

Recommended Marketing Tactics for Extension Districts

Marketing efforts are important for any K-State Research and Extension local unit but become even more so for new and existing districts. The district format is unfamiliar to most Kansans, meaning extra attention must be given to educating district residents on staff and programming changes. Because misconceptions and resentment can arise in new districts if the right actions are not taken, it is especially important to help residents understand why the district was formed and how its new format will benefit them.

Numerous marketing tactics can assist a district in doing this. Many of those below have already been adopted by districts throughout the state. Implementation of such tactics is highly recommended to any K-State Research and Extension district.

Consistency

One area for special attention is consistency in all communications. Because multiple county offices now operate as a single unit, they need to look and sound like one. By achieving this, the new district helps residents to better recognize the new format. These actions help a district to achieve consistency.

- Produce marketing materials carrying the new name (e.g., “K-State Research and Extension Scenic District”). Replace all old items that have the county name, such as clothing, office and vehicle signage, letterhead, business cards, thank you cards, nametags, magnets, notepads, etc.
- Develop consistent references to the district name and agent titles for use when answering the phone and making public or written introductions.

(The recommendation for answering the phone is, “K-State Research and Extension Scenic District”).

- Be sure the K-State Research and Extension log and district name appear on all publications.
- Acquire K-State Research and Extension clothing items for all district staff.

- Have agents wear nametags (updated with district name) whenever working with public through events, programs, presentations, etc.

Making the transition

It can be a challenge for district residents to make the transition from using their county office and agents to recognizing and using their district office and agents. The K-State Research and Extension district needs to assist residents in making this transition and understanding the changes. Some ideas include:

- Develop a district informational brochure educating residents about district agents and programs.
- Develop and design a single district-wide newsletter covering all agents and program areas. If a single newsletter is not feasible, develop a single template to be used for all newsletters so that each agent and program area has a similar look and feel.
- At least once yearly, place a note in all newsletters reminding readers of the agent expertise available in other areas (for those who do not have a single district newsletter covering all program areas).
- Place “Extension Highlights” updating readers on extension-wide events/news in all newsletters (for those who do not have a single district newsletter covering all program areas).
- Develop an informational display to be used at all district programs and events. Make a point to display it at local health fairs, back-to-school events, lawn, and garden shows, etc.
- Have offices relisted in county pages in phone books. List categorically under common names (i.e., county extension) but refer to the district by its full name.

Technology

Because districts cover larger geographical areas, technology can be a significant asset to local unit communications. It helps disseminate information and reaches younger, more technologically savvy audiences.

When the district is successfully using technology for communications, it creates a more professional and reliable image. Districts using technology as part of their marketing efforts have implemented tactics like the following:

- Develop a district-wide website that is regularly updated with current, relevant information. Use the website as a reference for district residents.
- Make the newsletter available electronically to all residents willing to receive it in that format.
- Print the district website address on all written materials.
- Send out bimonthly news e-mail to all available contacts updating recipients on district events, programs, and other timely information.
- Use technology such as teleconferencing or instant messaging for district meetings and communications.
- Incorporate a phone system that allows connection between offices in separate counties.

Working with media

Media can serve as an excellent partner in K-State Research and Extension communications with various audiences. That's why it is important to help your local media contacts understand the new district format. You can also use media in helping district residents make the transition to a district format. Ideas include these:

- Send a brochure on the new district (with a letter of introduction) to all media contacts.
- Develop a single district news-column header and make it available (in both printed and electronic form) to all newspapers in the district.
- Rotate agent columns through district newspapers so that the entire district staff is regularly represented in each newspaper.
- Have staff photos professionally taken for distribution to newspapers.
- Accompany each column submitted to media sources with staff member bio and photo.
- Develop agent FAQ sheets identifying agents as experts in their specific fields. Distribute these to all media sources.
- Place an extender (such as a brochure or flyer) promoting the district in selected newspapers.
- Run an ad in selected newspapers to announce formation of the district and introduce its staff.

- Explore the possibility of acquiring sponsorships for periodic radio spots offering timely information and promoting the district.

Communicating impact

Community support is imperative for the success of K-State Research and Extension. But for your district residents to support you, they have to know what you do. This means it is extremely important to communicate about the impact the district and its staff have on the lives of district residents. Some ways to achieve this include:

- Develop periodic impact reports compiled by all agents to be distributed to stakeholders.
- Develop impact postcards to distribute to local stakeholders (the postcard's picture should reflect the district makeup-for instance, a montage of each county courthouse within the district).
- Collect and write "success stories" illustrating the positive impact K-State Research and Extension has had on the lives of district residents. Use these success stories in newsletters, impact reports, presentations, etc.
- Develop an electronic presentation of district highlights to be played at events, booths, etc.