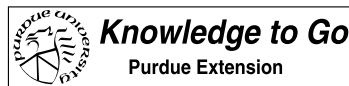


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e-Extension/USA— Building a Business Model



e-Extension/USA— Building a Business Model

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Summary

We propose to begin research and development on a business model for “e-Extension/USA,” an online educational service providing access to Land-Grant University (LGU) system expertise for a larger and more diverse set of target audiences than are currently served by the traditional Extension structure.

The project participants will conduct research and analysis on the economic viability of a new venture in the e-learning marketplace. Eight basic business plan segments will form the foundation of this research effort. At the end of the research phase, a development team will assemble a full business model for use with potential funding sources. The project includes a national decision-maker briefing to be held with Land-Grant system and associated leaders via satellite and two-way video upon completion of the business plan development workshop.

The critical question to be answered: Can we document and develop a plan, based on a sustainable balance of revenue generation and political capital, to create a viable new technology-based Land-Grant outreach system?

Background

Increasing Value of Information

Private-sector information providers such as crop advisors, business consultants, and private education and training providers are cropping up everywhere. They are attracted by revenue garnered by refining information to meet specific audience needs.

Access vs. Distribution



Extension has traditionally had a “provider mentality” focused on the process of distribution. It has been driven by what we want to distribute. A “user mentality” focuses on *access* and the customer. We now need to anticipate customer needs and provide them *access* to our knowledge base. Information technology is an access tool to meet these demands.

Extension No Longer Sole Provider

Extension has spent decades as a sole-source provider in many of the information and outreach markets it has chosen to establish. However, technology has created opportunities to provide and promote access to expertise and learning opportunities that weren’t realistic before. Because of this, the traditional education market is also more easily accessible for competitors—other universities, private education developers, and commercially based education and training organizations. Technology combined with open access to the rapidly expanding knowledge marketplace entices private information providers to step up the competition for learners who previously were dependent on Extension as a sole-source education provider.

Harvey Blustain (2000) says, “Few institutions have developed a coherent strategy for ensuring success in this new environment. Our fundamental contention here is that fainthearted attempts to test the waters will not hold back the tide of nontraditional competition.”

Disruptive Technologies

Christensen (2000) says, “Many of the most powerful innovations that disrupted other industries did so by enabling a larger population of less-skilled people to do, in a more convenient, less expensive setting, things that historically could be performed only by expensive specialists in centralized, inconvenient locations.” When you compare the distribution of traditional Extension educational programs to the access model of other providers—where you can obtain what you want, when you want it, in the convenience of your own home or business—clearly, we can be described as having “relatively expensive specialists in centralized, inconvenient locations.”

Expanded Reach *and* Increased Richness

The *richest* form of interaction with Extension educators has always been face-to-face (F2F). However, analyzing concepts developed by Evans and Wurster (2000), it appears *reaching* a mass audience with F2F *richness* requires more resources than Extension could ever generate. Amazon.com has shown us, however, that you *can* increase reach and richness, using technology to remember what a large number of individuals have ordered before and suggesting other books each might find interesting.

Navigation’s Importance

Evans and Wurster (2000) also say *reach*, even when it carries F2F *richness*, is just clutter without some form of navigation. Navigators can be software (Quicken), evaluators (*Consumer Reports*), or search engines (Google). However, Navigators can also be people. Evans and Wurster say private-sector information businesses acting as Navigators are driving fundamental power shifts among the other players,

such as Extension. Given the on-going privatization of information, if Extension does not respond, the private sector obviously will dominate. Navigation is not a new concept to Extension. Sorting information and helping people navigate to effective answers has been the foundation of the Extension system from the beginning. However, with the number of Web sites doubling every 100 days, the amount of information to navigate through is phenomenal.

Pressing Questions

Is This the Moment?

It is unclear whether traditional funding sources (state legislatures, USDA, other federal agencies) have the resources or the understanding to adequately support needed shifts in Land-Grant outreach in a timely fashion. Two years ago, John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems, said, “The biggest growth in the Internet will be e-learning.” In part, statements similar to that helped pump considerable funds into commercial e-learning startups.

However, according to Eduventures.com, a research firm analyzing the e-learning industry today, the flush of funds is over. Venture capital available is less than half what it was just three quarters earlier. Tom Stein (2001), writing in *Red Herring* magazine, said, “Too many e-learning startups have been funded. Not enough have produced results. The market is on the verge of vicious consolidation, and only a handful of companies will survive.”

Why are these companies failing, and why have their prospects dipped so dramatically? Most analysts agree they focused too much on infrastructure and not enough on content that satisfied learner needs. Portals have been the hardest hit, followed by software companies providing structure but not content.

Some e-learning companies are surviving. Notable among these are the e-learning companies Saba and Docent.com. They have continued growing in the downturn and consolidation because they aggregate content, instead of building infrastructure, and focus on specific strata of the corporate training market. They are providing training modules that address needs of working professionals and the corporations that employ them. Their survival through the consolidation has actually strengthened their competitive stance in the e-learning marketplace.

What Is Viability?

Our major concern is the on-going viability of Land-Grant outreach, in the form of Extension. What do we mean by viable? In the current competitive environment, viability relates directly to acquiring adequate funding and, through that funding, having a recognized positive impact on society. There are two factors involved in this equation: revenue and/or political capital. In order for Extension to generate either or both of these in adequate amounts to ensure long-term survival, we must expand our audience base from the current, and relatively narrow, traditional learner groups—who come to Extension from agriculture and family and consumer science audience segments—to much larger and more diverse target audiences such as working professionals and other so-called lifelong learners looking for upward competitiveness.

According to economist George McDowell (2001), there is a balance between political capital and

revenue. In many cases, you generate one or the other but not both at the same time. For instance, if you charge competitive user fees, you do not generate much political capital, even though in the short term your program may appear successful. If we in Extension increase user fees to finance the transition to the competitive marketplace, our current, more narrow, traditional audiences may not be inclined to generate enough political capital in the form legislative support to sustain Extension. Viability—meaning long-term survival and positive impact on society—will require a much broader audience base made up of individuals who place higher value on lifelong learning than current traditional Extension audiences. e-Extension/USA will target these new audiences. Our business plan research will focus identifying and quantifying the potential for success.

Will It Be a National System?

Some ask if we are talking about a national system under the auspices of the USDA or a model that can be adopted at the state level. The answer is purposely ambiguous. An effective competitor in the new knowledge marketplace will likely not be bound by geopolitical boundaries. Instead, by addressing the needs of *communities of interest*—which cross traditional boundaries to aggregate the needs of people with similar interests—the structure will form. Part of the proposed business plan research will focus on various structural options that provide the means of satisfying needs of communities interest—rather than geopolitical communities specifically—while maintaining the ability to build adequate political capital.

Why LGUs?

The question for Land-Grant universities is whether stepping up now will provide any different outcome from that of other e-learning enterprises. The proposed business plan will aggressively review the prospects. Land-Grant universities have the expertise to develop content, and Extension has the tradition and history of distributing education and information to learners away from campus. None of the current commercial players comes to the marketplace with that kind of expertise base and history. Can and should the LGUs step in from the sidelines and become a player? Can they compete in a marketplace where the rules are dramatically different than on-campus? This planning project is designed to assess these issues and, if possible, provide an implementable plan.

Conceptual Overview

Basics

Rather than reinvent from the inside, we propose creating from scratch a new virtual Extension Service: e-Extension/USA. Initial goals will be to match and surpass the current supply-oriented Extension distribution system with a demand-oriented anytime, anyplace, any-source access system.

Working with a virtual foundation on the World Wide Web and other telecommunication technologies, e-Extension/USA will attract new customers, new sources of information, and new developmental talent able to overcome the traditional barriers.

We will build on the positive brand identity of the Cooperative Extension Service, viewed as the larger



parent organization of e-Extension/USA. Brand identity will be maintained as Land-Grant faculty and specialists build and offer new educational modules focused on identified customer needs. We will follow up with ongoing audience analysis pinpointing the needs of “communities of interest” beyond traditional audiences.

Seed Money

In the process of developing the business plan we will analyze the potential of creating a seed-money, venture capital-like fund from major philanthropic foundations and corporations with national scope and presence. Corporate partners will be required to have a broad understanding of the value of science-based objective information and must not expect to “own” or control the flow of educational programming. e-Extension/USA will be a separate, public/private joint venture, but with clear public accountability and identity. It will have an “Extension inside” image and branding, much like “Intel-inside” in the computer industry.

Deliverables

If the business plan research indicates we should move ahead, we propose two initial deliverables as the foundation for e-Extension/USA. The first is a standards-based *Access Platform* designed to facilitate user/learner navigation to and through various information and educational opportunities. And the second is a *Protocol* for what information will be accessible through the e-Extension/USA access platform.

The *Access Platform* will focus on the intersection of user/learner needs with information access. Gary Rieschel, president of Softbank Venture Capital, says “We are now at a point where infrastructure and the content are colliding in a positive way with what users want.” The research supporting the business plan will help identify the impact of that collision through on-going learner needs assessment. The *Protocol* will establish the method to effectively help providers connect with learners.

The Critical Question

The critical question will be: Can we document—in a fashion that will convince potential funding sources—the need for, and our ability to develop, a new technology-based, possibly self-sustaining, outreach system for the Land-Grant/USDA partnership? Can we show how something can be built that will take advantage of our traditional experience base, be competitive and self-sustaining in the new marketplace, and at the same time provide access to Land-Grant system expertise and experience that provides true benefit to lifelong learners?

To be successful, e-Extension/USA must balance the ability to generate adequate revenue with the ability to develop and maintain effective political capital. The area of revenue generation may be the most problematic. Are there ways of developing an adequate revenue stream to make this effort viable? Current and past examples of both commercial and not-for-profit enterprises will be examined.

Population to Be Served and Target Audience

In this initial planning process we will develop a business plan for e-Extension/USA that is targeted for decision makers within corporate groups, philanthropic foundations, and the leadership of the Land-Grant university system.

The ultimate product of the planning process, e-Extension/USA, will serve large and diverse populations of people at various times. The target audience will have two points of segmentation. One will be access to technology. The other will be a need for information at a specific time. e-Extension/USA will *not* try to be all things to all people, all the time. Depending on specifically assembled audience needs, the educational opportunities and those accessing it will shift over time.

The overall amount of potential information and educational opportunities is staggering, as is the potential size of the audience of customers for that content. Specific needs assessment linked with content developed from the areas of competitive advantage within the Land-Grant university system will dictate, in part, what audience segment is targeted at what time. The controlling factor will be the ability to secure needed resources—fiscal and human expertise—to develop the needed content at that time.

The Digital Divide

e-Extension/USA's ability to aggregate learning opportunities and help people navigate through the sea of available information is inherently supportive of all efforts to bridge the "Digital Divide"—the chasm between those who have the access and ability to use information technology and those who do not. As various grant programs directed toward providing wider access to computing hardware continue to provide resources to groups aggressively attempting to directly address the Digital Divide, having a single navigable site available for LGU information, answers, and learning modules will magnify the impact and value of all these programs.

However, even though the historical responsibility of Extension has been to address the educational and information needs of groups of people who for various reasons—fiscal, social, geographic—cannot easily gain access to educational resources, the e-Extension/USA project is not initially designed to address the Digital Divide, per se.

Our goal is to basically pay attention to "first things first." We hope to expand access to new and diverse audiences that will provide both revenue and political capital to rebuild the foundation of the Extension brand identity. Then, once stabilized, the parent organization can improve its effort to expand access to those populations not yet well served by information technology.

Planning Process Details

Business Plan Outline

The following issues will form the foundation of the research effort to develop the business plan. The information gathered under each section of the business plan outline will provide the substance of the plan.

I) Organizational Analysis

- A. Conceptual profile of the organizations involved
 - 1. New: e-Extension/USA
 - 2. Parent: Cooperative Extension Service
- B. Past accomplishments
- C. Unique qualifications

II) E-learning Industry Analysis

- A. Market size
- B. Trends
- C. Industry-wide customer and competitor analysis
- D. Data sources

III) Customer Analysis

- A. Customer identification/definition
- B. Customer demographics
- C. Needs assessment
- D. Secondary customers (customers of our customers)
- E. Potential partners

IV) Competitor Analysis

- A. Define competition
- B. Identify competitive advantages

V) Marketing Plan

- A. Products and Services
- B. Promotion possibilities
- C. Price analysis
- D. Distribution/access network
- E. Factors in customer retention
- F. Marketing partnerships

VI) Operations Plan

- A. Short-term processes required to begin operation
- B. Longer-term processes required to continue operation
- C. Product development

VII) Management Team

- A. Description of key management team members
- B. Board of directors
 1. Description of areas of involvement of each member
 2. Methods of soliciting members

VIII) Financial Plan

- A. Detailed description of potential revenue stream options
- B. Sources of funds
- C. Uses of funds
- D. “Go/No Go” criteria

Additional Questions Crossing Business Plan Segments

- How do we keep joint ventures with the private sector from jeopardizing Extension objectivity and credibility?
- Is self-sustaining status a required goal?
- Are there enough faculty/staff willing to work within this unique structure to meet audience demands for learning modules?
- How do we effectively grow beyond the current geopolitical boundaries to meet the demands of larger and more diverse communities of interest and audiences that are not bound by geography?
- Can we predict user needs far enough in advance to have competitive learning modules available as needs arise?
- Will the LGU system provide adequate support for a non-traditional consortium-based enterprise such as this?

Evaluation/Dissemination/Assessment

An outside consultant will be available throughout research and development of the business plan to review on-going research and resources that will contribute to the plan. The consultant will also critique the plan during the development workshop and prior to the national briefing.

The project will culminate in a national interactive briefing and review by the leadership of the LGU system and associated foundations and consortia such as Kellogg and ADEC. This national briefing and subsequent review will be held on site at the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System headquarters in Indianapolis as well as be made available via satellite and two-way video to sites around the country. Land-Grant leadership such as the chair of ECOP, the chair of the Board on Agriculture, the chair of the 21st Century Extension committee, selected deans and vice presidents, and select individuals representing other organizations and associated foundations will be individually invited to participate. The interactive briefing will include the opportunity for critique and input by the LGU system leaders

and others on specifics of the plan and potential methods of implementation. After the national briefing and review, the leaders will be offered the opportunities to schedule specific briefings for the organizations and committees they represent.

Long-term evaluation will be based on our success in raising capital and soliciting partners to ultimately implement the business plan and establish the next generation Extension.

Conclusion

This is an effort to recast Extension as a knowledge marketplace competitor. Extension faces a difficult transition into a competitive marketplace environment—an environment that in some ways is dramatically different than the environment just 10 years ago. Aspects of this information marketplace are changing so fast that, if Extension does not have a realistic business plan built from effective market research to provide direction, it is questionable how long it will remain viable, even with its long history of success. Perhaps, in fact, it is exactly this long history of success that will make the transition more difficult.

Looking at the impact of this project on a broader basis, we will define the terms on which success will be (re)established and provide a vision for strategic planning and tactics to help ensure long-term survival of not only Extension but the LGU system as a whole.

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Addendum One

Market Analysis Structure

- **Selected Potential Audiences**
 - Financial professionals
 - Corporate HR directors
 - International business and other professionals
 - K-12 teachers
 - Gov't agency administrators and staff.
 - Local and regional leaders
 - Consumers
 - Journalists
 - Accountants
 - Lawyers
 - Health Care Providers
 - Clergy
 - Manufacturing leaders and employees
 - Special interest groups
 - High School students
 - College students
 - Higher education instructors
 - Corporate trainers
 - Business owners and employees
 - Natural resource professionals
 - Agribusiness: sales marketing, development

- **Selected Potential Messages**
 - Access to global expertise
 - Professional development
 - Issue-based answers
 - Various training programs
 - Future visioning
 - Workforce development
 - Leadership training
 - Information empowering consumers

- **Selected Potential Networks and Media**
 - Internet
 - World Wide Web
 - Video conferencing
 - Audio conferencing
 - Personal digital assistants
 - Advanced “wearable” computers
 - CD-rom
 - Satellite Video
 - Video tape
 - State-based digital telecommunication networks
 - Other

Addendum Two Timeline

Months One to Six

1. Development Team will be assembled, and each member will be assigned a research area. Each will be responsible for aggregating and helping analyze information and research for a portion of the seven segments of the business plan. Two to three days per month for six months will be required.
2. P.I.'s will meet weekly to review resources and research progress.
3. A development team listserv and a Web-based repository for research information will be established at Purdue University within the Department of Agricultural Communication. This will be developed and managed by partial appointment within Ag. Comm. Staff support will also begin developing the initial Web presence for e-Extension/USA so that others outside the development team will be able to follow and track ongoing research and business plan development progress. This will include initial development of an access platform for demonstration purposes.

Month Two

4. Professional support and counsel will be secured to support overall business plan development. This support will come from outside resources such as Growthink.com or ActIV, Harvey Blustain, principal. Services will be secured within the first two months of the research phase to review assembled research, suggest possible additional sources, and help narrow the focus to essential information required to make the decision on implementation. This resource will also be asked to review the final draft of the business plan.

Months Two to Five

5. Development Team members will deposit various pieces of research and information when assembled in the central repository for ongoing team review. Twice-monthly conference calls will be held to track ongoing progress and share concerns and ideas. The listserv will be used to alert team

members to new information available for review. It is anticipated that some if not most of the information aggregated may be redundant. Ongoing communication will help reduce duplicative effort.

6. It is likely during the research and aggregation phase that certain information sources will have to be purchased. It is also likely that during this phase holes in the required data will be identified. The PI's will review each request and purchase or commission independent research to help full the needs.

Month Six

7. At the end of the research phase, the development team will assemble at Purdue University for a three-day workshop to build the final draft of the business plan. Overall issues will be reviewed with the outside resource. Each segment of the business plan will be written and combined into the final draft on site, as will presentation graphics. At the end of the three-day session the final draft will be complete, "Go/No Go" options will be reviewed if appropriate, and a strategy for fund raising will be agreed upon.

Months Six to Twelve

8. Upon completion of the business plan workshop, a national briefing will be scheduled and held for the leaders of the LGU system and others representing associated organizations, consortia, and foundations, such as Kellogg Foundation, ADEC, and potential corporate partners. Selected deans and vice presidents from the LGU system will also be invited to participate in the briefing and review. The briefing will be held on-site in Indianapolis at the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System headquarters for those who wish to travel to participate in person. It will be simultaneously available around the country via satellite and two-way video for any of the leaders who wish to participate from their home locations.
9. We will offer to brief the members of the committees and the organizations these leaders represent over the following six months to help gain the critical mass of support from within the LGU system for effective fund raising.

Addendum Three Development Team

The Development Team will be assembled from a pool of individuals who have indicated an interest in contributing to the development of the next generation of Extension. Each brings unique capabilities to the team, but each also shares a fundamental ability for creative thinking. Each has committed 12 days during a six-month period to the research and development effort.

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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

David Watkins, Communications Consultant
i/e graphics
Ithaca, NY

**Addendum Four
e-Extension/USA—
Building a Business Model
Budget Detail**

<i>Assistance Requested:</i>	<i>\$87,550 Phase One</i>
	<i><u>\$75,000 Phase Two</u></i>
	<i>\$162,550 total</i>
<u>In-kind Support</u>	<u>\$134,400</u>
Total Cost of Proposed Research and Development Project:	\$296,950

Phase One Budget Narrative

Project Management \$10,000

Support to reimburse IHETS for project management release time.

Tech Support \$12,000

Professional Web development support will be acquired through the Agricultural Communication department at Purdue University. The 0.23 FTE will used to develop and maintain the repository for research and other resources, establish and maintain a Development Team listserv and other communication opportunities, and establish an initial Web presence for e-Extension/USA including preliminary development of the access platform and protocol.

Developing and maintaining listservs/chat rooms

Developing and maintaining Web presence for planning project as well as initial Web presence of e-Extension/USA

Travel, \$9,050

Travel for Potential Partner Discussions

The Principal Investigators will travel to the San Jose, California area to meet with representatives of leading e-learning companies, Saba and Docent.com to review their procedures and explore possible partnership options.

- o \$2,250
 - Airfare Indy to San Jose \$500 X 2 = \$1000
 - Lodging/Per Diem for 3 days \$500 X 2 = \$1000
 - Rental Car for 3 days \$250

Support for Development Team Workshop

We will provide each Development Team member from outside Indiana a \$800 stipend to offset travel expenses for the final business plan development workshop to be held at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, and at the IHETS headquarters in Indianapolis. We will use additional funds for room



rental and computer equipment support needed to develop the business plan on-site at Purdue University.

- \$8,800 — Each of the 11 out-of-state Design Team members will be provided a \$800 stipend to defray costs associate with travel, lodging, per diem for the final work session.

All Other Direct Costs \$56,500

Contractual Services

To bring outside professional input into the business plan development we will sub-contract for consulting support with a group such as Growthink.com or ActIV (Harvey Blustain).

Outside consultant — \$15,000

In addition, in specific areas where we cannot obtain publicly available research, we will sub-contract with a survey research center such as those at Indiana University or Oregon State University to conduct original research to generate decision data required to complete the business plan. This may include, for instance, information on the needs and motivations of professionals seeking a more competitive footing in current or future jobs.

- Survey research — \$20,000

We will use approximately \$15,000 to secure access and rights to completed proprietary research on our target audiences and technology adoption.

- Purchased access to existing data — \$15,000

National Briefing for LGU System and Other Leaders

The national briefing will be held on-site in Indianapolis at the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System headquarters. We will also be able from this site to provide one-way video, two-way audio via satellite, and two-way video via ATM, IP, or ISDN video connections. This will allow leaders to participate in an interactive briefing from various locations around the country. We plan to obtain satellite transponder time via ADEC. We will use the satellite uplink at Indiana University/Purdue University/Indianapolis (IUPUI). The funds for two-way support will help make adequate connections and find receive facilities for two-way inter-connections at the locations identified by the various LGU system and other leaders who will participate.

- Satellite transponder time — \$2000

- Satellite uplink fee — \$500

- Two-way video access (T1/ISDN) — \$2000

- Satellite uplink fee — \$2000

Cost Sharing \$85,000

Other Sources of Funds

Development Team In-Kind Support

In-kind consulting time from 14 Development Team members
(12 days during six months X 14 people X \$800/day)

- \$134,400

Phase Two Budget Narrative

From within the Land-Grant system, we will develop three prototype learning modules for use as examples in fund raising. One will address a need clearly identified with a traditional Extension audience segment, and two additional modules will address issues and concerns of two non-traditional audience segments.

Production cost:

\$25,000 each

\$75,000 total



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