

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Electronic Newsletters and Podcasts Reach a Wide Audience

The Situation

In an increasingly high paced world, it is sometimes difficult to deliver traditional extension programming to our intended audiences.

The internet with all its facets and nuances has become one of the main sources of information for many individuals worldwide, and has potential to be a more effective tool in extension programming beyond the basics. Unfortunately many web-based tools require a great deal of time and financial inputs on the part of an educator.

However, some effective tools are available which require little inputs of educator time or funding, and deserve exploration. Failure to supplement existing programming with these types of web-based tools would likely result in diminished overall impact of an educator's efforts.

Our Response

Combining humor with academic based information University of Idaho extension educators, Luke Erickson, Lyle Hansen, Marilyn Bischoff, and Karen Richel have made pioneering efforts by disseminating the timely topic of personal finance education via electronic newsletters and audio podcasts.

Newsletters are developed in-house using pre-made templates and are delivered via email lists. They are

accessible via standard web browsers and are in a printable format making hard copies very simple to produce from anywhere in the world. Catchy graphics and a humorous writing style are designed to attract and retain readers. Emailed newsletters do not require printing or postage.

Audio podcasts are produced with the same type of creative and humorous, yet academic-based content. The technique employed requires only inexpensive microphones and a five-dollar-a-month podcast hosting service. Using a free online chat service and a free shareware audio recorder, episodes which

contain complete uninterrupted conversations are produced from the comfort of each of the educators' respective offices, no travel required. Podcasts are available for download through an RSS feed in mp3 format from popular podcatchers such as Itunes or Podcast.com, or can simply be listened to on any computer with audio capabilities.

Newsletter and podcast materials have been collaboratively used and distributed across the U.S. with partnership from other universities and organizations including Utah State University, Brigham Young University (Utah and Idaho), University of Kentucky, Oklahoma State University, and the North Carolina based National Hummingbird Credit Counseling, Inc. It is also being distributed by a large number of local organizations in Idaho to their local clientele.



These innovative methods of education have reached wide audiences and require very little input of time and costs.

Program Outcomes

Numbers of direct monthly subscribers to the newsletters and podcasts have grown from under 100 in early 2007 to 1,238 by June, 2008. There is also evidence of overwhelming viral use, not counted as direct subscribers. For example, the newsletter is forwarded electronically by many subscribers to other acquaintances and associates, and hard copies of the newsletter are frequently printed and shared with additional audiences by subscribers.

It is calculated that approximately 250-300 direct readers/listeners exist for each hour of input by the educators.

Qualitative type comments volunteered by readers and listeners have also yielded the following indications of impact:

- Your material is funny and informative, I would definitely like to learn more. Please keep me informed of upcoming classes.
- I think that it would be very beneficial to our family to all be on the "same financial page" so to speak. I have forwarded the newsletters that I received them. I have learned so much in just reading the articles and going back to the archives.
- This has given me a new vocabulary. Before it was a topic that was so hard to talk about and approach with my husband. But now we understand the key terms, and principles that we are trying to talk about. It's made the process so much easier, and we've already made a lot of progress. I've got my kids looking at your newsletters and my oldest daughter is even talking about getting a master's degree in personal finance!
- It was excellent—readable and pertinent information. Will forward to my daughter who is in grad school. Please add my name to your list of subscribers.



While our targeted audiences include high school and college age individuals, our podcasts and newsletters have been effective in reaching other diverse audiences including the home bound, and those who would not otherwise attend a live class.

Additionally, we have found that those who attend live educational events also benefit from our newsletters and podcasts as a supplement to face-to-face educational experiences.

Issues and episodes have steadily grown in popularity and currently reach across state *and* international boundaries. They have proven effective at driving traffic to our

county websites, and have been an effective means of attracting audiences to our live events.

For More Information

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