It’s a legacy with roots that go all the way back to the mid-1920s, when then-Extension publicist and future Director P.O. Davis and a young engineer laid the foundations of WAPI, one of the nation’s first educational broadcasting stations.

Some things never change. More than 80 years later, Alabama is still leading the way, using cutting-edge technology to reach diverse audiences with critical knowledge and new ways of thinking—a legacy that is now reflected in our growing presence on the World Wide Web.

Our Web site, www.aces.edu, is one of the 10 most heavily trafficked Extension sites in the nation, according to www.alexa.com. Some 3.7 million visitors worldwide accessed the site in 2007—almost 8.8 million page views in all.

Popular resources on the site include the publications and streaming video libraries, the online calendar of events, and materials dealing with emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. Other popular stops are the Urban and New Nontraditional Programs page and the Alabama Water Quality Information System, one of the nation’s most definitive sources of information on water use and quality.

Alabama Extension also is leading the way in Weblogging—blogging, as it is popularly known—as a timely, cost-effective way to educate our audiences. Extension Daily, one of the oldest Extension-related Weblogs in the nation, is widely used by Alabama print and broadcast media for timely information related to agriculture, food safety, nutrition, and other quality-of-life issues.

Backyard Wisdom, a horticulture Weblog, serves as an online companion to our popular gardening program on Alabama Public Radio.

Alabama Extension educators also are leading much of the rest of the nation in developing blogs for their own distinctive audiences.

A regional horticultural Extension agent recently launched Heart of Dixie Gardener to complement his highly popular gardening column in The Birmingham News. Meanwhile, an Extension administrator and Internet technology expert is using her blog, Anne’s Spot, to educate Cooperative Extension professionals and other outreach educators throughout the world about the implications of blogging and other social networking technologies.

Extension also is reaching a new generation of information users through resources posted on Wikipedia and YouTube. Alabama Extension also helped lay the groundwork for eXtension.org, a national collaborative Cooperative Extension effort that is poised to become one of the world’s premier sources of online information and social networking.

Additionally, Extension was an early adopter of digital plant diagnostics. Plant diagnostic facilities at the C. Beaty Hanna Horticulture and Environmental Center, at six Regional Research and Extension Centers, and in more than 25 county Extension offices provide farmers and homeowners with rapid detection of plant-borne diseases.

But even in the midst of all these dizzying changes, some things haven’t changed—our emphasis on one-to-one interaction. Much as Davis organized radio listening clubs throughout the state to reach new audiences in the 1920s, Alabama has established 33 interactive videoconferencing sites in offices throughout the state, serving as accessible facilities where clients can view educational and certification programs via the Internet. More than 4,000 people participated in these videoconferences last year.

Even as we strive to retain our place at the cutting edge of technological change, we will never lose sight of the one trait that has always distinguished Cooperative Extension work—the human touch.