

Reader expectations: How important to meet?

DAVID A. FISCHBACH

As an International professional society, we have two predominant modes of communicating with others in our society and our profession: our annual convention and our two regular publications. With as diverse a membership as our organization has in experience, education, interest, and occupation, is it realistic to think that two publications can meet the expectations of everyone we intend to reach, or is it even important? The answer to both of these questions must be a unqualified YES! That is not to say that we only read what we agree with or already know about. We learn by reading or hearing things with which we either DISAGREE OR ARE UNAWARE OF—something unexpected!

The Mission

If the mission of our publication is to inform and educate we must first get the attention of the prospective reader. Boy, did that color photo of branding calves on the cover of the February 1987 issue of *Rangelands* get my attention, as well as the color photos in two articles in the December issue. These were totally unexpected, and they were effective and added to the readability and enthusiasm of the article. Colored photos are now expected. Enthusiasm has been described as when, on your wedding night, you turn off the lightswitch on the wall and get into bed before the room is dark! It is neither impressive nor effective to make statements like, "We procured a geotome with which to architect an aperture into the B₂", when you could simply say, "We used a spade to check the soil profile."

The subject of reader expectations goes much deeper than just, "What do the publications have to offer?" What our publications offer is the culmination of years of experience, education, expertise, and derived opinions on the many-faced subject of range. Our success in expanding upon and spreading this knowledge can not be achieved by sitting back and asking, "What do the society or the publications have to offer me?," but rather by asking ourselves as individuals and as a society, "What do we have to offer the world?"

The author is a rancher in Faith, S. Dak. This paper was presented in the symposium "You and SRM Publications" at the annual meeting of the Society for Range Management in Corpus Christi, Texas, February 1988.

Minding our own business and remaining anonymous achieves little and contributes nothing.

Everybody's Job

The offering of our efforts and knowledge includes not only having articles or research papers published, but also taking an active part in the society and in what is going on in range research and management on a world-wide scale. It is good to see that after many years of being afraid to become involved in any political aspects of range we have, in the past few years, finally begun making some public statements: not so much taking sides on issues, but rather as being an "expert witness" in instances where such witness is appropriate and essential. While being an expert witness on political issues may seem to diverge from the topic of Reader Expectations, it would be impossible for the Society to be a credible witness without having the material in *JRM* and *Rangelands* to back our claim to being professionals and experts in this highly scientific and technical field.

Prospective authors must constantly ask themselves, "To whom will the proposed article appeal and how can I get it to appeal to more people?" A basic fundamental of this can be learned from the example set by the late C.M. Russell in his career as a western artist. His paintings seem to come to life before your eyes, and this is caused in part by the fact that he lived the life of a Montana cowboy for eleven years before he painted commercially. The point here is that sooner or later, what is learned from research and articles must be able to be **understood and evaluated** by those of us educated in "the school of all outdoors." That is not to say the user will agree with or can use the information, but he must be able to understand it well enough to determine what might apply to his needs. The success or failure of the endeavors of the society and its publications is determined in the end by the user and his understanding and application of information.

A good article, like a good talk, is not measured by its length but by its content. A priest friend once said, "I've never heard a *bad* five-minute sermon".

A story is told of an elderly organist in a European cathedral. He

had reached the age of retirement and was to be replaced by a much younger man. One day the younger man approached the elderly man while he was practicing his beloved organ for the last time. The elderly man turned off the organ, slid the key into his pocket and began to leave the church. The younger man stopped him and said, "Sir, the key, please." The elderly man put his hand into his pocket, pulled out the key and placed it in the hand of the younger man. The younger man then began playing music such as the world had never heard, for that young man was Johann Sebastian Bach.

The older man said later, "Just suppose I had not given the master the key".

We have that key. Whether we use it or how we use it is up to each of us. By trying something new, by breaking the mold of what we are used to, we meet the expectations of our readers; namely that we publish the *most reliable articles* written by the *most qualified authors* in the *highest respected journals published* which deal with the topics surrounding the renewable natural resource we know as range.