



EXTENSIONNet

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What is the “agricultural rut” and how did we get here?

by John James, APEN President

I want to round out a discussion about extension being in an “agricultural rut” as it was I who introduced the topic during the APEN open space forum in Toowoomba last year. I was encouraged, but not surprised, that the topic attracted so much interest from extensionists keen to explore new futures for extension. Like others, I’m keen to see the extension profession’s traditional alliance with agricultural science does not blind us to other opportunities.

I should say at the outset that I’m not “anti-agriculture”. Like many members of APEN, much of my working life has been spent in agriculture and the professional and personal rewards I’ve reaped have been very satisfying. There is, of course, an enduring need for agricultural and land management science and some platform for communicating new technologies to those who would use it. One of the world’s most

pressing challenges will be – or is – matching the capacity of our arable land with the food and fibre needs of a burgeoning global population. Extension, from this perspective, is already assured a rich and busy future.

The term “agricultural rut” may understandably carry negative connotations and some extensionists may be offended at the suggestion that agricultural pursuits somehow lead to some sort of professional dead-end. Nothing could be further from the truth. We all know local “gurus” of extension who are passionate about pushing the boundaries of extension and tenaciously pursue professional excellence. They have innate or cultivated skills in communication, make excellent mentors, and take great care that extension – as a vocation and also enriching life work – is nurtured amongst novice practitioners. Usually, these “gurus” have a broad ranging understanding of agriculture –

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Qld Parks & Wildlife Service officer Karen Smith uses the “erotic” mnemonic in interpretive engagement with the community.

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Where to contact your local APEN representative. Also story guidelines for the next edition of ExtensionNet.

From the (new) editor

Hi all. I was briefly introduced in the last edition of ExtensionNet so I won’t talk too much more about myself here ... it’s one of my least favourite subjects!

I look forward to the challenge of editing ExtensionNet in the future and see it as one of the primary benefits of being a member of APEN. The stories from around the regions about members doing what they do best are illuminating and inspiring.

I thank and congratulate the former editor, Mark Paine, who has maintained the quality of this newsletter at an extraordinarily professional level in the past. I’d like to keep up that professionalism and introduce some new features in subsequent editions. Above all, if there’s news in extension, you’ll read it here. Please let me know what you think about the newsletter and pass on ideas about how we can keep it relevant and readable.

Darren Schmidt

APEN is pleased to acknowledge the support of:



Horticulture Australia

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... the social, political and economic circumstances that gave rise to a population of experienced extensionists have now changed markedly ...

What is the “agricultural rut”? And how did we get here? (cont’d from page 1)

the scientific principles, the practical realities, the facts and figures – and of the people that practise it. This deep and rounded education means many experienced extensionists frequently leave significant ripples in a rural community when they move or retire.

These venerable professionals are, I think, wonderful examples of what novice extensionists can aspire to. However, I do argue that the social, political and economic circumstances that gave rise to a population of such experienced extensionists have now changed markedly.

“Socially, agricultural world is different to even 20 years ago. Social backbones in rural communities such as tennis clubs, church groups and rural youth organisations have declined in importance. It was once relatively easy for an extension officer to socialise with a great many clients simply by joining the local service club or by being otherwise socially active.

“Politically, it now seems less acceptable to channel resources to a narrow segment of the food value chain – agricultural production – at the “expense” of other segments such as marketing or business development. Increasingly, extension officers are no longer likely to be afforded the luxury of being of a purely agricultural bent. Of course, for many extensionists this is not new ground at all and they revel in wearing the different hats required of their job.

“Economically, extension has never had a tougher time of proving its contribution to the region’s financial output. By its nature difficult to evaluate in monetary terms, extension faces increasing competition – especially in the public sphere – from research, business-oriented activities and even corporate image spin-doctoring. For bean counters, local testimonials, ethical advice and productive support do not fit easily into the credit and debits columns.

So, to re-iterate, extension has traditionally sat side-by-side with agriculture in a chair that was socially cohesive, economically justifiable, and with a political identity that was resolute and almost a given. Clearly, those days are past and, as modern professionals, we must take careful note of these changes and carefully plot our journey through them. Better still, let’s seize the inevitable opportunities generated by changing circumstances and turn them to our own advantage.

We need only to look to other agencies to pick up clues. Most of us have at some point worked or communicated with national parks and wildlife officers, mines and water infrastructure departments or environmental protection agencies. We’ve all been exposed to highly targeted public information campaigns, we ring up companies and organisations to book tickets, reserve restaurant tables, or hire equipment.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE ...

Long time readers will notice two things about this issue:

- 1 there is little “hard and fast” extension field work reported, and
- 2 the authors are all from Queensland.

The second point is easy to explain: the new editor is a Queenslander and as a way of “easing into the job” it was a lot easier to use local contacts to write the articles. Future editions will be less parochial!

The first point reflects the fact that there simply wasn’t room for agricultural extension stories in this edition because it is full of information about how other agencies deal with “extension”. This is *not* an indicator of how the newsletter is destined to evolve; future editions will, of course, carry stories about the sort of work we’re all familiar with: agricultural extension.

During the 2001 Open Space APEN forum in Toowoomba there was considerable interest in the “agricultural rut” (see story by John James, page 1). Consequently, this edition is themed toward showing how non-

agricultural organisations act as change agents, and you’ll see that some of practices and philosophies are familiar.

Other “hot” topics at the forum included marketing, a national extension framework, professional development, and extension theory and these themes will be more fully explored in future editions.

Darren Schmidt



Reducing the road toll with messages

by Kerrie Tregenza

Queensland Transport

Changing behaviour and attitudes is one of the greatest challenges for communicators. Queensland Transport attempts to meet this challenge through road safety public education campaigns on issues as diverse as safety for older pedestrians to drink driving.

Tony Kursius, Executive Director, Land Transport and Safety, said decisions about what messages are delivered are driven by research.

"The bottom line is the road toll — by examining our road crash database we can see what driving behaviours are contributing to crashes, where they occur and who to target," Tony said.

Once this has been established communication strategies can be developed for specific audiences.

"The means of communicating with the target audience will depend on the budget, their geographic location and other factors such as age, education and work status."

Queensland Transport's most recent campaign aims to show that "every K over is a killer".

"This campaign was developed after extensive testing and research to find the best way to drive home the message about the dangers of speeding. Ultimately we want to position speeding as socially unacceptable behaviour, therefore we went so far as to involve speeders in creative think tanks to develop the campaign," Tony said.

Specific objectives of the campaign were:

- to make the community believe there is no such thing as safe speeding and that they will be held accountable if they speed;

- to educate motorists of the consequences — social, financial, penalty-based — of speeding; and

- to educate motorists of the increased risk that results from increased speed.

Through focus group testing, features of successful anti-speeding commercials were identified.

The research showed that effective anti-speeding ads should have a strong story line, show a cause and effect link and a range of social consequences on family and friends as well as the driver.

"Participants thought that ads should have a strong emotional impact, but feature everyday situations people can relate to such as running late.

"Showing drivers speeding at 10-15 km/h over the speed limit was also a key factor. It goes without saying that the faster you go, the longer it takes to stop. The focus on 10-15km/h was a strategic decision. If the consequences exist for people speeding in lower speed zones, it is obvious they are more severe in high speed zones."

The marketing mix for the campaign includes television and radio advertising, billboards and on-going publicity.

"Speeding is a very complex social issue. To successfully achieve a reduction in motorists' speeds, campaigns must seek to change attitudes and behaviours. No single advertisement can achieve attitudinal and behavioural shifts for all audiences," Tony said.

A series of five television commercials were developed, each with a

DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS

Proceedings for sale

Did you miss out on proceedings from the Open Space APEN 2001 Conference in Toowoomba? Don't despair! The Secretariat has copies of Proceedings and Conference folder for sale: Cost for both (including GST and postage in Australia): Members \$49.50, non-members \$65.50. Refereed proceedings only cost members \$27.50, non-members \$38.50. Conference folder only costs members \$22.00, non-members \$27.50.

NZ Members \$51.80 NZ non-members \$68.30 (other overseas please contact Rosemary for the cost of postage). Contact Rosemary Currie at the APEN Secretariat, PO Box 1239, Wodonga, Vic, 3689 or Fax 02 6056 1967 or e-mail to rcurrie@albury.net.au. Phone 02 6024 5349 for inquiries.

Latest JOE online

The February 2002 edition of **Journal of Extension** is online. Commentary on extension and political acumen, and feature articles on extension in controversial studies, evaluating water resource outreach programs, groundwater education for farmers, how the adoption of transgenic crops affects cultural practices, herbicide drift and conflict management, measuring and benchmarking customer satisfaction, and much more. Address is www.joe.org. The next issue of ExtensionNet will highlight some other extension-themed websites. If APEN members have some handy sites bookmarked, please contact the Editor (details back page).

APEN who?

Ever mentioned "APEN" to a colleague to be met with a blank stare and have to spell it out for them? Worse, have you ever had to explain extension to someone who's never heard the term in its agricultural context? Please consider completing the faxback form posted with this edition. It's your chance to convey your thoughts and opinions to the APEN National Executive.

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Karen Smith (middle) with her two sub-editors

Reaching the masses: interpretation & eroticism

How national parks and wildlife officers use messages to “fire hearts”

by Karen Smith

John Muir said “Dry words and dry facts will never fire hearts.” For those of you thinking that for practical, important stuff like changing farming practices or adopting new technology this has little relevance, pause to think. What makes more difference to the way we think, believe and act — just knowing something or being inspired by it affecting our emotions, intellect or way of life?

Well targeted, concise, relevant, thematic and (dare we say) enjoyable communication which gets to the heart of the matter and the heart of the hearer may be just what extension programs need. It may be that extension officers from various fields can draw on the experiences and techniques of other fields of communication — like interpretation — to find new, different or inspiring ways of getting messages across.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) — an arm of the Environmental Protection Agency of Queensland, Australia — has both extension and interpretation programs operating side-by-side as two largely distinct providers of public contact and education services. The two programs share common broad goals, but have differences in the audience they target and emphasise different techniques to reach these audiences. Interpretive programs relate to an understanding of the natural world and are targeted (for the most part) towards national park visitors or a wildlife issue and often “clustered” around a particular park, visitor centre or activity program. In contrast, extension efforts rely more heavily on taking their services to target audiences using structured workshops with set (usually adult) learning outcomes. Programs are usually targeted off-park and aimed at modifying attitudes and behaviour of natural resource managers in relation to conservation of nature on their lands.

“Extension differs from interpretation in that groups targeted by extension activities usually have an economic interest in environmental initiatives.”

THE MAIN POINTS

- Appeal to the heart, not just the ear
- “Interpretive” programs can work side by side with extension programs
- Extension can be EROTIC (it’s a mnemonic ... no letters, please!)

Many examples exist of interpretation and extension staff of QPWS working together, and indeed before the relatively recent (1998) establishment of the Nature Conservation Extension Program within QPWS, many interpretation staff were involved in what people would really term “extension”.

The QPWS Draft Interpretation Manual describes extension as “any communication with user groups, special interest groups and commercial industries involved in or affected by the Service’s environmental management. Extension differs from interpretation in that groups targeted by extension activities usually have an economic interest in environmental initiatives.”

While many extension activities require distinct “extension” techniques, extension professionals could readily adapt some interpretive techniques in some circumstances. One obvious way to incorporate interpretive principles is when developing displays, publications or signs, but it need not be limited to non-personal forms of communication.

Contemporary American interpreter Sam Ham states that effective interpretation is **EROTIC**. That is, interpretation should be **Enjoyable, Relevant, Organised, Thematic, Informative and Challenging**.

Extension could be erotic too! Let’s look at each in turn to see what this idea means.

Enjoyable: Today more than ever, if people are not stimulated by what they see or hear, they will be less likely to listen to what you have to tell them. Make your materials and programs more enjoyable by using catchy headings and titles, colourful descriptions and anecdotes. Use emotive, thought provoking language and creative words to convey information, thoughts and views. Be personal and inject some novelty, humour, surprise and variety. Encourage the use of senses — feel, smell, see and hear. Tell

stories. And remember that an attractive design (free of clutter and clever with colour) aids readability. Involve a graphic designer from the very start of your publication, not just at the end when you've decided on all the words and want to make it look pretty.

Relevant: Information should be both meaningful and personal. Information needs to be in context and connected to something the audience already knows or cares about. By relating information back to a person's everyday life or experience you can make it personal and give it more value. The information should also relate to the theme (more on this later).

Organised: If the audience has to work too hard to get information you might lose their attention. Use layers to organise information into a logical hierarchy or sequence giving most emphasis to the most important piece. Remember that people may not read displays, signs or publications in the sequence you present the information, but by using layers you can make your main message reach even the "skippers" or "skimmers". Sam Ham suggests using 4 levels of information as follows:

- Level 1 - theme awareness (mini-summary or main point prominent at start or top);
- Level 2 - main messages or sub-themes (usually organised under headings and explored briefly);
- Level 3 - selected details (highlighted or expanded to illustrate the theme and messages. Could be a photograph or illustration with caption); and
- Level 4 - action (ways the audience can act on the information).

Thematic: The best interpretation is thematic — it has a major point. A theme is different to a topic. The topic is what the interpretation or extension is about, the theme is the storyline — the message you want the audience to take away with them. It is what you want them to remember if nothing else! People will forget the details but will usually remember overall concepts or messages. Even extension professionals find that by developing themes and messages, communication can be more effective. And developing themes and messages also helps weed out the relevant from that which is not relevant.

Informative: All audiences have a number of information needs as well as a desire for new information and experiences. But neither interpretation or extension are just about information. Freeman Tilden first defined interpretation as being "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information." Extension may "involve the conscious use of communication of information to help people form sound opinions and make good decisions" but these days is more about active and participative learning and stimulating an ongoing search for knowledge. In either case, information must be relevant, timely and challenging.

Challenging: Information itself rarely leads to a change in a person's behaviour — which is essentially what both interpretation and extension programs aim to do. Such programs should aim to provide information that enables the audience to make a choice about their actions. Information given should not only answer the questions the audience is asking, but should also give new knowledge and insights into issues the audience may have never considered. If your materials or programs do not challenge some already pre-conceived view or behaviour, then your efforts will not be successful.

Recently in the QPWS Southern Region, interpretation and extension staff have started working more closely together, with joint communication skills training and sharing of resources. Some interpreters work on an almost daily basis with extension staff within and outside QPWS, helping and giving advice on planning, writing and producing extension materials. Extension and interpretation staff can gain much from sharing experiences of how different communication techniques can be used in different situations. Inspiration to try new ideas may not be far away — perhaps with a colleague having a slightly different job description but working in a similar field to you.

Even extension professionals find that by developing themes and messages, communication can be more effective. And developing themes and messages also helps weed out the relevant from that which is not relevant.

END 1

Reducing the road toll with messages (cont'd from page 3)

specific role to play in the overall campaign.

The first was a factual ad demonstrating stopping distances of a car traveling at different speeds. This commercial aimed to establish the fact that the faster you drive the longer it takes to stop.

"This was followed by an emotionally charged ad depicting the moments before and after a crash involving a young mother and a school girl.

"This was designed to dramatically show the emotional consequences for all those involved, including the victim, her friend and the driver."

A third commercial focuses on enforcement, and that if you speed, you will be caught. This ad debuted at Christmas time during a major enforcement push by police.

The next commercial in the series challenges the common myths about speeding.

"Excuses for speeding are juxtaposed against a scene showing a small boy running onto the road with tragic consequences."

The final commercial, which is yet to go to air, specifically targets young males and is quite graphic in nature.

"Our research showed that graphic-style ads appealed very strongly to this age group and would be most likely to influence their driving behaviour."

A number of billboard messages were also developed after research (see sidebar, left).

"Early indications are that the billboards have achieved very high recognition."

The next phase of the campaign will be evaluation.

"Evaluation measures were built into the campaign at the initial planning phase," Tony said.

In the short term six monthly quantitative tracking research will provide results on awareness levels and self-reported behaviour change.

The number of speeding offence notices issued will provide an indication of the level of behaviour change as a result of the communication and enforcement activities.

An analysis of media clippings/reports will provide an evaluation of the level of community debate generated due to the communication.

"In the long term, speed-related road toll fatalities and hospitalisations will provide an indication of the level of success of the strategy, complemented by enforcement activities."

"Public education campaigns require strategic complementary enforcement activities to meaningfully contribute to a reduction in the road toll.

"It is only through the integrated approach of education, enforcement and engineering activities that we can achieve significant reductions in the road toll," Mr Kursius said.

Initial results from telephone survey

ENCT

- .. **Every K over is a killer.**
- .. **How many times do we have to tell you? 60.**
- .. **Has your car got a nut loose at the wheel?**
- .. **High speed. Low IQ.**

Rural internet guide available

Incongruously, many people still seem to appreciate information about the web when it's delivered in a magazine. In fact, some of the best information you'll find about the web is in print.

On that point, the second edition of the "RURALit: Queensland Internet Guide" is now out. Ignore the state-based title - URLs work from anywhere, we're assured.

This is a well organised guide, complete with hundreds of internet addresses, site descriptions, how-to-find-it and other information for rural people.

Topics aren't restricted to agriculture; lifestyles, remote-link businesses and education are all covered. Urbanites would no doubt find something to tickle their rural romantic side as well.

RURALit was distributed as a

supplement to the Queensland Country Life. If you don't receive this newspaper, you can purchase a copy from the DPI Shop Online for a very reasonable \$3.95. Just go to www.dpi.qld.gov.au and follow the prompts. RURALit is a project initiated and managed by JoAnn Resing, the DPI Rural Information Specialist for the North Queensland region.

What is the “agricultural rut” and how did we get here? (cont’d from page 2)

What can these experiences tell us about how we conduct our own business, and how can we put their ideas into practice for ourselves?

Switched-on extension officers do this intuitively. They strive for better presentations, they maintain client databases carefully, and they manage professional affairs professionally. Other extensionists hone their skills in contemporary extension practice through further study, often mixing with professionals from other streams and discuss similarities and differences. I believe these extensionists are taking the profession forward, not by deliberately leaving agriculture behind but by actively pursuing the wisdom and practices evident in kindred organisations.

What could come of establishing strategic alliances with organisations that are also employing social technology to achieve prescribed ends, such as marketing, public communication or fundraising organisations? For some, it may seem a waste of time but I think this is a reflection of the very nature of a “rut”: an inability to see over the rim of a self-built crater which not only prevents the inhabitant from seeing what else is going on in the professional world, but prevents the outside world from gazing in to scrutinise the work of the crater dweller. I believe that extension professionals need to commit to exploring every avenue they can to make extension a vital profession. I also believe that aligning exclusively with agriculture is a good way for extension to perish in the past.

What rich outcomes might we expect from “getting into the heads” of marketing experts, public communication gurus or fundraising geniuses?

AROUND THE TRAPS - CHAPTER ACTIVITIES (WA)

Western Australian extension officers have been busy invigorating their chapter with some successful activities and meetings and plans for more.

Brain dominance

Following their AGM (these people are organised!) the WA chapter took part in a pilot of what could end up being a national activity: a “Brain Dominance Workshop”. This sounds sinister, but isn’t ... participants answer a series of questions which reveal whether they are left or right hemisphere dominant, or principally auditory or visual in their learning styles.

Amanda Miller (now no longer Prez of the WA chapter - see back page) reports that 15 people attended the workshop and feedback was quite positive. The WA Department of Agriculture wants to run at least one workshop in a rural location with APEN taking the lead in presenting.

Carol-Anne Thacker from cat2.com.au was the presenter and is keen to help run the workshops with us nationally.

Writing workshop

Still in the golden west, a writing workshop will be piloted on the 24th May this year, 9am-4pm at UWA. Organisers report that getting suitable presenters has been a challenge (mumbling something about a five-hour flight) but they have scored big with two professionals at the top of their game: Barb Clews, who is a freelance writer (skills are quickly sharpened when you *rely* on the written word to put dinner on the table) and Chris Anderson who is editor of the Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture and a long associate of APEN.

New committee in WA

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Chair | Colin Holt |
| Vice Chair | Sandra Maynard |
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Committee

| | |
|------------------|----------------|
| Sally-Anne Penny | Sue-Ellen Shaw |
| Roy Murray Prior | Jon Warren |
| Amanda Miller | |

ICE-BREAKERS

All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter into another!

..... Anatole France

Guidelines and deadlines

Submission should be made in MS Word 6.0 with minimal formatting. A portrait photograph is required. All photographs, figures and/or tables ought to be provided as separate files (preferably TIF, GRIF or JPEG; photos scanned at 300 dpi). Feature articles ought to be around 1500 words and minor articles 750 words. Letters to the editor or general items of news of interest to the network are welcome. Articles should be submitted to the committee four weeks prior to publication. Preference is given to articles that are grounded in some form of project or event.

Editing and layout: **Darren Schmidt, Qld Department of Primary Industries, Kingaroy.**

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

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

**Theme for next edition of ExtensionNet: Marketing extension:
how? why? who? what? where? when?**

Stories and photos due to Editor Friday, 31st May 2002.

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