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Using Web-Based Interactive Video to Enhance University of Florida IFAS Extension

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Using Web-Based Interactive Video to Enhance University of Florida IFAS Extension

Abstract

University of Florida /IFAS Extension faced with reduced budgets and continued increase demand for services from clientele turned to the use of Web-based interactive video to enhance Extension seminars, day to day communications, and professional development for county Extension faculty and administrative operations. Extension systems including Texas A&M, Kansas State, and South Dakota State have developed the use of Web-based interactive video for Extension programming. Extension in Florida currently operates 30 locations of interactive video sites and continues to explore additional uses.

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Introduction

University of Florida /IFAS Extension, faced with reduced budgets and increase demand for services from clientele, turned to the use of Web-based interactive video to enhance Extension seminars, day-to-day communications, and professional development for county Extension faculty and administrative operations.

The purpose of using Web-based interactive video use was to reduce the amount of travel time and expense for county faculty, state specialists, and Extension administrators. Web-based interactive video provided for increased state specialist participation during county program planning, workshops, and conferences and reduced costs of professional development training programs for county Extension faculty. As users became more comfortable with and confident of the new technology, other uses of Web-based interactive video increased, including uses for administrative meetings, interviews, and distance education for Extension.

Objectives

Reducing travel and expense and saving time were the underlying principles of the project. Some of the objectives of the project included:

- Reduced travel time and expense for county Extension faculty attending during professional development opportunities,
- Increased communication and reduced cost of collaboration between state specialists and county faculty,
- Increased contact of Extension administrators with county faculty,
- Reduced time of travel for Extension Administration,
- Increased multi-state Extension programming for clientele, and
- Enhanced and increased "Internationalizing Extension" activities.
- Extension clientele only having to commute to their local County Extension office to join with

other clientele from across the state in simultaneous workshops, seminars, and discussions.

Methodology

A review was conducted of other state Extension systems' use of Web-based interactive video by discussing current use and types of equipment standards and reviewing the literature (Kessell & Miller, 2001; Hiel & Herrington, 1997). In addition to use and types of hardware used, the costs of Web-based interactive video hardware were reviewed. Leaders at the time in the use of interactive video were Extension systems at Texas A&M University, where a site is maintained that identifies video sites across the nation (Lippke, 2003), at Kansas State (Snyder, 2003), where interactive video has been used in Extension for many years, and South Dakota State.

Results

A review of university Extension systems in other states revealed that equipment should be based on the H.323 standard. In addition, based on ease of use, quality, and price, the vendor "Polycom®" was selected to ensure continuity across the interactive video system. Over 30 Extension sites have been set up with equipment, and people are being trained in the use of the new hardware.

The current uses for interactive video via the Web at University of Florida /IFAS Extension are:

- Delivery for professional development for county Faculty among campus, Research and Education Centers, and county Extension offices.
- Campus and Research Center state specialist joining county Extension faculty in program planning sessions held throughout the state at multiple sites.
- Campus-based Extension administrators increased opportunities for County Extension Director and District Faculty administrative meetings.
- Promotion and tenure workshops held remotely for county Extension faculty.
- Inter-District program planning between faculty located at Research and Education Centers and faculty located at county Extension offices.
- District Extension Directors at off-campus locations communicating during monthly Extension Administrative meetings held on campus in Gainesville, Florida.
- Interviews conducted for county Faculty positions between county offices and Gainesville campus locations.
- Increased daily communication between all administrative locations, reducing telephone costs for similar communications.
- Increased international communication between District Director office in Florida and EARTH University in Costa Rica.
- International training and teaching between the Gainesville campus at the University of Florida and EARTH University in Costa Rica.

Future Plans

As additional funding becomes available, University of Florida /IFAS Extension will continue to add Web-based interactive video at additional county Extension offices, Research and Education Centers, and departments on the Gainesville campus. Expansion will continue the current distance education offerings from the Gainesville campus with similar interactive video hardware. Extension continues to review Web-based management software for managing online Web-based workshops, presentations, and seminars (Webinars), and reviews new and improved hardware and software specifications to add items such as Web interactive cameras to microscopes to enhance remote digital diagnostics.

Costs and Resources

Major costs include high speed Internet access with a minimum of 384 K of bandwidth at each site. These costs vary based on current connections, ranging from \$120 to \$400 per month at a county Extension office location and are free to those county connections with current adequate bandwidth. Costs vary. A single desktop connection costs \$450. Small conferences and teaching costs begin at \$4,300 and go up for the conference/teaching interactive video unit, depending on types of additional equipment needed.

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