



FINAL REPORT – SRDC SCHOLARSHIP STU061

COMMUNICATE TO ADVANCE AND INNOVATE

**by
P BONAVENTURA**

SD08008

BSES Limited



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Contact:

Palmina Bonaventura
Extension Officer
BSES Limited
PO Box 86
Indooroopilly Q 4068
Telephone: 07 3331 3322
Facsimile: 07 3871 0383
Email: pbonaventura@bses.org.au



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SUMMARY

In 2007, Palmina received funding to complete a coursework Masters in Communication majoring in Public Relations and Professional Communication at the University of Queensland, St Lucia. As part of the 18 month course, she completed nine subject courses and prepared a thesis titled 'Improving communication between sugarcane industry organisations and growers by introducing new style elements to paper-based publications'.

The thesis analysed the style and visual metadiscourse of existing sugarcane industry publications including newsletters, magazines, and eNewsletters. She found that the style elements of newsletters and eNewsletters could be inexpensively improved by addressing Kumpf's 10 categories for visual metadiscourse; in particular, the categories of convention, external skeleton, chunking, and interpretation.

The effect of improving visual metadiscourse in the sugarcane industry was tested through Palmina's thesis by creating a new publication and surveying readers. Results show that the industry responds well to all improvements and agreed hypothetically that the new document would be useful if direct access to researchers or extension agents was not available. This finding provides evidence for the argument that improving communication will add value to sugarcane industry organisations and extension practices.

Through the coursework masters and preparation of a thesis, Palmina achieved the objectives of her project, which included building on her existing knowledge and providing skills to enable the improvement of communication within the sugarcane industry.

1.0 BACKGROUND

Survey results from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) in 2005/06 show sugarcane producers actively sought information to better manage their farms. At that time, Australia had 4824 sugarcane growers hungry for information. Coutts (2007) claimed nothing had changed in 2007 and that growers are still hungry for information. ABARE surveys indicate that farmers sourced most of their information on farm management and production from family, friends, and other growers (Hooper, Henery, Ashton, & Lubulwa, 2007). Nearly 80% of sugarcane growers also obtained information from industry organisations and more than 60% sourced information from the media.

While it is a positive sign that growers are accessing advice from family, friends, and other growers, it is important to make sure they are getting the correct advice for their farm. Potentially, a suitable way for organisations to access this ‘grapevine’ is through the use of extension agents. Traditionally, extension agents interpret output from researchers and package it to suit growers in their area. Conversely, an extension agent also acts as a liaison officer to the researcher by providing grower knowledge back to the researcher that provide directions for future research.

The manner in which researchers and extension agents communicate and cooperate is as critically important as the relationship between extension agent and grower (Coutts, Roberts, Frost, & Coutts, 2005). Both these relationships have a strong influence on whether the flow-on effects of agricultural science succeed or fail at the farm level. Developing these relationships is expensive for companies working in the sugarcane industry, so a combination of extension models and communication tools are employed (Coutts, 2007). Conducting such an orchestra of constant communication is not easy, and the issue of ‘research relevance’ can sometimes become lost (Eponou, 1993).

Information already exists on ways to improve productivity and reduce costs for growers, but this information only delivers dividends if it is adopted. Therefore, the effective communication of the “how to’s” and the “where for’s” are essential for farmers to adopt and implement these changes so they can realise the short-term productivity improvements. The challenge is to use communication as a catalyst for these process changes, relating how better practices should be presented to ensure maximum adoption (Vanclay, 2004).

A key factor to success in communication is consistency, and any message for change should be consistent from all industry service providers (Darwin Murrell, 1996). Achieving consistency of message in the Australian sugar industry will require a step-change in the approaches taken by all of the key parties involved: growers, millers, and research providers. BSES believes that this alteration in approach is the single-most important step that can be taken towards improving productivity and reducing input costs in the short term (Wallis, 2007). The conundrum remains on how to bring together communication activities when extension is generally a localised activity and is provided by many different organisations, including BSES, millers, productivity service companies, researchers, independent professionals, CANEGROWERS, QDPI&F FutureCane, agribusiness, regional NRM companies, ‘green’ groups, newspapers, magazines, field days, etc.

Analysing traditional industry paper-based communication materials will show what visual elements are prominent. The value of these elements can be measured using research and literature to determine if they are necessary and how they can be modernised. There is a gap in the literature regarding how to apply contemporary thinking to current sugarcane industry publications and whether applying these changes for information transfer will improve the transfer of vital knowledge to the grower. This thesis aimed to take the research one step further by applying principles of extension media design that take into account visual metadiscourse into the production of a circular for sugarcane growers and evaluating its impact on the target audience.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The flow of information from industry organisations to growers is vital in the process of adoption of best practice (Vanclay, 2004). The objective of this thesis research was to not only analyse existing communication between industry organisations and growers, but what changes could be made to dramatically improve this interaction.

To explore how existing communication could be changed to become more effective, three research questions were posed:

1. What style of features characterise current media used for communication between sugarcane industry organisations and growers?
2. How can existing sugarcane industry communication be altered to reflect contemporary thinking on effective communication?
3. What are the effects on communication effectiveness when contemporary thinking is introduced in communication media?

To provide a theoretical basis for the thesis, Palmina undertook nine coursework subjects. She achieved a grade point average (GPA) of 6.08 and a Dean's Commendation for High Achievement each semester. A copy of the study transcript is provided in Figure 1.

Degree:	Master of Communication					
Confer Date:	2008-07-16					
Plan:	Public Relations and Professional Communication					
	Master of Communication in the field of Public Relations and Professional Communication					
Sem 1 2007						
COMU	7301	Public Relations Media Prod	2.00	2.00	7	14.000
COMU	7303	Public Relations Campaigns	2.00	2.00	7	14.000
JOUR	7511	Principles of Reporting	2.00	2.00	6	12.000
MKTG	7501	Marketing	2.00	2.00	5	10.000
TERM GPA :		6.250	TERM TOTALS :		8.00	8.00
						50.000
Dean's Commendation for High Achievement						
Sem 2 2007						
JOUR	7540	Feature Writ & Freelance Jour	2.00	2.00	7	14.000
MGTS	7080	Leadership & Change Mgmt	2.00	2.00	5	10.000
MKTG	7508	Marketing Communication Mgt	2.00	2.00	6	12.000
WRIT	6030	Professional Communication	2.00	2.00	6	12.000
TERM GPA :		6.000	TERM TOTALS :		8.00	8.00
						48.000
Dean's Commendation for High Achievement						
Sem 1 2008						
COMU	7009	Thesis	6.00	6.00	6	36.000
COMU	7302	Public Relations Planning	2.00	2.00	6	12.000
TERM GPA :		6.000	TERM TOTALS :		8.00	8.00
						48.000
Dean's Commendation for High Achievement						

Figure 1 **Copy of Student Studies Transcript for Palmina Bonaventura**

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology contained three components to answer the research questions:

- An analysis of paper-based industry publications of existing communication media between industry organisations and growers.
- The creation of a new publication using the results of the analysis and research into the basic elements of effective communication.
- A survey of growers to assess the effectiveness of the new publication.

3.1 Analysis of paper-based industry publications

Palmina selected the Burdekin region for this research because it is the largest sugarcane-producing region in Australia, with an average of 4.6 Mt of cane harvested each year. A sample of paper-based industry publications was obtained by asking two industry members involved in the region to record every item of paper-based media that came into their possession over a 30-day period.

Paper-based media was the focus of this study, as it is typically the type of communication growers receive from industry organisations. Publications collected were sorted into three main categories of paper-based media: newsletters, magazines, and eNewsletters. eNewsletters were included as their style and structure are similar to newsletters and magazines in that they can be moulded by the organisation to suit the reader. Only items that were derived directly from agribusiness, research, extension, and political representation organisations were included.

Newspaper articles were not analysed in this study, despite growers reportedly relying heavily on their content for industry information (Hooper et al., 2007). This is because, once information is presented to media outlets, the organisation no longer has control over the visual metadiscourse.

Each publication was analysed using the headings shown in Table 1 – this ensured consistency across types of publications. The results were collated into the three categories of newsletters, magazines, and eNewsletters, to account for category-specific style features and enable fair comparison.

Table 1 Explanation of each style element used to analyse industry publications

Style element	Explanation
Audience	Refers to whether the publication was intended for local growers, growers across regions, the entire sugarcane industry including millers, or general public.
Reader's prior knowledge of topic	Assesses whether the publication was introducing new concepts to the reader. Measured as general to specialised.
Writer's role	Role can be anything from raising awareness to inciting a defined action.
Stance	Refers to the voice of the publications; 1 st , 2 nd or 3 rd person
Writer/reader relationship	Relationship can be personal or impersonal, but can also cover dictatorship or teacher-type scenarios as well.
Tone	Formal tone is considered pompous, structured, and predictable. Informal tone is considered relaxed, messy, and friendly.
Humour	Used to measure the instances of humour in the publication. A scale of nil to frequently used.
Dramatic elements	Relates to the use of contrasting text, photos, colours, images etc. Measured on a scale of nil to frequent.
Language	Divided into four categories to measure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the formality of the language 2. evidence of abbreviations 3. frequency of industry jargon 4. style, e.g. verbose.
Sentence structure	Mostly interested in length and complexity of sentences.
Structure and paragraphs	Addresses the use of paragraphs to create structure, length of paragraphs and also logical sequencing of paragraphs.
Title	Measures the type of title chosen, in particular the length of the title and the colour/language used.
Content	Investigates the information contained in the publication. Subheadings were used as an indication.
Layout	Size of paper, use of columns, number of pages, presence of diagrams/boxes/tables/figures, alignment of text.
Advertising	Whether or not advertising was evident.
Cross organisation	Assessment of evidence that the publication openly referenced other industry organisations where relevant.

3.2 Design of publication

Using the results of the visual metadiscourse analysis, Palmina designed a publication that incorporated those style features identified as favourable for effective communication and that addressed the common errors of existing industry publications. The specific design and style features incorporated into the publication are listed in Table 2. The new publication was part of a current industry-funded project aimed at informing Burdekin growers of the latest research being undertaken in their region. Researchers and growers contributed articles for the booklet by sending the editor a summary of their project. After editing, the article was sent back to the author for approval. Following this, a consultant from Brisbane-based company, Pagecreations, was commissioned to assist with layout.

The publication was entitled 'GREAT 2008: Burdekin RD&E symposium booklet', with GREAT standing for Grower Research Extension Activities and Trials. A copy has been included within the thesis provided in Appendix 1. The booklet was distributed by mail in conjunction with the BSES Burdekin quarterly newsletter. Approximately 600 copies were sent to the 98% of growers in the Burdekin who have a service agreement with BSES. There was a budget and time limit for the preparation of the booklet. One thousand copies were printed on 130 gsm A2 satin stock with a four-colour process throughout and a saddle-stitched A4 finish.

Table 2 List of features incorporated into the GREAT 2008 booklet in respect to each style element

Style elements	Change made
Audience	The publication was aimed at the general public.
Reader's prior knowledge of topic	No prior knowledge of the topic was assumed.
Writer's role	The writer/editor took on a journalistic role.
Stance	3 rd person only.
Writer/reader relationship	The introduction was used to add a personal touch and establish a relationship with the reader; however, the relationship was kept at a distance due to stance and tone.
Tone	A formal tone was used as the research needed to appear credible.
Humour	Little humour was used except for the photo accompanying the introduction and occasional use in titles.
Dramatic elements	Deliberate effort was made to use dramatic elements to break the text into readable chunks. A consistent colour of blue was used for the blurb under the title. Logos were displayed on each page for visual association between the article and the author. Colours used in the tables matched colours found on that page. A photo or diagram of some definition was incorporated into every page.
Language	Language remained formal, however the style was simple English. All abbreviations were expanded and all industry jargon explained.
Sentence structure	Simple sentences with clear punctuation.
Structure and paragraphs	Single sentence paragraphs were used wherever possible. Each article was limited to one page. A blurb with headings of who, what, when, where, how, and why was used at the beginning of each article.
Title	Titles were kept short and an effort was made to ensure obvious links between titles and article content. Some humour tactics were employed.
Content	Content was highly scientific in nature and very industry focused.
Layout	Layout depended on the content received. 20 A4 pages were filled with two wide columns on each page. Text was left aligned.
Advertising	No advertising was used but the four organisations sponsoring the publication were displayed on the front and back cover as well as verbally mentioned in the introduction.
Cross organisation	Logos of every company/organisation who had contributed an article to the booklet were clearly displayed on the respective pages, as well as mentioned on the back cover.

3.3 Survey

A telephone survey of Burdekin district growers was completed using numbers selected randomly from the local telephone book. An internet-based random-number generator was used to select the phone number location on each page of the telephone book (Daniels, 2008). As not all numbers in the phone book were sugarcane growers, calls were continued for two weeks with a total of 65 growers being surveyed. The questionnaire gathered growers' perspectives on the new publication and existing industry communication, as well as investigating their thoughts on basic communication style features (e.g. paragraph length). Strategic use of open-ended and closed questions dominated the questionnaire, with minimal use of questions requiring the growers to rate on a scale. Closed questions work best when conducting data collection via the telephone (Conley & Lamble, 2006).

To provide an objective basis for evaluation, a statistical analysis the survey data was completed. The data collected was mostly yes-no in nature so is considered nominal and classed as categorical rather than quantitative. Some ordinal data was also collected through the survey and, like nominal data, can be classified into categories or classes. However, with ordinal data, as the name suggests, the order of answers impacts on the statistical interpretation. Summarising categorical data is best done using descriptive statistic techniques that can measure the central tendency, shape, and variation in data. Tables were used to illustrate the meanings implied in the collected results (Steele & Torrie, 1980).

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Visual metadiscourse analysis

Kumpf's 10 categories were used to score the industry publications received by growers over a 30-day period (Kumpf, 2000).

4.1.1 Newsletters

Four industry organisation newsletters were analysed as part of this study. An overview of the analysis of paper-based industry publications data is available as part of the thesis in Appendix 1.

Newsletters, whose audience were local, tended to assume that the reader had an in-depth knowledge of the sugarcane industry and current events. Jargon and abbreviations were common and confusing, especially as some newsletters were up to eight pages long. Two of the newsletters provided information from other organisations and used logos to acknowledge them. Humour was not a feature in any of the newsletters.

One newsletter was particularly different. The writer took the role of 'dictator' with a third-person stance using matter-of-fact language. Although aimed at local growers with specialised knowledge, this newsletter did not have unexplained abbreviations, or use

dramatic elements such as photographs. However, it did use single sentence paragraphs and short headings.

4.1.2 Magazines

Industry magazines appeared to have a very good balance in the use of visual metadiscourse. All magazines were similar in length, focused on the same audience, and expected that audience to have a medium level of knowledge about the Australian sugarcane industry. Dramatic elements were maximised in all three publications, although the use of humour was not prominent. Jargon and abbreviation use was less than in newsletters. Language was formal, tone was formal and third person was popular.

Most articles were attributed to an author, and appropriate signage was provided if that author was from another organisation. One magazine was different to the others because it did not just report on activities; it was also used to inform/educate readers on new research or developments. This magazine did not contain any advertising and had an external skeleton of two columns rather than three.

4.1.3 eNewsletters

The range of eNewsletters was much more diverse than newsletters, with some collected examples originating from companies outside the sugarcane industry. Equally diverse was the style of eNewsletters. They ranged from very formal to informal and third person to first person, with one even using humour. Language-wise, there was an association between eNewsletters aimed at the entire industry or general public and the lack of jargon and abbreviations.

In nearly all cases, the author of the eNewsletters was anonymous and varied in role from informer to teacher to salesman. Many of them were not cross-organisational. One eNewsletter was six pages long and was unlike the other smaller eNewsletters – it did not contain hyperlinks. However, it was written in a very personal fashion and created the feeling of transparency between writer and reader.

4.2 Publication of the GREAT 2008 booklet

It took five and a half months to collate and publish the GREAT 2008 booklet. Articles for the publication were called for and received via email with many researchers and extension staff sending PowerPoint presentations or original funding applications as a reference from which the article was derived. Each article was less than 400 words to create room to apply visual metadiscourse features such as shorter paragraphs (chunking).

Correspondence with each author was critical to ensure the key message was achieved within the word limit. Each draft article was checked by the author and both editors before being sent to Pagecreations for layout, and, after layout, each article was checked again by both editors and an external editor. Three major visual metadiscourse features

were incorporated into the layout of the GREAT 2008 booklet, along with consideration of all ten categories mentioned in Kumpf (2000). The three major additions included:

1. The use of ‘who, what, when, where, how, and why’ at the start of each, accompanied by the logos of any organisation involved with the project (see Figure 2)
2. A photograph of the editors with a humorous speech bubble on the introduction page (see Figure 3)
3. Provision of all author and editor contact details on the back page (see Figure 4)



who	Marian Davis and Toni Anderson from BSES Limited	 
what	Research to help improve water management	
when	Commenced in 2004, continues to 2008	
where	Mona Park, Airdmillan, and Mulgrave	
how	Use demonstration sites to test the effects of changing practices	
why	To ensure sustainability	

Figure 2 ‘Who, what, when, where, how, and why’ and appropriate logos were placed under the heading for every article within the GREAT 2008 booklet



Figure 3 A photograph of the editors was used as a visual introduction to the booklet

Authors			Editors		
Catherine Kettle	BSES Limited	4783 8609	Evan Shannon	BSES Limited	4783 8601
Jayson Dowie	BSES Limited	4783 8605	Palmina Bonaventura	BSES Limited	3331 3322
Keith Bristow	CSIRO	4753 8596			
Marian Davis	BSES Limited	4783 8603			
Mike Hanks	DPI&F	4722 2530			
Peter Kooyman	BPS	4783 1144			
Peter McDonnell	ADS	0429 837 497			
Phillip Jackson	CSIRO	4753 8592			
Rob Magarey	BSES Limited	4088 0707			
Ross Coventry	Soil Horizons	4728 2340			
Ryan Matthews	BSES Limited	4783 8602			
Steve Attard	CSIRO	4783 8622			
Zoë Bainbridge	ACTFR	4781 4595			








Figure 4 Contact details of each author and the two editors were placed on the back page

4.3 Survey

4.3.1 Findings for the GREAT 2008 booklet

40 phone calls to growers were made in the same week as the publication was delivered via mail. Of the growers who answered, 17 said they had received it but not read it yet - only five had read it. Two growers said they had received the publication but did not want to be questioned. 16 growers said they had not collected or read their mail yet.

Calls continued for 2 weeks after the booklets were mailed, with a total of 65 growers contacted; 10% did not wish to participate in the survey. A further 20% were happy to participate, but had not read the GREAT 2008 booklet. However, they were still able to answer the general questions about industry publications - results are given in Table 4. The remaining 70% had either read the booklet completely, partially, or flicked through the pages skim reading - results are given in Table 3.

The survey showed that 93% of growers thought the booklet easy to read (Table 3). All growers were happy with the font size and style and most found the headings attractive. However, when asked if any of the tables, diagrams or figures captured their attention, growers were split 50-50. Some said there were tables, figures, and graphs that attracted their attention and others said there were not. Of the growers who said yes, they stated the reason they remembered the table, figure, or graph was because they found it difficult to understand or link to the text. This suggests that in the category of interpretation, the GREAT 2008 booklet did not achieve a very high rating.

More than 80% of growers said that there were no words used in the booklet that they did not understand. But confusion was evident when asked whether they thought the booklet had an informal or formal tone, with 51% choosing the 'don't know' option, 29% saying

they thought it had a formal tone and the remaining 20% selecting in-formal tone. The photograph accompanying the introduction page attracted the attention of 20% of readers who looked at the photograph but did not read the text. A further 64% of growers chose to read the introduction and by doing so participated in forming a relationship with the editors.

All growers who had read the GREAT 2008 booklet liked the strategic use of ‘who, what, when, where, how, and why’ at the top of each page. They also acknowledged that they were in favour of having the authors’ contact details within the booklet for reference. The question “Are you more likely to believe the information in the booklet because the author’s name is at the top of each page?” was used to gauge if the presence of the author’s name can provide credibility to the article. The result was 78% agreed that the information was more trustworthy if the author’s name was there. The remaining growers disagreed or were not sure.

Nearly 90% of growers said the GREAT 2008 booklet had in some way challenged their thinking on farm practices and all agreed that, in a hypothetical situation, the booklet would help if no face-to-face contact was available with researchers and extension agents. No growers thought the booklet was worse or much worse than existing industry publications – 36% rated it the same, 53% rated it better and 11% considered it much better than recently received industry publications.

4.3.2 Findings on general publications

First impressions do count for sugarcane growers. The type of paper and use of colour are important markers of the quality of the publication, with 81% of growers agreeing it increased the likelihood they would read the publication (Table 4). In regards to heft, the survey did not measure the growers’ preferences, but through the visual metadiscourse analysis, it became clear that heft varies significantly across industry publications. For example, the length of eNewsletters ranged from one page to six pages.

Table 3 **Summary of responses to questions pertaining to the GREAT 2008 booklet**

Question	Response	Frequency (%)	N*	Notes
Have you read in any way the Burdekin GREAT 2008 RD&E Symposium Booklet?	yes, completely	38	58	
	yes, partially	24		
	flicked / skimmed	16		
	no not at all	22		
Is the booklet easy to read?	very easy	93	45	Some participants were older immigrants who struggled with English
	some parts easy	0		
	difficult	7		
Do the headings attract your attention?	yes	71	45	
	no	13		
	don't read headings	16		
Do you like the font size and style?	yes	100	45	
	no	0		
Did any of the tables, diagrams, or figures attract you?	yes	51	45	Main responses: ▪ Can't remember ▪ I only remember because I couldn't understand it
	no	49		
Were there words in the booklet you could not understand?	yes	13	45	
	no	87		
Did the booklet have a formal or informal tone?	formal	29	45	
	informal	20		
	don't know	51		
Are you more likely to believe the information in the booklet because the author's name is present?	yes	78	45	
	no	13		
	don't know	9		
Do you like the fact that who, what, when, where, how, and why was listed at the top of each article?	yes	100	45	
	no	0		
Do you feel comfortable knowing that the contact details of the authors were printed in the booklet?	yes	100	45	
	no	0		
Did you read the introduction page?	yes	64	45	
	no	16		
	looked at the picture	20		
Does the publication challenge you to question your farming practices?	yes	89	45	Main responses: ▪ It made me think ▪ It was interesting
	no	11		
If you were not able to talk with researchers or extension agents, would this booklet help you in your business?	yes	100	45	Main responses: ▪ I suppose ▪ Would help a little ▪ Better if more info given
	no	0		
Would you rate the GREAT 2008 booklet against current publications?	much worse	0	45	
	worse	0		
	same	36		
	better	53		
	much better	11		

*N = total number of respondents that answered that question

Results show short paragraphs, illustrations and pictures, the type of paper, and use of colour does make the publication more attractive to read for growers. Columns, on the other hand, do not affect their interpretation of information. There was confusion when asked if they prefer a formal tone when reading – 74% said they were not sure, or that they preferred the tone to be in-between formal and informal.

When asked if the growers prefer any one publication over another, the response was generally, “no because they are all similar”. Yet when asked if there was any aspect of industry publications they did not like, the major response was “no because each publication has its advantages”. A third question touching on this issue asked growers if they felt they received too much mail from industry organisations; 14% of respondents felt this was true. The *Australian Sugarcane Magazine*, the CANEGROWERS eNews and Pioneer eNews are not received as often as some other industry publications.

An overwhelming 88% of participants openly said they had changed at least one of their farming practices after reading industry publications. However, some of them mentioned that it was not only from just one article - they preferred to cross-reference the information in some way. Common examples of changes to farming practices include changes to irrigation, fertiliser and chemical practices, trials of wide-furrow planting, minimum tillage, new varieties, new implements, and the use of FEAT.

Overall, the results show the sugarcane industry is affected by the presence of visual metadiscourse in publications. Results from the questionnaire identified Kumpfs’ 10 categories for visual metadiscourse as relevant to growers and, therefore, important to industry publications. The analysis of collected paper-based communication from the Burdekin suggested that no industry publication addressed every category adequately.

Table 4 Summary of questions regarding all industry publications

Question	Response	Frequency (%)	N*
Do you prefer short paragraphs?	yes	60	58
	no	40	
	doesn't affect me	0	
Does the type of paper and use of colour make the publication more attractive to read?	yes	81	58
	no	19	
Do you like illustrations and pictures in industry publications?	yes	100	58
	no	0	
Do columns affect the way you read the publication?	yes	0	58
	no	100	
Do you prefer a formal tone when reading?	informal	16	58
	in-between	33	
	formal	10	
	not sure	41	
Do you receive the following:	a. BSES newsletter	100	58
	b. CANEGROWERS newsletter	90	58
	c. BPS update	81	58
	d. CANEGROWERS/Pioneer enews	40	58
	e. CSR enews	79	58
	f. <i>BSES Bulletin</i>	100	58
	g. CANEGROWERSmagazine	86	58
	h. <i>Australian Sugarcane Magazine</i>	24	58
Did you read these publications?	yes all	36	58
	yes some	19	
	flicked/skimmed	45	
	no none	0	
Do you prefer any one industry publication over another	open ended question		58
	▪ No, all similar	69	
	▪ <i>BSES Bulletin</i>	9	
	▪ Prefer no ads	9	
	▪ Magazines	3	
	▪ CANEGROWERS magazine	10	
Any aspect of industry publication you do not like?	Open question: main responses included ▪ they're all good ▪ no ▪ each has good bits		
Do you think you receive too much mail from industry organisations?	yes	14	58
	no	64	
	no opinion	22	
Have you ever changed your practices after reading an industry article?	yes	88	58
	no	12	

*N = total number of respondents that answered that question

5.0 OUTPUTS

In addition to completing the Masters course (thesis in Appendix 1), Palmina undertook numerous activities in semester 3, 2008 which allowed her to apply knowledge gained from the Masters course. They included:

- Contributing to the ongoing formation of a BSES strategic communications plan
- Presenting at the Rural Skill Conference of school career guidance officers about the opportunities for careers in the sugar industry
- Continuing her strong contribution to the *BSES Bulletin*, particularly using her editing skills
- Publishing a story in the Bundaberg Women in Sugar book ‘You can’t eat the dirt’
- Participating in Primary Industry Week both formal functions and as a presenter for Rural Discovery Day in the sugarcane tent to educate children on sugarcane
- Redesigning BSES press releases to increase uptake and evaluated the changes
- Contributing to the implementation of BSES internal enews
- Assisting preparation of sugarcane BMP booklets
- Continuing participation in Brisbane RAW group (Generation Next) and preparation of a draft funding proposal
- Palmina is contributing to the development of a document designed specifically for the Tully district – details are still being finalised.

6.0 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Part of the thesis research was to investigate what changes to communication would positively impact industry publications and current extension techniques, so as to promote change and adoption of best management practice. Coutts (2005) suggested that the information access model of extension is one that could operate without demanding extra resources.

Research conducted as part of this thesis has contributed to providing avenues to increase the effectiveness of all extension models. Surprisingly, all respondents said that a publication like the GREAT 2008 booklet would in some way aid their business if they did not have direct face-to-face access to researchers or extension agents. It is worth noting that when prompted further, the yes response was accompanied by comments of “it would raise awareness and get me interested, but I would need to cross-reference it in some way and find out more from other sources”. Such statements are healthy and show that growers apply the principles of critical analysis.

Common examples of grower changes to farming practices include changes to irrigation, fertiliser, and chemical practices, trials of wide-furrow planting, minimum tillage, new varieties, new implements, and use of FEAT. Some of these practice changes are more involved than others and contain high levels of risk. For example, changing a chemical mix is less costly than choosing to implement wide-furrow planting. However, the rewards of both changes can be considered equal.

7.0 FUTURE NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With more than 80% of respondents saying they had changed at least one of their farming practices after reading industry publications, it is clear that a publication such as the GREAT 2008 booklet builds news communication capacity within the sugarcane industry. It is also clear that communication is not falling on deaf ears.

This thesis finding highlights that small changes to how information is presented to growers increases its acceptance, which results in greater uptake of new methods and technologies. Such findings are instantly applicable to every extension model, as each model contains an aspect of communication that is affected by visual metadiscourse. With more than 4000 extension positions across all agricultural industries in Australia, adoption of better visual metadiscourse in publications could make a marked difference to the nation's productivity.

The existing industry publications often display adequate metadiscourse to engage readers and be partly effective, but more could be done and it doesn't necessarily have to come at a cost. Organisations have considerable control over the elements that affect readability of their publications, and increased readability means increased chance that growers will adopt the information presented.

Within sugarcane industry publications, newsletters and eNewsletters are obvious areas for improvement. The findings in this thesis imply that organisations need to be more aware of how language, paragraph length, heading style, consistency, and links between tables, diagrams, and figures can alienate their readers. These aspects of publication preparation have been proven to help in persuasion and attraction. Newsletters and eNewsletters have the potential to be a very personal media and provide a unique opportunity to maintain and strengthen the writer/reader relationship. In a small way, the GREAT 2008 booklet has suggested a stronger writer/reader relationship is also possible through magazines.

In terms of creating a more considerate publication, the thesis research concluded that there are avenues through which the sugarcane industry can improve. Perhaps the most well received change demonstrated in the GREAT2008 booklet was the addition of 'who, what, when, where, how, and why' at the top of each article. This simple tactic considerably helped readers focus on the key message delivered. Even the 7% who said they found the publication difficult to read, agreed that the 'who, what, when, where, how, and why' was useful. Jargon and abbreviations should be removed from all industry publications, as the research conclusions in this thesis indicate it will increase the effectiveness of publications without affecting credibility.

There appears to be a considerable number of paper-based communication publications in the sugarcane industry. However, growers are not critical of this, so it is safe for extension models to continue to rely heavily on paper-based communication, provided that they consider visual metadiscourse. A minority of growers produce the majority of sugarcane, so changes in communication techniques as suggested in this thesis do not have to be dramatic to potentially have a large impact. Improving visual metadiscourse will create publications that are accessible by all demographics within the sugarcane industry and streamline the flow of information from organisation to grower. This is

especially important at present when sugar prices are low and input costs are high; and into the future as new technologies emerge and sugarcane is recognised for its hidden value. Agricultural industries should strive to communicate in an effective and innovative fashion, and this thesis highlights the changes in visual metadiscourse of paper-based publications which can be employed to aid the flow on information from organisation to grower.

8.0 PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE PROJECT

A paper about the thesis research results is being prepared for the ASSCT conference in May 2009 and also the APEN extension conference in November 2009. A paper about the evaluation of BSES press releases is also being written for submission to the *Australian Journal of Communication* or similar publication.

9.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many times throughout life you find yourself choosing the safe option, and towards the end of my thesis I remembered why I enjoyed working in the Burdekin at BSES Limited but it was the safe, easy, and comfortable option. I'm thankful of the day my colleagues encouraged me to challenge myself and apply for a Sugar Research and Development Corporation (SRDC) scholarship to study a Masters in Communication at the University of Queensland (UQ).

My first attempt at the scholarship failed and again it would have been easy to turn away and forget about it. I spent the next year preparing to apply again. As it turns out, good things really do come to those who wait and I was over-the-moon to receive the news of my success. SRDC deserves to be congratulated on their postgraduate scholarship program and the opportunities they create.

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Preparation of the industry publication used to test the hypothesis proposed in this study wouldn't have been possible without the trust and patience of Evan Shannon and John Hudson. Personal thanks also to Marian Davis and Lina White for organising the postage.

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APPENDIX 1

Improving communication between sugarcane industry organisations and growers by introducing new style elements to paper-based publications

Palmina Bonaventura

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a degree of Master of
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Behavioural Science at the University of Queensland

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