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A MEASURE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SERVICE IMPROVEMENT
VIDEO USED IN THE FISCAL YEAR 1997 COMMUNICATIONS
PLAN FOR THE ALLEGHENY AREA OF THE USPS

by
Raymond V. Daiutolo

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan University
May 2, 1997

Approved by _____

Date Approved 5/1/97

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To Dr. Steve Shapiro, my advisor, from whom I drew the greatest strength. His knowledge and dedication have inspired me and have left an everlasting impression on me personally and professionally.

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--R.D.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Mini Abstract	3
Chapter 1	
Introduction	4
A Design to Improve Communication: Internal Reorganization	7
Communicating and Training Employees	8
Need For The Study	9
EXFC: Measuring Service Performance	12
Related Literature	15
Can Video Support Employee Communication Successfully?	16
Chapter 2	
Statement and Methodology	22
Chapter 3	
Data	25
Survey Results	25
Focus Panels Results	26
Informal Interviews	30
EXFC Scores	31
Chapter 4	
Conclusions	33
An Explanation of the Research	34
Is Video Practical	35
Chapter 5	
Suggestions For Further Study	39
Bibliography	40

Abstract

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Steve Shapiro
Public Relations

This project measured the effectiveness of a service improvement video prepared by the U.S. Postal Service's Allegheny Area Corporate Relations department. The video was directed at the letter carrier craft and disseminated to the ten postal districts comprising the Allegheny Area in October 1996.

Information searches for relevant literature were conducted through several databases cataloguing books, periodicals, journals and articles with the use of video communication as part of an employee awareness and training strategy.

This thesis activity reported on the effectiveness of the inaugural video using information collected from: interviews with South Jersey letter carriers; a survey of South Jersey letter carriers; two focus panels of South Jersey letter carriers; and EXFC results reported by the independent accounting firm, Price Waterhouse. The data compiled was analyzed to determine the overall success of the video strategy with recommendations for future video utilization.

Mini Abstract

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This project measured the effectiveness of a service improvement video prepared by the U.S. Postal Service's Allegheny Area Corporate Relations department. The video was directed at the letter carrier craft and disseminated to the ten postal districts comprising the Allegheny Area.

The data compiled was analyzed to determine the overall success of the video strategy, with recommendations for future video utilization.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1970, the Post Office Department of the United States became the United States Postal Service. By passing the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, Congress changed the agency into a quasi-governmental organization designed to emulate modern day business and operate without the assistance of taxpayer dollars. At that time the change was necessary, because the Postal Department was a debt ridden organization considered by many to be the most disorganized branch of the federal government.

Although the Act of 1970 was necessary and reasonably successful, at the time few people could foresee the dramatic change about to take place in the world of communication technology.

Today, people can communicate instantly by way of personal computers, the internet, facsimile machines (fax), and electronic mail. More and more individuals and businesses are moving away from hard copy communications to alternative technology.

The United States Postal Service relies on hard copy communications. So, how does the Postal Service continue as a practical provider of communications if its main product is disappearing? For the Postal Service, part of the answer is to provide enhanced service with overnight-committed First-Class Mail.

Over the last few years, the Postal Service succeeded in its effort to improve service. Under the guidance of Postmaster General Marvin Runyon, appointed in 1992, the Postal Service posted record levels of service performance and profit during the last few years. The influx of alternative technology enabled customers to benefit from the Postal Service's improved efficiency and economy. The price of mailing a letter is still one of the cheapest forms of communication available, and with enhanced levels of service, more reliable today than ever. Thus, the Postal Service endures because many customers continue to utilize its services.

A major impetus in the improvement of service is the renewed focus on employee communication and training. As it struggles to defend against known corporate competition, like UPS and FedEx, and the explosion of alternative technology, the Postal Service continues to focus its employees on the exigency of efficient mail service.

The modified training and communication program used by the Postal Service today relies on more face-to-face communication, reinforced in some instances by video, class instruction and scripted service talks. The renewed commitment to improved communication emanates from the very top.

With the implementation in 1996 of CustomerPerfect, the Postal Service's new approach to doing business, management sent a declaration to all employees. The organization would operate through a system focused on the three most important voices -- the voice of the customer, the voice of the business, and the voice of the employee. This new approach "is a cycle of linked activities and

processes driven by customer needs, established through teamwork, and measured through sophisticated indicators.”¹

Employee communications and training are significant details of the voice of the employee. In 1996, all managers participated in at least 20 hours of formal training. A major section of this training focused on communicating effectively. Additionally, an independent firm was contracted to survey employees about the quality of communications they were receiving. Now, a part of all management’s compensation is bound to effective communication.

According to Carole M. Howard, former vice-president of public relations at Reader’s Digest, good internal communication originates with upper management. “Good internal communications start with the personal commitment and individual involvement of senior executives. They set the tone and climate for communications throughout the company. Employees quickly sense phoniness -- as the country music song put it, ‘almost hearing the promises breaking.’ Management truly has to ‘walk the talk.’”²

The Postal Service employs approximately 750,000 people. As the nation’s largest civilian employer, communicating with that number of employees can be a complex task. Nevertheless, it is a task that the Postal Service must master.

Since his appointment, Postmaster General Marvin Runyon has engaged in a national campaign designed to embellish the credibility of the Postal Service.

¹ USPS, “CustomerPerfect! ...first time, every time,” Brochure, 1995

² Carole M. Howard, “Face-to-Face Communications: Payback Is Worth The Effort,” *Public Relations Quarterly*, Spring, 1996, p. 11

His vision demands that the organization be more aggressive, more high-tech, and significantly more efficient. Recent reports indicate that the Postal Service is delivering on that mandate. Currently, the agency is delivering overnight-committed First-Class Mail at record levels (90+% as of October 1996).

Moreover, Runyon forced the competition to take notice. The following quotation was taken from an article in the United Parcel Service's employee newsletter. "An aggressive, business-oriented leadership, a high-profile marketing campaign, and technological innovation have people taking notice. The USPS is on the move. Its goal is to have this eagle soaring at levels of service, profit, and efficiency like never before."³

A Design To Improve Communication: Internal Reorganization

To facilitate the new plan, Runyon's leadership team engineered a complete reorganization in 1992 to modernize the organizational structure of the Postal Service. The configuration was modified to promote higher efficiency and improved internal communications.

The new organizational design divided the country into ten major areas: Allegheny, Great Lakes, New York Metro, Northeast, Pacific, Mid-West, Mid-Atlantic, Southwest, Southeast and Western, each guided by a vice-president of operations. Individual areas are comprised of performance clusters, composed of many post offices and one or more processing facilities. Currently, there are 85

³ "To Soar Like An Eagle," *Inside The UPS*, July/August, 1996 pp. 11-13

performance clusters throughout the country. Each cluster is managed, in most instances, by a district manager of customer service and sales, responsible for the delivering post offices, and a plant manager, responsible for the processing facilities.

The new organizational structure provides each area the latitude to manage the training curriculum and communication schemes designed through the CustomerPerfect system at headquarters in Washington, DC. Blueprints are developed and provided to each area for refinement and application. Subsequently, each performance cluster is provided the plans for final deployment.

Communicating and training employees

To fortify the emphasis on face-to-face communication, many areas were encouraged to support front-line management with short instructional and informational videos. This year, the Allegheny Area designed a portion of its communication plan to include short videos. Developed and utilized properly, a short video can be an invaluable component of an organization's communication strategy. "PR professionals should work with Human Resources colleagues to develop training internally or arrange for managers to attend external courses. Then back up supervisors and managers with print, video, and electronic communications tools to reinforce the messages of face-to-face sessions."⁴

⁴ Carole M. Howard, "Face-to-Face Communications: Payback is Worth The Effort," *Public Relations Quarterly*, Spring, 1996, p. 13

Many modern companies accentuate their communication programs with video. Some companies, like Ford Motor Company, developed elaborate networks to air many programs.

Apparently, the Postal Service intends to stand by its commitment to enhanced employee communication. By affixing a portion of management's compensation to successful internal communication, the organization took a major step to secure credibility with all employees.

Supporting front line management with video to enhance communication is good theory, but the video program must be relevant, practical, and effective. Many practitioners also believe that effective videos are short. "You can have a lot of information on a video, but it must be very short to keep the viewers' attention," said Margaret-Ann Cole, a principal with Kwasha Lipton.⁵

The Need For The Study

As noted earlier, the extent of the Postal Service presents management obstacles to effective and total communication. The Allegheny Area is a large geographical region enveloping the entire states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and includes all of South Jersey, Zip Codes 080-084, and small portions of Kentucky and Indiana. The Area is comprised of ten performance clusters reporting to the Vice President of Operations. The performance clusters are: South Jersey, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Lancaster, Harrisburg, Erie, Columbus,

⁵ Ed McCarthy, "401(K) Communication: What Works Best," *Pension Management*, June 1, 1996, p.32

Cleveland, Cincinnati and Akron.

Businesses use of television and video for internal communication is an effective and relatively low-cost technique for quick, mass communication to a range of distant sites and is a great method for building and maintaining corporate culture in a widely dispersed organization.⁶

In an effort to duplicate the success of other large, widely dispersed organizations and accentuate communication and training, the Allegheny Area is testing the practicality of employing short videos in 1997 as a support mechanism for managers. If successful, the Area intends to expand this formula to many other operations. Although some video has been used in the past by the Postal Service, a video strategy was never scrutinized or maintained locally.

The purpose of this thesis activity was to measure and report the effectiveness of the inaugural video embraced by the Allegheny Area, and utilized in the South Jersey district. The information compiled provides beneficial details for area managers to use to determine the practicality and proficiency of a video supported communication strategy. Hence, the feedback collected should assist management in future decisions concerning the utilization of video as an integral component of any communication and training outline.

The first video tested was a service improvement video directed to the letter carrier craft, specifically "city delivery carriers." Unlike most rural carriers, letter carriers who customarily deliver mail, city delivery carriers are also

⁶ William Keenan Jr., "TV or not TV?", *Sales and Marketing Management*, March 1993, pp. 86-91

responsible for many procedures affecting successful mail collection.

This video, labeled "External First-Class Measurement," runs eight minutes and 13 seconds, and provides employees important details on how certain aspects of the letter carrier's assignments influence overnight-committed First-Class Mail performance. Because of the agency's renewed devotion to improving mail performance, local management desires tools to enhance employee awareness concerning mail collection and delivery operations. The Allegheny Area's Corporate Relations team is responding to this desire with video assisted messaging.

The cost of developing and producing the first video was between 10 and 12 thousand dollars. This price does not include the salaries of the postal employees involved in the writing, directing, editing, and final dissemination of the finished product.

To support local management efforts to communicate with letter carriers, the video was disseminated to a total of 1,191 delivery units throughout the Allegheny Area in October, 1996. These delivery units embody a total of 25,333 city delivery letter carriers (these figures represent fiscal year 1996 totals). Locally, the South Jersey district consists of 121 delivery units employing a total of 2,253 letter carriers. A brief letter from the Allegheny Area vice-president was included, requesting that the video be displayed for all employees. The letter noted the importance of postal operations associated with proper mail collection and delivery, and how these activities influence service performance and assessment.

Measuring Service Performance--EXFC

Improving service performance is one of the main objectives for the Postal Service. As the agency continues to develop new products and services, a major effort was set in motion to deliver overnight-committed First-Class Mail more efficiently and promptly. Under the principles of the Private Express Statutes, the Postal Service is extended the exclusive right to carry addressed letter mail. Because of this mandate to serve America, the agency is concerned with service performance and measurement. It is the Consumer Affairs Department's responsibility to measure the levels of service provided to customers.

To establish internal and external credibility in association with service measurement, the Postal Service engages the independent accounting firm Price Waterhouse to measure the timeliness of delivery for overnight-committed First-Class Mail. The initial contract was approved in 1990, with the conception originating from the Postmaster General's desire to develop a strategy to measure First-Class Mail service perceived by postal customers.

The service measurement system, known as External First-Class Measurement (EXFC), is designed to measure service performance of First-Class Mail experienced by customers. "Service performance is defined in two ways-- the percent of mail which arrives at its destination within a predefined service commitment standard, and the average number of days to deliver a letter from a specified destination (including adjustments for non-delivery days)."⁷ This

⁷ "1990 Proceedings of the Government Statistics Section", pp. 118-119

service measurement system interprets the reports of approximately two million pieces of test mail (as of FY'97) deposited annually in collection boxes.

Price Waterhouse inducts mail into the mail-stream six days each week, except holidays, through independent "droppers." Test pieces are mailed to 96 of the nation's largest cities and surrounding areas. The procedure used by Price Waterhouse measures the destinating service performance for each of these areas for their overnight-commitment zones.

The test pieces include First-Class letters, postcards, and flats, addressed to independent households and small businesses who report the date they receive the mail to Price Waterhouse. These results are compared with the Postal Service's service commitments to determine performance. The consumer advocate reports the results to the public each quarter.

Before the implementation of the EXFC system the Postal Service depended entirely on an in-house sampling procedure known as the Origin-Destination Information System (ODIS).

ODIS was originally designed as a sampling method to estimate volumes of different types of mail flow through the mail-stream. The system was later modified to include service performance measurement. ODIS measures the elapsed time in days between the postmark or meter date and the date the piece is available for delivery. ODIS tests are conducted daily in post offices all over the country. However, unlike EXFC, ODIS data are collected in postal facilities by postal employees. Hence, the potential for a credibility issue arises. "Although steps have been taken to ensure the independence of the postal data collection

staff, the potential exists for viewing this style of service performance measurement as the 'fox guarding the hen house.'"⁵

The credibility intrinsic to the EXFC system is the independent operation outside of the Postal Service. Foremost, the seeded mail-pieces are transparent to postal employees and no data collection is performed by postal employees. Furthermore, the EXFC articles are designed to simulate "normal" mail-pieces and have no identifiable markings, i.e., "Price Waterhouse," or "Test Mail" or any other markings that could influence handling.

The EXFC performance data has replaced ODIS as the source of First-Class Mail service performance reported by the Postal Service. The ODIS system continues, but only as a sampling method to compile useful data related to mail volume.

Postal management is committed to improving service performance. To the degree that now, managerial compensation is attached to successful EXFC performance. To remain competitive, Postmaster Runyon believes that the Postal Service must strive to provide Americans outstanding First-Class Mail delivery. "The voice of the customer has come through loud and clear," says Runyon. "America doesn't want a different Postal Service, it wants the one it has to be more businesslike and responsive to its needs."⁶

Although it's hard to predict the future at this time, current performance indicates that the Postal Service is striving to endure in the rapidly changing

⁵ "1990 Proceedings of the Government Statistics Section," 1990 pg. 119

⁶ "To Soar Like An Eagle," *Inside UPS*, July/August, 1996, pp. 11-13

communication marketplace. To date, the agency is delivering on Runyon's quest for enhanced service. As noted previously, the Postal Service is currently delivering overnight-committed First-Class Mail at record levels. "Americans demanded improved mail service and we delivered ... There were skeptics who said it couldn't be done. But we did it."¹⁰

Related Literature

Relevant literature associated with the use of video communication as part of an employee awareness and training strategy was found in several locations. The guidelines used in the search were limited to the question of using video as part of employee communication, internal communication, and employee training.

The ABI Global Business Directory in the On-line Data Base of the Rowan University Library was used to search for employee communication, training and video. The Global Directory features abstracts and articles from more than one-thousand academic, management, marketing, and business journals, and more than 350 international references.

When the categories of "employee" and "communication" were matched, one hundred and nineteen references were found. Twenty-one of these references were germane to this thesis. When the categories of "internal communication" and "training" were entered, the result was nine references, four of which were relevant to this analysis. Two of these were duplicates of the first search.

¹⁰ "Record level mail service delivered for a full year, announces Postmaster General," United States Postal Service News Release No. 84, October 3, 1996

Additional research was performed using the Wilson Business Abstracts On-Line Data Base at the university library. The categories "employee communication" and "visual aids" were matched, producing seventy-three references, ten of which were relevant.

A review of books in the on-line catalog at the Rowan Library revealed four relevant works using the search criterion employee communication and video, and internal communication and video. A review of this author's personal library revealed six books and articles relevant to this research project. A summary of the relevant findings is contained in the following section.

Can video successfully support employee communication?

All the materials reviewed by this author confirmed the advantages of using video to embellish communication plans. Many major business journals -- *Sales and Marketing Management*, *Training and Development Journal*, *Pensions and Investments*, *Planning Review* and *Employee Benefit Plan Review* have examined video assisted communication plans extensively.

In an article written by William Keenan Jr., in *Sales and Marketing Management* magazine, the author discusses the benefits of using television and video to communicate to a range of distant sites. According to Keenan, more than one-hundred businesses now use internal television networks, and the market for equipment, programming, and satellite transmission has reached \$350 million.

Providers of business TV services generally target big companies with a number of scattered office locations as potential users.¹¹

With the influx of electronics in the workplace today, many people believe that managers and employees used in videos must become more comfortable in front of the camera. With more and more companies taking advantage of the new electronic technology and using video to communicate, performers must refine their on-screen performances. "As corporate America moves toward electronic technology, the ability of professionals to perform well before a camera is important to the success of the organizations. A video project aimed at employees is a group effort, but the success of a well-written, well-produced, and well-edited piece ultimately depends on the on-camera performances."¹²

Correspondingly, the use of video for communications and training was extensively covered in communications, public relations, and personnel journals. In a review of the advantages received from genuine face-to-face communications, Carole Howard, former vice-president of public relations at *Reader's Digest* wrote about using technology to communicate up to date news to employees. "For generations employees have asked that they hear news first from the company and not the radio or TV report. In the past, when print was our main distribution vehicle, that goal could sometimes be hard to achieve. But today,

¹¹ William Keenan Jr., "TV or not TV," *Sales and Marketing Management*, March, 1995. pp. 86-91

¹² Carolyn Dickson, "Lights--Camera--Action," *Training and Development Journal*, October, 1990, pp. 48-52

technology makes it inexcusable for companies not to meet this obligation, even when staff are dispersed around the world."¹³

Managers responsible for developing and planning communication and training strategies must find the best mix of traditional devices and new-age technology. Video communication is a tool that can enhance communication schemes and save valuable time. An article written by Robert Carey in the periodical *Successful Meetings*, quotes Margaret C. Munroe, president of the Communications Media Management Association (CMMA) in Wheaton, Illinois: "Anyone who says that planners will lose the significance of their jobs because of advancing technology has it backwards. The more technology becomes involved with meetings, the more complex meetings become, and the greater the possibilities for delivering meeting content. Planners will be absolutely necessary."¹⁴ Carey's article endorses video communication as a practical reality today and a time-saving, cost-effective alternative to many traditional meetings, sessions or informative disseminations.

Larry Conley, manager of Ford Motor Company's FORDSTAR dealer communication network, located in Dearborn, Michigan, says: "The most important value to any firm is time. How do you most efficiently and effectively use people's time--do you put people in airplanes to move them to the trainer, or do you bring the trainer to them over technology."¹⁵

¹³ Carole M. Howard, "Face-to-Face Communications: Payback is Worth the Effort," *Public Relations Quarterly*, Spring, 1996, pg. 13

¹⁴ Robert Carey, "The Future is Here," *Successful Meetings*, April 1, 1996, pg. 41

¹⁵ *IBID*

Ford Motor Company takes full advantage of a video assisted communication's network. Ford decided in 1993 that it needed a broader format connecting not only its corporate sites, but its thousands of dealers as well. With a new Ford product coming out every nine weeks, that expertise had to reach people quickly. To add to this complication, 34 percent of Ford dealers are more than 100 miles from a Ford training center. By the end of 1996, all 6,000 Ford dealers in the United States and Canada were linked to FORDSTAR, a state of the art dealer communication video network.

Larry Conley is quick to point out that not all of Ford's training is done over the video satellite system. Much hands-on instruction still must take place, but the amount of travel to those centers for dealers and their technicians was cut by 50 percent. "We asked ourselves, if we were to intrude in the dealers' business day, would it help them, and would they watch?" Conley says. "The answer is a resounding yes. Corporate is tough in that they expect a return on investment in a reasonable amount of time. But this system is paying for itself fast. There are so many things you can't even tally up in monetary figures, like dealer confidence. The fruits from the video and interactive connections are huge."¹⁶

Communication, regardless of the channel utilized, is useless without credibility. Therefore, when communicating information to employees,

¹⁶ *IBID*

organizations have to utilize communications models that provide feedback. In his paper, "Crisis Communication, Getting Bad News to the Top," Richard Slovacek of North Central College in Illinois points out that the space shuttle Challenger disaster was a result of "bad news" (the vulnerability of the O-rings) not making its way to NASA's top decision makers. According to Slovacek, "Positive feedback typically encounters few encumbrances. ... The saying that 'bad news travels fast' may be true in some instances, but it does not often apply to negative upward communication. ... The bad news may often be transformed by some sort of organizational alchemy into good news before reaching the top."¹⁷

Many organizations using video provide employees a mechanism to respond. "Focus groups with the dealers now drive a lot of what we do," Conley says. "We're getting a lot of good ideas from these sessions with the dealers that we didn't used to."¹⁸

To be successful, organizational communication "must break the bastions of bureaucracy: hierarchy and turf. Communications should cross departments and levels and involve customers, vendors and other stakeholders."¹⁹ Employees must know how their performance contributes to the organization's mission. Executives must create new ways to communicate with employees. Participation and involvement are impossible without providing employees all the knowledge

¹⁷ Scott Kominkiewicz, "[Credibility.] It's not only what you say," *Communication World*, June 1, 1996, pp. 25-26

¹⁸ Robert Carey, "The Future is Here," *Successful Meetings*, April 1, 1996, pg. 48

¹⁹ Erik Van Slyke, "Cultural Change. Busting the Bureaucracy," *HR Focus*, July 1, 1996, pg. 16

and information they need. For successful organizations, communication must become a strength. Communication must be top to bottom, bottom to top, and side to side. With the availability of technology today, breaking down the common barriers to open communication is almost elementary. Managers must be vigilant of the importance of communication to success and of the importance of being active participants in the communication process.

Chapter 2

Thesis Statement and Methodology

Statement:

A measure of the effectiveness of a service improvement video used in the fiscal year 1997 communications plan for the Allegheny Area.

Methodology:

The EXFC video was distributed throughout the Allegheny Area at the beginning of October, 1996. In the South Jersey performance cluster, this dissemination included 121 delivery units – post offices, stations and branches – reaching 2,253 letter carriers.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the film's effectiveness, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques was performed in the South Jersey cluster. This research included two focus panels, informal interviews with letter carriers and managers, and a written survey of letter carriers. The research results were combined with the performance results of postal quarter one and postal quarter two, as reported by the independent accounting firm, Price Waterhouse.

The following methodology was followed to collect and measure data from primary and secondary research sources:

- 1.) EXFC scores reported by the independent firm Price Waterhouse were collected for the ten performance clusters in the Allegheny Area. Because the

video was disseminated in October 1996, the EXFC scores for postal quarters one and two for fiscal year 1997 were collected. These scores were made available December 9, 1996, and March 1, 1997. This data was compared to each cluster's previous quarter score and also compared to the same period last year.

2.) In-depth interviews with letter carriers and front-line supervisors, in the South Jersey District, provided necessary feedback about the practicality and usefulness of the video as a service improvement mechanism. (Primary)

3.) A survey was developed for and conducted of South Jersey district letter carriers to solicit genuine beliefs about the video. The seven question survey was designed to measure the feelings and opinions about the EXFC video. The questionnaire was compiled to collect feedback concerning the efficacy of the video's content, style and tone, the accuracy of the video's procedures, and the potentiality of using short video for future communication.

The voluntary questionnaires were sent to all delivery units in the South Jersey district. All carriers were asked to complete the voluntary surveys after viewing the video. The survey produced a total of 368 responses. The questionnaire utilized a forced-choice set of responses, completed with the Likert Scale response design – a five step model using agree-disagree, with the adverb strongly on each side and no opinion in the middle.

The survey questions were developed using information provided from the Allegheny Area Corporate Relations department. An outline of each question and the percentage of responses follows. (Primary)

4.) Two focus panels of South Jersey carriers were conducted to acquire first-hand research about the video strategy and to solicit ideas for future reference. (Primary)

5.) Finally, this thesis analyzed the research data compiled to determine the overall success of the inaugural video, and offered recommendations for future video assisted strategies will be offered.

Chapter 3

Data

A detailed synopsis of the research findings follows.

The Survey:

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response Frequency</u>	
1. The information contained in the video helped me better understand the importance of accurate collections, mis-sorts, and hot case mail procedures in the EXFC process.	Strongly Agree	34.8%
	Agree	23.6%
	No opinion	34.2%
	Disagree	2.4%
	Strongly Disagree	4.9%
2. The information related to hot case & collection activities was accurate.	Strongly Agree	41.6%
	Agree	26.6%
	No Opinion	24.7%
	Disagree	6.0%
	Strongly Disagree	1.1%
3. The length of the video, 8:13, was effective in communicating the information.	Strongly Agree	36.7%
	Agree	35.1%
	No Opinion	19.0%
	Disagree	4.3%
	Strongly Disagree	4.9%
4. The style and tone used in the video were effective.	Strongly Agree	35.1%
	Agree	34.2%
	No Opinion	23.4%
	Disagree	3.8%
	Strongly Disagree	3.5%
5. Using short video is an effective form of supporting face-to-face communications.	Strongly Agree	38.3%
	Agree	29.9%
	No Opinion	25.3%
	Disagree	2.7%
	Strongly Disagree	3.8%

<u>Question</u>	<u>Response Frequency</u>	
6. I like the concept of using short video in future communications.	Strongly Agree	42.9%
	Agree	27.2%
	No Opinion	19.6%
	Disagree	4.3%
	Strongly Disagree	6.0%
7. The video's information helped improve my awareness about activities related to EXFC.	Strongly Agree	33.7%
	Agree	32.6%
	No Opinion	23.4%
	Disagree	5.4%
	Strongly Disagree	4.9%

According to statistical theory, a probability sample of 384 respondents has an error rate of plus or minus five points when the results are extended to the universe. Applying this margin of error to the cumulative percentages of the positive responses (Strongly Agree and Agree) yielded the following ranges: question number one, 53.4% to 63.4%; number two, 63.2% to 73.2%; number three, 65.7% to 75.7%; number four, 64.3% to 74.3%; number five, 63.2% to 73.2%; number six, 65.1% to 75.1%; and number seven, 61.3% to 71.3%.

The Focus Panels:

Two focus panels were conducted by Total Research Corporation of Princeton, New Jersey. The purpose of the focus panels was to do exploratory and qualitative research to generate firsthand views from the intended target audience.

The panel's interaction communicated the audience's point of view. This allowed participants the opportunity to openly express their opinions, ideas, and attitudes related to the EXFC video.

Total Research requested a total of 20 participants for the two panels. The South Jersey district employs about 2,200 letter carriers. An interval lottery system was used to select groups representing multiple post offices within the South Jersey district. Using a post office list of carriers, indexed from a to z, every 110th name was selected to participate. This produced a total of 20 possible participants for the panels.

Ten carriers participated in the morning focus group and four carriers participated in the second group. Although ten carriers were scheduled for the second panel, only four participants attended. Each focus group met for two hours April 1, 1997.

After respondent introductions, the moderator began each session with an explanation of the ground rules and a brief description of the topics for discussion. The topics for discussion were assembled from information provided by the Postal Service. The group's topics for discussions included:

- ⇒ Awareness of EXFC – What does EXFC mean? How is South Jersey performing relative to other districts? How do employees learn about EXFC scores? Do you think about EXFC when performing your job? What is the benefit to having high EXFC scores? To the organization? To you?
- ⇒ Value of EXFC to the Postal Service – What do you think about EXFC? Is it useful or another corporate gimmick? What does it do for the image of the Postal Service among customers? Its employees?
- ⇒ Evaluation of the EXFC video – What type of information has management provided to guide you in providing better service? How has it been provided - verbally, print, video? How often is it provided? Is it helpful? Are these general instructions for all employees or a specific group? How many are aware of a video developed for carriers? How many have seen it? *After viewing the video, the participants were asked:* What is your initial reaction to the video? What do you like? Dislike? What does this do for your impression of the Postal Service? Is this a useful way to communicate information or is there a better way? Are you likely to do anything different after seeing the video? How realistic is this video? Does it cover your

responsibilities accurately? Does everything apply? Is there anything missing that you would like to see covered in the video? Is there something that should be eliminated? Are the characters in the video realistic? Should the video use real employees?

⇒ Wrap Up – Time allocated for questions that arise as a result of the group discussion.

An executive summary of the findings was prepared by Total Research.

The following bullets itemize the conclusions.

- Awareness of EXFC is generally widespread. Virtually all participants in the focus groups are at least somewhat familiar with the measurement system. While the participants are familiar with the measurement program, often heard criticism relates to the impact other parts of the organization have on the EXFC scores. They (the carriers) believe they perform their job responsibilities consistently yet the score fluctuates. Participants indicate that if they understood more about other roles within the mail distribution process and the ways in which their performance impacts the next person in the mail chain they might be able to perform differently in hopes of stabilizing or increasing the EXFC score. Currently, among these participants, the fluctuations in the scores appear to be more random chance than a direct result of poor performance.
- USPS is doing an adequate job of communicating the EXFC scores. Carrier participants typically learn the current score via weekly staff/safety meetings or see it posted within their post office. Generally, the scores are posted on or near the time clock and, in many offices, near exit doors and break rooms.
- Some locations have linked EXFC to a contest or reward system. Several participants mention that employees who are able to state the correct score, when asked, win a small token. Others mention that meeting or surpassing the EXFC scores results in a free breakfast in their respective post offices.
- Participants react favorably to “challenges” from other regions of the country. A recently viewed video from California dared the South Jersey region to beat their score. The carrier participants mention this “playful” challenge is a means of reinforcing EXFC and keeping performance in the top of their minds.
- In terms of the value associated with EXFC, there is no clear consensus that carriers recognize the importance of speedy service and the effect it will have on their job security. The morning group appears to understand that if the competition provides quicker

service delivery they may not have jobs in the future. They recognize the positive intent of EXFC as a measurement tool for maintaining performance. On the other hand, the afternoon group seems to be unable to see any merit to EXFC. Comments heard from this group tend to focus on EXFC being a gimmick and another tool for management to criticize them.

- Participants are aware of and have seen instructional videos. They recall past videos that have focused on safety issues (i.e., run away trucks) and job performance skills. While carriers mention they like the videos, they are also quick to point out that the video should be current. In some cases, videos have been presented which included procedures that are no longer followed. Case in point, the test video includes tapping collection boxes as part of the mail carrier's responsibility. The participants mention that segments as these tend to cause the viewer to stop watching the video.
- The test video is considered by most carriers to be more relevant to new employees. The general consensus is that it is a useful tool but not geared toward experienced carriers. They suggest that the segment on tapping the box be eliminated and that the video be more factual in communicating job responsibilities, specifically with regard to the amount of mail to be delivered - mail bags are typically quite heavy while the video portrays a bag which appears to be half empty. An often heard comment centers on the fact that the carrier's role is presented as easier than it actually is.
- Participants indicate they would like to see future videos geared to other parts of the postal organization as well as their own. They would like to learn more about window clerks and processing roles and how these roles impact their responsibilities. Concerning videos developed exclusively for carriers, these videos should be produced for both new employees as well as experienced employees.²⁰

²⁰ "South Jersey Performance Cluster Employee Focus Groups," *Total Research Qualitative Report* April 16, 1997, pp. 3-4

Informal Interviews:

Several face to face interviews were conducted with letter carriers, postmasters and supervisors throughout the South Jersey area concerning the EXFC video and its effectiveness.

When the video was viewed by letter carriers from the Cinnaminson, New Jersey Post Office, many employees commented about the video's out-of-date portrayal of collections performed by city carriers. In addition, many carriers said they were disappointed in the inexact representation of mail delivery. More specifically, the carriers portrayed in the video were not handling automated mail bundles. Today, almost all carriers are managing the DPS - Delivery Point Sequence -- mail bundles. This extra bundle of letter mail is sorted into street delivery sequence by automated mail processing equipment.

Despite the video's obvious weaknesses, a majority of the employees interviewed informally said they prefer the use of short video as a complement to face-to-face communication. Many employees said that all channels of communication are important to the success of disseminating information. However, many employees stipulated that credibility is of utmost importance. Particularly, credibility in the message, accuracy in the demonstrated activities and authenticity of the players involved, especially when using video assisted communications.

Most carriers said they were turned off by the actors used in the EXFC video. Many employees commented that they could sense immediately that the characters used in the video were not actual postal employees.

The EXFC Scores:

The EXFC results reported by Price Waterhouse for September 14, 1996, through December 6, 1996, (postal quarter one, FY '97) established that 91.11 percent of First-Class Mail pieces destined for addresses within the South Jersey overnight-committed service area were delivered on time. The EXFC results reported for December 7, 1996, through February 28, 1997, (postal quarter two) established that 93.09 percent of First-Class Mail pieces destined within South Jersey were delivered successfully.

The EXFC results for the entire Allegheny Area established that 91.19 percent of First-Class Mail pieces destined for addresses within the Allegheny Area were delivered on time. Likewise, the EXFC score for postal quarter two indicated that 91.76 percent of First-Class Mail pieces were delivered on time. The Allegheny Area's EXFC performance for postal quarter two made the Area the top performer in the nation for service.

Here is a list of each cluster's EXFC scores for the last seven quarters:

Cluster	PQ 1 '96	PQ 2 '96	PQ 3 '96	PQ 4 '96	PQ 1 '97	PQ 2 '97
South Jersey	84.29	85.09	88.85	90.42	91.11	93.09
Akron	88.39	87.14	91.56	92.59	92.27	90.86
Cincinnati	88.73	88.98	88.36	92.17	90.19	90.87
Cleveland	85.13	85.05	91.77	90.66	90.38	90.88
Columbus	91.08	89.48	91.88	91.89	91.21	91.87
Erie	93.70	91.22	92.47	93.98	90.94	93.11
Harrisburg	91.84	88.54	93.58	93.12	94.17	93.74
Lancaster	87.72	84.68	92.05	90.92	89.39	92.64
Philadelphia	84.50	83.95	89.82	88.71	89.72	90.65
Pittsburgh	89.16	90.80	93.07	92.04	92.55	92.40

Seven of the ten performance clusters, in the Allegheny Area, demonstrated an increase in EXFC scores from postal quarter one to postal quarter two. In particular, the EXFC scores for the South Jersey cluster indicate an improvement in overnight service performance for every quarter, beginning with the first quarter of FY '96. Moreover, South Jersey is the only Allegheny Area performance cluster to exhibit improved EXFC scores for six consecutive quarters.

Currently, as of April, 1997, South Jersey's EXFC scores to date for postal quarter three are between 92 and 93 percent.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

The Postal Service's Corporate Relations department assists the organization with internal and external communication campaigns. These plans are designed to fortify the emphasis on face-to-face communication incorporated in CustomerPerfect, creating a variety of messaging techniques for all levels of management. Correspondingly, the Allegheny Area's corporate relations team constructed an aggressive outreach program for fiscal year 1997 that included short video pointed at specific crafts.

The inaugural video used for this campaign was the EXFC video. The video was written, designed and produced by the Allegheny Area's corporate relations team and disseminated to delivery offices throughout the Allegheny Area in October of 1996. The video's main audience was letter carriers.

Various research techniques surveying the effectiveness of the video were performed in the South Jersey district to provide valuable feedback for the Area managers to consider for future video applications.

The research discoveries affirm that many employees prefer the use of short video as a component of any communication outline. This opinion was discovered through all of the research techniques utilized. With regard to that disclosure, it is also apparent that employees prefer "believable" videos using real employees over videos using actors as the main characters. The inaugural video was criticized during the focus groups and informal interviews for using actors to

portray employees. In addition, the video was criticized for an inaccurate depiction of carrier operations. I believe these shortcomings contributed to the video's "moderate" success.

An explanation of the research findings

Although the video was produced less than twelve months prior to dissemination, two key elements of the carriers' operations changed by the time the video was actually observed. Employee feedback clearly labeled these inaccuracies as an impairment to the retention of the video's message. Essentially, the carriers were displeased with the incorrect portrayal of mail collection. "The collections, we're on the wand system. The film is the old way," said one focus group participant.²¹

At the end of fiscal year 1996, many post offices reassigned the duties of mailbox collections to individual employees. Before, this operation was customarily performed by city letter carriers during street delivery. This alteration coincided with the implementation of a new, computerized collection system known as the Collection Management System -- CMS. The new system utilizes computer chips and wands that are carried by the collection employees. When a mailbox is tapped, the wand is passed over the receptacle's chip recording the date and time of the collection. This information is downloaded to the district's central data base for documentation and confirmation.

²¹ "South Jersey Performance Cluster Employee Focus Groups," *Total Research Qualitative Report* April 16, 1997, pg. 12.

The EXFC video failed to portray this latest modification. In addition, the video failed to present mail delivery managing the extra bundle of letter mail processed by automation. The DPS – Delivery Point Sequenced – bundle is processed into street delivery order by machines and delivered by carriers along with mail sorted in the office. Although the equipment used to process DPS mail is extremely efficient and accurate, better than 98 percent accurate, a few errors can still occur related to: incorrect bar-codes, incorrect Zip Codes, inaccurate address hygiene, along with some minor problems related to the type and style of envelopes utilized. Like manually mis-sorted letters, DPS errors must be detected and corrected by carriers making deliveries. “I think they should show the carrier carrying the DPS bundles. Somebody new wouldn’t know and then all of a sudden you expect him to carry the DPS bundle,” said one focus group participant.²² If an erroneously sorted letter is not discovered, a delay in service may result. If the mail-piece happens to be an EXFC test piece, the delay in service negatively affects the EXFC score for that period.

Is video practical?

The research findings clearly indicate that the overall success of the video was negatively affected by the use of actors, the depiction of the duties, the minimal amount of mail carried, and the leisurely work attitude of the characters. The qualitative research performed found that many employees were turned off by these minor discrepancies.

²² IBID pg. 12

Overall, the research data clearly indicates employee contentment with a video assisted communication strategy. Videos are regarded as another means of providing information. However, the investigation also produced several key factors to consider for future video employment.

Credibility immediately affects the message of the video. If real employees are used, the video's message is more likely to be accepted and interpreted. "The last film I saw was from Wilmington, Delaware. All the carriers and supervisors were actual employees. ... One of the carriers actually filmed it," said one participant.²³ This video was remembered favorably by most of the participants in the focus group.

Craft specific videos should be accurate and targeted to the defined audience. The employees participating in the focus groups, along with the employees interviewed, all believed that the EXFC video was better for new letter carriers. "It's pretty much a basic film. It's routine for us. It's like a training film. I think it would be good for new people to watch this, but old timers, they already know," said most participants.²⁴

Another important finding focused on the correct portrayal of the job responsibilities and the surrounding conditions. Many employees were unhappy with the video's picture of the letter carrier's workload. This incorrect picture interfered with the film's complete message. "Not too many of us have three trays of mail. We have a lot more than that," said one employee. "I think the carrier looked like he didn't have any cares, just leisurely walking along. All

²³ IBID pg. 12

²⁴ IBID pg. 10

kinds of time in the world. That's not the case. Most of the carriers I know are really moving," said another employee.

"Negative because it makes the job look easier than it is. If someone actually looks at the video and thinks that's the amount of mail I'm walking down the street with, yeah, right. It automatically turns you off to what the video is trying to say because you look at it and say, that's not realistic," said another employee.²⁵

If these key elements are considered, video assisted communication can be very successful. As noted previously though, video should be used as one component of a communication strategy. Only certain messages are appropriate to this channel. In addition, video should not be used as a crutch for the absolute form of employee communication -- face-to-face.

The correct blend of messages and channels is essential. Many of the employees interviewed expressed a desire to see videos that covered a diversity of postal related topics. Although they prefer videos related to their specific function, employees expressed a desire to understand how other operations and activities affect the organization.

Although there are varying levels of awareness concerning the specifics of the EXFC testing procedures, the research discovered that most employees are aware of EXFC. In addition, most of the employees interviewed knew the desired goal and the current scores.

²⁵ |BID pg. 11

During discussions about communication of EXFC scores many employees indicated a desire to understand the entire process. Some employees wondered about fluctuating scores, and other craft employees' roles in the EXFC process.

Chapter 5

Suggestions For Further Study

As a result of the feedback acquired from this study, the Allegheny Area Corporate Relations team plans to reevaluate the short, video assisted communications strategy projected for future applications. More craft specific videos are expected in the future to support face-to-face communications.

Further study measuring the effectiveness of these videos could provide valuable employee feedback on the success of the revised strategy. These future studies should attempt to acquire feedback related to: the credibility of the messages, the value of the topics, the believability of the characters and the depth of audience's awareness on the video's issues.

The organization's efforts to improve and increase the quality of employee communications provide a number of possibilities for future study. How effective is the new-fashioned internal communication strategy? Which channels are preferred by employees? Are the enhanced attempts to communicate perceived as credible or trustworthy? Do employees feel informed about essential issues? Do employees feel involved in the communications process? Are the channels providing sufficient feedback?

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