

Developing a Marketing Plan for Your Multi-Site Church

By Tom Cheyney

If you are to develop a sound and successful marketing program for your multi-site church, you must start at the beginning. A marketing outreach program starts with an understanding of the organization. It also includes various planning activities required to produce a plan to promote your services to the community. In other words, you are marketing your off-site church. For the multi-site church, understanding and using marketing is the first step in developing a market outreach campaign.

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as “the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from the producer to the consumer or user.”

This definition in the field of evangelism and church growth is quite restrictive. For the local pastor, regardless of the size of the church, I define marketing as the human activity by the church directed at satisfying the community’s needs and wants through exchange processes. The human activity may be as simple as calling a newspaper to place an advertisement in next Saturday’s edition. The human activity could be as complicated as developing a team of church workers to create an outreach campaign using marketing as one aspect. No matter where the human activity falls in this scale, a lot of personal touch still goes into any event designed to draw people to the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, no matter what definition you and your church choose, the point of a marketing outreach plan is to develop services and ministries to attract and to satisfy the needs or wants of individuals within your marketplace. While advertising may be important, it is usually just one of many ingredients in the marketing mix for your new multi-site ministries.

In the broadest sense, any individual, church, or association that seeks to develop prospects or services in its community marketplaces has developed some form of marketing system. The marketing of a New Testament church can be described as the management of four P’s. The four P’s include (1) Product, (2) Place, (3) Price, and (4) Promotion. In other words, to develop a successful church marketing plan, there must be a church product (the good news of Jesus Christ) available to the consumer at a place

(The local church) for an acceptable price (participation in the stewardship efforts of the local church) with proper promotion (advertisement in various forms), so the consumer is aware of the product (the church) and its advantages.

The actual task of marketing for the church is in the marketplace. Since there are many churches of all types and forms, it quickly becomes evident that success is unlikely without planning. Without a plan, the church stands little chance of successfully marketing its worship experiences to a community that is lost and without Jesus Christ. Therefore, the development of a plan or program for community outreach through various media usually consists of a series of considerations, evaluations, and decisions by local church leaders.

The Product

The primary product our churches have today is the same as in the days of Pentecost. If we want our churches to grow, we do not need a better product or a better program, we need to go back to the days of Pentecost to that which has always worked. Churches today are struggling to be the first in line for the latest program. Other churches are talking to para-church groups trying to glean ideas. Still, the number one thing we are to do as New Testament churches is to tell men, women, boys, and girls that Christ Jesus died for their sins. Our message (the product) is the same as it was 2,000 years ago. That message is that Christ Jesus died for you and me, and that He promised to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

How we present our message is crucial. Ways in which we gathered the lost of our world 30 years ago may not work as effectively today. When I was growing up, all the preacher had to do was announce that we were having church and the place was full. Today mere articulation from the pastor is not enough. Why? Has our product changed? Is our message different from that on the day of Pentecost? No. The only difference is the way our listening audiences gather, retain, and respond to information. Throughout this plan book, many methods are shared to help your church overcome these modern barriers.

The Place

Has the local church changed in the past 30 years? Does the local church still position itself the way it did just a few decades before? You must consider these questions as you think about new ways to attract people to the Lord Jesus Christ and your church. One crucial subject to be mentioned is the way the church's outside property and building look. Too often, church leaders do everything to make the inside look pleasing and never give any real attention to the way the outside of the buildings and the grounds look.

The local church must realize it is in direct competition with everything that is attainable for the person who does not go to church, who does not want to hear about God's unending love, who chooses to stay home on Sunday because the church has not discovered a way to touch that heartfelt need that only Christ Jesus can quench. You are in direct competition with everything that keeps people at home or at the office instead of developing a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

A friend who pastors a Southern Baptist church in the Midwest has glimpsed what I am talking about here. Knowing the competition he must face, and that even on Sunday there are still many that the church cannot reach, this church has begun Saturday night services and is being blessed for its willingness to try something different in the Lord's work.

The place is still the same, but new ways to use church facilities are being tried with great success.

The Price

People considering your church must be able to see what God will do through their financial commitment to the church. Their participation in local stewardship efforts must be considered. Is the price in line with the perceived value? Does participation include a larger vision and ministry? If you fail to excite church members in the total ministry of your church, you will also fail to excite them in the church's stewardship goals. Many pastors cannot excite their churches in stewardship. They often conclude that the ministry will continue exactly where it is. That is wrong. With the growth of the baby boomers in churches today, that is no longer the case. Baby boomers will leave one church and go to another just because they feel that their participation counts for something in the new church. You must emphasize the great calling God has for Southern Baptists to evangelize the world and help church members develop the excitement that your local church is reaching out to the world through its stewardship efforts. A church in Florida emphasized the theme: "Big Enough to Touch the World... Small Enough to Touch Your Heart!" That is how you should emphasize stewardship efforts in your church. You should help your families know that their gifts count for something that is far-reaching and ongoing throughout the world.

The Promotion

Promotion includes activities that communicate the merits of the church and persuade targeted prospects to visit the church. What does your community know about your church? Do they even know there is a Southern Baptist witness in your city? Does your church name spark discussion or confusion? These questions deal with how you are viewed by your community. In our community, for instance, several views are held about our church. The first view is from believers. These are not only members of our church, but also the entire evangelical Christian community. That view is that something wonderful and meaningful is happening in our church. God is in the process of touching our community with Christ Jesus, and we are the tool He is using to touch lives and transform people. But there is another view that I am more excited about. That view is that our church members will not give up trying to tell lost men, women, boys, and girls that Jesus Christ loved them enough to die for their sins. I want them to know that our church did everything possible to keep them from living a life eternally in hell. We love our community enough to expend every ounce of energy trying to get the lost of "our" world into the kingdom of God.

Developing a Marketing Plan for Your Multi-Site Church

Here is a short list of the areas you might want to consider when you begin marketing your new campus. Do not forget the importance of brand identity and the need to tie the new site with the successful initial site. This will allow the new campus to grow more quickly if it has already trusted the brand of the original church.

Total for Outreach Marketing & Promotion	\$15,000
Budget Breakdown	
Signage	\$ 2,000
Direct Mail	\$ 5,500
Newspaper	\$ 3,000
Radio	\$ 2,000
New Campus Invitations	\$ 800
Electronic Invitations	\$ FREE
New Campus Block Party	\$ 1000
Follow-up Letters	\$ 700

Do not miss the importance of portable signage for a new campus church. It is important that people begin to see your signage and begin to know about the new campus in their area. Caution should be given towards local ordinances regarding signage. In some instances, you will not be able to leave the portable signs out overnight. You will have to put them up in the morning and take them down almost immediately after the morning services. Since they are a cost-item in the multi-site budget, be sure to check regarding any local ordinances regarding the signage issue.

The Ten –Minute Guide to Successfully Marketing Your Church

You will receive some strategies to successfully execute your messages in the various media available today. The message of your multi-site church is the most important decision in an outreach campaign, and all other decisions amply reinforce or magnify that decision. Yet, the actual execution, or how the outreach strategy is communicated to the prospect, has a strong effect on the overall campaign. For the most part, a sound strategy succeeds regardless of the execution. If what your church says is beneficial to the prospect or solves a prospect's problem, some response usually occurs. For example, a greater number of families are looking for churches with inventive children's ministries as part of their ministries. No matter what you think about the idea of separating the family during worship, countless numbers of parents are looking for churches that meet this felt need.

As you speak about your multi-site church, share the benefits. However, if the strategy is presented in an interesting, exciting, and memorable way, larger numbers of prospects are likely to respond to the message or respond more quickly. Interestingly, while what you say is vital, how you say it can prove to be the difference between a successful church outreach campaign and an outstanding one. We can learn a lot from national television commercials on this matter. For example, food commercials often emphasize taste. When an advertisement begins to run, it usually has the strategy of getting viewers' attention, but after a few days it changes to the idea of taste. The strategy has not changed; the execution has.

The Big Idea

As your team begins to work and dream, keep looking for the big idea that will make this more than just another project by your church. The big idea is usually simple, but it brings realism, an understanding of the community, and an empathy with the target audience. It makes the promotion jump off the page, off the radio, or out of the letter and into the life of the reader or hearer. The big idea brings the message home in a way that prospects enjoy and believe in, but most of all react to. That is the beauty of a big idea. Churches must learn to use these to their advantage. The big idea is simple and direct. It clearly states the strategy completely. It clearly states the message being delivered. Most important, it empathizes with the audience – the prospects for your church.

How Do You Develop the Big Idea?

In developing the big idea, there is no advantage in trying to be extraordinarily complex. Controlled creativity is the key. But how do you come up with the big ideas? How do you come up with great ideas that will turn a sound strategy into a successful promotion campaign? Big ideas are the result of what I call ideation. Ideation is the development of ideas. But how do you do this? How can a pastor and staff learn to generate ideas and come up with new and exciting concepts that will grab the attention of the audience and literally drive the message home in an interesting and effective way? Are you capable of doing this? Yes. A new idea is nothing more or less than a new combination of old elements. At least five steps help in developing ideas. They are:

1. **Gather the raw material.** These are the specific and general ideas that help you form concepts down the road. It is brainstorming.
2. **Work the ideas over in your mind.** If you do not digest these ideas, they will never help you form a big idea.
3. Maintain an incubation stage. During this stage, carry your ideas around. Do not look at them. When the timing is right, the ideas will be with you so that you can work on them. Until that time, they are out of your mind, and your unconscious mind does the work.
4. **Birth the idea.** At the time you least expect it, a tremendous idea will jump out of your mind. You must be ready. The first time an advertising idea jumps out, it might scare you. You may not be sure it will work or where it came from. Simply make it a matter of prayer and faith, acting in accordance to God's will. This is the exciting part of the process, but it is not the final part.
5. **Develop and shape the idea.** Not every idea comes out of you head complete. This is where the work begins and a team of creative thinkers is needed. This is where the idea is fleshed out into practical usefulness. Usually, the idea requires adaptation or refocusing to fit the situation exactly. This is often the stage where good ideas can get lost. Stay tough all the way through the final adaptation process.

This has worked for me and many others. It can work for you. Let me share one further idea on what I call run-offs. A run-off is an idea that has been formed from a prior idea or promotion. Our church has developed five promotional brochures that are examples of the run-off idea. We have one main public relation packet that we send or deliver to prospects. It says a lot about our church, but it does not say it all. Currently, we have four run-off brochures that expand our touch ministry. We have a tri-fold brochure for baby boomers. We have a "Pastor's Dreams and Vision" booklet for people who want to know where this church is going under this pastoral leadership. We have a tri-fold brochure entitled "Questions to Ask When Trying to Find a Church Home!" These four run-offs tell a prospect even more about our church family.

A few quick pointers will help the team develop ideas. Sharing these ideas in print with the entire team could be the best decision made.

1. Say what you planned to say. Do not allow your efforts to drift from the real goal and course.
2. Make sure your execution appeals to the right audience. If you are no longer targeting the audience desired, go back and start over.
3. Be sure that what you say in print or through radio or television is what you would say to the church prospect in person.
4. Be sure your idea has been written for the prospect and not for the pastor or church. This is not your opportunity to say how wonderful the staff or the idea is. Your goal is to help your prospect make a life-changing decision.
5. Be clear, complete, concise, and convincing in your execution. Do not assume the reader already knows everything about your church.
6. Do not overwhelm the message. You are sold on your church, or you would not still be there. Keep exaggeration from getting in the way.
7. Call for some type of action. Whether you are writing a letter or making a personal visit, end with the idea of "Why not try us this coming Sunday? You will be glad you did!"
8. Be proud of what the Lord and your team have created. Show it off to someone close to you and get a response. If you are not proud of it, scrap it, and start over.

Keeping these few basic planning pointers will not make you a promotion expert, but will give you respect among your team and throughout your church. A positive response to these pointers can help you realize that you have done everything to ensure success. The rest is in the hand of the One who holds our future.

It's Time to Get Started

The easiest part of the process is completed. It is time for one and only one thing. That is WORK! In our church, I have defined work for our deacons and Sunday school workers as:

Winning Others Rapidly to the Kingdom

This is the moment where you roll up your sleeves and get down to the calling that goes with being a Christian. This is where you are found being faithful to the work of the kingdom. This is where you touch lives instead of merely thinking about them.

Here are 16 suggestions to follow in your execution:

1. Know your church benefits.
2. Know your church community.
3. Talk to your prospect.
4. Make an honest promise to your prospect.
5. Get to the point right away.
6. Be specific and relevant.
7. Be brief and concise.
8. Be logical and smooth.
9. Be enthusiastic about your church.
10. Be complete.
11. Avoid the razzle-dazzle.
12. Use real language.
13. Empathize with your prospects.
14. Have only one response in mind.
15. Major on your church's benefits, not gimmicks.
16. Ask them to visit soon.

George Barna shares in his book, *Marketing the Church*, seven steps to preparing the way for successful implementation of the marketing plan. In all of my experience, I have not found a better list. He lists them in order of enactment. They are listed here.

1. Establish one person as the market director for the church.
2. Create ownership of the plan among the key leaders of the church.
3. Identify the resources and conditions needed to move ahead with the plan.
4. Identify specific resources that can be used in the plan's implementation.
5. Train leaders in the basics of marketing, to maximize their input and their talents.
6. Hold people accountable for doing their assignments.
7. Implement the entire plan.

Barna says, "While there are never any guarantees of success, experience has shown that organizations have a greater chance of success if they do follow the path laid out in their plan."

Has this entire idea blown you out of the water? Does the idea of a total church communication plan seem staggering? Of course it does if you attempt to incorporate all the steps and ideas discussed in this article at once. However, if you and your church set a few realistic goals to incorporate each year, then after a few years you will have developed a total church communication plan. It will not happen overnight, but it can and will happen. This task is never complete. Your church can always go further than it has before. Bravery, courage, and a keen sense that God is ultimately in control are vital if you are going to affect your city with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Keep evolving; do not allow yourself to do simply that which you did the year before. It will be worth the effort as you work with the resources God provides in your church. Touch lives for the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.

Strategies to Effectively Change Your Church Image

What kind of image does your church present to the community? Is it known for its tremendous buildings? Is it known for being on the historic register, or for feeding thousands each year at Thanksgiving? Is it known by its ministries? Are there any hidden statements that hinder your witness for Jesus Christ? This chapter will expose several overlooked matters that could be hurting your church's community image.

Businesses in the United States currently spend more than 5 billion dollars a year on the development and implementation of their public images. By any measure, image development is a big business. Some 100,000 people are engaged in it yearly. In the early 1900s, at least 3,000 new practitioners were added annually. Why has the church not kept pace with growing technologies?

The Seven Deadly Sins

Churches must avoid the seven deadly sins of church advertising and promotion. These cardinal rules provide a checklist against which to measure any promotion and image development program. These seven sins are:

1. **The sin of being a braggart.** Verbosity doesn't have a place in Christian advertising. To reach people with advertising, you must speak to their needs and show them how they can benefit from accepting Christ.
2. **The sin of talking to yourself.** The most creative church promotion directs its remarks to the interests of the target audience – not to the interests of the church. The choice of words must speak to the world.
3. **The sin of preaching.** Preachers often feel compelled to preach as they would in church. Advertising can use other, more effective ways to bring lost people into the church to hear Spirit-anointed preaching.
4. **The sin of being noisy.** Many churches believe they have to make a big noise in order to get people's attention. If your church has something interesting to say about a subject or event, there is no need to set your hair on fire or stand on the church roof in order to catch their eye.
5. **The sin of being sloppy.** Appearance is important. In the same fashion, no one likes someone being inconsiderate. Always put your best before the world.
6. **The sin of being cute.** A lost person is turned-off when a church tries to be cute but appears disrespectful. Deliver your story in as straightforward a manner as possible. If you do, you will get more attention and applause from your audience than if you put on an act.
7. **The sin of being dull or boring.** Of all the deadly sins of church advertising, worst by far is that of being dull or boring. The church advertising campaign should enhance the message. The campaign that takes away from the church is doing more damage than good.

Image Strategy is Like Fishing

In the past, image promotion centered on identifying the target audience. Monitoring, refining, and analyzing demographics allowed the group to fine-tune its image to ensure that the center of the target was hit.

Churches today compete with more messages bombarding the listening audience than they did 20 years ago. Amazingly, the average person encounters more than 1,400 messages a day. So, what has been hurting most of our churches' image promotion the past few years? Even though the church hits its target audience, it is in direct competition with at least 1,399 other messages to win the attention of that single viewer.

Hitting the target is not enough in today's world. It does not ensure complete communication. To have successful communication with your audience, a firm understanding of whom, what, and where they are is required. Only when proper targeting is developed and achieved will a church be able to catch the heart of its audience.

Seven Steps to Image Placement

There are at least seven steps to strategic image placement:

1. **Clarification and identification of the church's mission statement.** What does your church do well? For whom do you do it? This succinct statement serves as the flagship of the ministry. It should be concise -- not lost within larger visionary goals or objectives. Lack of clarity at this point could prove fatal. Too much diversity can destroy your intended message at the moment you are getting off the ground.
2. **Audience delineation.** Who is our church seeking to touch for Christ? Where are they? What are they like? What are their needs? How can your church reach them more effectively? The church's goal is to learn how to use people's talents and abilities in the community for the Lord. Many families join a church because they believe they will be used in ministry at that particular place of worship as compared to another.
3. **Audience appreciation.** Any church wanting to expand must truly appreciate the target audience and its needs. Sensitivity to the needs of a target group is paramount. Whether in ministry or ministry-related business, understanding an audience's felt needs dramatically improves the results of your communication.
4. **Image placement design.** What has our church done in the past in the area of design? Has it been successful? If not, why not? If past promotions have been successful, then build on that past. For the church moving into the twenty-first century, continual development and changing of your design are required. People do not look at the same advertisement more than the number of times it takes to be familiar with it. Therefore, after that time you have lost your target audience unless you say it differently. Look for the weaknesses and strengths of past projects and build on them. Identify opportunities or growth and advancement in your work
5. **Develop the right tools.** Now that you have a message that is targeted toward a particular audience, how are you going to get that message out to them? Ideas such as color, form, and paper should be considered at this point. Do not try to get something for nothing. Remember, if a sloppy job is done, your results will be sloppy.
6. **Implementation.** When all is ready, start with a small test to see if the intended results can be accomplished. This will save your church a lot of time and money and will assure you that the plan can work. If the results are less than expected, how can careful refining eliminate any ineffective material? When refinement is completed, the results should improve.
7. **Follow-up.** As with anything, follow-up is always required. If your church believes it can reach a specific target audience simply by developing an appropriate image, do not continue any further in your course of action. Results are achieved when God's people follow up with personal contacts and visits. Have a goal of reaching a certain number of families through this campaign. Then aggressively go after these people.

Dream the Dream Again

As with any ministry, no sooner is it developed and continuing than a need arises to repeat the process of doing and developing a new approach. It took courage and boldness to get this ministry off the ground. Do not allow it to die with just one project underway. Develop a new idea. Select a new audience to touch with the gospel. Minister to the needs of another group in your community. Launch another new campus or plant a church! Be on the cutting-edge for Jesus Christ. Penetrate your entire community for Christ. Always be willing to follow through with that which the sovereign Lord has begun.