

# The Effectiveness of an Equine Extension Website in Delivering Important 4-H Horse Project Information to Youth, Leaders, and Extension Agents



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## Abstract

The objective of the study reported here was to describe the effectiveness of an Equine Extension website in delivering important 4-H Horse Project information to youth, adult leaders / parents, and/or extension staff. A survey was developed to determine the demographic and purpose of the website users. The survey was voluntary, and responses from 50 individuals were received. From the data collected, the Colorado Equine Extension website provides a great service to those involved with the Colorado 4-H Horse Program. It serves as an efficient alternative to communicate and provides valuable information with youth, leaders, parents and extension personnel within the state.

## Introduction

The state of Colorado is geographically and demographically diverse. It is currently divided into 60 plus counties, each with its own extension personnel. In 2003, there were 4,213 youth enrolled in the Colorado 4-H horse project (Annual Youth Extension Report, 2003). Guiding these youth in the success of their project are numerous 4-H horse project leaders, parents and guardians. One of the largest challenges facing the youth horse extension specialist is the problem with effective and cost-efficient communication issues.

Traditionally, communication regarding developments and updates within the 4-H horse project were conveyed via mail and meetings around the state. With recent decreases in Extension budgets (particularly travel budgets), new methods of communication must be developed. To meet the demand for cost efficient and effective delivery of information, an Equine Extension website ([www.equineextension.colostate.edu](http://www.equineextension.colostate.edu)) was developed to communicate with the youth, leaders, parents, and extension personnel who

are involved in the Colorado 4-H horse project. The objectives of this study were to identify the following:

1. Demographic characteristics of persons accessing the website;
2. Motives of those accessing the website;
3. Effectiveness of the website in conveying information;
4. Whether the users consider the website an effective alternative to other methods of communication;
5. Which information on the website was most important.

With a better understanding of who is accessing the Equine Extension website and why, communication between the state extension office and those disseminating information throughout the state will become more effective. The information gained from this study will provide insight as to the effectiveness of using this technology as an alternative to the traditional methods of communication.



Figure 1: Screenshot of the [www.equineextension.colostate.edu](http://www.equineextension.colostate.edu) homepage.

## Materials and Methods

The Department of Animal Sciences at Colorado State University has hosted a website since the late 1990's. However, the department's website did not provide information for youth, leaders, and extension agents involved with the Colorado 4-H Horse Program. Therefore, the Equine Extension website underwent initial development in 2002. Several web development guides and web evaluation tools were used to guide the development of the site (Alexander, 2001; Beck, 1997; Kirk, 1996; Tillman, 2003). Input from several outside leaders and county extension agents guided the direction of the website and its content. The result was a comprehensive website that contains general project information, event registration forms, an interactive calendar of events, project rules and regulations, and resource information (Figure 1).

The homepage of the website offers a list of links that guide the user to information about the different programs within the Colorado 4-H Horse Program (Figure 1). For example, the user can access the homepage, click on youth horse judging and easily and quickly access information about upcoming horse judging contests and resources for youth horse

were made aware of the website's existence at extension based meetings around the state of Colorado. Since 2002, the website has undergone several revisions. Currently, the Equine Extension website is designed to serve both youth and adults involved in the Colorado 4-H Horse Project. The homepage provides current news regarding the 4-H Horse Program and is updated on a regular basis. The homepage also provides easy access to commonly used links. The "adult resources" and "youth resources" links provide information of interest to adult leaders / agents or youth respectively. The website was designed to be easy for users to locate information.

The website was in existence and had undergone revision for a period of 12 months prior to the survey being conducted. Persons accessing the website were asked to voluntarily participate in the survey by a pop up window. Users were informed that survey results would be used to improve the information contained on the site and its design. Youth, leaders, parents and extension personnel from Colorado and other states were asked several questions to determine their demographic and purpose of accessing the website.

## Development of the Instrument

A survey instrument was developed to determine a demographic profile and the motive(s) of persons accessing the Equine Extension website. In order to determine who and why persons were accessing the site, 15 statements were developed. Survey questions were designed by a committee of leaders and agents. The Likert-type scale of measurement was used when possible: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree.

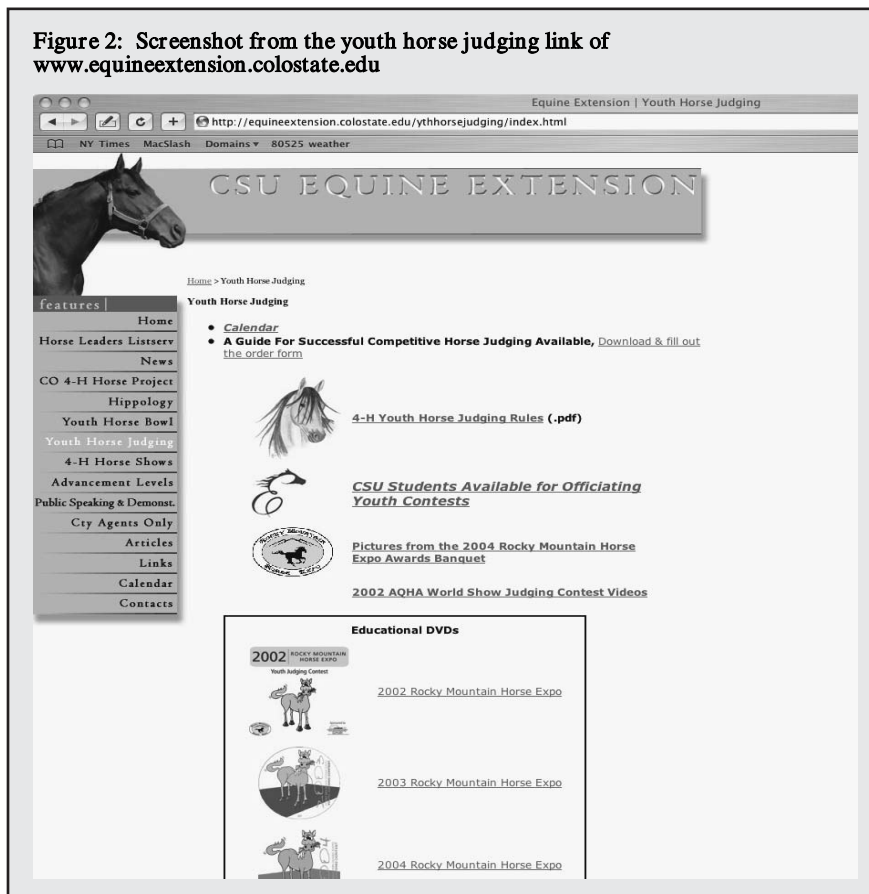
## Data Collection

The survey was available on the Equine Extension website for a period of 60 days during the summer of 2003 to all persons accessing the website. Participants in the survey were randomly selected. Survey responses were monitored via e-mail addresses such that each person responding to the survey could respond only once. The data collection procedure resulted in 50 completed surveys.

## Data Analysis

This study used descriptive statistical method. It includes frequencies, means, percentages, and standard deviations, were used to summarize, organize, and interpret the data.

Figure 2: Screenshot from the youth horse judging link of [www.equineextension.colostate.edu](http://www.equineextension.colostate.edu)



judging participants (Figure 2). Once completed, notice of the website's existence was conveyed to agents and leaders using both e mail list serves and via hard copy notice. Additionally, leaders and agents

**Results and Discussion**

**Characteristics**

One objective of the study was to describe the demographic of persons accessing the Equine Extension website. Summarized below is a list of the characteristics that describe persons using the website:

**Location**

- 76% from Colorado
- Other states: CA, CT, NV, OR, AL, IL, NY, PA, TN, WI, WY

**Gender**

- 28% male
- 72% female

**Computer Experience**

- 76% considered themselves to be expert level computer users
- 22% only used the computer for word processing or internet access

**Computer Use**

- 85% of website users accessed the website from home or place of business
- 15% accessed the site from a county extension office, friends' house or school

**Age**

- 10% over 50
- 58% 30-49 years of age
- 24% between 13 and 29
- 8% did not respond

**Participation in the Colorado 4-H Horse Project**

- 36% extremely active in Colorado 4-H
- 32% somewhat or moderately involved in Colorado 4-H
- 20% live outside of Colorado
- 12% live in Colorado but are not involved in Colorado 4-H

**Affiliation to the Colorado 4-H Horse Project**

- 30% were Colorado 4-H horse leaders
- 20% were Colorado Extension Agents
- 4% were Colorado project members
- 46% were other interested parties (i.e. out of state affiliates, horse owners, judges, farriers, level raters, horse council Representatives, etc)

Not surprisingly, the majority of persons accessing the website were female from the state of Colorado. A previous survey summarizing the Colorado Equine Industry reports that the majority of equine participants in the state of Colorado are female (Colorado Horse Power, 1999). Surprisingly, the majority of those participating in the current survey were between the ages of 30-49 as previous surveys have reported that the majority of equine activity participants are between the ages of 8-19 (Colorado Horse Power, 1999). Since the purpose of the website was to more effectively communicate information regarding the Colorado 4-H Horse Project to youth, leaders and agents, it was nice to see that 36% of those responding to the survey considered themselves extremely active in the Colorado 4-H Horse Project, 50% of whom were either Colorado 4-H Horse Project leaders or county extension agents.

**Motivation for Accessing the Site**

The second objective of the study was to determine the motivation behind persons accessing the website. The motivation for accessing the site is represented in Table 1 and below.

**Source of website address**

- 50% of heard about the site through the Colorado State Extension Service
- 16% from a county agent
- 10% from a friend or horse leader
- 24% from other state extension offices, websites or 4-H seminars in Colorado

**Frequency of use**

- 64% of said they would visit the site occasionally
- 32% said they would visit regularly
- 4% said they wouldn't have a need to visit again

**Reasons for accessing the website**

- 40% to gain updated information
- 46% to find information they heard about elsewhere
- 4% to register for an event
- 10% to post information, access links, find judges, get updates

Since only 50% of the users heard about the site through the Colorado State Extension Service, this suggested the need for increased awareness of the

**Table 1: Colorado's Equine Extension website user's motivation for visiting the website.**

Statements	Frequency of Responses <sup>1</sup>					
	1	2	3	4	Mean	N
I accessed the CSU Equine Extension site with a specific purpose	15	30	3	2	1.84	50
I accessed the CSU Equine Extension site just to see what was on it	8	34	4	3	2.04	49
I actively sought out the CSU Equine Extension site	18	23	7	1	1.82	49

<sup>1</sup> Respondents used the following Likert-type scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree.

website, its use and its purpose. With 64% of persons responding to the survey conveying that they would visit the site occasionally indicated that the user felt the site was effective in its purpose and ability to

- 14% called their horse leader
- 10% called a friend or other source

The website appears to be an effective means of communicating information and can save instructors or extension personnel valuable time that would otherwise be spent on the phone. Additionally, most users felt they were more in touch with the State Extension Office because of the website (Table 3).

**Table 2: The effectiveness of the Colorado Equine Extension website to convey important information**

Statements	Frequency of Responses <sup>1</sup>					
	1	2	3	4	Mean	N
I think it is easy to find information on the Equine Extension site	18	21	8	2	1.88	49
I found all of the information I needed on the site	13	31	4	0	1.81	48
The information I found was easy to understand	18	26	1	1	1.67	46

<sup>1</sup> Respondents used the following Likert-type scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree.

convey useful information. The true measure of a website's success is its ability to attract return visitors. The website also appeared to be a good source of information as 86% of the users accessed the site to either gain updated information or obtain information they had been told was available on line. Additionally, Table 1 demonstrates that the majority of the visitors actively sought out the site with a specific purpose.

**Effectiveness of the Site in Conveying Information**

The third objective of the study was to determine the effectiveness of the site in conveying information that would have otherwise been mailed via hard copy. The effectiveness of the site in conveying information as perceived by those accessing the site is expressed in Table 2. Some of the users surveyed had difficulty finding the information they were seeking. Additional surveys will help to make the website easier for users to manipulate and locate the information they are seeking. A follow up survey to address these issues is in the developmental process.

**The Website as an Alternative Method of Communication**

The fourth objective of the study was to determine if the website serves as a good alternative to communicating with the state horse extension office. The effectiveness of the website in serving as a method of communication is summarized below and in Table 3.

**Had I not accessed the website to gain information, I would have –**

- 54% called their extension office
- 22% called their county extension agent

However, some survey respondents would still like to receive important information via hard copy (Table 3). As a compromise the website will now offer information not only online but also in PDF format which allows the user to access then print information. All information added to the site in the future will be available both in HTML and PDF format.

**The Importance of Information Contained on the Website**

The final objective of the study was to determine what information on the website was most important to those accessing the website. The most important and valuable aspects of the website to the user are summarized below.

**I think the most important information contained on the website is:**

- 20% - Colorado 4-H Horse Project information
- 13% - Event registration forms
- 13% - Youth study guides
- 13% - Advancement levels riding tests
- 10% - 4-H Horse Judges List
- 10% Calendar of events
- < 10% - Other lists, links, and news clips

Surveys will continue to be conducted to determine which information is important to be contained on the website and which information the user is not

**Table 3: The effectiveness of the Colorado Equine Extension website to serve as an alternative method of communication**

Statements	Frequency of Responses <sup>1</sup>					
	1	2	3	4	Mean	N
I would rather have information such as judges and raters lists on the Web site versus receiving the information hard copy	11	25	9	2	2.04	47
Because of the Web site, I feel like I'm more in touch with changes in the Colorado 4-H horse program	11	28	7	0	1.91	46
Because of the Web site, I feel as though I am more in touch with the state horse extension office in Colorado	15	27	6	0	1.81	48

<sup>1</sup> Respondents used the following Likert-type scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree.

## The Effectiveness

accessing. Additionally, a website counter will be employed to track the number of hits on each of the pages of the site. The website will continually be updated to reflect the interest and needs of the user.

## Summary

The majority of website users were female (72%) ranging in age from 30-49 (58%), and residing in the state of Colorado (76%). Most users (86%) accessed the website to find or gain updated information regarding the Colorado 4-H Horse Project. The information contained on the website was reported by most users (80%) to be easy to access. Most importantly, website users reported feeling more in touch with the state extension office (88%) and the Colorado 4-H Horse Project (85%) because of the website. Had the information not been contained on the Equine Extension website, 76% of users would have called the state or county extension office to obtain the information they needed.

Apparently, the Equine Extension website provides an effective means of communicating information regarding the Colorado 4-H Horse Project. Additionally, an Equine Extension website can be used to disseminate information and reduce the call volume to either a state or county level

extension office. Most users (77%) reported that they would rather be able to access the information via the website versus traditional methods of communication (i.e. hardcopy via mail).

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