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Publication distribution research: Planning and evaluation of public outreach

The objective of this research was to plan, implement, and evaluate the distribution of a rural tourism map of the Mississippi River Hills region. The Mississippi River Hills, located in southeast Missouri, is the pilot region of the Missouri Regional Cuisines Project (<http://extension.missouri.edu/cuisines/>). The project markets regional wine and agricultural products based on regional identity and a distinctive label of origin. The presentation traces four steps involved in distribution of the map: 1) identifying distribution points and planning the distribution, 2) publicizing the distribution, 3) evaluating media coverage, and 4) evaluating the economic impact on the businesses due to increased regional tourism encouraged by the map. Distribution points identified included regional businesses, Extension offices, Chambers of Commerce, Electric Cooperatives, Farm Bureau offices, and Tourism Centers, as well as some stores in St. Louis. To plan the distribution, we developed a site list and contacted the sites to determine how many maps they would distribute. The distribution plan successfully directed over 30,000 maps to appropriate distribution outlets. Publicizing the distribution included identifying and contacting media outlets which would be most interested in printing stories about the project and the map. Story ideas appropriate to media outlets were developed and made available to them. Due to our publicity efforts, the project's name and stories about the map have appeared in newspaper and magazine articles across the state. Evaluating media coverage included using the web to gauge afterward how well they picked up the story for print. Evaluating the economic impact of the project involved determining how the project affected tourism revenues in the region at participating businesses. A research protocol was developed and used to contact regional businesses to determine whether the map and project increased the number of customers they received and to what degree.