



December 2009
Volume 47 Number 6
Article Number 6TOT5

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Expanded Information Delivery Using the World Wide Web

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Abstract: Web posting of program agendas and presentations has proven successful for increasing contacts and providing timely information. Web posting of program agendas can aid clients in forward planning and encourage attendance. Web posting of conference presentations can help clients who were not able to attend the program and increase exposure to a wider audience. Software for tracking Web page activity provides data for reporting and a measure of value to clients.

Background

The World Wide Web is an excellent means of finding information. Bamka (2000) discussed using a Web page as a marketing tool for producers. Hermann, Carson, Muske, and Kleim (2005) described using a Web page as in-house resource. A Web page can also serve as a storehouse of information for clients. The Web page described by Wiersma (2007) created access to production information for Minnesota's wheat and barley producers. The program agenda for our program's major fall conference first appeared on our Web page <<http://www.umaine.edu/umext/potatoprogram/>> in the fall of 2005. The program agenda for our program's major winter conference first appeared on our Web page in the winter of 2006. In the following 2 years, both agendas and presentations for each conference appeared our Web page.

Viewing presentations from a Web page does not provide the same level of information as does listening to a speaker. Extension program delivery is not only Web page postings. The need for delivery presentations, complete with interaction and questions, still exists. Extension clients often have to choose which meetings to attend, considering the cost of travel, increasing demands on time, and many meeting choices. Additionally, conflicts arise when a client would like to attend the presentations but is unable to do so. The agendas posted on the Web allow clients to see the presentation topics. The presentations posted on Web allow clients to view the presented information.

Making it Work

Presentations are intellectual property of the presenter. To avoid unpleasant issues, the presenters should sign a form granting permission to post their presentation. Implied is that the presenter has permission to use any photographs or graphics that are included but are not their own intellectual property. Before posting, the presentations are converted to a PDF file format. Password-enabled prohibition of printing of the presentation is an additional measure to protect intellectual property. The PDF file format works out well with the universal availability of the Adobe reader free of charge. Conversion to a PDF file format file also

substantially reduces the file size, always a plus for Web-based files.

The agenda and presentations from the previous year are removed before the agenda for an upcoming program appears on our Web page. This avoids any confusion on annual programs. In cases of one-time conferences, the agenda and presentations removal of the information occurs within 12 months.

Many Web page development software programs have the ability to track Web page data. There are numerous aftermarket Web page tracking software programs as well. Web page tracking software can supply data for reporting purposes as well as measure the access of information by clients.

Results

For the 3-year period for our program's two major conferences, there have been over 20,000 actual downloads of the agendas and presentations (Tables 1 and 2). These are not just search engine hits, but actual opening of the documents. To date, each year shows a use increase.

Table 1.
Fall Conference Downloads

Conference Year	Conference Agenda	Conference Presentations	Total
2005	337	- ¹	337
2006	1110	2946	4056
2007	1600	3361	4961
Total			9354
¹ Presentations did not appear on the Web page			

Table 2.
Winter Conference Downloads

Conference Year	Conference Agenda	Conference Presentations	Total
2006	235	- ¹	235
2007	1004	3787	4791
2008	2012	5339	7351
Total			12337
¹ Presentations did not appear on the Web page			

Conclusions

Many clients now expect to have access to agendas and presentations on the Web page. While traditional clients may not be responsible for all the accesses, many traditional clients do use the information and do so at their convenience. Attendance at programs has not suffered and possibly has increased in response to the posted agendas. The posting of presentations has increased the exposure of the work and, in many cases, developed new clients.

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