

Life Is Fast, Research Is Slow

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Professional Development Editor

Would you conduct research if your job advancement and tenure were not dependent on it? What percentage of ACE members are on the tenure track? Does the JAC need a readership survey or a nonreadership survey?

We don't know the answers to these questions, but we should. Mark Tucker has added the somewhat confrontational "So What?" section to research articles, and we want to apply the same scrutiny to the entire *Journal of Applied Communications*. That's the rationale for the electronic readership survey we launched in early May. We shared the results at the 2007 ACE meeting in Albuquerque in a session titled *You Don't Know JAC: Readership Survey and Listening Session*. We will distribute the results more widely soon.

As one member among the unknown percentage of ACE members not involved in the tenure process, I am more interested in using the JAC for professional development than for "publishing or perishing." However, research and professional development can go together like fish and bicycles or like chocolate and peanut butter. It takes a delicate editorial balance to make this work for an organization as diverse as ACE.

I do enjoy reading research that pertains to my field, but many of the things we do daily change faster than research can make it through the review and publishing process. These days, Steve Jobs introduces the Apple i-phone on Monday and by Wednesday there are video parodies of it all over the Internet. Customer satisfaction? Diffusion theory? That may come later, but most people have made their decisions by the end of the week.

I like to think of this phenomenon as the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle of communications. The idea is that you are really only studying something in the place where it was when you started, not in the place where it is today. I think you know this intuitively. By the time CNN or Fox produces stories about blogging, the trend has probably already peaked. Many universities have jumped into podcasting based on the number of downloads the media report, but there isn't much known about how, or even if, these downloads are being used.

Of course, we have been in the information age at least since Gutenberg. The difference today is that delivery methods are blending into one another. "I'm a photographer for a radio station" used to be a joke, but these days, radio stations routinely use visuals as part of their Web site offerings. Newspapers offer streaming video; television stations have reporters write blogs.

Introduction

Between the time I write this and the time you read it, there will be some other innovation in information delivery. What probably won't happen is an innovation in content. That's where we come in. As long as our Web addresses end in .edu, we are uniquely positioned to provide quality, trustworthy content. A communicator's most precious commodity is credibility, and we must cling to that.

As the JAC's new professional development editor, I will seek out articles and reviews on emerging technologies, as well as pieces that review and update basic skills. What's the best way to do an interview? What's the best digital camera for someone who is not a photographer? I want to include practical notes for land-grant universities working on today's breaking issues, such as bio-renewable fuels and agricultural reclamation in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Someone might publish an academic paper on these topics, but that might not be the best way to go about it. Instead, I'd like to invite and solicit guest writers to help keep us up to date.

While Mark Tucker invoked the image of *The Andy Griffith Show* in a recent JAC, I'd like to bring up *Green Acres*, only because that was the last time I saw an Extension agent as an ongoing television character. I guess we still have some credibility issues to work on.

Mark Tucker and I don't have all the answers, but we hope that by the end of the year, you will "know JAC."