Why Haven't You Published That Research (and Your Other Ideas)?

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Various disincentives and barriers keep communicators from pursuing scholarly publication opportunities. Rather than take the extra steps to share details or concerns, communicators feel pressed just to do the work and move on to the next challenge. This paper examines six common barriers to—or disincentives from—publishing, such as lack of time, appointment type, and methodology intimidation. However, there are ways around the barriers, such as redefining "research," working with publication partners, and signing up to make presentations at conferences. Ten suggestions for overcoming the barriers are discussed.

Introduction

Working in the field of applied communications hands us more than a responsibility to tell other people's stories. We also receive an obligation—to ourselves, to others, and to our profession—to share our own communications experiences.

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However, we fall short on our obligation to ourselves. We don't publish "our stories," we say unselfishly, because tight budgets, insufficient time, and other barriers keep us from doing work that benefits primarily us.

Yes, that is what happens. Yes, we must acknowledge the barriers we face. But we also must acknowledge that those barriers are not insurmountable.

Within these pages, we will examine six major barriers that often block communicators from publishing their communications experiences in scholarly and trade journals. Then, we will address 10 major ways to begin maneuvering around the barriers. Some of these techniques may be familiar to you; others may be new. But do not discard or isolate any of them. Look at them as a package. Apply them as complementary strategies that work together to help you maneuver around the barriers that keep you from publishing your research and other ideas.

Barriers to Publishing
1. Time
During the past decade, many campuses and land-grant communications units have been experiencing downsizing; organizational restructuring; departmental mergers; strategic planning for technology, marketing, and communications; Total Quality Management (TQM) or its variations; needs assessment; and the list goes on. Politicians and university presidents like to use the words "doing more with less," "leaner and meaner," or "work harder and smarter." But the outcome generally has been fewer people to do more work.

Change continues to be difficult for most people. Sometimes, we cannot give up certain old projects because they still are deemed a priority within our colleges, and yet we are expected to address new priorities as well. Because our fields are changing so rapidly, we barely have time to keep up with the new ways of doing business, much less write about those changes.

Lack of time seems to be the major excuse for not pursuing research in the first place and not publishing it in the second place. Other tasks take precedence, and research—indeed scholarly activity of any kind—is put off. This is alarming, given the fact that the land-grant system prides itself in dis-

seminating useful and practical educational information based on research!

2. Appointment Type

We don't have data to back this up (Might be a great research project?), but the general belief is that a growing proportion of staff appointments in land-grant communications units is in the area of academic/professional positions rather than full-fledged faculty, tenure-track appointments. Faculty appointments include teaching, research, and service requirements, leading to the "publish or perish" scenario, whereas academic/professional positions in general do not. Thus, we have communications professionals without bona fide research responsibilities in their job descriptions and without promotion and tenure committees looming as a stark threat to their career paths.

Another issue is that nonfaculty professionals may have the interest to do research but not the communications theory, research methodology, and statistical analysis training that comes with master's and doctoral work. One telling indication of fewer researchers and less research in agricultural communications is the increasingly difficult challenge to get research contributions for our own *Journal of Applied Communications*.

3. Funding Sources

Money to support communications research also can be a major hurdle. Let's face it, in most of our experiment stations a significantly smaller amount of funding is dedicated to social science research relative to production agriculture. And communications research is usually only a small chunk of the Hatch social science allocation, if that. Rarely are graduate assistants available. External funding through research gifts or grants is always an opportunity, but again that first hindrance—time—can get in the way. Investigating funding opportunities, writing research grant proposals, and then dealing with the paperwork that comes with accounting for external funding sometimes are nightmares. Once into the bureaucratic process many people often lament, "Is it really worth it?"

4. Methodology Intimidation

With the exception of those ACE members who have agricultural journalism or communications teaching roles or those who are on full-time research appointments, those of us with master's degrees or doctorates are left with aging research or

post-graduate experience. Our major job responsibilities are to produce communications products—print and electronic— rather than do research.

And it's like anything else: When you do not use research skills enough, you soon forget them. Every spring and fall many of us must set our clocks forward or backward on our computer, VCR, kitchen range, or whatever; to do so, we must locate the instructions and learn all over again how to set the time. The same problem faces us as we infrequently approach preparation of a survey instrument, draw a sample from a population, select appropriate statistical methods, test reliability and validity, organize data, and correctly interpret findings.

5. Appreciation/Reward/Recognition

For those in the faculty tenure process, recognition for good research becomes very evident. Publication of peer-reviewed work generally leads to job promotion and permanency. But beyond that, one wonders how often administrators and others pay any attention to what communications research tells us. Often we push ahead with major efforts, such as satellite videoconferencing or CD-ROM development, with little or no research as to whether the technology will work, meet clientele needs, or be cost effective. Many of our communications decisions are not based on solid scientific research but on experiential, anecdotal, ad hoc reflections and hearsay.

A final point is that all people interface with (maybe more like "are bombarded with") "communications" daily and, because of familiarity with it, often ordain themselves as communications experts. How often have you, as an agricultural communicator, been approached by an Extension specialist, agricultural researcher, or administrator who knows exactly what he or she wants (a fact sheet and text to appear as he or she wrote it)? Recognition that communicators have a discipline, training, and research findings to rely on is too easily glossed over by others in our university community.

6. Complex Publishing Logistics

Once the research is done, where do you publish? The best choice is a peer-reviewed journal if you are on a tenure track. There are hundreds of opportunities but each journal has its own rules and regulations you must follow. You need to identify their deadlines; rules for writing abstracts (if appropriate); procedures for submitting text electronically rather than in print; copyright rules and releases; guidelines for article length,

line spacing, use of tables and figures, and bibliography citation style; page charges, and on and on. All of this takes an enormous amount of endurance, with publication perhaps occurring many months after submission.

Dealing with professional journal constraints is as formidable as grant proposal writing or completing the research project itself. Popular publications can be a great outlet for those of us beyond the tenure process or not concerned with it. Magazines have various publishing requirements, too, but they usually are not as stringent as those for professional journals. Most important, material needs to be written in popular style, not loaded with "academese."

What about other forms of "publishing"? Paper presentations are a viable way to disseminate findings, but often (and let's use ACE as an example) you have a handful of researchers presenting results to one another. Interest in research symposia relative to other professional development activities is not particularly high on most ACE members' "to-do" lists. So, the downside is a researcher might reach a reasonable number of people through journal publication but have to deal with the burden and great complexity of the process while, on the other hand, presenting a paper at ACE may be easy to arrange and present but too few people will hear the message.

No doubt there are other barriers to communications research and subsequent publishing, but these six are recognized as major challenges and as reasons offered most often for not doing so.

Maneuvering Around the Barriers

Today, we are encouraged to consider "problems" or "barriers" as "opportunities" or "challenges." First, we need to change our way of thinking and then we must change our behavior (sometimes it's the other way around).

Here are some hints for how to meet the challenges we face as we try to find time, support, and motivation to share our "research" with others.

1. Redefine "Research"

Most of us, when thinking of research, envision formal projects with theories, samples, research instruments, methodologies, statistical analyses, results, conclusions, and recom-

mendations. These usually represent quantitative research. Another research methodology we could use is called qualitative. This includes case studies, observations, content analyses, interviews, and other such techniques, usually on much smaller groups of subjects than required for quantitative research.

Either approach lends itself to the "research" or "scholarly work" we do every day on our jobs. When trying to solve a problem, we may explore alternative solutions. When preparing to teach a workshop, we may seek appropriate information for our students. When approaching a new task, we may explore what others have done before us or come up with new ideas not thought of by others. After having completed a task, we may evaluate our effectiveness and come up with insights of value to ourselves and our colleagues.

These activities, too, represent research or scholarship. So, the challenge is to think of research and scholarship in a broader way. Not only are we referring to formal research projects, but also case studies or how-to information or critical thinking about common concerns. Redefining "research" will help you overcome a major hurdle (or challenge): identifying what to write about.

2. Overcome Methodology Intimidation

If you are intimidated by the necessity of using appropriate research methodology, consider auditing a research methods or statistics course. Or volunteer to assist or shadow someone who is involved in a research project already. Or collaborate on a new project with someone who has research skills.

Remember, however, that much of what you might write about does not require specific research skills—just critical thinking and clear writing on your part.

3. Ask Yourself, "Why Bother?"

Rather than each of us having to solve similar problems or try new technologies or approaches, wouldn't it be better to learn from each other's mistakes and successes?

Taking time to write and reflect actually can help you do a better job at whatever it is you do all day. If you teach workshops, for example, drawing from your day-to-day experiences can make your presentations much richer. And reflecting upon your day-to-day experiences while preparing your presentations can help you approach your daily tasks with a more critical eye.

Sometimes we may not receive credit at our own institutions for the good work we contribute to our professions. This is a shame. On the other hand, how often have you taken an interest in a co-worker's research or endeavors? Have you ever lobbied your administration for more communications research opportunities?

Lack of appreciation or recognition should not stop us from connecting with our colleagues. We all probably remember a dynamic speaker at a meeting somewhere. We may have even been that speaker. The payback in casual contacts and formal collaboration can be great from such efforts. However, simply giving a talk is not enough. Put your thoughts in writing so that they may be available to more people over time.

4. Check Out What Others Are Doing

Take a moment or two to examine closely what others are writing about. For example, next time a pile of journals or magazines crosses your desk, look at the tables of contents. Are you interested in the topics? Do you have something to say about those topics or similar ones? Would you like more information about a topic and think you know how to go about getting it?

In a recent unscientific survey, we asked the approximately 500 members of the ACE listserve which journals or magazines they regularly read for work and which they had published in. The 110 respondents listed 309 individual journals or magazines they read for work, plus groupings of "all farm magazines" or "all state and national ag and news magazines." Table 1 lists those "read-for-work" publications mentioned by at least six respondents. Sixty-two respondents indicated that they had been published. (Some respondents may have interpreted this question to mean publishing articles reporting on the work done by "others" versus articles on "their" work.) Although these respondents were published in 115 different magazines or journals, in only two—*Journal of Applied Communications* (31) and *Journal of Extension* (11)—had more than three people been published. Some respondents indicated that they have published nonwork-related articles in other publications.

You can see from Table 1 that there are multiple outlets for stories of interest to ACE members. You could possibly publish in most of them. However, if you were to concentrate for starters on just two—*Journal of Applied Communications* and *Journal of Extension*—you'd reach most of your colleagues.

When selecting a journal or magazine for which to write, skim the articles in several issues. Get an idea for which types of stories get published and which styles of writing are acceptable. Do the authors use examples and anecdotes to illustrate their points? Are personal pronouns and short sentences acceptable? Are certain section headings (e.g., introduction, materials and methods, results, etc.) expected? Must you include literature citations?

Remember that sometimes journal or magazine editors simply will reject your manuscripts because they do not fit the style required, not because the information is not valuable.

TABLE 1:
Journals and Magazines Read for Work by ACE Listserve Respondents (N=110).

Title of Publication	Number of Readers
American Demographics	10
American Journal of Distance Education	8
A/V Video	13
CASE Currents	9
Chronicle of Higher Education	6
Columbia Journalism Review	7
Communication Briefings	6
Editor and Publisher	6
Farm Journal	6
Journal of Applied Communications	62
Journal of Extension	23
Journalism Quarterly	10
MacWorld	11
MacUser	10
New Media	9
Publish	7
Quill, The (Society of Professional Journalists)	7
Successful Farming	6
Technological Horizons in Education Journal (T.H.E. Journal)	6
Video Systems	9
Wired	9

5. Visit the Library

When was the last time you visited the library? Make a commitment to spend an afternoon at the library soon, scanning the shelves to see what's available. Also, sign up for one of your library's tours for new users. Technologies and services change so rapidly that you'll be surprised by the databases and searching capabilities available today. Also, find out whom to ask about issues that concern you. Some libraries call themselves "information centers" because that's exactly what they are.

6. Accept That "You" Can't Do It All

One simple strategy for getting yourself to write about your research is to work with someone else. Not only will the thinking process be richer, since you will be able to bounce ideas off one another, but you will have someone to keep you motivated and on track.

It's the same principle as exercising with a buddy: You're much more likely to write about your research if there's someone to do it with you and keep you on track. Set yourself goals and a time line for achieving them. Then stick to that time line. E-mail, telephone, and fax are great tools for collaborating with colleagues miles away.

To counteract lack of time, find students to help do some of the work. Often journalism or communications classes are looking for small, simple research projects or papers to do. Ask them to help you. With the help of student interns, some research questions might be addressed relatively inexpensively and conveniently.

To counteract the problem of appointment type, work with faculty either in or outside of your unit by piggybacking communication issues onto their studies. For example, at Ohio State a longitudinal study (a repeated survey of the same sample of people—in this case farmers—over a period of several years) was initiated to address economic trends. At the last minute, some communication questions were added to the survey instrument at the suggestion of some communications personnel. This added considerable usefulness to the study.

ACE members tend to be more interested in applied rather than theoretical research. There is a place for both. Therefore, when seeking someone to work with, look for colleagues with skills different from your own. For example, if it's been awhile

since you looked at a statistics book (or if you've never read one), perhaps you may want to find a colleague with up-to-date statistical skills to help with quantitative analyses or with sharp observational skills to help you with qualitative analyses. Or perhaps there's someone in a neighboring school of communications who could steer you toward current theory related to your topic.

7. Find Yourself a Mentor
This is similar to number 6. Sometimes it's a great help to work with someone who has already developed a successful track record in publishing. This person will understand the steps that need to be taken and can guide and support you through the process.

Sometimes you can be a peer mentor—each of you helping the other through the creative process.

8. Creatively Fund Your Research
To counteract lack of funds, both research and Extension administrators often are willing to dedicate seed money for small research projects. Don't be bashful; ask for help. Tie your research idea into something that they especially need help with or answers to, and funding chances will improve.

Some research or scholarly projects don't really require extra money at all, depending upon how complicated they are. Don't let lack of money stop you. Of course, there's less available. So figure out how you can shift priorities and use money previously dedicated to other purposes.

9. Present Papers at Conferences
Another strategy for publishing is to commit yourself to present a "paper" at a conference. This will force you to reflect on what you have been doing and to put your thoughts on paper.

However, it is not enough to prepare a talk. You also must prepare a paper—and the two are not one and the same. Your talk should involve simpler sentence structure, more personal language, visual aids, and other techniques to keep your listeners' attention. Often we speak only from notes.

Your paper, however, should be more detailed, written in full sentences and in a more formal style. You might include such things as literature citations, tables, charts, or other details that are important but might clutter up a 10-minute talk.

Writing a paper serves several functions. It forces you to think through what you want to say. It provides you with a written record of what you have done. It provides your listeners with something to take home. And it provides you with the draft of a potentially publishable article.

Yes, it takes more time to write a paper than just to prepare notes for a talk. But in the long run, it will take you much LESS time to write a paper in the first place than to try to find the time later on, when you've moved to other pressing tasks.

Don't let your "talks" become what has been called "fugitive research"—good work that is never published. This is frustrating both for the researcher and for those of us who want to retrieve the information later on.

10. Give Yourself Permission to Think

This is a hard one, since so much of our lives is tied up in "doing." We would all probably agree it would be good if only we were to stop and reflect every once in a while about what it is we're doing, why we are doing it, and what we should be doing in the future. But perhaps the only time we do this is at a staff retreat.

Try this: Block out several hours each week, or perhaps half a day once a month, or at least a few minutes at the end of the day, just to think. Cross off that time from your calendar and don't let anything else take precedence. Then sit down at your computer or at a table in the library or go for a walk and just think.

You'll probably feel guilty (we work-ethic-trained Americans tend to feel this way) and your colleagues will likely assume you're goofing off. Get over it.

Have something to think about. Maybe it's why you come to work each day; what makes you feel good about yourself as an employee; what would make your job or your office more efficient, more responsive, or more relevant; how to promote teamwork and creativity within your unit and beyond; where agricultural communications should be headed; what the land-grant university system should look like in 5 or 10 or 25 years; or whatever.

Think critically. Examine the issues from several sides. Read what others have to say. Lots of good information is available on just about everything. Reading others' thoughts

can often help you shape your own opinions and direct your efforts.

Do something with your thoughts. Share your ideas with others, either internally or externally. Put your ideas in writing. And submit those ideas to critical review by others. Sometimes it might just be a "white paper" or memo to your dean or your colleagues, or sometimes it might be a journal manuscript.

Not only will others appreciate your efforts, but you will feel a sense of accomplishment.

One problem with being a communications "specialist" is that we deal with people who communicate all the time, some of whom consider themselves to be specialists as well. What will set us apart from others is our training, experience, creations, and critical thinking about communicating.

Summary

Too busy, too broke, too intimidated.... The "too's" reinforce barriers that can block all of us from publishing our communications research and "think" pieces. But if we are too "too" to tell our own story as communicators, who will tell it for us? Only we can fill that void. Ironically, our work dictates that we communicate. But what do we communicate? We tell other people's stories: their struggles, their discoveries, their successes. Consequently, communications journals and other relevant publications rarely reflect the problem-solving work—the struggles and successes—occurring daily in land-grant communications offices.

Various barriers keep communicators from pursuing publication opportunities. Rather than take the extra steps to share details or concerns, we feel pressed just to do the work and move on to the next challenge. Our rich but untold stories become debits, deducted from the national treasury of knowledge.

These debits affect the work of other communicators in the land-grant system. Unshared knowledge spawns duplication of effort—or sometimes just plain frustration—in land-grant offices in other states and other countries. Keeping the wealth locked away also slows the growth of the body of knowledge for applied communications: If everyone is working simultaneously but separately on similar problems, some will waste time

building where they need not. Others will be unaware of foundations that could let them build higher.

Despite what the journals may indicate, applied communications is not a stagnant field. Land-grant communicators add to the field and its body of knowledge every day. However, our contributions may be lost if we do not begin to overcome the barriers that keep us from sharing and enhancing our wealth.

The first step is to identify and define our barriers, such as little time, few dollars, and devalued work. The next step is to identify and implement new ways of thinking and acting that can circumvent the barriers. Our maneuvers could include redefining research, re-examining communications work and funding, finding publication partners, and signing up to make presentations at conferences.

Both the barriers and the maneuvers to publishing have a common denominator: You. Until you realize that your work needs to be shared and you overcome the barriers to publishing, your work remains "fugitive research." It deserves to be shared. Only you can share it.