# Research Briefs

## Localizing Project

Like many extension information offices, the Virginia Tech office prepares subject-matter news releases and sends them weekly to all 130 newspapers in the state. To know what becomes of them, the office has access to a clipping service. Warren G. Mitchell and Robert B. Frary have developed a computer program to analyze the clippings (ACE Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1, Feb.-Mar. 1979, p. 23-27).

Clippings have been analyzed from years 1979, 1980 and 1981 and many facets about the use of stories have been determined such as the average number of uses of a packet story—6.75, and the average length of a story used—6 inches.

Stories also have been sorted by story number, by newspapers, by program area, by specialist, by academic department, and by geographical region. The information can be cross tabulated in several ways particularly using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Services).

Shown in Table 1 is an example of information available. These are the total number of clippings by program areas.

Table 1
Number of EIO Clippings from Newspapers,
Sorted by Program Areas

|  | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family Resources | 1,142 | 1,224 | 1,188 |
| Agriculture Resources | 1,675 | 2,178 | 2,321 |

Number of Family Resources stories remained relatively consistent over the three year period. Agriculture stories increased between 1979 and 1980, however, this may have been due to the addition of a regular weekly home horticulture column.

From information in the printouts, we can see seasonal fluctuations that repeat each year, with a peak of the number of stories used in July. There is a great deal of information available using this research tool and it was used extensively for this localizing project.

In January 1982, Director of Educational Communications, William Walker, felt a need to send a series of stories to help promote the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service while the legislature was in session. He wanted to assure the greatest possible use by a large number of newspapers, so we agreed to rely on an old axiom of the business—localize the release.* We felt that the editors would assume the readers' interests decrease as the distance from their doorsteps increases. If there was any way possible, we would localize the stories.

We have done this regularly. For example, for 4-H Congress, stories on winners are sent out in news releases localized with the 4-H members' names, parents' names and addresses in the lead.

Use of these stories seemed high. A story on achievement winners was sent to 60 newspapers and 17 used it; one on presentation winners was sent to 37 newspapers and 17 used it; one on judging teams was sent to 21 newspapers and six used it; and Share-the-Fun was sent to 10 newspapers and two used it.

Use of these stories was affected by many variables, not the least of which was that Virginia agents who work with 4-H probably got the story on the local youth to the hometown newspapers before the information office story, thereby lowering the possible number of uses.

But, still the use seemed high so when the opportunity to test localizing came, we did.

Using Mitchell's program, we can easily get the numbers used in this study.

For this project, four stories were selected, Extension Homemakers, 4-H, Forage Testing and Livestock Marketing. They were selected because we had information to localize them by counties—memberships, number of clubs, number tested or numbers sold.

Stories were written and approved through the usual channels and the information on the local numbers obtained. For the

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*Bellissimo, Anne, Associate Editor and Educational Radio Producer, Clemson Univ. ACE Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 4, Dec.-Jan. 1979, p. 56, "Dailies and Weeklies were consistent in their ranking: 1. Local interest in story was listed first over importance or relevance of story; 2. Readability; 3. Physical appearance of release; 4. Size reputation of college or university.

Table 2
Localized Stories: Summary of Use

| Story | No. of Clippings Returned | No. of Newspapers Story Sent To | Percent of Use* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Homemakers | 9 | 70 | 12.9 |
| Four-H | 27 | 107 | 25.2 |
| Forage Testing | 13 | 60 | 21.7 |
| Livestock Marketing | 3 | 34 | 8.8 |

*17.1 average percent use.

writer, this was probably about the same amount of work. All the stories are prepared working with the specialists in this way.

Major difference in the stories was a format that allowed the localized information to be inserted in the lead or near the lead.

For the secretary, however, there was more work on these stories than on a normal story. She had to individually handle each story. When she got the story, she programmed it into an IBM Memory Typewriter, typed the localized lead in each story, ran all the pages of the story so each would look the same; looked up the addresses of the appropriate newspapers; addressed the envelopes and stuffed the proper story into the proper envelope and mailed them.

The story with the highest use was the 4-H story which got used 27 times out of a possible 107 newspapers to which it was sent. Forage testing was used 13 times in the 60 newspapers which received it, homemakers got nine uses out of 70 and livestock marketing was used by three of the 34 newspapers.

To compare the stories we calculate the percent of use figure. If all newspapers a story is sent to were to use it, it would be getting 100 percent use. Divide the number of uses by the number of newspapers it was sent to, to get a percent of use.

The 4-H story got the highest percent of use, 25.2 percent with the others falling under that number.

Averaging the percent of use of the localized stories, shows 17.1 percent average use.

We knew from the past years' data, the average use for a subject-matter packet story as 6.75 times among the 130 newspapers in the state.

For the subject-matter packet story getting 6.75 uses, the percent of use is 5.2 percent.

Localizing the stories resulted in about three times the use as not localizing.

To look at the information in another way, look at the totaled circulation figures of the newspapers which used the localized stories.

Table 3
Localized Stories: Summary of Possible Readers

| Story | Circulation oı Newspapers Using Story Totaled | Possible Readers Per Use* |
|---|---|---|
| Homemakers | 95,496 | 10,610 |
| 4-H | 169,196 | 6,266 |
| Forage Testing | 138,633 | 10,664 |
| Livestock Marketing | 41,748 | 13,916 |

*10,364—average number of possible readers per use.

If the total circulation of each newspaper which used the story is divided by the number of uses, and averaged, we learn that the average number of persons who could have been exposed to a localized story is 10,364.

We randomly selected eight stories sent in the packet to all 130 newspapers and calculated the average number of individuals who could have been exposed to a story. It was 9,563.

Table 4
Randomly Selected Packet Stories:
Summary of Possible Readers

| Story Number | No. of Newspapers Clippings Returned | Circulation of Using Story Totaled | Possible Readers Per Use |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 4 | 18,316 | 4,579 |
| 2 | 4 | 83,222 | 20,805 |
| 3 | 5 | 31,348 | 6,270 |
| 4 | 2 | 10,755 | 5,377 |
| 5 | 5 | 33,178 | 6,636 |
| 6 | 3 | 24,277 | 8.076 |
| 7 | 1 | 7,863 | 7,863 |
| 8 | 1 | 16,899 | 16,899 |

*9,563 — average number of possible readers per use.

Average number of possible readers per use is very similar to that of the localized stories.

Because of the circulation of the newspapers using the stories, the average number of persons who could have read any given story is about the same—10,364 or 9,563.

In the study it was planned to compare the localized stories to a general packet story on the same subject in a similar style. One was done on 4-H volunteering and sent out in May. Though it is possible that the story will be used later in the year, so far two publications have used it.

Table 5
Packet Story on Similar Topic As Localized Story:
Summary of Use and Possible Readers

| Story | Number of Clippings Returned | Number of News-papers Story Sent To | Percent of Use | Circulation of News-papers Using Story | Possible Readers Per Use |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Volunteers | 2 | 130 | 1.5 | 32,023 | 17,011 |

Comparable information calculated on this story shows percent of use as 1.5 percent and that the average possible number of readers per use is 17,011.

But that last figure is skewed. One of the publications which used it is relatively new and is distributing free copies to build circulation. Its paid circulation could be estimated at about 10,000, which would bring the average number of possible readers to the same range as for a localized or regular packet story.

Newspaper editors select the stories they use based on the interplay of many variables, news value, size of news hole, time of year, and size of publication among many. Local interest is one of the major variables.

Results of our localizing experiment showed that the localized stories got about three times as much use as a normal packet story—17.1 percent use compared to 5.2 percent use.

Localized and randomly selected packet stories each received about the same average number of possible readers per use—10,364 and 9,563.

Perhaps the most practical suggestion is to localize the stories to the bigger newspapers in order to take advantage of a larger circulation and get more possible readers per use.

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