



EX-0116

A Social Media Call to Action

A Commentary by Jim Langcuster

Our Legacy

Seaman Knapp and Booker T. Washington were two men of different races and starkly different backgrounds who shared one all-consuming passion—Cooperative Extension work.

They were knowledge pioneers—vanguards of knowledge transfer, innovation, and change. Much of what they pioneered was adopted the world over to help people make lasting, meaningful changes in their workplaces and even in their personal lives.

In addition to their outreach work, these men left another enduring legacy: their values. They lived roughly a hundred years ago, but they anticipated many of the values we cherish today. They didn't view their clients as passive subjects. They actively sought their advice. They saw them as active collaborators in their work. They viewed them as equals.

This genuine, deep-felt regard for those they served quickly developed into a hallmark of Extension work.

They secured a proud legacy, one in which twenty-first century Extension professionals justifiably take pride. But this legacy should not detract from the challenges we currently face.

Today, our historic roles as knowledge providers, innovators and change agents are under threat.

Make that dire threat.



Booker T. Washington, American Educator and Extension Pioneer

Our Challenge

As the twenty-first century advances, we are steadily losing ground on the very turf we once largely pioneered—the knowledge and innovation landscape.

Decades ago, we were one of an elite handful of knowledge providers. Today we are only one among tens of millions of sources across the planet—

human and virtual alike—fostering innovation and change through knowledge transfer.

The techniques we have used to dominate that landscape—face-to-face encounters and traditional print and broadcast media, for example—are being replaced by a new information order in which online sources of knowledge accessed literally at the speed of light out compete everything.

Is it any wonder why *New York Times* columnist and author Thomas Friedman refers to this new knowledge landscape as the “flat world”?

The availability of so much information explains why we're being shoved off the turf we once considered almost exclusively our own. And here's the really scary part: We face the real risk of extinction unless we learn to operate effectively within this increasingly crowded landscape and in ways that distinguish us from tens of millions of others.



Online tools that enable users to access knowledge literally at the speed of light are replacing the tools Extension educators once used to dominate the knowledge landscape.



ATMs are only the beginning: The rapid advances in artificial intelligence may soon result in machines capable of replacing highly trained specialists and educators.

Changing Rules

Even the rules of competition are changing. To an increasing degree, success is based far less on power and efficiency and far more on how well one develops the best values and talents to compete within this flat knowledge landscape.

As it turns out, this may be only the beginning of our challenges. Automated teller machines have already put many bank tellers out of business. An updated version of the ATM threatens to put us out of business as well.

For the first time in history, technology is available that can replace the human dimension entirely—not only employees who tag merchandise along shopping aisles or process it at checkout counters but even experts who spent years acquiring expertise in disciplines such as economics, horticulture and nutrition.

HAL in Real Life

How is this possible? Because machines are making rapid progress in natural language processing. In a manner of speaking, they are able to understand and process human language much the way we do.

HAL the computer is no longer the stuff of science fiction fantasy. He's not only real but he's breathing down our necks—a fact driven home by a recent *Jeopardy* competition when an IBM computer



IBM supercomputer Watson's victory over *Jeopardy* contestants Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter is only a foreshadowing of the rapid advances in artificial intelligence projected in the next few decades.*

system named Watson handily defeated two of the all-time best human *Jeopardy* players.

These advancements can even cause people involved in artificial intelligence research to worry, according to John Markoff of the *New York Times*. The pace of artificial intelligence is occurring so rapidly that it threatens to overrun many areas of the economy that previously seemed immune to it, Markoff claims.

These rapid advances could have many implications for everyone in higher education. We Extension professionals are no exception.

Writing in the *New York Times* recently, San Jose State University business professor Randall Stross expressed the issue in stark terms, "When colleges and universities finally decide to make full use of the Internet, most professors will lose their jobs."

He's speaking the truth—an inconvenient if not painful truth—for many of us. In fact, some of the smartest people on the planet, including computer mogul Bill Gates, are asking why someone hasn't stepped forward with an online educational approach.

And when he speaks of online education, he isn't referring to the hybrid fare in which professors integrate some facets of virtual learning into conventional classroom lectures. Quite the contrary, he's talking about a completely virtual system that can provide every facet of a college education, including grading.

And that raises the disturbing question: If HAL threatens college professors, can Extension educators be far behind? Truth is, we have a fight on our hands—perhaps the biggest fight in our 100-year history. Our survival will depend on how well we reequip ourselves to work with our diverse audiences in this new knowledge landscape.

There is still a place for educators—networked, engaged educators—who not only inspire their clients but also help them learn and adapt in this flatter knowledge arena.

Yes, hope still exists as long as we acquire the values and talents of the twenty-first century—the right-brain, high-touch values represented by creativity, empathy, and, most important, the ability to see the big picture. Our prospects for survival depend on how readily and effectively we adopt these values.

The Solution: Fully Engaged, Networked Extension Educators

Of course, acquiring these new values and talents isn't enough. We must become comfortable enough with them to ensure that they are integrated into every facet of our outreach work. This shift will call for dramatic change in the way we deal with our clients. In the future, the simple transfer of knowledge will no longer be enough.

We flesh-and-bone knowledge purveyors are simply being outgunned by virtual knowledge providers. There is no denying this fact. We can't provide knowledge in the volume or at the speed of virtual sources. That's the bad news.

Our Trump Card

The good news is that we still possess one trump card. Despite all the advances associated with search engines and other online knowledge sources, we can still supply our audiences with something search engines can't: knowledge in deep and enriched context—working knowledge that enhances lives in lasting, meaningful ways.

We hold another distinct advantage. To an increasing degree, wiki knowledge, which emphasizes the power of collaborative wisdom and learning, is being adopted by everyone from global companies to educational institutions.



We are fast approaching the point at which all facets of a college education can be offered exclusively online.

The work of Seaman Knapp and Booker T. Washington were early forerunners of this collaborative, empowering learning. Our long-standing experience gives us a distinct competitive advantage in this new landscape.

Merging Old with New

Yes, traditional Extension methods—field days, conferences, workshops, printed materials, newspaper articles, video news releases—still have a place, and they will still play a role in fulfilling our mission. But they won't be enough to ensure our survival.



Christian Brodbeck, Auburn University research engineer, left, demonstrates a tractor fully equipped with precision farming technology.

We must transform ourselves into an entirely new kind of educator—a fully engaged, fully networked educator who uses social media two ways: to disseminate knowledge to a much larger audience and to develop two-way, reciprocal relationships with those audiences.

The good news is that we're already halfway there. An essential building block already exists: the face-to-face relationships we've built over the course of our careers. In time, we'll learn to use these experiences to enhance our social media effectiveness.

One Extension educator who is already fully engaged and networked through applications such as Facebook and Twitter has already learned this lesson. He's also learned something equally as valuable: the wider perspectives he's gained from social media contacts around the country and around the world have enriched his face-to-face interactions with clients.

This underscores one of the most valuable but largely overlooked lessons associated with social media. They extend our reach to wider audiences, while enriching our relationships with our traditional client base.

In the process of learning this lesson and many others, we will change what it means to be an Extension educator. Social media will help us develop active, collaborative relationships with our clients and help us regain our competitive advantage over other knowledge providers.



John Fulton, an Alabama Extension precision farming specialist, uses several types of social media to keep farmers across the planet updated on the rapid advances in his field.

Hallmarks of the Twenty-First Century: Engaged, Networked Extension Educators

How will these new values and talents be reflected in our work as Extension professionals? What will a fully engaged, networked Extension educator look like?

Collaborators

We will recognize our clients for what they have become in this flat-world knowledge landscape: equals. Social media—and the growing emphasis on the right-brain, high-touch values that accompany it—will work to reinforce this new reality.

Our clients will increasingly become active collaborators in the production of our knowledge products—prosumers, to use a popular twenty-first century term. The services and products that we create will be through mutual collaboration and subject to change not only by us but also by our clients.

Empathizers

We will become empathizers.

Our long-standing expertise with face-to-face relationships, coupled with our increasing use of social media, will result in our becoming more empathetic to our clients' needs and in a way that will distinguish us from other innovators and change agents.

More than ever in our history, our professional values will be grounded on a solid foundation of responsibility and trust. We will develop an even keener appreciation for the important role these two virtues play in the day-to-day interaction with our audiences.

Catalysts

Many of our clients are already fully wired into the flat world and are as readily exposed as we are to new ideas and new ways of thinking. Many have already adopted social media tools and can exchange information as quickly as we Extension professionals can.

But we still play a valuable role as catalysts, trained experts who not only see the larger picture but who also can point our clients to cost-effective solutions that have not been fully explored because of time constraints or other factors.

Synthesizers and Synergists

We will also operate as synthesizers, who will use social media as effective ways to help our clients not only understand complex information but also how to fit it into a wider context. Also, in the course of becoming synthesizers, we will develop a keener appreciation for the value of working across multidisciplinary lines.

The world needs synergists too—people who make things happen, who have the connection to ensure that ideas are translated into practical action and results.

Our long-time experience with forging and cultivating partnerships among disparate groups has often enabled us to succeed where others have failed. Time and again, we Extension professionals have provided the much-needed impetus to ensure that ideas move from the drawing board to the assembly room and ultimately to the end user.

Innovators and Transformers

The widespread adoption and use of social media will enhance our role as innovators. We will develop a renewed passion for new thinking as well as a deeper understanding of how technological advances secure new opportunities for stronger, more enriched relationships with our clients.

We will also understand that simply educating our clients will no longer be enough.

We will be transformers too. We will use social media and the open environments they provide to create transformative relationships with and among our clients.

In the course of building these transformative relationships, we will also accumulate social capital, which will prove every bit as important to our organizational future as the funding we secure through public and private sources.

A Charge to Keep

Even in this era of stringent budget cutting and rapid social and technological change, we Extension professionals still have a charge to keep and a relevant role to serve.

Our long-standing appreciation for dialogue, forging partnerships and empowerment distinguishes us from many other public and private entities and, to a significant degree, uniquely equips us for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

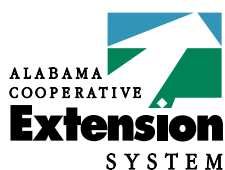
Even so, we still have plenty of work cut out for us. Our challenge today is striking a balance between the old and the new—those time-tested values that always distinguished us from others and that account for our uniqueness over the past century versus the new twenty-first century values that will ensure our survival.

There is still a place for Extension educators, but only if we transform ourselves into networked and engaged educators—people who not only inspire their clients but also help them learn and adapt within this radically new world and flattened knowledge landscape.

 Find a video version of this publication at www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBFvQI6Phvg.



Hayes Jackson, Extension Urban regional agent, discusses plant identification with young women involved in an educational horticulture project.



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Jim Langcuster, *Specialist, Extension Communications and Marketing*, Auburn University, is assisting with social media educational efforts in Extension.

*Photo Credit: The screen shot of the *Jeopardy* episode that appears on page 2 is used as part of critical commentary on the use of artificial intelligence and in compliance with intellectual property fair use standards.

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