CATV as an Extension Communication Channel

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Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future. – John F. Kennedy

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY can bring about sudden changes in the way we try to communicate with the clients of the Cooperative Extension Service. This may be especially true with community antenna television, known by the acronym CATV. The expansion of this technology during the time that extension is eyeing the urban audiences may bring about many fruitful cooperative efforts.

During the 1960's, the Nation provided large federal subsidies for a new interstate highway system to facilitate transportation. Now, in the 1970's, some are making a plea for a national committment to an electronic highway system (CATV), to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas *(1)*.

In February, after years of debate and quarrel, the Federal Communications Commission laid out the rules for CATV expansion *(2)*. Regardless of whether these FCC rules ultimately govern the operation of CATV, they have focused attention on providing educational programming via the "electronic highway of a wired nation." The rules, which became effective March 31, 1972, provide a public access channel, an educational channel, and a local government channel at no cost to the user for at least five years after the CATV system starts operation *(3)*.

It seemed appropriate at this point and time to do a survey with the objective to inventory extension's use of CATV, to determine the methods used to get access to this channel, and to determine future expectations of CATV as a channel for extension information.

As one Rand report succinctly put it, there is no doubt in anyone's mind that urban cable communications has the potential for tremendous clout . . . socially, politically, and economically. Once the highly complex concept of broad-band cable communications, commonly referred to as CATV, is understood, it becomes clear that this new technology can not only add new televised program services for local homes, businesses, and public and private institutions, but can entirely change our way of living by introducing new ways of enjoying entertainment, conducting business, providing education, and transmitting public information *(4)*.

Our own AAACE member, J. Cordell Hatch, describes the power of CATV in uniting a Puerto Rican community in Berks County, Pennsylvania. A Spanish-language program on the Reading CATV started to crumble the barriers of suspicion and jealousy between the professional and para-professional community workers and the Puerto Rican newcomers. The twice a week, half-hour cable show reaches 2,000 Spanish speaking households. At first, the program was guided directly by county extension staff. Now a committee from the Spanish-speaking community has accepted the responsibility for planning and producing the show with a segment contributed by extension. The main product has been community pride as the community planning group learned about small-group democracy, management of time, skills development and leadership principles *(5)*.

Scope of the CATV Channel

Although changes occur everyday, the magnitude of the CATV effort is depicted in the *1971 CATV Systems Directory (6)* where 2,832 operating systems are described with 5,676,930 subscribers (households) and 158,592 miles of cable with an annual fee revenue from subscribers of $354,646,700. Of major interest to extension are the 661 CATV systems which currently originate their own programming to 2,610,182 subscribers (households). It is these systems that can utilize the talents of the local extension staff and the materials produced at the state level.

More than 300 CATV systems were built per year prior to FCC regulation of the industry which began in 1966. Representing the CATV industry, John Gwin, chairman of the National Cable Television Association, reports the "freeze" is over. CATV's growth and development can flourish under the new FCC rules. General optimism for rapid expansion of CATV seems to prevail.

CATV Systems Originating Programs

State	Number of systems	Number of subscribers	State	Number of systems	Number of subscribers
Alabama	22	78,655	Nebraska	9	17,705
Alaska°°	3	1,600	Nevada°	4	14,650
Arizona	6	22,850	New Hampshire°	2	11,500
Arkansas	6	11,542	New Jersey°	12	67,693
California	72	322,706	New Mexico°	11	27,944
Colorado	13	21,201	New York°	29	213,801
Connecticut	0	0	North Carolina°	11	20,588
Delaware°°	1	6,000	North Dakota	2	4,097
Florida	37	151,609	Ohio°	32	177,368
Georgia°	18	58,051	Oklahoma°	9	16,699
Hawaii°	4	7,535	Oregon°	16	47,190
Idaho	6	20,000	Pennsylvania°	45	360,554
Illinois	27	91,938	Rhode Island°°	2	4,460
Indiana°	12	39,858	South Carolina°°	7	10,668
Iowa°	6	21,780	South Dakota	2	6,800
Kansas°	14	13,203	Tennessee°	8	27,425
Kentucky°°	12	14,749	Texas°	35	107,737
Louisiana°	9	28,604	Utah°	2	2,387
Maine	5	12,493	Vermont°	3	9,950
Maryland°	6	27,539	Virginia°	13	31,835
Massachusetts°	13	30,915	Washington°	18	120,865
Michigan°	25	97,936	West Virginia°	12	52,656
Minnesota°	12	48,636	Wisconsin	9	28,133
Mississippi	10	20,090	Wyoming°°	8	24,627
Missouri°	12	29,357			
Montana	9	34,043	Total	661	2,610,182

° State Extension Editorial Offices reporting use of CATV prior to March, 1972.
°° State Extension Editorial Offices not responding to survey.

What Extension Editorial Offices Report

Out of 44 responses to the detailed survey questionnaire, which was sent to 50 states, 64 per cent indicated that CATV had served as a channel for extension communications in their state prior to March 1972. An additional seven per cent were trying CATV within the next year. By March 1973, a total of 31 states will have made use of CATV in some way as a channel for extension communications.

CATV Use by Extension Source Prior to March 1972

Extension source	Number of states reporting	Number of CATV systems involved
Local county staff	24	69
Multi-county and area staff	4	11
State staff	11	76
Federal staff	0	0

Expanded use of CATV is apparent when the states project ahead and indicate the CATV projects planned from March 1972 to March 1973. Three states with no previous CATV experience indicated they will take the plunge involving 51 new CATV systems.

CATV Used by Extension Source From March 1972 to March 1973

Extension source	Number of states reporting	Number of CATV systems involved
Local county staff	20	77
Multi-county and area staff	6	12
State staff	16	131

Twenty-three of the states had already assigned staff the responsibility of keeping the state extension service abreast of the latest developments in CATV with eight anticipating the assignment of staff to this responsibility.

Fifteen states were planning evaluation studies of CATV as a channel for extension information. Planning training for extension staff in the use of CATV for extension communications were Alabama, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Production and Packaging Methods for CATV

Individual responses by states indicate a vast array of production and packaging methods germane to CATV. These short reports from individual states indicate the wide variation:

Georgia. Live productions plus time and weather. Since these are small towns, feedback is personal.

Hawaii. Personal appearance of specialist and county agent.

Indiana. Local agents will use CATV for regular programs (some for call-in shows; some for assigned lessons for special groups; some with guests and demonstrations of a mixed nature). All at local agent option – state programs in home economics to special viewing groups will probably be planned.

Iowa. In N.E. Iowa there is a known cable operator with an expressed interest in extension as a source of local material. We will try to help the county staff home economist make use of the system. There will be feedback – most likely through offers of printed material.

Kansas. Video tape, various formats, depending on subject matter areas. Audience again depending upon subject matter, especially to homemakers.

Evaluation by various methods, particularly by independent and research firms.

Maryland. Four members of county staff participate. Each appearing once a month – one Agriculture Science, one 4-H, two Home Economists. They prepare and present either live or on tape. (If taped, arrangements are made ahead of time.) One agent is responsible for coordination with the studio.

After six months, the staff feels that they can see some results of the telecasts – people not formerly involved in extension are calling office and attending meetings. Small response when leaflets are offered. They continually mention the extension programs.

Michigan. Programs are distributed throughout Michigan's Upper Peninsula on CATV systems from Northern Michigan University in Marquette. One program series produced (2 inch. HiBond) at M.S.U. by state staff will be used on that system this summer.

Minnesota. Some local agents will do live presentations; we hope to provide video tapes when new facilities are completed; several now have been presented as an experiment combining telelecture and CATV; materials from audio-visual library.

Missouri. Video taped units and kinescope materials.

Nevada. Will be packaged for easiest convenience for CATV. Programs will probably be 15-minute shows and one-minute spots.

New Hampshire. Programs would be aired by New Hampshire network and carried on CATV outlets in state; feedback would be built-in, i.e., we would ask for replies, offer informational materials.

North Dakota. Sew Smart Clothing Construction series will be carried on one channel, 3,000 subscribers, simulcast picked up from live broadcast – place Bismarck, fed from Fargo. One telelecture session will be held in conjunction four weeks after the 13-week series begins.

New Jersey. Local agents appearing weekly.

New Mexico. We are suggesting that extension agents contact their local CATV offices to assist in promoting events like 4-H Club Week. For example, a slide might follow the weather reports.

New York. During the past year the Chemung County Cooperative Extension Association in Elmira, New York, has initiated a relationship with the local Teleprompter Cable System and produced approximately four, half-hour programs. Neither the cable company nor the agents involved have any experience in program production and little attempt was made to promote the programs in the area. They are now re-evaluating their efforts with CATV.

During the same period, Tompkins County Agents have appeared on local programs produced at the Ceracche Cable Company in Ithaca, New York. Although the studio staff was somewhat more experienced, the effort was of questionable value since no audience analysis is available and it is generally assumed that very few people watch the local channel during prime time.

We occasionally get requests for our programs from a cable company or from an agent dealing with a cable company. To date, we rent our programs ($15 for a one-hour tape) in the one-inch Ampex format for cable use. We will have the Sony U-Matic video-cassette format and possibly the IVC one-inch format available. We have found the latter to be the most

common format used by cable-casters. Our experience here in Ithaca has made us question the value of cable distribution unless the cable-caster can guarantee an audience by giving the programs a good time slot, promoting them heavily, and transmitting them with a reasonable degree of technical quality. The Ceracche system serves about 13,000 homes in the Ithaca area.

Most of the material we produce is distributed on two-inch quadruplex videotape to standard broadcast stations – both commercial and public – in New York State. We distribute directly to the stations and also to agents who have an on-going relationship with the stations. Most programs deal with topics which support extension programs and goals. We presume that many of the stations carrying our programs are being carried on cable systems.

Ohio. Use of CATV started in 1968 when the local county agent asked for help on the state level. The TV editor worked out an arrangement with the station, supplying all sorts of slide sets, plus commentary, plus 16 mm. film on a regular basis for over two years. These programs were played not once, but up to five times a day.

Two CATV stations called upon TV editor to aid them in presenting materials and live personnel for broadcast over their stations in 1967. This has been continuous up to the present, with one station and at intervals with the other station. Two other stations have requested aid and received it periodically for four years.

The one station, CATV Channel 2 in Chillicothe, Ohio, really promotes local live programming and, in addition, uses materials sent out from this office on a regularly scheduled basis. More and more inquiries have been made about local state specialists appearing live on CATV stations. It is obvious that local live programming is gaining strength as far as number of viewers is concerned.

One needs to take into consideration the many variables and the obvious differences in the way each CATV station operates.

Oklahoma. We have taken a state survey and it shows CATV to be difficult to serve in a package form because some use mag-stripe 16 mm., some optical 16 mm. (only) and some video one-half inch, one-inch tape, some live camera only, and probably no studio facility.

Pennsylvania. Our extension TV studio may serve as home base for a statewide CATV microwave network. Will produce TV for individual systems, dub tapes, distribute, bicycle, appear on live shows. Will cover all extension topics of interest to CATV subscribers as well as schools, hospitals, institutions (jails and prisons), etc.

Tennessee. Extension leaders in 13 Tennessee counties have indicated a desire to produce local programs for the CATV systems operating in their area utilizing studios maintained by the local CATV station. We anticipate that a limited number of features will be produced by specialists and research workers at the University of Tennessee to supplement the programs of local agents.

Utah. Nothing specifically planned because of extremely small CATV systems now in the state. However, we recognize the great potential of cable and will move into programs for this medium as audiences justify it.

Vermont. The only CATV system in Vermont that is doing some tele-

casting is in a limited town-rural area. Most of the contacts have been made through the county extension office. We have supplied the office with publication offers, printed 3 × 5-inch cards that fit into the CATV revolving barrel. Feedback has been limited. At present we do not plan anything more elaborate. If the second CATV system starts telecasting local programs, we will offer the same service.

Virginia. The film production of a monthly half-hour feature involving different segments of extension activity. 16 mm. color film is bicycled among the various systems.

West Virginia. We have been using CATV for the past three years. Local and multi-county extension staffs with the assistance from the state TV specialist have been using CATV systems that originate locally, programming to reach specific audiences. Then, through a great deal of advance publicity (direct mail, newspapers, meetings, etc.) these programs are produced and shown. We've conducted legislative telelecture sessions with two or actually three-way communication (legislators at the state capitol during session, host in CATV studio; and viewers at home), nutrition programs weekly, and special lawn and garden shows. Some of these programs in the future will be 'live,' others taped (where two-way communication is not necessary).

How States Get Access to CATV Channel

When asked to explain how they obtained access to CATV, the states with CATV experience gave these responses:

Georgia. So far our contact has been largely through local agents. We have made some contacts with persons or firms producing or planning to produce programs for CATV systems.

Hawaii. From "ads" appearing in local newspapers.

Indiana. We simply ask them to work with our agents (via a personal visit by appointment) and they seem most willing to give us their facilities if we will bring the program.

Iowa. In the one known case, the operator of cable came to our extension service at the local level.

Kansas. Personal contact; extension radio-TV; assistance of local extension representatives.

Louisiana. The initial contact made by CATV representatives offering time to local extension agents.

Maryland. CATV made contact with Dorchester County Office when hook-up started. They were acquainted with the work and personnel of extension because of their radio programs. (Radio and CATV are under same management.)

Michigan. A cable system in the Flint, Michigan area contacted county resource person to do a show. Also, Northern Michigan University contacted state staff.

Minnesota. Personal contact – much done by CATV management contacting local agent, others with direct contact to extension TV specialist. New facilities going into operation contact us. Some facilities are operating in connection with radio stations. Agent programs have resulted. Some re-

sult from camera being turned on agent while doing radio. So it goes over CATV simultaneously.

New Jersey. Local agents contact CATV management just as they do radio stations and regular TV stations.

New Mexico. Local extension staff contacted individuals from local system.

New Hampshire. What has appeared in promotion of University of New Hampshire programs has been carried through New Hampshire network broadcasting through its ongoing link with CATV.

New York. Local agents approached the local cable company.

North Carolina. We are suggesting that extension agents contact their local CATV offices to assist in promoting events like 4-H Club Week. (Example: A slide might follow the weather reports.)

North Dakota. The Bismarck station being used for Sew Smart carries all programs broadcast on this particular Fargo station so no effort was made. They carry everything Fargo broadcasts.

Ohio. We visited the station "in person" – nothing, but nothing, beats regular "in person visits." We have 30 Ohio commercial TV stations, eight Ohio public service broadcasting TV stations and eight out-of-state commercial TV stations. We have 104 CATV stations in Ohio – as of today – tomorrow maybe we will gain six, lose three, etc. I visit all those doing "live" broadcasting, and where the county agent or area or state staff requests it.

Oklahoma. Personal contact with local CATV through our local extension office. Announcement cards concerning events of local interest is the most used form in our state.

Oregon. County staff made contact with local CATV manager and put on 4-H and home-economics program.

Pennsylvania. Our problem is not to gain access to CATV channels but to produce programs in the video format which systems can run.

Tennessee. In the five counties where CATV is being used presently, the local extension staff found the station manager quite eager to use all educational programs they could produce. In most cases, the local studio is not being used for many educational programs. Eight additional counties have contacted local CATV managers and arranged to schedule programs when local studios are completed.

Texas. Local efforts on CATV have been initiated through personal contact by local people. Radio-TV specialists have encouraged county agents to use this channel when conducting training sessions. If state-wide use becomes reality, it will be through contacts made by mail (which may be supplemented by local extension agent support).

Utah. Representatives of the cable system approached the local extension home agent and asked her to furnish a regular program.

Vermont. Access to CATV was through the county extension office. We had one meeting with the CATV director and the agent, and decided to supply CATV with material.

Virginia. By a phone call or personal visit. The CATV systems are crying for program material – especially from a university or college.

Washington. Our own "in state" survey indicates that a personal visit to the CATV facility opened the door.

West Virginia. Our efforts at establishing rapport with CATV systems began four years ago when the first West Virginia system began local originations. We scheduled a meeting with the operators from the state level and included the local county agent in the meeting. Since that time, we have written articles for the state CATV newsletter regarding extension's educational efforts, attended all state meetings, and have stayed in contact through telephone calls and personal correspondence. Additionally, many CATV systems have contacted us, knowing of our efforts on public and commercial TV.

Fifteen states indicated they kept CATV systems informed regarding extension communications. Local extension staff ranked before personal correspondence and field visits as the most appropriate avenue for CATV contact. Professional meetings and newsletters or news packets tied for last position as little-used avenues.

Expectations of CATV

Users of CATV rated its potential as a channel for extension communications higher than the non-users of CATV. When asked to rank order channels according to their potential for carrying extension communications during the next decade the following responses were given:

	Channels	
Rank	*CATV Users (N-28)*	*Non-CATV Users (N-16)*
1	Broadcast TV	Newspapers
2	Extension publications	Broadcast TV
3	Newspapers	Broadcast radio
4	Direct mail	Direct mail
5	Face to face	Extension meetings
6	CATV	Extension publications
7	Broadcast radio	Magazines
8	Extension meetings	Face to face
9	Magazines	CATV
10	Video cassettes	Video cassettes
11	Telephone networks	Educational packages for self-instruction
12	Educational packages for self-learning	Telephone networks

A broad spectrum of advantages for CATV was enumerated. Ranking first was the ability of CATV to reach select, known audiences with extension communications. Ranking second was the future availability of this channel. The potential for two-way communications with the extension clientele ranked third and several thought the audiences would watch for content so the extension communications offering would not have to match the entertainment fare. Others had doubts about this assumption.

A limited audience in numbers and all urban with no rural participants was perceived as the major disadvantage. It was assumed by a majority that CATV just would not reach the rural audience because of cable cost. Several cited the lack of local CATV programming equipment. The technology is available but it is not there at the local level. One respondent gives this pertinent observation that users will tend to use it as if they were in the physical presence of a group. There would be the tendency to leave a still video on the screen forever. Because people would be prepared for a meeting rather than television, there would be too little visual and too much audio. Competition with big time show biz programs has not been eliminated, you just don't have to fight with them on the same channel. A major problem would be to get people to tune in the educational channel you are on. This would take promotion. However, with specialized audiences, you might be able to assemble them easier than a general audience.

Logical Suppliers of Extension Communications

Whether a state had used CATV or not, they all agreed that local county staffs were the logical suppliers of extension communications for CATV. Next in rank were multiple county and area staffs with state staff third and federal staff last. Extension editorial staffs definitely perceived CATV as a local medium at this stage of its development.

There was agreement on audience also. Specific extension clientele ranked first before general mass audience as the target group via CATV.

General agreement was evident on the techniques to use if you had unlimited access to CATV to reach all extension clientele.

Rank by		
CATV users	*CATV non-users*	*Technique*
1	1	Specific in-depth instruction with two-way communications
2	2	General televised information program
3	4	Specific radio news type of treatment to markets, insect outbreaks, etc.
4	5	Facsimile reproductions of data, publications or direct mail pieces.
5	3	Computerized extension communication information bank.

Some Observations

Without hesitancy, a majority of the states is acquiring experience with CATV as a channel for extension communications. Most

extension editorial offices view CATV as another tool in the communication technology arsenal by which they can do their job. They perceive the local extension staff as the best extension source to work with CATV. Several states have extensive plans to backstop this local extension source. An example is the following Task Outline by Pennsylvania on CATV Training and Program Planning and Production for 1972-73.

Problem statement. Pennsylvania, where cable television began, has more systems than any other state. In early 1972 the FCC ruled that each CATV system is required to provide during the next five years one free channel for education, one for state and local government, and one for other public access use. The implications to extension are obvious and it is imperative that we prepare for these opportunities.

Plan of action. Conduct TV workshop to train extension staffs in CATV techniques. Develop programs and program series for CATV dissemination. Assist state and county staffs in CATV program production. Evaluate results of CATV programming. Total number of days budgeted to CATV is 45 by this planning unit *(7)*.

Some extension efforts with target audiences on CATV in a few states have not been successful. The results have not warranted the effort. As with any new communication channel we have to learn when not to use it as well as when to use it. There are vast differences between CATV systems. Yesterday we needed to know the editor. Today we need to know the CATV system and its local manager so we can match extension communication resources to need. Successful use of CATV will depend on adequate analysis and appropriate planning and careful allocation of resources to backstop extension communications via this channel.

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