**AgGateway 2014 Communications Plan**

**Situation Analysis**

AgGateway continues to experience significant growth, reflected in the size of membership, project participation, meeting attendance and other indicators. At the end of 2013, membership stood at 203 members, more than a 20% increase over 2012.



With this rapid growth come expanding and changing communications needs, namely:

* *Awareness:* Success of the AgGateway mission requires an appreciation for the importance of eBusiness, yet much of the agriculture community has no awareness of AgGateway and its activities, and the value of eBusiness.
* *Project/Council support:* At the same time, as AgGateway grows there is more project activity, and more information to communicate. The leadership for many of the AgGateway projects (SPADE, PAIL, ADC, etc.) and Councils are increasingly asking for guidance and support to boost participation in their activities. They are looking for ways to effectively report on the milestones and successes of their activities.
* *Consistent corporate branding/messaging:* With rapid growth – and with these requests for communications support from various sectors – comes the need to maintain a standard approach that can be used continuously to promote AgGateway and its activities.
* *Corporate positioning:* Hand-in-hand with corporate branding is the evolving position of AgGateway as an industry expert in eBusiness. As the organization grows and activities increase, we have the opportunity to better position AgGateway as *the* leader in promoting eBusiness in agriculture. **This involves pulling together the disparate activities and pieces and presenting in a clear voice and vision the progress of the ag industry in achieving eConnectivity, what comes next and why it is so essential.**

This plan attempts to meet these needs (and begins to address the larger corporate positioning goal), even as it squarely addresses AgGateway’s overall 2013-15 current strategic objectives.

Specific to the 2013-15 strategic objectives, the plan is relevant to all four corporate strategies, but in particular it supports the first strategy, which is:

* **Strategy 1: Promote the value and benefits of eBusiness and membership in AgGateway** (Results in more members and more connectivity.)

Implement a marketing and promotional plan to increase awareness and positive impression of AgGateway and of the value of membership, within the targeted agriculture industry audiences, by a reasonable amount by 2015.

*2014 Tactical objective*: Implement communications plans developed in 2013 within the targeted agriculture industry audiences and evaluate progress toward increased awareness target (i.e., reasonable amount) through follow-up surveys in fall 2014. Based on those results, develop communication plans for 2015.

It also provides direct support to the 2nd and 3rd strategies, which are:

* **Strategy 2: Increase/Enable implementation by reducing implementation barriers** (Results in more eBusiness implementation.)

Provide tools and assistance to enable eConnectivity for member companies and their trading partners by implementing solutions that significantly reduce at least three of the top identified barriers to implementation by 2015.

*2014 Tactical objective:* Address two barriers and significantly reduce at least one barrier identified by implementing the plan created in 2013.

* **Strategy 3: Expand eBusiness by broadening the scope of representation** (Results in more members and more project opportunities.)

Broaden the scope of representation within AgGateway by adding members to our existing councils and by creating and implementing a plan to internationalize AgGateway.

*2014 Tactical Objective*: Identify and prioritize targeted companies; group them into targeted categories for focus, develop and begin implementing an acquisition plan for the targeted companies by 12/31/14.

This plan is least relevant to the fourth objective, which is to “Operate AgGateway efficiently,” ensuring that all committees and councils are active and functioning. However, we do intend to assist councils and project teams as needed in clearly stating their goals, objectives and activities. This, in turn, will help in the operations of these groups.

**2014 Objectives**

Specifically, this plan’s primary objectives are:

* **Increase awareness of AgGateway** in the ag industry by the goal we established from the 2013 benchmark survey, which is the 2014 awareness level plus 2% by 2015.
	+ We have set an interim goal to increase awareness in **2014 by 25%, from 8% to 10% by the fall of 2014**, when the second wave of awareness research will be fielded. We will also look at a secondary goal to raise the relevance of AgGateway’s mission to a company’s own business, as rated in the research (see below).
	+ We would work to increase awareness an additional **2% between 2014 and 2015.** In other words, we will take the awareness measurement from the 2014 wave of research and add 2% for a 2015 goal.
		- Caveats: In our 2013 benchmark research we removed names of individuals who were active members of AgGateway, because we conducted separate research of members. However, moving forward we concluded that pulling out these names could artificially decrease our awareness number, since companies becoming more aware of AgGateway could decide to join. Therefore, moving forward we will NOT eliminate names (emails) of people who are in member companies.
* **Promote the value of eBusiness** and the value of AgGateway membership and involvement.

\*Further Background on Objective #1: Increase awareness of AgGateway in the ag industry from 8% to 10% by fall 2014.



As a secondary goal, strive to **increase the number of respondents rating AgGateway’s mission** as either “Very Relevant” or Somewhat Relevant” to their own business. Currently 72% say AgGateway’s mission is somewhat or very relevant; increase this to 76%.



**Key Strategies**

* **Provide additional materials** (e.g., “pass-along” testimonial videos, 1-pagers, project updates, better web presence, etc.) that promote AgGateway and eBusiness projects, milestones and successes, that members/prospects can then share with their leadership, and with their trading partners, to promote our overall strategic objectives.
	+ **Support the “Reducing Barriers” plan** in other ways as needed by providing communications tools and activities that encourage member companies and their trading partners to engage in eBusiness.
* Increase **media relations efforts** (e.g., press releases on AgGateway projects, eBusiness goals and successes, bylined columns in key publications)to raise awareness of AgGateway projects (e.g., SPADE, PAIL, SC II, CPCC, etc.) – specifically the milestones reached and successes/impact.
* Leverage more fully the relationship with **trade association** members, particularly ARA, TFI, CLA and ASTA, which had highest familiarity/utilization by industry in the awareness research.
* **Promote the use of AgGateway eBusiness tools, particularly AGIIS.**  Publicize anticipated changes in access to AGIIS, and the value of AGIIS and other AgGateway tools (e.g., tonnage, readiness survey, etc.) as associated with the value of implementing eBusiness and the value of involvement with AgGateway.
* **Support Membership efforts,** including the committee’s onboarding plan, to further tout the benefits of AgGateway involvement and engagement in eBusiness.
* **Support Meetings goals** to increase attendance at the Mid-Year Meeting and Annual Conference, as a way to increase awareness of AgGateway and engagement in eBusiness.

**2014 Targets**

* **Current membership**
	+ ***Active members*** within these segments of the ag industry: allied providers (distributors, retailers, software and service providers), ag retailers, crop nutrition, crop protection, feed industry, grain, precision agriculture and seed (primarily focused on row crops).
	+ ***Leadership within member companies,*** reached via current member volunteers and other means (media, etc.) as noted below.
* **Potential members**
	+ Other companies within the sectors above.
* **Ag industry leaders**
	+ Progressive growers and grower leadership (e.g., trade associations representing grower community.)
	+ Ag industry influencers (trade associations, key media, consultants, etc.)
	+ Government officials interfacing or potentially interfacing with AgGateway projects

**Tactics**

While some of these tactics are primarily internal communications efforts (e.g., the newsletter), most work to support our goals of increasing awareness in the industry as a whole, through exposure to AgGateway activities and by promoting the value of AgGateway involvement.

1. **Marketing Communications Materials**

Develop tools that can be used and shared by AgGateway leadership or internally by prospective members promoting value of AgGateway/eBusiness, and further establishing AgGateway as the lead organization for eConnectivity in ag.

* Develop a **testimonial video on the importance of implementing eBusiness**.
* Support the development of **case studies, 1-pagers, presentations and other materials** on eBusiness that can be shared with prospective members and/or “passed-along” to members’ upper management and trading partners.
	+ Through these materials, promote the valuable tools AgGateway offers to help companies achieve eConnectivity (AGIIS, tonnage tool, enabling tool, etc.)
* Consider production of an **AgGateway Annual Report** that summarizes achievements, mission and goals, and includes observations on the state of eBusiness in agriculture. (Consider producing a graphical video rather than traditional print piece.)
* Assist the CEO in preparing a **speech for Annual Conference** that gives a “State of Ag eBusiness”, to better position AgGateway in its leadership role, and to set the stage for 2015 goals and activities.
* Support the **Projects** (PAIL, SPADE, ADC, CPCC, SC II, etc.) in communicating their goals, milestones and accomplishments as a means to demonstrate the value of AgGateway and to increase involvement in eConnectivity projects. This may include testimonial videos, flyers, media articles/reprints, etc.
* Support **AGIIS** and the **Future Vision Task Force** in communicating new offerings (through presentations, articles, webinars) that underline the value of AgGateway tools and communicate plans for the future.
* Support the Meetings Committee through production of a **video** to promote attendance at the 2014 Annual Conference (shoot raw video at MYM). This would be similar to the 2013 video, but with a fresh approach and testimonials from different members.

Timing:

* eBusiness Video: At MYM conduct interviews of at least 5-7 member companies' management level personnel in at least 3 segments (some distributors/retailers may cover 3 segments). Complete video by Annual Conference.

*(Add additional time targets.)*

Communications Committee: Guidance and review of key pieces.

1. **Media Relations**
* Clean/update/expand press list – put the list on into AIM
* Connect with key editors to discuss their editorial calendars and opportunities for 2013; plan at least 2 guest columns/articles in trade press based on schedules.
* Press releases – goal of at least 1/month; more releases on individual project milestones and successes.
* Develop an AgGateway media protocol including key messages.
* Evaluate from an Issues Management perspective if AgGateway needs to develop position statements on any key topics (e.g., data security).
* Pursue feature in mainstream business media

Timing:

* press list update - Feb/March
* editorial calendars – Feb
* press releases – goal of at least one release/month
1. **Advertising**

As part of the conversations with editors (above) explore opportunities for low-cost ad to run in select “friendly” trade press to promote 1) AgGateway and 2) the annual meeting. Try to identify in advance the issues where this is possible.

Timing:

* Q1 & Q2
1. **Newsletter**
* Continue tight management and good variety of contributions demonstrating breadth of AgGateway activities.
* Evaluate content, layout, production for update – make sure compelling article titles stand out.
* Continue leadership recognition – profile from each council, profile of individuals who have served for good length of time.

Timing:

* Jan/Feb review of newsletter and layout/production options.
* Consider further “touch-base” calls with key project staff to stay abreast of project milestones and newsworthy advances.

Communications Committee: Continued management of this project

1. **Leveraging Association Ties**

Target associations highlighted in the survey (ARA, TFI, CLA, ASTA) for promotion to their membership.

* Susan to connect with the communications staff/function of at least the organizations that scored prominently in the research to discuss further means to communicate about AgGateway/eBusiness in 2013.
* Where the association does not yet have an Innovation Award, work to set up this award with that association partner.

Timing:

* Q2
1. **Membership Support**
* Coordinate with Membership Committee – Support of onboarding plan as needed (support on such tactics as onboarding webinars, newsletter articles, flyers, etc.)

Timing:

* Determine in Jan/Feb specific support for 2014
1. **Website**
* Raise the profile of public **Council** and **Project** pages, and to provide a standard approach to making these pages more dynamic and valuable so that they are visited and used frequently.
* Ensure the continued look and appeal of the home page given the goal above, as well as addition of new features including a store to sell AgGateway products and sponsorships.
* Consider similar improvements to the **member-protected Council** pages, so that Councils can find frequent updates that can be shared with others to promote the work of the Councils.
* **Leadership recognition** – make sure active companies and individuals are highlighted to promote peer incentive for involvement.
* Leverage further use of photography and video throughout the site.
* Manage closely, posting fresh, easy-to-find content.

Timing:

* Jan./Feb. – Improvements to Council and Project pages
* Update Home page, project and Council pages at least monthly

Communications Committee: Help gather updates from Council Chairs/Vice-Chairs after Council calls

1. **AgGateway Meetings**
* Assist in goals to increase attendance at Mid-Year Meeting (June 9-12, Ankeny, Iowa) and Annual Conference, “Cultivating eBusiness for Global Success” (Nov. 10-13, Phoenix)
* ***Social Media:*** If there is interest from a particular member of the Communications or Meetings Committee, pursue LinkedIn as a means to promote the meetings. Recognize that frequent monitoring is required if this area is pursued.

Communications Committee: A particular member(s) would need to own this area.

*[See full promotion plans for the MYM and Annual Conference below – Appendix I]*

Communications Committee: A particular member(s) could “own” the MYM or Annual Conference in terms of getting out eblasts, helping proofread documents, etc.

**Awareness Survey**

* Conduct the 2nd wave of awareness research in fall 2014 /don’t exclude members)

Timing:

* June/July – Determine if external survey work will continue with 2013 contractor; work to develop a contract and schedule for implementation.
* October/November – Conduct research
1. **Awards Program**
* ***Ron Storms:***
	+ Work on a new name/tagline (keeping “Ron Storms” but adding some language to the name such as “Leadership Recognition”
	+ Increase nominations through promotion (emails, press releases, member communications), and especially through outreach to Councils to solicit nominations.
* ***Innovative Technology Awards:***
	+ Explore ways to promote, particularly leading up to the “grand prize” winner at annual conference
	+ Increase the number of trade association members awards (Susan may combine this with outreach to associations, noted above.)

Timing:

Q2

Communications Committee: A committee member(s) could take on managing Ron Storms Award, particularly helping with outreach to Councils.

1. **Individual Meetings**
* Ensure that Rod and others have tools (PowerPoint, video, etc.) for one-on-one meetings with prospects.

Timing: Susan to discuss with Rod and Wendy in Q1

1. **Trade Show/Conference Participation**
* Evaluate collateral; Consider updates/changes/additions to booth materials

*[Events Calendar at end of this document – Appendix II]*

**Appendix I: Meeting Promotion Plans**

Mid-Year Meeting Promotion Plan *(preliminary)*

Assumes registration opens March 11 (3 months before meeting).

**Jan-March**

* Home page promotion – Mark Your Calendar (by 1/10)
* Press release when registration opens (3/11)
* Newsletter:
	+ Mark calendar – Jan/Feb issue – (due 1/17; publish 1/31)
	+ Register! – March issue – (due 2/14; publish 3/7)
	+ draft for April issue - General description/dates, sponsorship – (due 3/14; publish 4/4)
* Eblasts
	+ Registration open! (3/11)
	+ Register now for MYM (3/25)

**April**

* eBlasts
	+ Register Now (3/11)
* Blurbs to trade association partners with request to run on their websites/newsletters (4/11)
* Communication to councils to encourage registration (4/1)
* Newsletter – register now, reserve hotel, sponsorships, invite a trading partner (due 4/18; publish 5/2)

**May**

* Press release - promote speaker and educational opps, invite a trading partner – (5/7)
* eBlasts:
	+ Hotel reminder, invite a colleague (5 reasons you should be at MYM) – (5/6)
	+ Invite a trading partner, hotel/registration reminder – (5/13)
	+ ***Previous attendees*** eblast (5/15)
	+ Networking opportunities, 2 weeks out registration reminder – (5/27)
* Communication to councils to encourage registration (5/1)
* Newsletter – last minute information, transportation options (due 5/16; publish 6/4)

**June**

* Membership eblasts:
	+ Final reminder/logistics details – (6/2)
	+ Survey – 6/16
* Newsletter – wrap-up, thank sponsors (due 6/16)

Annual Conference Promotion Plan *(preliminary)*

Assumes registration opens 8/13 (a little over 3 months before meeting).

**January**

* Website – save the date (“Events” page, text on Home page)

**April**

* Newsletter – save the date (due 18; publish 5/2)

**May**

* Newsletter – save the date (due 5/16; publish 6/6)

**June**

* Website: Rotating banner on Home page
* Newsletter: start planning now, inviting colleagues, highlights (due 6/16; publish 7/3)
* MYM: Promotion at MYM – info table; Consider taping testimonials at MYM

**July**

* Website: Produce and post a video promo on Home page
* Newsletter: Registration opening soon (due 7/18; publish 8/8)

(Additional related articles: Ron Storms and GTAC nominations open)

**August**

* Press release: Registration Open! (8/13)
* Website: Rotating banner – Registration open!
* Newsletter: Register now, highlights, link to promo video (due 8/15; publish 9/5)
* eBlasts
	+ Registration open! (8/19)
* Ads: Work to secure at least two low-cost/free ads in trade pubs by 8/29, to run Sept./Oct.
* Councils: Communication to councils to encourage registration, invite teams and trading partners (8/27)

**September**

* Association Partners: Ask to run promo blurbs in their website/newsletters (by 9/10)
* Press Release: Speakers, educational highlights, special events (9/17)
* Website: News story with highlights (such as keynote speaker headshots)
* Newsletter: Networking, special events (due 9/19; publish 10/3)
* eBlasts:
	+ Why come? Check out what trading partners are saying! (link to the video) - (9/9)
	+ GTAC nominations closing soon (9/11)
	+ Ron Storms call for nominations (9/16)
	+ Registered yet? Early bird rates, keynote speaker, educational highlights (9/23)
	+ Early bird hotel rate ends 10/2 - *UPDATE as needed* - (9/25)
* Councils: Communication to councils to encourage registration, invite teams and trading partners (9/24)

**October**

* Website: Promote list of who’s already registered.
* Newsletter: Not too late, last-minute announcements (due 10/17; publish 11/7)
* eBlasts:
	+ See who else is coming, location highlights (10/7)
	+ Invite a trading partner, IT Innovation Awards (10/14)
	+ Keynote speaker, thank sponsors (10/21)
	+ It’s not too late to register! Early bird drawing winner (10/28)
* Councils: Communication to councils to encourage registration (10/22)

November

* eBlasts:
	+ Checklist for the conference (11/4)
	+ First time attendee lunch
	+ Survey (11/17)

**Appendix II -- 2014 Events Calendar:**

**JANUARY**

Jan. 13-15

**Michigan Agribusiness Association 2014 Winter Conference** – not attending

Lansing, Mich

Jan. 14-16

**IPSA 25th Annual Conferenc**e – not attending

St. Louis

Jan. 25-28

**ASTA Vegetable and Flower Seed Conference** – not attending

Monterey, CA

Jan. 28-30

**International Production and Processing Expo** – not attending

Atlanta

**FEBRUARY**

Feb. 3-5

**The Fertilizer Institute Marketing and Business Meeting** – attending

San Diego

Feb. 10-12

**ARA Winter Board Meeting** – not attending

Washington, D.C.

Feb. 17-19

**AAPFCO Annual Mid-Year Meeting** – attending

San Diego

**MARCH**

March 10-12

**AFIA Spring Committee Meetings** – attending

Las Vegas

March 11-13

**Council of Producers and Distributors of Agrotechnology (CPDA)** – evaluate attending

Washington, DC

March 13-14

**Purchasing & Ingredient Suppliers Conference** – not attending

Las Vegas

March 30-April 1

**NGFA 2014 Annual Convention** – evaluate attending

Hilton Head Island, SC

**APRIL**

April 9-11

**CLA and RISE Spring Conference**

Arlington, VA

**MAY**

May 20-22

**CLA 2014 National Policy Conference**

Washington, DC

**JUNE**

June 8-12

**GS1 Connect 2013**

San Diego, CA

June 9-12

**2014 AgGateway Mid-Year Meeting**

Des Moines, Iowa

June 10-13

**United Fresh 2014**

Chicago

June 11-14

**ASTA 131st Annual Convention**

Indianapolis

**JULY**

July 12-15

**AmericanHort Short Course (OFA and ANLA)**

Columbus, OH

July 21-23

**CPDA Annual Meeting**

Santa Fe, NM

July 25-27

**PMA Foodservice Conference & Expo**

Monterey, CA

July 29-31

**InfoAg**

St. Louis

**SEPTEMBER**

Sept. 7-9

**TFI World Fertilizer Conference**

San Francisco

Sept. 8-10

**United Fresh Washington Public Policy**

Washington, DC

**OCTOBER**

Oct. 5-8

**CLA 2014 Annual Meeting**

Colorado Springs, CO

Oct. 7

**NGFA Joint Feed/Pet Food Conference**

Omaha, NE

Oct. 17-19

**PMA Fresh Summit Convention & Expo**

Anaheim, CA

Oct. 19-21

**North American Fertilizer Transportation Conference**

Tucson, AZ

**NOVEMBER**

Nov. 1-4

**ASTA Farm & Lawn Seed Conference**

Kansas City, MO

Nov. 6-8

**Equipment Manufacturers Conference**

Palm Springs, CA

Nov,. 10-13

2014 AgGateway Annual Meeting & Conference

Phoenix

Nov. 18-20

**Fertilizer Outlook and Technology Conference**

Savannah, GA

**DECEMBER**

Dec. 2-4

**ARA Annual Conference**

New Orleans

Dec. 7-9

**NGFA County Elevator Conference**

Indianapolis

Dec. 9-12

**ASTA CSS 2014 & Seed Expo**

Chicago

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