



Marketing techniques can increase the value of barley research

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Abstract

Awareness and adoption of the latest research and technology is critical for the Australian barley industry to maintain its role as a provider of first class research.

Whilst the rate of adoption of agricultural technology is increasing, the excessive amount of information available to industry means that important messages are often missed and research outcomes are not adequately adopted. The techniques used to communicate this information may be insufficient for effective transfer to the target audience, reducing the value of research to the barley industry.

Marketing techniques offer researchers the tools to increase the adoption of the latest research and technology. These techniques include identifying the target audience for the product, describing the product and benefits it offers, identifying the value of these benefits to the target audience and then packaging the product in a way that can be accessed and utilised by the audience.

We propose that the application of marketing techniques to the delivery of research outcomes can improve the adoption by the target audience and increase the value of barley research to the Australian industry.

Introduction

Awareness and adoption of the latest research and technology is vital for providing and maintaining a competitive advantage in a fast changing world. However, the overload of information often faced by industry means that vital messages can easily be missed.

Considerable resources of time and money are allocated annually to agricultural research. The contribution by the Grains Research and Development Corporation to

the course grains industries in Australia exceeds A\$ 8.2 million (GRDC 1998). Unfortunately, links to the efficient adoption of the research are often neglected resulting in the research outcomes not effectively transferred to those who can benefit. Just as good research has methodologies that must be followed to ensure quality results, good communication encompasses techniques that can ensure that the target audience receives the correct message.

This paper outlines how marketing techniques can be applied to improve the adoption level of barley research and increase the effectiveness of the research dollar to ensure the Australian barley industry maintains a competitive advantage well into the future.

Marketing techniques

When marketing research outcomes, it is important to provide information that the industry wants not what we think it wants. The marketing techniques that will allow this to be done include clearly identifying the target audience, describing the product and benefits it offers and identifying the value of these benefits to the target audience (Stanton *et al.* 1991). Packaging the product in a way that it can be accessed and utilised by the audience is also important.

Identifying the target audience

The first step in marketing the research outcomes is to identify the target audience that has the greatest need for the product, information or research results; hereafter referred to as the product. Not all members of the industry will want the product. It will be both costly and inefficient to market to those who don't recognise a need for the product.

Identifying the product

What is the product that is offered to the target audience? The product is often defined in terms of its features. However, the audience will be more stimulated if the product is defined in terms of its benefits (Aveling 2000). For example, interest can be aroused in grain growers by marketing 'a quick and easy method for calculating the nitrogen needed to grow premium grade barley' rather than marketing the 'Rite Nitrogen slide rule', recently released by Western Australian Department of Agriculture.

What value does the product offer the target audience?

A product will be accessed or adopted by the target audience if it is of value to them (Aveling 2000). It is important that the value of the product is clearly identified to the audience. All promotional material must clearly highlight the 'what's in it for them' concept. This value may not necessarily be monetary; it may also be of time-, health- or prestige-value.

Too often the focus is on why the product is important to researchers and this is the message that is sold. For example, 'mLo gene' discovered in barley. This was an exciting finding for researchers but not overly stimulating for grain growers. For a target audience to seek and adopt results from the research it must be important to them. For example:

- New barley gene resistant to mildew costs less to grow (monetary value).
- Less spray time with new mildew resistant barley (time value).
- Lower health risks with new barley (health value).
- Leading farmers soon to use genetics over chemicals for mildew (prestige value).

Packaging the product

Packaging or presentation of the product is important to make it stand out from others that are available and to make the product easily accessed and useable. For this to be accomplished the packaging must be user-friendly, clearly identify the product benefit, and provide sufficient information to meet the needs of the target audience.

Keeping the message simple is also important. Use vocabulary that is familiar to the audience. Don't under estimate the effect of a professional appearance for the product. A professionally published pamphlet has greater impact and credibility than a photocopied sheet.

Promoting the product

When developing a promotional campaign for the product, we must identify the aim for the campaign, the main message, the media to be used, the budget and a method to measure the success of the product (Aveling 2000).

The role of a promotional campaign is to take the target audience from awareness of the product through a series of levels including interest in the product, desire for the product, and finally to receiving or adopting the product(Aveling 2000).

To advance the audience from one level to the next involves the provision of relevant information at each level that satisfies their needs. The best method of presenting this information will involve a combination of four promotional tools. These include personal selling of the product, public relations, media advertising where the promotion is bought, and sale promotions which are short-term incentives to encourage purchase or adoption.

The optimal combination of the different promotional tools will depend on the readiness of the target audience for the 'product'. Advertising and public relations play a major role during the early stages of awareness and interest. This is largely achieved through developing media press releases and advertisements and using displays at industry events such as expos, field walks and field days.

The importance of personal selling increases as the customer begins to desire the product. Personal selling of the product needs to be undertaken by credible industry

members. Endorsement by community leaders offers significant benefit in promoting agricultural information.

Personal selling is also important in 'sealing the sale' of the product. It is important to develop a strong relationship with those who are involved with the later stages of selling the product, particularly agronomists, consultants and development officers when growers are our target audience. The use of sale promotions hasn't been widely used in agricultural extension but may offer important opportunities in the future.

Successfully distributing the product to ensure adoption

Regardless of how informative and well packaged the product is, there is no advantage if the target audience does not access it. It is important that we document how the product will be distributed or accessed by the audience, who is responsible, and how success will be evaluated.

There are numerous formats that can be used for distribution or through which the industry can access the product. Some examples of written material include short advisory notes, newsletters, reference book chapters, journal papers, brochures and booklets, ready reckoners, newspapers and magazines, fliers and fax notes. Multimedia activities include radio, television, inter-net, question and answer web sites, compact discs, video and cassette tapes, and video-conferences. Interactive activities may include grower productivity groups, field days and farm walks, workshops, study courses and industry events, seminars and conferences. Promotional boards such as display signs, billboards, posters and truck advertising may be applicable in some situations.

There are both personal and non-personal channels that are available for distributing the product. Personal distribution channels may include a direct relationship between the researcher and the target audience and relationships with advisory staff including agronomists, consultants and government officers or productivity grower groups such as TopCrop. Relationships with other components of the industry, including barley marketers and barley and malt processors, are important and should not be underestimated.

Examples of non-personal distribution channels include publishing houses, funding bodies, bookshops, direct selling and mail order bodies, government publication sales and the various activities of the rural media. Non-personal distribution channels have the advantage of being accessible when required however, are less likely to offer back up service.

Conclusion

The continuation of high quality research is vital for the Australian barley industry to sustain a competitive advantage in the world market. The full value of this research will only be realised when the research outcomes are effectively communicated to

their target audience. The applications of marketing techniques, outlined in this paper, offer researchers the tool to increase the success of the communication and adoption of their latest research, enhancing the reputation of the industry as a provider of first-class research.

References

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