

Using Cable Access for Forestry

Lights! Camera! Tree Action!

The Challenge

Urban and community forestry flourishes with public interest and public involvement. Education forms a huge part of that success, but natural resource professionals and volunteer leaders cannot be everywhere at once. They need channels to distribute and multiply their messages if they are to effectively get information to landowners and residents who care about trees.

The Solution

Foresters aren't often thought of as television stars, but a little follow-through on a good idea made that a reality in Rhode Island with the cable-access program Tree Action. Tree Action is produced by the Rhode Island Tree Council and airs twice weekly during primetime. It's the classic story of an innovative concept that got started with partner collaboration.

A long-term partner of the State, the RI Tree Council has developed such strong technical expertise in urban and community forestry that it now acts in a niche very similar to that of an extension service. With this competence established, the RI Tree Council had matured to the point where it was ready for new challenges.

"We want the show to have something for everybody," says John Campanini, Tree Action host and technical advisor with the RI Tree Council. "We started with overviews of our organization and the State Forestry organization, established that and now provide much more technical programming that people can still relate to."

Resulting Benefits

"We reach more than a thousand people a week," notes Paul Dolan, frequent Tree Action guest and urban forester with the State of Rhode Island. "We broadcast seasonal advice and messages, and fine tune for coverage of invasives or other emergent topics. It's low-key and inexpensive, but results in inquiries for more technical information or information on the Tree Council."

Check local listings for Tree Action on Rhode Island cable access.



Tree Action reaches neighbors in the field and at home during primetime every week.

Campanini agrees: "Our Asian longhorned beetle show brought in two dozen calls. With Tree Action as our chief channel of exposure, our membership has gone from a plateau of 300 to more than 800 in the two years the show has been on. It's established us as Rhode Island's premiere advocate for trees."

With the goal of one new show per month, a shortage of topics is never a problem. Recent messages included:

- Insects and disease problems,
- Planting and pruning,
- Christmas tree selection and maple sugaring, and
- Drought, just to mention a few.

Sharing Success

How could another State, tree council or community repeat this success. Money isn't the hurdle, assures the Rhode Island example. Dolan's recipe cuts to the chase: "Go ask the cable company (how to make it happen). They're receptive if you're competent, serious about putting the time in, and going to be consistent."

Campanini adds that FCC guidelines support the public service work. Also, many local stations provide introductory training on how to develop a show.

As with any successful partnership or communications effort, trust and action are the foundation. "Someone has to champion the program," Dolan advises. "The person or group that is champion has to follow through."



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