, Bundaberg, Kairi/Atherton and Rockhampton), who supervise staff regionally. This is timed to follow our business group's management team meeting and while it's early days, it will allow me to communicate management team meeting outcomes in a timely way and clarify any queries, instead of sending out an email. I also encourage the team leaders to run a similar meeting with their teams.

Within our team structure, we've also embedded a discipline framework where champions drive the professional development for staff in three technical production areas. In addition to this, we also have a discipline champion for eExtension and this is proving to be very successful, once again, based on the passion and drive of the individual – a essential trait for all successful champions! Greg Bath, an Industry Development Officer, is one such person.

Greg, with input from other eTools enthusiasts, has been developing a series of 'How To' guides for first time users ranging from: configuring computers, to joining a

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## Closing the Gap (continued)

webinar for the first time, to hosting a webinar. Thus building on the foundation work done by John and Gerry training up people like myself and other early users of these technologies.

The guides will be critical tools to support staff in the development of their own skills and confidence. Greg also provides training and support for webinar hosts and presenters – an investment that has already paid off with these members going on to use the technology for project and other meeting needs. He has also been helping staff with the development of esurveys.

At the same time, our younger staff are leading the charge with running webinars for beef and sheep producers. The sheep industry is well acquainted with using this technology through the Leading Sheep Project team who have been coordinating and delivering webinars very successfully, as part of an Australian Wool Innovation/DEEDI funded project, for the past

five years. We are aiming to see the same successes within the beef industry.

Over the next twelve months, I expect the FutureBeef team's use of eTools will grow especially in complementing team and producer face-to-face meetings. I believe it will also be used increasingly to bring new opportunities to the beef industry, such as webinars from national and internationally respected speakers, which may not have been possible before.

We will continue to focus our efforts internally to create 'nodes of competence' within our FutureBeef team. In time using eTechnologies such as webinars will become just one of the ways we deliver valued information and esurveys will be a timesaving and valuable tool to measure the effectiveness of our service delivery.



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## Web-Conferences - Lessons of a Long Term User

*Tony Hamilton, A/Manager, Leading Sheep, Queensland*

*Pick topics that  
are relevant and  
timely to get a  
good attendance.  
These topics  
also prompt  
discussion and  
questions.*

Successful web conferencing does not just happen. It involves a series of steps which when followed make it possible for everyone from presenter to participant to get the most out of this type of communication.

In the following article I put together some tips I've picked up on how to manage web-conferences. In the Leading Sheep project we use Webex as a provider so my comments come from using it.

### **Planning and promotion**

Pick topics that are relevant and timely to get a good attendance. These topics also prompt discussion and questions.

Select a good presenter because not all experts are good presenters. If needed do some coaching on delivery techniques for on-line.

Advertise at least 1 month before the event but make sure the web-conference is set up first so people can register immediately. Prepare a media release to email out to your networks and other interested people. Where you can, advertise the event on website calendars also.

### **Setting up the Web-conference on WebEx**

Use an experienced WebEx buddy when setting up the web-conference. This ensures all check boxes etc are correctly selected so people can easily access the registration process.

Create an invitation email and embed the link to the registration page in it. Check the link and content of the invitation by sending it to another person before sending it out. Also get the other person to open the invitation email and register before sending to others. They will see mistakes in the text, incorrect dates, times, contact details, registration process etc that you may miss.

Keep the invitation e-mail as simple as possible and ensure the file size is not too big – definitely less than 1MB, so use minimal graphics. Smaller gets into mail boxes more easily. Make it a 'one click' link to take people to the registration page for that workshop. The invitation is now ready for distribution.

Send an invite to presenters and even send them a copy of your own invite as a backup.

Practice with the presenter at least 1 day before web-conference. Get presenter

# Web-Conferences - Lessons of a Long Term User (continued)

skilled and confident to use some the web-conferencing tools e.g. underlining, pointers etc. Also try to have them use some of the features that make the web-conference more interactive e.g. polling, use of emoticons etc.

There are usually three options for a presenter – present, share a doc or share a desktop. Work out with the presenter what is the best way to go.

## Managing the session on the day

Have the presenter call you on the day, half an hour before start time to get their presentation loaded. The visuals are the most important thing to get right first up.

Have an introduction slide show of about 4 slides about the event to run at 30 seconds per slide for about 20 minutes prior to start time.

Start on time – remember some have logged on 15 minutes before which is recommended and will be waiting.

Hosts can have a detailed introduction script ready for the start. The script includes features attendees can use, how people can mute themselves or ask questions, asking participants to not use 'hold' on their phone if they have hold music as it goes to everyone, background about presenter, giving credits and thanks etc.

Give attendees 'how to use' explanations. Features that may need explanations include emoticons (eg yes/no/ smiling face, applause, too fast, too slow), what happens on screen

when the presenter shares their document (ie where the participant list, chat and QA box go – and how to get them back) and how to make the presentation bigger on their screen.

It pays to have an experienced assistant to help those having trouble connecting. The helper needs a final registration list to see names and telephone numbers. Also highlight the technical help number of the service provider.

The host should have a detailed conclusion ready – tell people about the evaluation and why it is important, mention any other upcoming web-conferences/events, once again acknowledging funders, thank presenter and attendees.

## After the Web-conference

In the 'thank you' emails (for those who attended) and the 'sorry we missed you' emails (for those who registered but did not attend) – give them details as to where they can go for more info and info about upcoming web-conferences

Finally, follow up with a media release on the outcome of the web-conference including evaluation and comments so attendees know what others thought of the event.

That's it and from my experience when you put these in place you'll have done all you can to make it a successful web-conference experience for attendees and presenters alike. Have fun!

*Use an experienced WebEx buddy when setting up the web-conference.*



*Webconferencing?  
No, sorry mate – this is the afterlife  
Cyberspace is over there!*

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# APEN Web-Conference Review

## “At the Receiving End”

**Austin McLennan, Extension Entomologist, Katherine, NT**

On the 24th of March this year, APEN organised a web-conference for members and non-members that featured a presentation from Neil Guise who won last year's APEN Award for Excellence in Extension along with other members of his West Australian team.

I am becoming a big fan of web-conferences.

Conferences are great, but if your conference budget is struggling to make it to \$1000 for the year, that's probably not even one conference. Whereas it's a lot of web-conferences!

For example, I can pretty much guarantee I would never have got the OK from my employer to fly from Darwin to Perth for a two-hour presentation on Neil and Nancye's work with small landholders. But for a fraction of the time and cost, and with no airfares, airports, hotels or taxis, I and several NT colleagues were exposed to new ideas and insights without having to go anywhere. Instead of us going to them, Neil, Nancye and Kate came to us... via the internet.

But what is it like at the receiving end of a web-conference? They might be cheap but are they any good?

Despite the fact that most of us will say a meeting is better if it's face to face, it's amazing how little it seems to matter whether the presenters are there or not. For this web-conference that may have been because I went for the information, not the chance to meet the presenters over a cup of tea, and also because their talks were clear and the topic interesting. Plus we could see their faces, hear their voices, and ask them live questions during and after their presentations. In fact, I'm sure it was harder for them to get used to talking to a webcam and an empty room than for us to watch a PowerPoint presentation with voiceover.

The simplest form of web-conference is one where each attendee joins from his/her own computer. The next step up from there is where several attendees come together as a group to view the web-conference via a single computer.



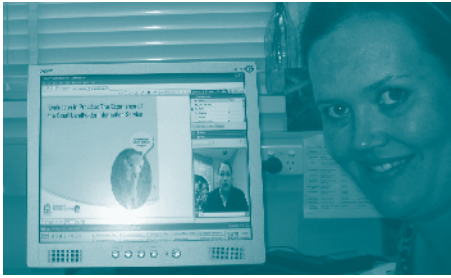
This APEN web-conference was a variation on both these, with remote presenters at a single location (Perth) communicating to multiple locations around Australia and New Zealand, with several people gathered around a single computer at each location. At Darwin, we had 12 people watching via a datashow projector, with audio managed by a 'Polycom'® device attached to our phone line. I highly recommend one of these for larger groups as they are much better than a conference phone.



Top: Neil Guise gives his presentation in Perth, WA  
 ABOVE: Attendees at Richmond, NSW  
 BELOW: Attendees at Toowoomba, QLD -  
 (L to R): Alison Spencer, John James, Warwick Waters, Marie Vitelli, Kate Charleston, Greg Bath, Lyn Dadswell, and Iain Purvis.







So, as a participant, do I have a preference for the sit-at-my-desk vs. the watch-as-a-group model?

Not really. For this web-conference, I really liked the chance to meet at a single venue for the talks while catching up socially and work-wise with the other attendees.

But I know there will also be times and topics when it suits me better to sit at my computer while a web-conference plays and I can choose to either actively participate, work on something else at the same time, or just eat my lunch.

Still hesitant to leap into attending a web-conference? A few final thoughts...

One, it's really easy. In my experience the IT side is straightforward. You just click on a link sent to you by the web-conference organiser, sometimes dial a number for the audio (often toll-free) and away you go. Organisational firewalls don't seem to get in the way either.

Secondly, if the presenter remembers to give a few housekeeping tips at the start you will find out even faster how to do a few simple things, such as 'raise your hand' to ask a question, type chat messages to other attendees or submit written comments to the presenter.

Third, if you are going to join as a larger group around a single computer, make sure you have a good audio system. I mentioned earlier the 'Polycom' device we used in Darwin – a good investment.

Finally, I don't really see much difference between a well-run web-conference and a face to face presentation. After all, what was it that made this recent web-conference a good event of which APEN can be proud?

Answer: Excellent content, delivered by

presenters who have a passion for what they do and who are obviously doing an excellent job.

So, can innovative delivery using a web-conference make a good message go further? Absolutely yes! Will participants respond well to electronic delivery? Yes again. But will a web-conference make up for substandard presentation skills? Not at all.

While there is still a bit of a 'gee-whiz' factor about web-conferences, I'm sure this will fade, in much the same way that we are no longer amazed by email or the telephone.

But they aren't a gimmick. In particular, web-conferences are a cheap and effective way for you to hear from first class presenters who would ordinarily never make it to your corner of the world...or at least mine.

And that's why I am looking forward to the next APEN Web-conference.



*TOP LEFT: Louise Scott attended from Bendigo, VIC*

*LEFT: Neil Guise, Nancye Gannaway and Kate Ambrose in Perth, WA*

*ABOVE: Nancye Gannaway gives her presentation in Perth, WA.*

*Can innovative delivery using a web-conference make a good message go further?*

# Web Conferencing – Where is the Interaction?

**Kate Charleston**

**Development Extension Officer, DEEDI, Queensland**



*I missed the  
interaction I  
normally have  
with an audience*

I am a fan of web conferencing – it saves time and money and it is almost like being there – or is it?

I was recently asked to present to a group of people at a workshop in Brisbane. The morning session was to be devoted to eExtension so what better opportunity to demonstrate this technology than to present my talk via a web conference. Since I work in Toowoomba, over 100 km's away from the venue, it would also save time and money.

The practice session, a week prior to the event, worked well so I was ready for this new venture. One advantage of remote presentations was that I could have my notes in front of me. This provided me with some additional confidence though I was still a bit worried about the technology. But we had a contingency plan and the organiser had my presentation on his computer so should anything go wrong – he could run the slides and I would give the talk via telephone.

Then came the big day! The technology worked, my slides were visible to the audience and they could hear me talk clearly enough. But who was I talking to? I sat at my desk,

showed my slides and talked non-stop for 15 minutes. But I saw no-one; I heard no-one and talked to a brick wall rather than a group of 70 people.

I felt deflated and although I received positive feedback about the presentation – I still rated this as my worst presentation ever. Why? Because I missed the interaction I normally have with an audience. There was no nodding, no yawning, no smiles and no eager faces. I could not see the people asking the questions or even whether they understood my responses.

So how do we improve this interaction? One way is to have a camera on the audience. At the start of the presentation I was briefly introduced to a blurry audience this way but leaving the camera on will at least provide the presenter with some focus on who they talk to.

Will I do it again? Most likely, if time and money prohibit travelling to the venue and then only when fully equipped with cameras to provide the vital interaction needed to get the message across.

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## Technology Ideas

For this edition phone technology has taken our attention. Try these for interesting info.

Look at URL <http://www.technologyreview.com/biomedicine/25286/?nlid=2989&a=f> for info about a microscope that plugs into a mobile phone. The discussion here is medical however it might be handy for people who work with plants and animals...and it's seriously cheap!

URL <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/technology/personaltech/14talk.html> Check it out to find out that mobile phone use in USA for making calls is declining while use of phones, especially generation 'smartphones', is increasing for many other things.

Think that your eye could allow you to send a text or dial a contact? It seems it is real and may be on the way soon. Find out more at URL <http://www.technologyreview.com/computing/25369/?nlid=3015&a=f>



# Web Conferencing – A Producer's View

***Prue and Stuart Barkla are sheep producers at Rosscoe Downs, via Cunnamulla in south west Queensland.***

Web Conferencing allows access to high quality speakers and presenters, keeping primary production clients informed with the latest information.

To a large extent web conferencing nullifies the tyranny of distance therefore reducing the cost of quality presentations.

Web conferencing also allows primary producers, to remain at the workplace, dealing with the tasks at hand plus having the opportunity to interact and receive high quality material over a one hour coffee or lunch break.

There is the opportunity with this means of presentation, to deliver into all primary production enterprises and there's no excuse for not being able to access presenters from across Australia. As we think about what it means for all extension officers, it seems the world's your oyster and we are ready to receive quality information from quality presenters.

We, the professional producers, need information constantly and the people with the information need us, so it is a win, win environment.

However our experience suggests there are a few things to consider:

- The guest speaker must be interesting - please no drone's, as it really is a listening delivery with minimal interaction. The way we learn needs to be acknowledged when using web conferencing.
- Government departments must also be very careful not to over use this way of delivery. We think this medium is a great way to introduce a subject that provides an overview and whets the appetite – so to speak – and where needed, add further depth in later sessions.
- Extend the word clients to be all team members in a primary production enterprise (eg scientists, service providers, financiers, etc) so all are informed by this concept of delivering information.
- Web conferences could be used to promote what is coming to, 'a workshop near you'.

As primary producers we are time poor, thin on the ground, work hard physically and mentally, but we are constantly looking for quality, informative sessions to enhance our



production enterprises. And this is where we see on-line presentations winning, as you have the ability to reach from Cape York to Melbourne for your audience – a very powerful, cost effective, informative, interactive presentation-room.

The concept of course, works both ways – giving presenters the opportunity to interact and learn from the grass roots level of primary production – it means we all gain through this very powerful concept of presentation.

## ***A Final Practical Tip for Web conferencing sessions:***

Hosts have the ability to mute everyone attending. However, may we suggest that you ask each attendee to use their mute button at home as well by giving instructions on how to do so. Done this way it means that when the general mute isn't on attendees won't be irritated by hearing constant background noise or deep breathing. That can certainly take the edge of an otherwise very good presentation.



*We, the professional producers, need information constantly and the people with the information need us, so it is a win, win environment.*



# NSW Dairy Extension Goes Digital

**Greg Mills, Livestock Officer – Industry Development  
Industry & Investment NSW**



As extension budgets contract, the challenge continues to implement cost effective extension methodologies whilst maintaining high levels of client service. Podcasts are a low cost tool which has potential to promote client engagement in extension programs.

Podcast are audio files which can be listened to on-line or downloaded for later listening on a computer or portable MP3 player. The audio files can also be burnt to a conventional CD.

66% of Australian farmers used the internet in their business in 2007/08 (ABS 2009), up from 46% in 2003/04 (ABS 2006), with 68% of these having broadband internet access. Internet access on farms was as high as 90% on those farms with an estimated value of production above \$1M (ABS 2009). Increasing acceptance of the internet as a delivery mechanism for information suggests that podcast may enhance the delivery of extension messages. Podcasts have been used by Texas A&M University System Agricultural Communications since 2004 (Fannin 2006) with at least 12 land-grant universities in the United States now using podcasts (Xie and Gu 2007).

A random phone survey in January 2009 of 1,858 people in the United States revealed that 22% of people had listened to a podcast, up from 18% in 2008 and 11% in 2006 (Webster 2009). A follow-up survey in October and November 2009 of 4,787 podcast users identified the ability to access material whenever and wherever they wanted as the key reasons for using podcasts (Webster 2010). The ability to access unique material unavailable elsewhere, and having this on demand, was also rated very highly. 79% of these podcast users listened to audio podcasts each week. As with other trends in computer and internet use it would be reasonable to expect that, with some lag time, this trend would be also seen amongst Australia farmers.

In 2009 Industry & Investment NSW (I&I NSW) released the first 13 podcasts in an ongoing series focused on dairy production and farm business management. The development of these podcasts focused on developing a methodology to allow the production of high quality podcasts which could be produced at a low cost by extension staff with minimal training.

Audacity, a free open source software system, was used for recording and editing the podcasts. A conversational/interview style was selected for the content of the podcasts as this proved more engaging than a monologue style in initial testing. A telephone recording adaptor, costing \$175, connected to a computer, made it possible for the host and the interviewee to be in two different locations. This technology made the recording logistics simple and very cost effective. Using this system it was possible to record twelve podcasts in three and a half hours.

Following each recording the audio quality was enhanced by removing background noise and amplifying if required. The content was also edited to remove ums, ahs, deep breaths and do-overs. On average it took 40 minutes to edit the audio file and add the introduction music and disclaimer. As a general rule it takes 4-5 times the length of the audio to edit the file, depending on recording quality and the skill of the host and interviewee.

Royalty free music, costing \$45 was purchased and used at the start and end of the podcasts to develop a common theme across the podcast series. As with all government publications, and following legal advice, a disclaimer was developed and added to the end of each podcast.

To ensure equity of access to the material provided, each podcast was transcribed using an external transcription service. This cost \$2.20/minute of audio with a minimum charge of \$25 for shorter podcasts. In August 2009 the podcasts and transcripts were then uploaded to the I&I NSW Website ([www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/podcasts/dairy](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/podcasts/dairy)).

The existence of the podcasts was initially promoted on the I&I NSW website with a highlight spot on the main dairy web page. Members of the dairy extension team used email contact lists to promote the podcast and publicity articles were also included in industry newsletters and other publications. The I&I NSW podcasts became the first listed item in a Google® search for dairy podcasts. This has assisted in delivering considerable traffic to the podcasts.

From August 2009 to April 2010 the counter system on the I&I Website showed 8505 total

*Podcast are audio files which can be listened to on-line or downloaded for later listening on a computer or portable MP3 player.*

# NSW Dairy Extension Goes Digital (continued)

hits to the 13 dairy podcasts. While the hit counter system shows that the audio files have been delivered it does not give any indication that the recipient listened to the file. It does not indicate either that some change in management resulted, which is the aim of an extension program. Experience suggests that the number of hits and audio downloads provides some measurable data on usage (Fannin 2006:13).

It is not possible at this early stage, and may prove too difficult in the longer term, to measure the impact on-farm of the podcast initiative. While the podcast system is a relatively low cost system, it is not zero cost, and must show demonstrated value if it is to be utilised on an ongoing basis.

The preface for the evaluation of the podcast series was that any new system must be as 'good as' or 'better than' the existing system in which an organisation is already prepared to invest time and dollars. In the case of podcast, the comparable existing system was the web based delivery of extension material as PDF files. Typically this information would be in the form of a PrimeFact or other topic based publication.

A comparison of the web traffic generated by podcast and PDF was undertaken over an eight month period from September 2009. The hits to the website generated by the 13 dairy podcasts was compared to the hits generated by the top 13 PDF on dairy topics in each month.

The analysis of web site traffic, as shown in Table 1 (below), revealed that over a five month period the 13 dairy podcast generated 3.52 times more downloads than the top 13 publication in PDF format. This level of acceptance of podcast by I&I website users, combined with a low production cost, has demonstrated that podcasts are a tool that warrants inclusion into extension programs.

Through the methodologies developed, podcasts allow topical information to be deployed quickly. A podcast can be recorded and edited in an hour, transcribed overnight and be on a website or emailed to clients within 24 hours, or perhaps sooner if required.

The use of Podcasts is not without its challenges. While podcasts can be quickly generated and released many organisations may not have policies and procedures to approve release this quickly. As was the experience in I&I NSW, podcasts are technically easy, but the framework of legalities, approval procedures, equity access, publication policies and web logistics must also be moulded and manipulated to make podcasting a reality.

The skill sets required to develop and deliver podcasts is one that can be readily acquired by most extension officers with minimal training. With a low start-up and ongoing cost, podcasts will quickly become a mainstay in the toolbox of many extension officers.

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File Format	Sep 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09	Jan 10	Feb 10	Mar 10	Apr 10	May 10	Total
Podcasts	265	1267	1390	1638	1121	1089	837	898	835	9340
PDF	253	368	263	346	374	230	274	305	291	2740
Podcast:PDF	1.05	3.44	5.29	4.73	3.00	4.73	3.05	2.94	2.87	3.45

**Table 1.** Total hits to I&I website for dairy podcasts and the top 13 dairy PDF documents for that month.

# Service and Information to New Landholders Project (SINL)

*Ruth McGowan, Victorian Department of Primary Industries*



*There is an estimated 85,000 small landholders across Victoria*



*Some of the range of information material produced for the SINL project*

Since 2006, the Victorian Department of Primary Industries has run a targeted information service specifically designed to meet the information and service needs of small landholders who wish to know more about their land management responsibilities.

The Services and Information to New Landholders (SINL) project is wrapping up after four years and with plans to reincarnate the project as a new service from July. The project specifically targeted small landholders within Victorian peri-urban growth regions, an emergent group not traditionally catered to by DPI or government agencies.

An extensive evaluation of the project found that SINL unequivocally made a positive impact on the awareness of the participants who were involved. SINL successfully assisted small landowners (sometimes know as lifestylers or hobby farmers) to increase their understanding of sustainable land management, particularly in pest plant and animal responsibilities. The project also significantly contributed to DPIs knowledge of how to more effectively engage with this client group.

This has been achieved through the dissemination of well targeted information and evidence-based service delivery to small landholders in Victoria by the SINL team. Part of the success of SINL is that it has targeted a group who have historically not received attention from Government and private service providers. More than 130 events reached approximately 2000 participants and a further 8000 new landholders received copies of a New Landholders information kit, distributed to mail boxes with the assistance of local councils.

Ongoing research managed by Carole Hollier (DPI Rutherglen) led to better informed practice by the projects Regional Coordinators (David Stewart/DPI Frankston, Louise Scott/ DPI Bendigo and Greg Bekker/ DPI Benalla). Staff have been a valuable resource for external and internal partners wanting to learn how to better engage with small landholders.

For a copy of the final report on the project see the SINL website at

[www.dpi.vic.gov.au/new-landholders](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/new-landholders)





# New APEN members

If you've recently joined APEN, welcome! You'll reap plenty of professional and personal rewards. If you've been in APEN for a few seasons now, be sure to say hello to the new members.

## Andrew Freeman



Following an extensive period working in Queensland agri-politics Andrew joined Meat and Livestock Australia in November 2009 as Project Manager – Environmental Systems. His focus is on ensuring the industry is well positioned to maximise emerging opportunities to demonstrate our environmental credentials, and to meet the challenges of evolving climate change policies.

Andrew holds a degree in Applied Science – Agriculture from University of Melbourne. From 1998 to 2009 he worked with AgForce Queensland as the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Policy Manager. Previously he held the position of Policy Director – Sheep & Wool for the United Grazers' Association of Queensland. In that time AgForce extended its areas of member service to include an extensive knowledge building program across natural resource management, WPH&S, and other areas of information and knowledge building for producers.

Welcome to these new members who have joined since last edition. We're glad to have you all on board.

<b>Andrew Freeman</b>	QLD
<b>Tracy Adams</b>	QLD
<b>Theresa Kunde</b>	QLD
<b>Adrian James</b>	TAS
<b>Donna Lucas</b>	TAS
<b>Rosalie Anderson</b>	QLD
<b>Susan Maas</b>	QLD

Andrew has extensive experience in a range of areas including natural resource management, policy and service delivery. He also has extensive knowledge of the impacts of environment policy and the impact they have on landholders and farmers, as well as the pressures on Australian farmers to produce food in a sustainable way.

Andrew is enthusiastic about refreshing networks in all parts of Australia and overseas through the APEN network.

## Results of ExtensionNet Survey – Electronic or Hardcopy

### Tracey Gianatti, APEN President

Well the results are in! Of the 144 APEN members who responded to the survey, 70% were in favour of an electronic version and 30% preferred hardcopy. So what happens next? Rather than just emailing ExtensionNet to you as a PDF, several members suggested that APEN should increase the interactivity of both ExtensionNet and our website. The management committee thought this was an excellent idea. As a professional organisation focussed on networking, APEN has an opportunity to lead the way utilising the latest web 2.0 technologies.

Before we make any changes, we'd like to hear some more from you. We are planning to set up a blog on the APEN website to find out:

- 1) What functions do you want the APEN website to do?
- 2) What could it look like?

If you are interested in helping us to get started, please give me a call on 0427 344 722 or email [president@apen.org.au](mailto:president@apen.org.au).

Some proposed functions for the website could include:

- News Service – eg. members post own items, email alerts when new content is posted
- Extension Information – eg. downloadable tool kit for extension practitioners, wiki to develop improvements to existing tools, articles on extension techniques, printable references, posting of questions
- Published documents – eg. peer-reviewed articles, downloadable PDFs eg. ExtensionNet, conference proceedings
- Downloads – webinars (recorded and real time), video and audio podcasts,
- "APEN Live" – live webinars, real time posting of questions, forums.

The main benefit of this new approach is that members could have direct interaction with the authors of ExtensionNet and eBulletin articles. In addition, there is

currently a gap in the marketplace for interactive extension information. Some impediments would include: perceived loss of value of APEN membership ie. tangible products no longer exist; and we would need a critical mass of people using the website to build momentum and drive the benefits of the new approach.

Thank you to the 144 members who completed our on-line survey and thanks also for your comments and suggestions on the content of **ExtensionNet**. These comments have provided a wonderful resource for our Editors, as we move forward in our use of web 2.0 technologies.



# APEN's 2nd Webinar – Wednesday 4th August, 2010

The theme for the next APEN webinar will be "Working with Grower Groups". We are excited to announce that two speakers have been confirmed - Dr Lauren Richards, MR Consulting Group, and Mr Mike Weise, WestVic Dairy Inc. Lauren was winner of the 2009 APEN Amabel Fulton Award for Excellence in Extension by a Young Professional and will speak about her work with the Birchip Cropping Group and Meat and Livestock Australia. Mike will speak about his experiences as the Executive Officer of WestVic Dairy.

The webinar will be broken into two sections with a 30 minute presentation from Lauren followed by 15 minute Q & A session. Mike will then follow with his presentation. Lauren will be in Melbourne, Mike in Terang Western Victoria, and we will be able to see and hear them live in up to 25 locations around Australia and New Zealand.

If you and your colleagues would like to link into the webinar, please contact Roe Currie on (02) 6024 5349 or email [info@apen.org.au](mailto:info@apen.org.au). This is a great opportunity to gather with other

APEN members to allow discussion and networking after the webinar. The price for a catered event will be \$45 for members and \$65 for non-members.

## Webinar times will be:

<b>WA</b>	<b>9.30am</b>
<b>NT/SA</b>	<b>11.00am</b>
<b>Qld/NSW/Vic/Tas</b>	<b>11.30am</b>
<b>NZ</b>	<b>1.30pm</b>

See the website for more details as they come to hand

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## Guidelines and deadlines

*Submissions should be made in MS Word 6.0 with minimal formatting. A portrait photograph of the author is required. All photographs, figures and/or tables ought to be provided as separate files (preferably TIF or JPEG; photos scanned at 300 dpi). Feature articles should be around 1000 words and minor articles 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submitted material to meet space restrictions. Letters to the editor or general items of news of interest to the network are welcome. Articles should be submitted at least four weeks prior to publication.*

*Preference is given to articles that are grounded in some form of project or event.*

**Editing: Kate Charleston and Gerry Roberts**

**Layout: Ross Tasker, Snap Printing Wodonga, Victoria.**

**Production management: Rosemary Currie, APEN Secretariat, Wodonga, Victoria.**

*Opinions expressed in ExtensionNet are not necessarily those of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (Inc.) unless otherwise stated.*

**Stories and photos (next edition) due to Editor 27 August 2010**