

CEVIS-Call Extension Voice Information System: A Client Information Dissemination Approach

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Cooperative extension's mission is to transmit practical information produced by research centers and universities to the public. Its aim is to help people identify and solve problems, primarily at the local level (Larsen, 1988). With the plethora of knowledge available today and often impatient clientele awaiting its receipt, efforts are underway to automate the dissemination of basic, timely information.

The Electronic Technology Task Force at North Dakota State Univ. adapted the computer-based AudioText system used successfully in Wisconsin and Minnesota to help answer seasonal questions on horticulture and food preservation.

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The specific messages placed on the system were identified by county extension staff as questions that are asked often. Subject matter specialists extracted specific parts of their most popular educational materials. In addition, brochures advertising the Wisconsin and Minnesota systems were reviewed and sometimes used after appropriate editing. County staff, specialists, and professional broadcasters were used to record the messages. A brochure available from the extension service lists all messages available.

The microcomputer-based AudioText system uses two large hard disk drives to store the software and voice messages. Voice boards in the computer connect the telephone to the microcomputer.

The system had to be easy to use. When clientele call CEVIS, the AudioText system answers and automatically starts delivering the message. All are accessed by pressing the appropriate keys on a touch-tone phone. Thus, individuals are given adequate instructions on how to obtain the information they desire.

CEVIS allows clientele to access the information they want, when they want it. The 24-h/day system provides voice messages (1-1.5 min). It also delivers "weekly tips" that county staff can update at will. The total cost of updating a message is a phone call, which

is usually local. The system can be used for various purposes, as the needs of the clientele change with the seasons or with current concerns.

A total of 1025 phone calls were made to CEVIS during the initial test period of 18 July to 31 Aug. 1989, an average of 23 calls per day. Callers requested 2436 messages, for an average 2.4 messages per call and 4.9 min/call.

The most often requested messages in sequence of frequency were: outdoor plants topics list, controlling ants, food preservation topics list, growing tomatoes, calendar of events, watering lawns, list of county extension office topics, tomato fruit diseases, seeding lawns, renovating old lawn, and weekly tips.

About 17% of the calls were made on weekends. Eight percent of the calls were made between midnight and 8:00 AM and 29% between 5:00 PM and midnight. About 54% of the calls were made during non-business hours.

Using CEVIS shows that information delivery systems should be accessible 24 h-day⁻¹. This need has been met with the AudioText. The system is also part of our ability to organize, store, retrieve, and transmit information (Dillman, 1985).

The success of CEVIS in the Stark-Billings County extension office has led extension administrators to install the CEVIS system in county extension offices statewide.

Literature Cited

- Dillman, D.A. 1985. The social impacts of information technologies in rural North America. *Rural Soc.* 50(1):1-26.
- Larsen, R.P. 1988. Comprehensive extension system—The land grant example. *HortScience* 23(3):479-482.