

Apple and Pear Industry Communications

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FINAL REPORT

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Apple and Pear Australia Ltd Communications

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Purpose

The purpose of this project is to communicate to the apple and pear industry critical information that growers need for their businesses to maintain, adjust or adapt to the increasingly dynamic physical and economic environments in which they operate.

Growers need a range of communication inputs to remain close to what is happening in terms of research and development, local and world markets and market developments, and overseas developments as well as keeping up to date with information in relation to all aspects of on-farm production, storage, biosecurity, labour issues etc.

This communications project uses a wide range of communications tools to deliver the information required by growers.

Funding sources

This project is supported by apple and pear growers levy contribution partially matched by Commonwealth funding. APAL also contributes funding to this project.

Date: 31 January 2012

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Summary

Apple and pear growers need a wide range of critical information to adjust and adapt to the increasingly dynamic physical and economic environments that they face now and into the future.

A range of communication inputs are needed to support grower's operations in terms of research and development, local and world markets and market developments, overseas developments and keeping up to date with information in relation to all aspects of on-farm production, storage, biosecurity, labour issues etc.

This communications project used a wide range of communications tools to deliver the information required by growers. These include

- Australian Fruitgrower, a monthly magazine (project MTO8043)
- The APAL website that has freely available information as well as a levy payers section that is password protected. (Website address is www.apal.org.au)
- Apple and Pear World News is a weekly summary of media coverage of apple and pear industry issues
- Media releases were distributed when major issues arose, for example, the biosecurity issue related to the import of New Zealand apples.
- Formal and informal communications with growers and state organisations provided direct communications between APAL and the industry participants.

APAL commissioned surveys of growers in 2006, 2008 and in October-November, 2010 and responses to questions related to the effectiveness of APAL communications with growers and the result was APAL communications was rated very favourably.

The results from the 2010 survey indicate the following:

- The overall quality of APAL communications are well regarded by growers, 79% reported that they believe communications to be *excellent, very good or good*.
- Over the three surveys, the proportion of growers who said APAL communication was excellent or very good increased from 27 per cent to 37 per cent to 46 per cent. Those reporting APAL communication was excellent, very good and good increased from 71 per cent in 2006 to 79 per cent in 2010.
- Those who accessed the APAL website were more likely to say that APAL communications have improved in the last two years which suggests that the website plays an important role in determining growers' perceptions.
- More than a third (35%) have accessed the APAL website, and those who have consider the website content to be useful, 67% thought that the usefulness of the website was *excellent*,

very good or good. Future Orchards 2012 is the main reason growers visit the website, either to access information about the program or to check on the monitoring block information.

Introduction

This Apple and Pear communications project was made up of activities that were, until the 2008/09 financial year, funded through the APAL/HAL Partnership Agreement. The activities have long been recognised as of fundamental importance to the apple and pear industry. At HAL's insistence the activities covered by this project have been removed from the Partnership Agreement.

The Australian Fruitgrower application is separate (MTO8043)

Industry adoption was already well established for all the elements of this project, as the activities had been occurring over a number of years.

There was a change in 2006 when a communications manager was employed by APAL. In August-September 2006, a wide ranging baseline research project was conducted using focus groups in each state and a phone survey of 180 growers across the country.

It was generally confirmed that APAL had a very well established reputation for good management and good communication with growers. However, it was also found that there was room for development and improvement.

Improvement was needed to support growers in an increasingly complex environment, which are destined to become even more complex in the future.

The apple and pear industry was on the verge of been fully opened to international competition in the fresh fruit sector and that happened in 2011. Major rationalisation was expected and the number of orchard operations was expected to decrease significantly.

The remaining operators would more likely be highly professional in their operation across the value chain, particularly in the increasingly complex market environment. Communications has become even more important and working from a well established base, APAL will be in a strong position to meet those critical communications needs.

A follow-up phone survey in April 2008 re-confirmed APAL's high regard amongst growers and nearly half the growers surveyed said that APAL communication with growers had improved in the past two years, with nearly 20 per cent saying that communications had improved a lot.

An important part of the improved communications with growers has been the state grower meetings where the APAL chairman and senior APAL staff advise growers of what issues and work are being managed and are open to feedback from growers. This communication was important to empower the growers to have their issues heard and managed.

And while the phone survey showed an improvement in communication and the result was pleasing, there were still 25 percent of people surveyed who considered APAL's communication with growers was only fair or poor. There is clearly room to improve, and this project is the major vehicle for both maintaining the standard reached to date and providing the improved communication sought.

Method and Activities

The methods and activities associated with apple and pear grower communications are detailed below. (Australian Fruitgrower magazine is the subject of a separate final report.

APAL website

The APAL website was regularly updated with each issue of Apple and Pear World News (weekly) and Australian Fruitgrower (monthly). The APAL structure was updated to reflect the changes to APAL Board and staff. Regular maintenance of contacts, reports and submissions was made.

Website statistics varied during the life of the project from about 1730 unique visitors a month to 3039 unique visitors a month with most months getting around 2,000 to 2,500 unique visitors. The number of pages visited varied from 2.5 to 3.06 page views per visit. Average time spent on the site was about 2.30 minutes.

The most popular site from month to month was recipes, with how to contact APAL the next most popular site. Australian Fruitgrower was the next most popular in most months.

Levy payers were encouraged to access the Future Orchards 2012 data in the levy payers section.

In the last nine months of the project, little progress was made on developing a new section to provide information on the PIPS program. Part of the issue was the website approached full capacity and it was advised by the web developers that a major revamp of the site was required to bring it up to current standards of operation.

Issues

The APAL website is not easy to maintain with many quite simple changes having to go to the website developers for them to make. Given the fast moving pace of issues this year and the heavy workload experienced by the website developer, it often took days to have changes effected.

The APAL website is now five years old and since it was developed, website technology and techniques have greatly advanced. Early in the life of the new communications project, an allocation needs to be made to completely revamp the APAL website and bring it up to the most up-to-date standard and functionality available.

The developers had problems in adding a PIPS site within the APAL website structure so a small site with basic information will be developed while the full development of a PIPS website within the APAL website will be part of the overall revamping of the APAL website.

Media monitoring

Media monitoring occurred on a regular basis and a media report was prepared and distributed to the APAL board, State organisations and a small group of selected growers and industry people.

APAL continued its contract with Meltwater News as its monitoring service and after many contacts regarding availability of articles; the coverage did seem to improve.

A test of that was a media release on Chinese apple imports put out by APAL was widely reported and was monitored by Media Monitors as well as Meltwater. There was little difference in the pick-up of newspaper articles but the pick-up of radio coverage was better by Media Monitors.

Generally, the apple and pear industry gets sympathetic media coverage and accurate reporting if its spokespeople. Apples generally get positive media, helped greatly by the marketing and PR efforts of HAL.

Issues

During the term of the project, APAL used three different media monitoring companies to track media coverage.

Initially, Media Monitors was used and APAL was able to be a 'member' of Media Monitors by being part of the HAL membership. The service was very good.

HAL then reviewed its media monitoring contract and in November 2009, decided to go with AAP News Centre. It was the opinion of APAL this service was inferior to that provided by Media Monitors.

In July 2010, APAL took up an offer from Meltwater News, which provided the option of posting links to media articles onto the APAL website so they could be accessed by anyone. However, when major APAL media releases were distributed, APAL usually had a PR firm use Media Monitors to cover the main period of media activity to ensure we recorded full coverage.

The Meltwater News contract finishes in 2013, and APAL will explore the best media monitoring options once that contract is finished.

Apple and Pear World News

Apple and Pear World News (APWN) was produced weekly from February to December and distributed to an extensive email list of growers and industry personnel in Australia and many overseas countries.

APWN usually consisted of 10 to 12 pages of news summaries mainly from Australia and New Zealand, and market information on selected apples and pears and summer fruits from England, Netherlands and USA. It continues to receive good feedback from recipients, who mainly appreciate the quick and easy to read summary of what is happening in the industry worldwide.

Ross Wall continued to collate the news clippings except for a five week break in 2011 when APAL contracted Alma Reynolds to do that job.

APAL still receives strong positive feedback from recipients and a steady stream of requests to be put on the emailing list.

Communication with growers

Direct communication with growers is always a high priority for APAL. Face to face meetings were organised each year to occur mainly in June and July, as this is a relatively quieter period for orchardists.

For the great majority of meetings, the Chairman and Managing Director covered many of the issues facing the industry including apple imports from China and New Zealand, the industry response to the WTO findings on New Zealand apples and marketing issues.

In 2011, the meetings also provided an update on Prevar and APFIP by Garry Langford and a description of an industry environmental program by Don Chambers.

Attendance at meetings varied from year to year and from region to region and despite one or two regions having consistently low attendance, it was always considered to be worthwhile holding the meetings.

Issues

APAL sometimes hears that it does not communicate well with growers despite the number of channels through which it contacts growers and the opportunities it provides for face to face communication.

APAL is very conscious of the need to have good communication with growers and a review of communications will look at how to improve current communications and introduce new

communications channels to ensure as much as possible, all apple and pear growers receive relevant and timely communications from APAL.

Apple Import Task Force

In the previous 12 months, considerable time and effort was put into communicating with a grower group that called itself the Apple Import Task Force. This group had unrealistic expectations that imports of apples from China could be stopped and vigorously presented their case.

Weekly meetings with a grower representative continued for a three month period after a series of AITF meetings but were deemed unnecessary after that time. However, there were more irregular phone conversations with members of that group who were kept up to date on APAL activities in relation to apple imports.

Growers continued to be very keen to be informed of developments in regard to apple imports from China and New Zealand and what impact they would have on the Australian industry. APAL eNews was an important medium for disseminating this information.

APAL eNews

APAL eNews, is an emailed 'newsletter' to about 500 growers and industry people. It started in 2010 as an *ad hoc* communication, but for most of 2011, it has been distributed on a weekly basis, and on some occasions more frequently. While little direct feedback has been received, the considered feeling is that it is helping to keep growers informed of issues and activities and there have been no complaints that growers do not know what is happening in the industry.

APAL eNews is a particularly valuable medium to inform growers of what media releases have been distributed so that if they keep up with their emails, they are informed of industry communications before seeing anything in the media.

Communication with State organisations

Communications with state organisations occurred on a regular basis. Each month, the state organisations provide an up-date of activities in their state for publication in Australian Fruitgrower magazine.

State organisations were regularly contacted to discuss and get assistance for a number of APL projects.

Representatives of all state organisations met in Melbourne each year for a briefing on issues being managed by APAL and on the upcoming marketing campaigns, including in May 2011, the new Aussie

Apple brand rolled out this year. At each session, there was much discussion about the state marketing programs and how they could be supported by HAL.

Issues

Some comments criticising APAL communication with state organisations appear from time to time; that APAL does not communicate well, does not communicate enough or it competes with state organisations.

APAL is very conscious of its relationship with the State organisations and includes them in all the regular communications as well as holding at least one and usually two face to face meetings a year. Attempts in the past to conduct a regular phone hook-up found interest from the States waned quickly and attendance was so irregular that the meetings were not continued.

Annual Industry Report

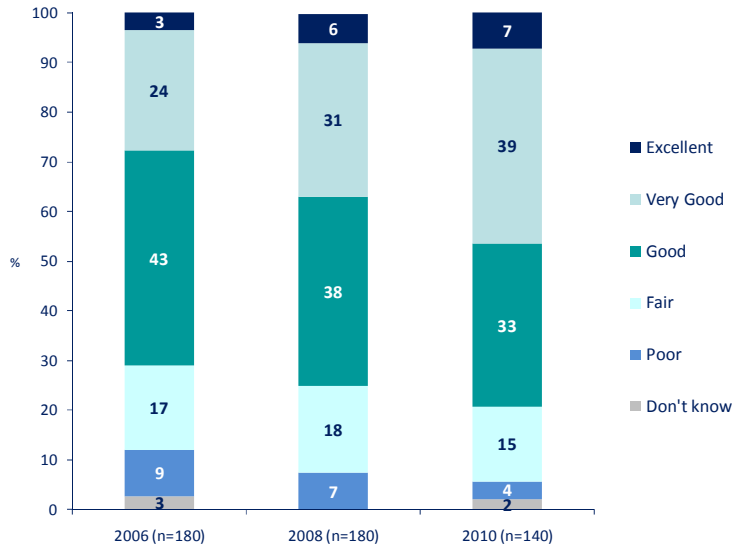
The annual industry report was compiled each year in conjunction with HAL. APAL opted to contract the production of the report which was completed in time for the AGM and Levy payers meeting each year.

Evaluation

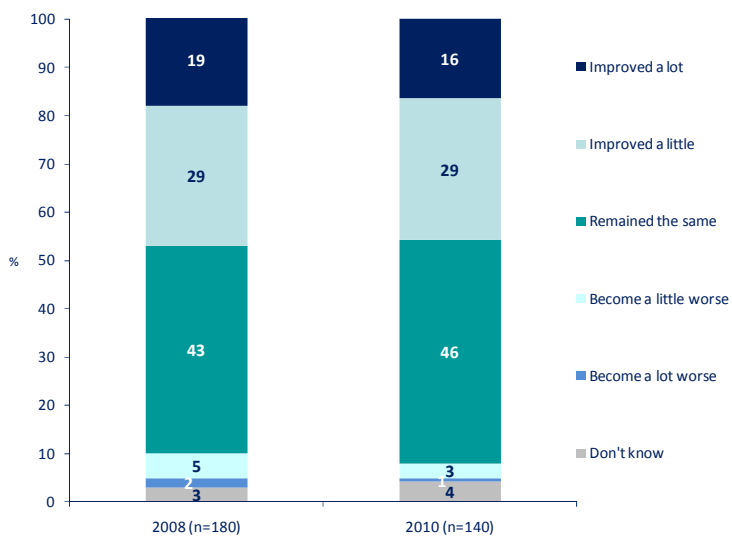
APAL commissioned surveys of growers by IPSOS-Eureka social research institute in 2006, 2008 and in October, November, 2010. A specific set of questions related to the effectiveness of APAL communications with growers and overall, growers rated APAL communications favourably.

The results from the 2010 survey included the following:

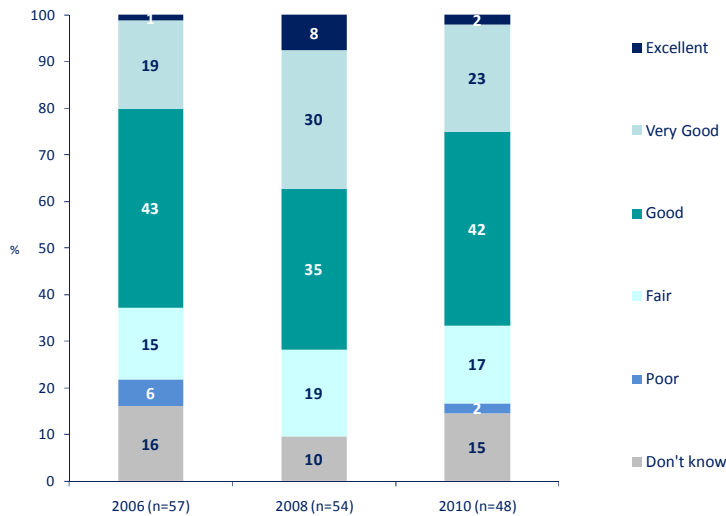
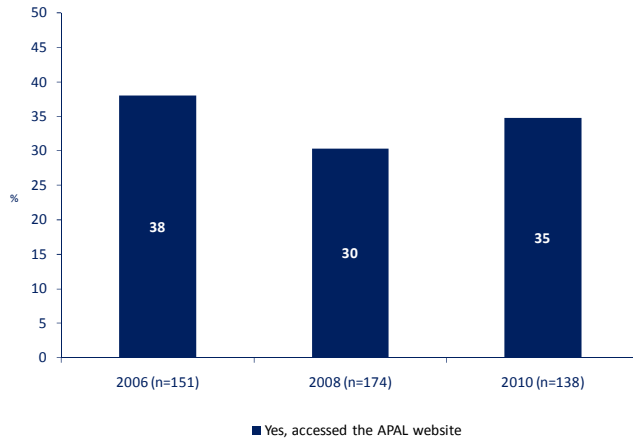
- The overall quality of APAL communications are well regarded by growers, 79% reported that they believe communications to be *excellent, very good or good*.



- Over the three surveys, the proportion of growers who said APAL communication was excellent or very good increased from 27 per cent to 37 per cent to 46 per cent. Those reporting APAL communication was excellent, very good and good increased from 71 per cent in 2006, 75 per cent in 2008 and 79 per cent in 2010.
- At the 2008 and 2010 surveys, 48 and 43 per cent of respondents said that APAL communications had improved a lot or improved a little, with 43 and 46 per cent saying that communications remained the same.
- Those who accessed the APAL website were more likely to say that APAL communications have improved in the last two years which suggests that the website plays an important role in determining growers' perceptions.



- More than a third (35%) have accessed the APAL website, and those who have consider the website content to be useful, 67% thought that the usefulness of the website was *excellent*, *very good* or *good*. Future Orchards 2012 is the main reason growers visit the website, either to access information about the program or to check on the monitoring block information.



From the 2006 to the 2010 surveys, the proportion of growers rating APAL communication as poor has dropped with each survey, though not statistically significantly.

Baldwin Boyle Group Report

The Baldwin Boyle report has been submitted to HAL in the final report for project AP11021 “Review of and planning for apple and pear industry communications”

Despite the very favourable view of APAL communications found in the IPSOS surveys of apple and pear growers, the Baldwin Boyle Group report was quite critical of APAL communications.

To quote part of its executive summary

“The review has revealed that APAL has a number of strengths that will help it in the future. It has a clear strategy and annual operating plan that dictate its roles and desired outcomes; it has a number of leading programs such as Future Orchards which have added value; it has demonstrated it can be more proactive and contemporary, for example, in how it communicated on the recent biosecurity issues; it has some committed and expert resources; and it has a good reputation among some of its growers and other stakeholders, particularly Government.

However, APAL is not being effective in fulfilling its role in communicating the following:

- r&d outcomes and extension information to growers and the supply chain
- Receiving feedback from growers and the supply chain about the types of r&d outcomes and extension information that is most of interest
- Marketing activities – ie how the marketing levy is being spent
- General information to ensure growers remain well informed so they may improve business decision making abilities.

APAL is let down by not having the right communications tools and activities in place to enable it to be the mechanism by which information is conveyed to and from growers and the supply chain. Unfortunately, APAL’s communications overall, when compared with industry benchmarks, are tired and lack lustre. Some communications need a complete overhaul to ensure they are on strategy, other areas need housekeeping. Everything needs to be sharper, more proactive, more timely and more contemporary and in some cases, less will be more.”

The Baldwin Boyle Group Report will be reviewed and appropriate recommendations will be implemented.

Implications

While APAL has been successful at communicating with its constituents, the industry environment changed dramatically in 2011 with the introduction of apple imports into Australia from China and New Zealand.

The new environment will require growers to operate at a higher level to remain internationally competitive; this will require:

- greater technical knowledge and more intensive use of external expertise;
- growers to have exporting as part of their marketing mix;
- growers to be more aware of, or employ expertise in, apple and pear marketing, both domestically and internationally;
- awareness of the impact of trade requirements; biosecurity; climate change and environmental issues; chemical regulation; labour issues and government policy changes.
- APAL will have to provide higher quality data on storage, sales and import levels; growers
- Electronic dissemination of information, such as via the APAL website, will become more critical
- New communications technology offer new opportunities for communication with growers and the supply chain

This will require a new focus on APAL communications and it was for that reason APAL commissioned Baldwin Boyle Group to review APAL communications and prepare a detailed strategy for the next three to five years.

Recommendations

The Baldwin Boyle Group review and strategy will provide the basis upon which a plan can be developed to deliver effective and timely information and know-how to meet grower needs into the future (next three to five years). Effectively, this is a plan to ensure that priorities and content as well as tools, activities and infrastructure provide the best possible industry outcomes for the money invested in communications.

Initially the APAL executive will meet with BBG to assess the priorities and phasing of the redevelopment of the communications program. The outcomes of those deliberations will be put to the APAL Board.

This will provide APAL with a direction so that it can work with HAL to develop a way forward. It is likely that APAL and HAL will form a small team to progress a new communications program that represents value for money from matched grower levies and meets the communications needs of growers.

The new program is targeted for commencement from April 2012.

Acknowledgements

Many people contribute to APAL communications with growers and the industry. Specifically, APAL would like to acknowledge the inputs from Ross Wall, Fruitscope Media, for preparation of Apple and Pear World News.

Bibliography

Review of Apple and Pear Australia Limited (APAL), Communications Activities, Channels and Resources by Baldwin Boyle Group (appended)

Appendices

Baldwin Boyle Group – Please contact APAL for details of this report.



Apple & Pear Australia

▪ Baldwin Boyle Group ▪

**Review of Apple and Pear
Australia Limited (APAL)
Communications Activities,
Channels and Resources
Final Report**

27 September 2011

Baldwin Boyle Group