AGCJ 404: Communicating Agricultural Information to the Public

Objectives
- Discuss the principles of digital communications.
- Examine design issues for online media.
- Explore the advantages and disadvantages of digital communications.

Week #14: Digital Communications

Principles of Digital Communications
- Same as in other technical communications’ forms:
  - Accessibility – audience must access and use information for it to be valuable
  - Usability – efficient information because audience’s needs are met quickly
  - Relevance – information directed to a specific audience, using specific content

Additional Principles
- Writing Issues:
  - Impatient readers’ needs – avoid long blocks of text; use appropriate font types; and chunk information.
  - Nonlinear readers’ needs – users “link” from one source to another quickly
  - Diverse audience needs – global influence; compensate with additional information links for highly technical material, feedback mechanisms, and short, simple sentences.

Design Issues for Digital Communications
- HTML coding affects organization and “look” from paper versions
- Typography – fuzzy fonts onscreen
- Visual appeal is enhanced with positioning of graphics (Gutenberg’s diagram)
- Line length – shorter (columns) is better for online reading
- Technical – can everyone get to it?

Design Issues for Digital Communications
- Avoid over-use of the whiz-bang effect
- WYSIWYG – not always true
- Fast page download is preferred
- Check all links
- ALWAYS create digital communications from the visitors’ point-of-view
- Double-check spelling, grammar, etc.
Advantages of Digital Communications

- After accessibility issues, you can:
  - Reach a much larger audience with your agricultural communications message
  - Create a "living" document that is easier to update than its paper cousin
  - Provide media that can be viewed worldwide at the same time
  - Contribute to a growing number of connected topics

Disadvantages of Digital Communications

- After posting to the Web, you:
  - Need to update materials to retain content freshness and visitor appeal
  - Expand the focus of your digital presence as new knowledge is generated
  - Collaborate with others in relevant line of agricultural communications
    - Work smarter, not harder

Application

- Visit the AGCJ 404 and AGCJ Tutorial Web sites for more information
- Use digital communications to:
  - Create electronic media for your multiple forms of agricultural information
  - Expand your audience reach
  - Inform through multiple channels

Evaluation

- Future career situations
- Final examination