

what should a title say?

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Free-Choice Selection

One of Extension's principal means of disseminating information is through printed publications (bulletins, leaflets, pamphlets). These publications are used by Extension agents to supplement educational meetings and answer specific requests for detailed information. Perhaps the most widespread method of disseminating Extension publications, however, has been free-choice selection from a display board located in the county Extension office. Visitors to county offices may select single copies of publications displayed, usually at no cost.

Extension has worked hard to make its publications as appealing as possible to the potential user. Special attention has been given to design, color, shape, size, and illustrations. Unless the potential user is motivated to: (1) pick up the publication, (2) open it, and (3) read it, the purpose for which it's written can't be achieved.

Adults, generally, are problem oriented and seek information that will help them solve specific problems. A consumer sometimes finds it more difficult to translate a subject-oriented title of an Extension publication into a potential solution to a personal problem.

Little research has been conducted to date on factors that influence the free-choice selection of Extension's educational publications. It's generally assumed that people will select publications "in color" over those printed in black and white. This assumption, however, hasn't been substantiated by empirical research. In a similar vein, it's logically assumed that uniqueness in design, shape, and illustrations attracts the

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attention of potential users. More research is needed relative to the motivational power of these factors.

One factor that seems to have been largely ignored in the preparation of Extension publications is the potential impact of the title itself. I felt the wording of the title might be the single most important influence on the potential user's selection of a publication. To examine the influence of title as well as illustrations on free-choice selection of publications, I conducted a study in Mitchell County, North Carolina.

North Carolina Study

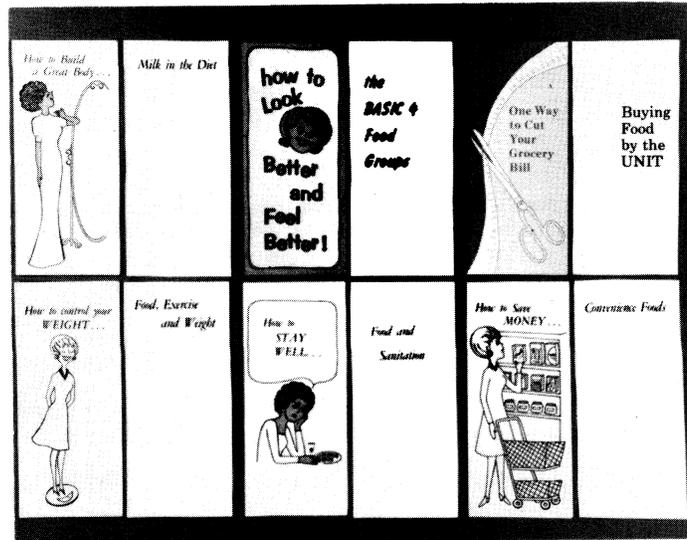
A set of six pamphlets developed for use in another study was selected for testing. The pamphlets each dealt with a single idea focusing on problems related to health and nutrition. The covers were simply illustrated. Each pamphlet was printed on a different colored paper. Titles were straightforward and focused on "how to"—"How To Build a Great Body," "How To Save Money," "How To Look and Feel Better" (see Table 1).

Table 1. Titles of pamphlets tested by type.

Type I (how-to)	Type II (subject content)
How To Build a Great Body	Milk in the Diet
How To Look Better and Feel Better	The Basic 4 Food Groups
One Way To Cut Your Grocery Bill	Buying Food by the Unit
How To Control Your Weight	Food, Exercise, and Weight
How To Stay Well	Food and Sanitation
How To Save Money	Convenience Foods

An additional set of pamphlets was published for comparison in the study. The new set of pamphlets was identical to the original set, corresponding in color, shape, size, and content. Only the titles were changed and illustrations removed. For example, the pamphlet corresponding to "How To Build a Great Body" was titled "Milk in the Diet."

Multiple copies of the two sets of pamphlets were placed randomly on a display board. Printed in large letters at the top of the display board was FREE PUBLICATIONS. The board containing the two sets of pamphlets was displayed for two hours on three different days at each of six locations in the county seat town. An individual was paid to monitor the board. When a pamphlet was taken from the board, the monitor approached the person taking the pamphlet(s) and noted the title(s) selected and asked questions about reasons for selection and recorded responses along with personal data about the selector.



The two sets of pamphlets used in the study.

Information was obtained from 195 individuals making selections from the display board. Chi square at the .05 level of probability was used to determine associations between variables.

Results

The question examined in the study was: Will consumers select Extension pamphlets with "how-to" titles and illustrations over pamphlets that simply specify subject content?

The consumers consisted of about 18% males and 82% females.

The largest group of consumers (44%) was between the ages of 21 and 30. The next largest group (19%) was in the 41-50 age group. The over 60 and under 20 age group accounted for only 4% and 6% of selections respectively.

About 91% of the consumers had completed 9 or more years of school and about 9% had completed 8 years of school or less. Thirty-five percent had completed more than 12 years of school.

The income level of the highest percentage (68%) of consumers fell within \$7,500 to \$10,000.

Table 2 shows the number and percentage of pamphlets selected by title of publication and Table 3 shows the number and percentage of pamphlets selected by type. Of the 195 pamphlets selected, 146 (75%) were the "how-to" illustrated pamphlets, and 49 (25%) were those that simply specified subject content. The difference was significant.

Table 2. Pamphlets selected from free-choice display rack by title.

Title	Number selecting	Percentage
1. How To Build a Great Body	17	8.7%
2. How To Look Better and Feel Better	26	13.3
3. One Way To Cut Your Grocery Bill	20	10.2
4. How To Control Your Weight	34	17.5
5. How To Stay Well	19	9.7
6. How To Save Money	30	15.4
7. Milk in the Diet	7	3.6
8. The Basic 4 Food Groups	5	2.6
9. Buying Food by the Unit	9	4.6
10. Food, Exercise, and Weight	14	7.2
11. Food and Sanitation	9	4.6
12. Convenience Foods	5	2.6
Total	195	100.0%

Table 3. Pamphlets selected by type.

Type of pamphlet	Number selecting	Percentage
"How-to" (1-6)	146	74.87%
Subject content (7-12)	49	25.13
	195	100.00%

$\chi^2=48.30$ with d.f. prob. 0.005.

Summary and Conclusions

Consumers exhibited a decided preference for the "how-to" illustrated pamphlets over pamphlets that simply specified subject content. The selection ratio was about three to one. It wasn't possible to determine the separate impact of title and cover illustration on selection. To compare the impact of title alone on selection, it would have been necessary to remove the illustrations from the original set of pamphlets. The expense of reprinting the original set of pamphlets with illustrations removed wasn't within the budget allowance for the project. It's recommended that another study be conducted that will compare titles only.

From the analysis of the data, it was concluded that titles and illustrations had a decided impact on consumers' selection of pamphlets. The selection didn't occur by chance. The only difference between the two sets of pamphlets was titles and illustration.

Implications

The findings of this study present a number of implications for Extension. Before this study, no empirical research could

be found that tried to determine the influence of title and illustrations on the free-choice selection of publications from a display board.

Educational publications account for a sizable item in state Extension budgets. Extension personnel responsible for preparing publications must understand the psychological needs of the various audiences Extension is trying to reach through this medium.

Adults, generally, are problem oriented and seek information that will help them solve specific problems. A consumer sometimes finds it more difficult to translate a subject-oriented title of an Extension publication into a potential solution to a personal problem.

If the free-choice Extension publication is to be an effective teaching tool, the cover and title must stimulate the potential user to: (1) take the publication from the display board, (2) open it, and (3) read it. All these require an understanding of human motivation on the part of the person who designs the cover and decides on the title.

The writer of Extension publications must realize that free-choice publications are used most often by consumers possessing a relatively high level of education. In this study, only 17 out of the 196 consumers had an eighth grade education or less. People possessing lower levels of formal education are assumed not to be avid consumers of free-choice publications. Perhaps reading levels of Extension publications should be examined.