

idea corner

Computer-Assisted Evaluation

Clipping services are expensive and the return of clippings, in themselves, is no real evaluation of the effectiveness of press services. This is a situation where the feedback (in the form of clippings) is overwhelming.

This seemed made to order for computer assistance and at Virginia Tech we have now implemented such a system. We're employing a computer program with five subprograms that gives us information by program area, by departmental contributions, by newspaper use of individual stories, use by individual newspapers, and use within the six Extension districts we have in Virginia.

Each of the subprograms is reporting the following information: number of uses of our material, total column inches, total circulation reached, and the dollar value of the column inches. This last value is artificial in that we don't pay for public service space in the papers. However, it's a measure most of us can relate to.

From the computer printout for the period October 25 to December 13, 1978, the following occurred:

Agriculture: 188 uses of material, totaling 1,541 column inches, reaching a circulation of 1,519,788. The ads would have cost \$3,258.

Home Economics: 104 uses, 1,318 column inches, 944,181 circulation. Value: \$2,974.

4-H: 6 uses, 72 column inches, 46,847 circulation. Value: \$216.

Community Resource Development: 2 uses, 14 column inches, 34,454 circulation. Value: \$44.

This accountability information is valuable. It's expected, however, that as we work with this more manageable data, we can discover information of a predictive nature to direct our future activities.

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