

Final Report

Cherry Communications Program

Project leader:

Andrew Cooke

Delivery partner:

Coretext Pty Ltd

Project code:

CY15002

Project:

Cherry Communications Program CY15002

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Is this report confidential?

No

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Summary

The Cherry Industry Communications Program began in 2016 and was aimed at improving communications between cherry growers, researchers, Hort Innovation and other cherry industry participants, as well as facilitating the recognition and adoption of cherry levy research and development and marketing outcomes. The program was developed to create an all-encompassing suite of communications products that would deliver relevant information on a short, medium and long-term basis for the benefit of growers and the wider industry. Its intention was to produce:

- a high-quality quarterly magazine for the cherry industry to inform growers about the outcomes of research projects and explain the cherry levy system, among other articles. This 20-page A4 magazine was aimed at publishing seven to eight articles per issue on subjects including (but not restricted to) research and development, marketing, government policy and other issues affecting the industry value chain;
- monthly email newsletters to provide up-to-date news content to growers (and others) on industry issues and events. These newsletters would relay information on more immediate, or short-term, industry events and issues such as supply and demand factors and prices, developments in other markets and producing countries, developments within the Cherry Industry Communications Program itself such as the release of new videos, as well as updates on industry events such as conferences, information days, industry appointments and annual general meetings; and
- two videos per year to offer detailed information on the outcomes of research projects to growers in an easy-to-understand and accessible format. These videos involved visiting researchers and growers to explain the workings and results of long-term research projects and how these results were being put into practice by growers in their own operations.

The intended outcomes for the program were comprehensive, high-quality communications among all stakeholders in the industry and increased awareness of levy investments by Australian cherry growers; increased adoption of levy outcomes, building a stronger, more resilient cherry industry; and increased understanding of the cherry levy system, particularly among cherry growers.

The communications were targeted at cherry levy payers, cherry industry stakeholders and value chain members such as marketers and retailers. The project targeted a national audience, while still addressing regional issues and considerations as appropriate. Its outputs were intended to be accessible to industry stakeholders from a wide variety of backgrounds and supply chain sectors, from growers to retailers. To ensure that, communications were produced for an audience that is familiar with the cherry and broader horticulture industry, but was not expected to have specialist knowledge of technical topics such as agronomy, research or marketing.

Keywords

Cherry; communications; Hort Innovation; industry; magazine; newsletter; extension

Introduction

The Cherry Industry Communications Program was devised by Hort Innovation in 2016, when a request for tender process was initiated. The program followed on from the earlier CY11026 project, which delivered a national bi-monthly newsletter for the cherry industry, and developed and maintained the industry website Cherry Growers Australia. The project (Hort Innovation code CY15002) was aimed at extending and developing the earlier project, taking into account a series of recommendations made by a review into project CY11026 that covered content, delivery and multimedia. It was intended to produce communications for cherry levy payers, industry stakeholders and value chain members that would develop industry cohesion and encourage uptake of research outcomes by growers in a way that would improve industry productivity and profitability.

Coretext was the successful tenderer for CY15002, with Tom Bicknell appointed as editor/writer to lead the project (later replaced by Andrew Cooke after Tom Bicknell left the company). Tom and Andrew were the central point of contact at Coretext, liaising with Hort Innovation and other key personnel to develop content for each issue of the magazine, email newsletter and video.

Coretext regularly liaised with the Cherry Growers Australia association and state regional bodies to align communication messages for R&D and marketing investments. This involved regular email as part of the planning process for each magazine issue to invite contribution of material and feedback, and to inform regional bodies of forthcoming communications content. Cherry Growers Australia was a key player in the project, providing content for the magazine (in the form of a president's report and state-by-state season updates provided by the regional bodies) and liaising on recommended editorial content.

As well as providing the quarterly season update for Tasmania, which informed growers of seasonal conditions across their state, forthcoming events and industry appointments, Fruit Growers Tasmania managed a database that maintained magazine and email newsletter subscriber details and also managed advertising for the magazine on behalf of the national body.

Methodology

As the primary part of the project, Coretext produced a 20-page magazine laid out by its design team using Adobe InDesign. The magazine, which was distributed to approximately 550 subscribers, communicated on the outputs of the research and development and marketing levies, and included articles about export readiness, new technology, grower case studies, international research, updates on R&D projects, translating R&D research into on-farm practices, scientific articles, upcoming events, world cherry trends and reports from key markets. The quarterly *Cherry* magazine was adapted into a convenient electronic form using the RealView program (and later the Partica program) to produce a hosted e-magazine which could be accessed online and was available in a format suitable for desktop, mobile and tablet viewing.

The magazine was delivered by Coretext and the magazine editor using a process that involved scheduling; brief writing; production of approximately 7.5 pages of editorial content, as well as Coretext sourcing information from relevant industry stakeholders including articles written by researchers and papers from conferences and grower information events; editing and sub-editing all content; design and layout; two rounds of proofreading; coordinating print production with a sub-contractor (Printgraphics Pty Ltd); and coordinating magazine distribution via a mailing subcontractor (D&D Mailing Services).

All received copy and other content was edited and sub-edited (to meet Hort Innovation style, clarity and consistency requirements) by the Coretext production editor. In the first half of the project, edited copy was sent to Hort Innovation for approval before moving to design and production, as were draft pages, for corrections and/or amendments before final approval. In the second half of the project (from December 2017), Hort Innovation withdrew the requirement for draft copy and print/newsletter/video content to be approved before publication.

The monthly email newsletter was produced to provide a more frequent channel to complement the magazine. It was produced by the Cherry editor by collating current news and developments of relevance to the industry, notification of forthcoming events and industry announcements and appointments. The newsletter was produced and delivered to subscribers using the MailChimp program.

Coretext also produced two videos per year communicating R&D project outputs. The videos, of five to seven minutes duration each, were hosted on a dedicated YouTube channel, linked on the Hort Innovation website and distributed via the email newsletter. They included interviews with R&D project managers, researchers and other industry stakeholders. Links to the completed videos were sent to growers and other subscribers as part of the monthly email newsletter.

As part of the project's development and management, Coretext developed a stakeholder engagement plan, aimed at identifying the relevant stakeholder groups, the relationships those groups would have with the project, as well as identifying strategies to engage with each group. Monitoring and evaluation was conducted using stakeholder surveys at three points during the project – at commencement, at a mid-point after 18 months, and at the conclusion of the project. These surveys were used to inform editorial choices (selection of stories based on grower and stakeholder needs and preferences) and to evaluate the communications plan against specific KPIs identified at the commencement of the project. The surveys also sought to determine stakeholder preferences for communication mediums and content; stakeholder priorities for industry development; stakeholder satisfaction with current communications; and industry adoption of levy outcomes.

Outputs

The project's deliverables were as follows:

Cherry magazine

Twelve quarterly issues, from Spring 2016 to Winter 2019

These magazines were printed and delivered to a subscriber base of approximately 550 people. They are available for viewing in electronic form on the Partica platform at:

<https://cherry.partica.online/cherrymagazine/cherry-autumn-2019/flipbook/0/>

Biannual videos on the following topics:

- Optimising nutrient management in cherries (project ST16005)
- Cherry evaluation utilising precocious rootstocks (project CY12024)
- Brown sugar flotation technique for assuring Qfly-free fruit (project CY16011)
- Stingless bees as effective pollinators for Australian horticulture (project PH16000)
- Cherry Industry Biosecurity manual update (project CY16010)
- Crop variability in cherries (project CY12003)

The videos are available for viewing on a Cherry magazine YouTube channel at:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0dl-HFmKkQxNMU4Sxf6ldw?view_as=subscriber

Email newsletters produced monthly from April 2016 to May 2019 (36 in total)

Monthly email newsletters were delivered to subscribers and consisted of content covering news and developments of relevance to the cherry industry; notification of forthcoming events; industry announcements; and links to the electronic version of the magazine and YouTube videos. From an initial subscriber base of just over 300, the number of subscribers grew to 720 by the project's conclusion.

A sample of these emails (the final newsletter, produced in May 2019) is available at

<https://us14.admin.mailchimp.com/campaigns/show?id=650505>

As well as these tangible products created for the industry, Coretext also produced a stakeholder engagement plan, a program logic framework, five biannual status reports, two updated annual communications strategies, and three stakeholder surveys. These documents have been lodged with Hort Innovations via the Milestones portal.

Outcomes

The Cherry Industry Communications Program built a very strong communications framework for the industry, with *Cherry* magazine, the Cherry Newsletter email and the YouTube video series receiving positive feedback from industry stakeholders.

Additionally, the cherry stakeholder surveys conducted by Coretext in June 2018 and May 2019 included several questions that addressed monitoring of the Cherry Industry Communications Program outcomes and impacts. The results of the survey yielded quantitative data on stakeholders' understanding of the cherry levy system and where funds are being invested, their satisfaction with industry communications, and their use of industry communications to inform changes in their orchard management practices.

In summary, responses to questions in the May 2019 survey demonstrated that:

- More than half of the 38 respondents (59 per cent) were satisfied with communication they had received about cherry levy R&D and marketing over the past 12 months (an increase on the 52 per cent in the June 2018 survey);
- Fewer than half of the respondents to the 2018 survey and the 2019 survey believed that there was room for improvement in current industry communications;
- A very large proportion of growers (79 per cent) said they were using information about levy-funded R&D and marketing projects to inform changes in their orchard management practices;
- More than 60 per cent of respondents said they wanted to receive more information about how the cherry levy system works; and
- Fifty per cent of respondents said a print magazine was their preferred medium for information about cherry industry research.

The results of the three stakeholder surveys identified several topics of interest which Coretext was able to incorporate into the magazine, newsletter and videos. The topics included the cherry levy structure and how Hort Innovation operates, practical orchard advice, biosecurity enforcement, approaches to dealing with the threat of Queensland fruit fly and exports to China, among others. More information on the stakeholder surveys can be found in the Cherry communications survey 2018 results report.

Email newsletters

The number of subscribers to the electronic newsletter increased steadily each month throughout the project, from 301 after six months of the project (December 2016) to 715 by November 2018.

The rate of newsletter 'opens' (whereby the newsletter is accessed and read by subscribers) averaged about 50 per cent throughout the three years of the project, approximately double the average rate for newsletters on host website Mailchimp. The number of 'click-throughs' on weblinks contained in the newsletters averaged about 9 per cent. This outcome reflects a very high level of industry engagement with this platform (industry newsletter click-throughs generally average 2 to 3 per cent).

Videos

The six videos received strong engagement and remain a resource that is utilised by the industry. They have been viewed between 200 and 250 times each, from an industry grower base of approximately 500.

Recommendations

This project demonstrated how effectively a multi-pronged approach to communications can reach an entire industry, from growers right through to researchers and marketers. While approximately 50 per cent of growers said (in three surveys) that their preferred method of receiving industry communications is via print media, the use of an e-newsletter, for example, showed how other forms of communication could be used to tie together all forms of communications as well as ensure that all participants have the opportunity to access information via their preferred media.

Coretext recommends that, where possible, similar suites of communications products be made available to horticultural industries. Such an approach enables the results of research projects as well as other important industry news to be communicated in a variety of formats so that there is maximum reach across industry.

Coretext further recommends increasing use of social media to communicate Hort Innovation, industry and research outputs as the uptake of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram expands. A social media campaign conducted by Coretext separate to the Hort Innovation communications contract – “100 days of Cherries”, on Instagram – was extremely successful and gathered more than 220 followers during the four-month campaign. Further success is likely to be achieved through the use of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

We would recommend the development of a curated Facebook page for each industry (as a more cost-effective option compared to developing discrete industry websites), to be used as a news delivery platform for growers and industry alongside a print publication (where possible), e-newsletter and Instagram / Twitter account. As more and more people turn to such media as a source of news and information, we feel there are huge advantages to be gained from contacting growers via social media. During project CY15002, social media and digital newsletters were a very effective method of letting people know that new print magazines and videos has been published, for example.

Refereed scientific publications

None to report.

Intellectual property, commercialisation and confidentiality

No IP, commercialisation or confidentiality issues to report.