Six Strategies for Effective Church Communications

Yvon Prehn

To help your church
fully fulfill
the Great Commission

SIX STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS

By
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Previous versions of bits and pieces of this material have appeared on the Effective Church Communication website and other books and articles by Yvon Prehn.

Scripture versions and citations:

Unless otherwise noted, Bible verses are from the New International Version.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The content in this book is from The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing, which will be published in its entirety in June 2012. The final book will be a comprehensive guide on how to create effective church communications. Effective church communications are all the communications in both print and digital form, created in the context of the church and irrespective of surface design or the technology used to create and share them, which help people come to know Jesus as Savior and grow to mature disciples, in other words, to fully fulfill the Great Commission.

In addition to sharing this common goal, the book will contain a number of sections that are helpful as stand-alone training for church communicators. I decided to publish these sections serially and separately, both to benefit church communications while the book is being put together, and for the usefulness of the individual topics after the complete book is finished.

The overall book and the serial parts of it contain the "why" of effective church communications, the website, http://www.effectivechurchcom.com has the "how," the practical implementation of the material. So as not to cause excessive problems with links (particularly for those reading this on a digital device), in the following material I will often simply refer to the "ECC website" above rather than having the full URL in the text. Please refer back to this first section for the URL to link to the ECC website. On the site there are how-to articles, videos, and supplemental training on many topics in church communications as well as background and information about the ministry of Effective Church Communications.

For updates on the serial sections published for the book on The Five Steps, as well as for others in the foundational series of church communications, please sign up for the ECC newsletter on the home page of the website, or for Facebook updates http://www.facebook.com/effectivechurchcommunicatons or on Twitter http://www.twitter.com/yvonprehn.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Why is strategy important in church communications?

First, let's define the term strategy:

Strategy: etymology: Greek strategia generalship, from strategos

1. The science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war.

2. A careful plan or method; a method worked out in advance for achieving some objective.

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The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing are: Invite, Inform, Involve, Instruct, and Inspire. Each one of these steps has many communications that work together to take people from outside the church and progressively move them to Christian maturity and to become disciples of Jesus, in other words, to fully fulfill the Great Commission. When you realize you need more than one or two church communications to change your world for the Kingdom of God, you are in a position similar to that of a general looking at the overview of his battle plans and resources. He knows the objective is to win the battle, he can see the territory that needs to be captured, but the general also knows that it will take more than an overview to

get from where the army is to where the army needs to be to declare victory. It takes strategy.

You also need strategy in your communication ministry: "the science and art of employing.....maximum support to adopted policies...a careful plan, ...a method worked out in advance for achieving some objective" to make whatever communications create practical and useful for your church.

We have objectives far more eternally significant than the capture of a beach or bridge. We want to enable the people in the mission field entrusted to us come to know Jesus as Savior and all our people to become mature in Christ. This book will provide you with strategies to help you accomplish those objectives.

The strategies each of The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing that apply to all church communications are:

- Strategy 1: Create multi-channel communications
- Strategy 2: Divide your communication team into two production levels
- Strategy 3: Always be who you are, where you are
- Strategy 4: Don't let money be a determining factor
- Strategy 5: Make the most of Seasonal Celebrations and Special Events
- Strategy 6: Do not confuse irreverence for relevancy

Let's now look at them one-by-one and learn how to practically apply them in your church.

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CHAPTER TWO:
STRATEGY #1—CREATE MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS

A key strategic question for any church any church today is what to do about all the channels of communication available? What material should go on the web? Stay in print? Be in both channels? What about social media?

If we look at secular communications, we see an explosion of options. *USA Today's* publisher Larry Kramer shared his strategy to provide content in a variety of channels when he took the job by saying*, "The paper will build 'closer relationships with our readers' through new uses of technologies. . . . . We're going to give people what they want, when they want it, where they want it. You want it on your watch; I'll give it to you. Or inside of your sunglasses. "*

Those sounds great—give people all the content they want in any channel they want it in, but realistically in the church, we don't have the time or money to do all this. Most churches are not looking for additional work in communications. Many are overwhelmed by the option of the print and the web and thinking about other channels seems impossible. We naturally want to simplify our communication workload in a ministry setting because we don't have time to do all the work we need to do. Most churches are not looking for

ways to increase, but to consolidate their communication efforts. Following are typical questions I've received for help in doing that:

"What is the best way to communicate with people today?"

"What is the way to reach people best: the web, email, or social media?"

"Do we still need to print?"

"What is a communication channel? Which communication channel works best to reach people outside and inside the church?"

These questions reflect the concern, confusion, and frustration over the communication channels available to us today, which include print, web, email, postal mail, telephone, texting, social media, digital projection systems, voice, and people. When overwhelmed with channel choices and having limited time to implement them, it is natural to want to narrow our church communications down to one or two that will be effective. Because of that, I always feel bad as I answer people's questions about what to use because I know people want me to tell them that one channel, especially if it is the one they prefer, is all they need, but I can't do that. I can't do that because to be effective in your church communication ministry, to fully fulfill the Great Commission, there is no one way.

Today to be an effective church communicator, you have to use every channel available to you.

It is the time of both/and, not either /or.

No one channel will work because people aren't any more alike in their communication preferences than they are in other areas of likes and dislikes. In addition to likes and dislikes, today there are also differences in technical skills that affect how people take in communications, for example:

- Some people love to go online; others don't have a computer.
- Some love words; others prefer images and videos.
- Some love to listen to podcasts; others don't have any idea what a podcast is.

- Some tweet, blog, live on Facebook, and participate in every new social media; others consider social media not only a monumental waste of time, but a pernicious evil.
- Some text continuously; some won't read anything that isn't on paper.

Some get all their news and information from television; some have a cell phone ear piece glued to their heads and thumbs perpetually flying across tiny keyboards.

What makes this broad spectrum of beliefs and preferences in communication channels challenging is all of people mentioned above go to your church. All of them are also in the neighborhoods, virtual and real, that you are trying to reach.

We can't simply pick out one way to communicate because the Lord has put us into a world of wonderfully diverse people and it is our responsibility to create communications that are useful for all of them. When the Apostle Paul encouraged us to "be all things to all people that we might win some," he probably didn't have the digital communication revolution in mind, but the gospel imperative of his words still applies.

Divide and conquer into three overall channels

To make this situation manageable for practical application in church communications, I've divided the many communication channels into three overall groups, which I'll discuss along with strategic implementation ideas for each of them. It is much more difficult to communicate in all these channels than it is to focus on the one or two we personally prefer, but I trust this section will encourage you and give you some strategic ideas how to be more effective as you work.

Also, just as there is no one communication channel that works for everyone, no one person has to be an expert in all the channels. We'll flesh out that strategy later, but don't feel overwhelmed, as an individual, as you read this section. The Lord put us in a Body and there is always someone in your church who understands and can do all that needs to be done to reach the people the Lord calls you to reach. If you don't like to tweet, someone else does; if tiny keyboards cramp your fingers, someone else can compose without looking at them, if editing video gives you a headache, it probably inspires someone else.

Someone else may need their resume proofed, a database created or a story edited. Not one of us has all the skills necessary for effective church communications—that's why we have each other.

The three channels of effective church communication

Channel 1: Print

This channel consists of printed bulletins, newsletters, postcards, invitation cards, connection cards, and instructional materials, printed matter of all kinds, sizes, and quality that we create in the church. Print, in color, black and white, and all its forms is still one of the primary and most important ways we communicate with people today and will be for some time. Almost everyone has access to this channel.

Channel 2: Digital

This channel is the latest tool we have to communicate the gospel message and we use it in PowerPoint presentations, the internet, our website, email newsletters, cell phone and small screen communications, social media, video, podcasts, and anything else that makes up the newest, latest, and greatest communication technology. This channel is still emerging, evolving, continuously developing something new, and expanding constantly. Not everyone has access to this channel and speed of adaptation varies tremendously with the age, interest, and socioeconomic group that an audience belongs to.

Channel 3: People

This communication channel is often easily forgotten, but it is probably the most important in any church communication program. You can have the most beautifully designed bulletin and the most complete and functional website imaginable, but if the folks at your welcome center ignore visitors and prefer to chat with each other, if the person answering the phone (assuming a real person can be reached) is having a really bad day and takes it out on all callers, if no one ever answers email sent to the church, or if the members of your congregation ignore visitors, the most beautiful and cutting-edge communications, no matter if they are in print or digitally presented, will be useless.

People are the church—the church throughout the ages is made up of people, regardless of the technology they use to communicate with each other or the outside world. Our people are always the primary delivery tool of church's messages, accessible at all times to all people.

We are living in a time of great communication transition

We need to keep this transition time in mind as we consider the various channels of church communication. A few hundred years from now, things may settle down a bit and everyone will perhaps receive messages beamed wirelessly into their brain stem in a way that can be turned on and off with the blink of an eye, but right now we are in the midst of the biggest communication revolution in the history of humanity and this revolution floods us with communication options of every kind.

Why the change is so monumental

For all of human history, written communication, whether on clay tablets, scrolls, or books, consisted of words and images in a linear order. Communication consisted of an author's thoughts, frozen in a moment in time, and passed on relatively unchanged in progression and content, even though the format might shift. For example, when we read what the Assyrians chiseled into a clay tablet, we might read it in English in a textbook, but the thoughts of that particular scribe, written on the day he wrote them, and in the order he wrote them, haven't changed from the time they were written.

The digital revolution changed communications from moments frozen in time to an ever-flowing, cascading, branching and recombining stream

Digital communication streams past us with evolving conversations, images, tweets, blogs, combinations, revisions, additions, collections, mashups, and condensations of information unimaginable in the past. This streaming of information and how we combine, modify, and interact with it is exciting to some and totally confusing to others. But no matter our like or dislike of these new methods, we are in process as to how content, divorced from time constraints and linear presentation, works to communicate timeless truth. These issues will not sort out for a long time and we need to figure out survival strategies in this evolving communication landscape.

The church communicator's challenge is to remember and to respond appropriately to the reality that people in your congregations, who you are trying to help grow to Christian discipleship, are in a variety of places in the process of this communication revolution.

- Some people are only comfortable with a style of technology that has been used from the time of Moses—words on a paper surface.
- Others are primarily comfortable with communication used from the creation of the world—the spoken word.
- Others are tiptoe on the bleeding edge of technology— with a Blackberry in one hand and an iPhone in the other, accessing every social media stream available.
- Some jump from place to place—some days glued to the computer screen and other days writing handwritten thank-you notes during television commercial breaks.

Is one communication channel "better" than another?

Is one communication channel "more effective" than the other? Today we can only answer questions like this for individuals and for a particular message, not for a church or even a group within the church, or for all the kinds of messages that need to be delivered by a church to all the audiences within and without the church.

For example, you might send out an email newsletter to let the Single Adult group know the schedule for upcoming social events for the month and it would be entirely appropriate. However, if you sent out an email to a mother who just lost her son in the war, it would be cruel. A personal visit is the best and only way to communicate some messages. On the other hand, if you made a personal visit to every single adult to invite them to every event, it wouldn't be a good use of your time. Similar contrasts can be made with many of the messages we communicate at church.

What are church communicators to do? If we can't focus on one communication tool, how can a church keep up?

The church can keep up with this constantly changing communication revolution in the same way it is successful in every other ministry endeavor and that is to realize that the task is not for one person, but for the Body. No one person can keep up with technology; no one person can create all the

communications needed for a church communications that ministers to all of the people at all the church. In practical terms this means:

Strategy suggestion: You need a communications team made up of people who are proficient with the various channels of the communication revolution
You need a team made up of some who love print; some who dream in HTML code; some who love images; some who love type and words in order; some who can create a great postcard and others who can text with their eyes closed, some who love the discipline of a monthly newsletter with consistent columns and articles, others who gravitate to the free-flowing forms of social media. You need people who are good in person-to-person communications, people who love the web, and people who manage databases effortlessly.

Though the next section on Strategy: the Two Production Levels of Church Communications will give you more detailed advice on teamwork in church communications, here are **Four Suggestions** on how to utilize a church communication team in the area of multi-channel communications:

Suggestion #1—People tend to create best and promote the channels and methods they personally love and are comfortable with.
You can't force a word-processing only church secretary to be excited about working on the website (although she might enjoy it with adequate training). It would probably be just as difficult to have someone who communicates primarily in text messages and website graphics create a detailed, printed church employee handbook or a correct Sunday bulletin.

Encourage the communication strengths of people and give them training in new skills if they want to learn new areas. A great website for inexpensive online training is the Lynda.com training site. On this site, for $25 a month, a person can take as many online training classes as they want. I've taken ones on many topics: MS Word, MS Publisher, PowerPoint, Adobe Creative Suite, WordPress website creation, HTML, CSS, PHP, Twitter and Facebook, from them and have found them all to be extremely helpful.

Suggestion #2—Don't make the mistake of assuming people of a certain age are more interested or proficient in certain areas than others or that any age can't learn new things.

There are grandfathers who have been programming since the days when a computer filled a room and there are teens who are tired of technology. There are baby boomers who run the gamut of the super-tech savvy to the completely computer phobic, as was the case in our home until I told my pastor husband I wasn't answering his emails for him anymore. I've used computers, as a writer, from when they were first invented, in contrast, computers were not in use when my husband attended seminary. Today we have his and her laptops. I caved in about the email—I still answer most of his email, but he now knows how to access them and how to do Bible research online.

Suggestion #3—The skills and ages don't matter; respect and mutual encouragement do

As stated earlier, age is unimportant in church channel skills, what matters is that the church communication team members mutually respect each other and realizes that every channel can be and is used today to communicate the gospel message. Team members must not allow expertise in any tool or technological skill to be a source of pride. A person who tweets is no more valuable than one who writes postcards to the homebound. Creating images for the website is no more important than entering correct birthdays in the newsletter. Remember Jesus could, at any time, rise up the stones in the parking lot to communicate more effectively than any of us are able.

None of us have a skill or ability that is not a gift from God. We are all servants of the same Master and we are to constantly build each other up in our work and to never make someone feel small or inadequate. Newer tools do not necessarily make superior communications.

Suggestion #4—Don't worry about changing the content of your message as you adapt it to different channels

The content of your message needs to be consistent. Your communication team can then take that content and put out the message using the various channels. For example, perhaps your content is a campaign to get the congregation involved in small groups. The communication team members, needs to create this core of content to be used in every channel:

- Clear description of the event

- Audience defined: everyone, one age group, outreach, church members only

- Why people should attend

- All connection details: location, contact person, contact phone, email

- Supporting details: cost, child care provisions,

- Marketing slogan for the campaign, in this instance in recruiting small groups it might be "Everyone in One!

- Colors and images—it is especially important that the same colors be used throughout any communication campaign. Can you image a Coke billboard with a pink can? A Coke website done in teal and purple? Of course not—Coke is one of the most recognizable brands in the world because of that consistent RED color. We see and respond to color before any written message. If you change the color of your message in various channels people will think it is about a different topic.

One you have this core of material finished, your communication team can then create a variety of communications in to accomplish your ministry goals including:

- Print brochure

- Bulletin announcement and insert

- PowerPoint presentation or reminder slides

- Website directory of small group times and locations

- Print directory with the same information for the welcome center

- Twitter feed that updates and invites to small groups

- Facebook page that group leaders are encouraged to post pictures, tips, topics

- Website section on small group that shares philosophy, resources, links, blogs from small group pastor or leaders

- Email newsletter designed to inform and encourage people to sign up for small groups and that refers to website and social media connection about them

Not only do you need communications in all these channels, but you must repeat them many times. In the past, marketing theory recommended repetition of the same event at least seven times is important for people to notice it and attend—today, advertisers have increased that number exponentially.

If you doubt the importance of repetition of a message enough times to get people to an event, think about how many times you see exactly the same preview for upcoming movies on television, web and print ads, often months before the movie is released. The media companies that produce them have done huge amounts of research and they know that repetition, many mentions in many channels, is vital if you want people to show up. Notice also how often they put out exactly the same message. If the message is constantly changing, it can be confusing to people who may not be paying attention totally.

Consider the dozens of times you see a movie advertised; consider also that many churches think that to put the same message out more than twice is too much. This might be part of the reason that movies get much higher attendance than church events.

Summary of suggestions to make your message effective as you use a variety of communication channels

- Don't change the content, colors, or look of your key message points or your audience will get confused.
- Each channel should repeat the message a number of times.
- Remember no one will see the message as many times as you do because not everyone uses all the communication channels.

Track how many times you used each channel and how often you used them. After the event, record attendance.

Never forget the people who don't have access to the easily created channels

It is very difficult to take time to do a print postcard for the three people who don't have internet access when fifty other people in the Sunday School class are so easy to reach via email. Or to make a copy of the newsletter (in large print at that) and mail it out to the ten people who vow never to use a computer when everyone else in the congregation can access it on the church website. In these situations we must remember—

Jesus left us a very clear example of what to do.
He told the story of the shepherd who went after the one little sheep who wandered off. Jesus isn't nearly as concerned about the efficiency of our newsletter delivery as he is that we care for the wandering little sheep just as much as he does. That little sheep was probably a naughty little sheep and

wandered off for no good reason. Still, Jesus went after him and carried him home lovingly.

We know some people need the additional format of communications because they are not able physically to access certain channels. Our heart is touched and we want to do whatever it takes to help them. But, sometimes we might feel that other people in the church make our communication tasks more difficult just because they want to be ornery—and that might be true.

Regardless of their attitude, whether it is gentle and appreciative or demanding and never satisfied, Jesus expects us to love and serve them with gentleness and respect. That means we do the postcard, and the large print newsletter, and the blog and the tweet and make sure the website is updated—or we make sure someone on the communication team does all these things.

To ensure channel success, consider times in the church service when you demonstrate the various channels available and how to use them.

Sometimes people don't make use of certain communication channels because they simply don't understand how they work. In addition, they might be fearful that everyone else knows how to do something and are ashamed to ask for help.

Demonstrations such as the ones below can increase involvement with and use of your church communication channels. All of these could be done with PowerPoint hooked up to a laptop and can be done during the church service or at other meetings:

- To promote your small group ministry, demonstrate to the congregation how the website has a listing of groups, directions on how to use the website to get to them, how the website has profiles of the people leading the groups, and lesson downloads for those who miss a week.

- Explain what the Small Group Twitter feed is all about and show your congregation how to follow it, how they can send messages or retweet them.

- Answer concerns about Facebook and show people how to "like" your church or small group page. Tell them what is appropriate to share and how to do it.

In addition to the digital formats, you could show small group sign-up cards for those without access to the web and give out the phone numbers for people who have questions and don't know how to use email.

Even though you do the presentation in PowerPoint, prepare printed handouts with instructions you demonstrated because people seldom remember details or how-tos from one PowerPoint presentation. Have someone unfamiliar with the church or your systems try the connection advice or sign-up sheet on the website to see if it makes sense.

Membership management systems may also need demonstrations

Related to communication use, there are a number of church management systems that allow church members to access their records online, including their financial records. There are lots of exciting options for these kinds of programs, but unless you take extensive time teaching your congregation how to use them, they will be a constant source of frustration to members and the church staff.

New technology, in any form, is seldom as "intuitive" and easy to use for the members of the congregation as it seemed to be to the staff person who was excited about buying it or who has spent hours learning how to use it. I've had lots of feedback from church staff members who have a really hard time getting their congregations to use these programs, but in every instance when I asked if the church ever took time to demonstrate how to use the program, I've never gotten a "yes."

Church members need to be shown how these programs benefit them (if they honestly do) or as a number of people have told me, they will simply seem like the church staff doesn't want to do their work and the church members are being asked to master one more thing that has no apparent value to them.

Sometimes age does matter in communication technology

Though you can't make assumptions based on age alone, church staffs do well to remember that many of us over a certain age did not grow up with computers and we don't always understand the language or certain practices that are second nature to people who grew up with them. It's not that we can't

do things or are too stupid to learn—the lingo just doesn't make sense when we first hear or see it. It's often in funny, little, areas that this comes up. Allow me to share a personal experience to illustrate this.

What I do now in technology did not come easily or quickly to me

I now have a huge training website I created for church communicators with hundreds of articles, videos, templates, and all kinds of materials; I have blogs for my communication ministry and teaching at church; I created and maintain a website for my adult Bible class. I participate in numerous social media. I create and edit videos. I love all these training opportunities where I can help equip and inspire churches and there aren't enough hours in the day to get done all the things I want to do.

But it wasn't always like that—I was scared to death of the terminology of early computer technology and was quite confused by it. I have a very large vocabulary (I'm a former English teacher and voracious reader), but it initially made no sense at all to me how, for example, supposedly simple blog creation programs used some terms that appeared essential to understand if I was going to create a blog and I did not know what they meant and at the time no dictionary could explain it.

For example, I had the hardest time figuring out what a "dashboard" was on a blog. I avoided creating a blog for months because I kept running into that term in statements like "really easy-to-use dashboard on this blog system" and the context always assumed you knew what they were talking about. I didn't know what a dashboard on a blog was, where it was, what made it easy or not.

When I finally took an online video course on about blogs, it showed you what a dashboard was and explained that this is the page on the blog software that had all the different tools you needed to create blog entries, organize them, etc. After the watching the video, the term "dashboard ' made perfect sense. Now I access the dashboards of various blogs and websites I maintain numerous times in the course of a day now and don't even think about it.

There are lots of humorous emails floating around that make fun of computer terminology, (all the ones about a computer "mouse" are pretty old jokes by now) and I've seen some making fun of people who thought "dashboards" were only on cars. These jokes aren't funny if you have no idea what the joke is

about. Keep that in mind and demonstrate for your people what might be obvious to you—you may get some people involved in your church communications who were feeling confused or intimidated and were afraid to ask for help. Pray for sensitivity to be aware of what might be confusing and gently explain.

This advice is for all ages—younger people don't understand terms their seniors use easily and seniors complain that younger people don't make sense. Mutual love, respect, kind questions and gentle answers are appropriate for all ages that claim Jesus as Lord.

For all ages—make sure the channel is appropriate to the content of the message

Though we want to use communication channels that appeal to all ages, more important than the variety of channels we us is that we match the content of our message to the channel. There are messages and content that can't be communicated in a tweet, a short, snappy snippet on PowerPoint, or a concise blog on the web.

We are sharing the words of eternal life: how to come into a relationship with our God and grow to spiritual maturity. How the Bible shares this message is a good pattern for us to follow. In the Bible, there are many short, concise, statements that summarize great theological truths:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12).

Though each one of these verses is short enough for a tweet (under 140 characters, punctuation excluded) and communicates a tremendous amount of information about humanity's relationship with God. Obviously the verses do not contain the depth and breadth of content in the whole books of Genesis,

John, Romans, or Revelations. We're expected to read the entire books of the Bible and study them in-depth if we want to become mature disciples. In addition to the content of the books themselves, outlines, commentaries, studies, and sermons on each of the books of the Bible, are all important for Christians to grow to discipleship maturity.

Both short verses and longer books are important in growth to mature discipleship. One form does is not superior or more effective. We know this is necessary for our spiritual growth, but how do we handle this situation as we create our church communications?

Following are some suggestions that might help.

How to combine short and long forms of multi-media communication in your church

The one certainty is that the channels and options will constantly change. The short forms change faster than the long ones and for certain groups in the church, requires constant attention. During the time that I've been working on this book, a number of new social media channels have sprung up and others died. I hesitated to put in specific links to websites or articles because of this— but I've done that anyway because they will either be useful as practical resources or useful as an example of how quickly things change.

Make the most of the variety of channels available to you.
Short, concise, quick messages can promote and summarize; longer form ones can explain, teach, exhort in depth.

Through social media, websites, and ebooks, that use hyper-links, you can add layers of depth to your content.
Facebook and Twitter are especially useful in this way. In the Effective Church Communications ministry, we have a Facebook page: http://www.facebook.com/EffectiveChurchCommunications and a Twitter account: http://www.twitter.com/yvonprehn, both of which we use to remind people of communication issues, announce training, encourage or challenge and almost always pair them with links to longer articles, videos, templates or training. I do the same thing with a Twitter account that is linked to the website for our adult Bible Study class.

Don't sell short your audience or assume nobody takes in longer content.
Just because some of your audience may not sit down to read a theology book, does not mean they won't listen to a lengthy podcast or read a longer piece on an e-reader. An excellent example of the power of offering serious theological content in a variety of multi-media formats is the White Horse Inn, which describes itself as: *"The White Horse Inn is a multimedia catalyst for reformation. . . .. The conversations take place in talk show, magazine, event, book, blog and social media formats."* The White Horse Inn has very popular long podcasts and other materials that are widely accessed by people of all ages. The ability of people to download lengthy podcasts and listen to them while driving, running, walking or exercising is a growing area of spiritual education.

Learn about and take advantage of newer communication tools.
Many of these channels put larger amounts content into contemporary communication systems. For example, people can now carry with them and read books on digital readers including mobile phones, tablet computers, and e-readers such the Kindle and Nook. Learn how to repurpose your material to take advantage of these tools. In the past it was complex and expensive to convert to e-reader format, today it is relatively easy and free to do. I use both Smashwords and KDP from amazon to freely format and make available many articles and books about church communications. You may be reading this as a result of one of them. Though the processes will most certainly change, this is a growing way to share the Biblical lessons you create to your people.

Challenge your audience with the serious nature of discipleship and the need for time-consuming study.
When you choose to use a short form of communication, make certain the content is appropriate to the form and that you are not using a short form to "dumb down" the message to your audience. Acknowledge that many messages take lots of time and many words to communicate. Constantly remind your people that the Bible needs to be written in its entirety if you want to fully understand any of the individual passages. Be especially careful to not use Bible verses or concepts out of context.

Offering your church communications in the various channels is true servant work

To create all the communications you need to create in all the channels necessary to reach all of the people you are called to reach is an almost impossible task. Some of the strategies that follow, such as the next one on creating 2 levels of communication product and having a team to help with the work will be useful. At the same time, often it is only you and the computer faced with all the work that needs to be done. To be able to do it all and to keep our hearts and minds at peace, we need to remind ourselves that we are not doing this to impress people with the variety of our communication options; we are doing this as an offering to Jesus and an acknowledgment of the precious value of every person to him.

The Apostle Paul called himself a "bond slave" of Jesus and sometimes it will seem like slavery to accomplish what he calls us to do. I realize it isn't popular to talk like this in our day when even people in ministry make totally inane statements like, "If it isn't fun don't do it." We don't do the hard work of creating our communications in a variety of channels because it is fun all the time, though sometimes it can be tremendous fun, that can't be denied. We do it because the hard work results in a variety of communications that are the most effective way to reach people. "Fun" should not be the criteria of the worth of any ministry project. We all have jobs to do, that often are not fun, but that doesn't mean we don't do them. Remember:

"Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus endured the cross because he understood God's ultimate purpose. We do all we do in church communications, including the challenging work of communicating in all the channels necessary, because though many of them are not fun, but sometimes crushingly difficult to learn, frustrating in implementation, and never-ending in the need to redo them each week and repeat them in every channel possible, they are the tools our Lord uses to bring people to eternal salvation.

John Wesley, one of my heroes of the faith, gave the following advice that I think is appropriate for this foundational strategy of multi-channel communication:

Do all the good you can,

By all the means you can,

In all the ways you can,

In all the places you can,

At all the times you can,

To all the people you can,

As long as ever you can.

CHAPTER THREE
STRATEGY #2: DIVIDE YOUR COMMUNICATION TEAM INTO TWO PRODUCTION LEVELS

The need for multi-channel communications is one of many reasons why you need a team of communicators to get all the work done you need to in any size of church. Some may be paid staff, some volunteers, or they might all be volunteers.

However, whenever in my seminars I mentioned using volunteers as part of the church communication team, there was often a gasp and the spoken or unspoken fear expressed, "What if I can't get them to do what I want them to do? What if volunteers create materials that are not appropriate or up to the quality we want for the church?"

These are valid concerns, but to not use volunteers because of these concerns, is not the answer. Unless a church is very small, you need more than one person to do all the needed communication. Unless a church is very rich, you probably can't afford to hire all the people you need to do the necessary communication in The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing needed to fully fulfill the Great Commission. Volunteers are essential and I've found that almost all of the concerns about using them can be answered if you divide your church communication team into two production levels.

A real-life example of the two production levels of church communications

Before I get into specific recommendations, let me share how this worked out in practice for me and what motivated me to come up with this division of labor in church communications. My bi-vocational pastor husband and I worked for many years in Single Adult Ministry. A number of years ago, the group we were leading was over 300 in membership and growing. I was doing all the communications as a volunteer, balancing that work with my ministry travels, seminar teaching, and writing. I did the overall newsletter, PR, and all the communications that related to the church: prayer requests, bulletin inserts reports, etc.

I realized as we grew that I did not have time to create all the PR material for many of the events that we had going on. More out of desperation than any well-thought-out plan, I announced that if someone was sponsoring an event for the singles group (we had a procedure in place for that process) the person or team sponsoring the event had to be in charge of doing their own PR.

An event came up and the young man and his friends who were sponsoring it were quite excited and more than happy to do up their own flyers for it. When he showed the finished result to me to me, my stomach knotted up; I felt ill. I estimated that he used almost every typeface he had on his computer on this one piece of paper and almost as many small pieces of clipart (yes, that is an exaggeration, but that is what it seemed like to me).

He was so excited about it. I wanted to throw up. It was honestly one of the ugliest flyers I think I'd ever seen. It did have all the information needed: it gave good directions, had a map, and clearly explained what was going on, but to my designer-trained eye—it was ugly.

But did I tell him that?

I'm sure the Lord sent an angel to cover my mouth, but this is what I heard come out of it, "That is wonderful—thank you so much for all your hard work on it!"

He printed the flyers in color (made it worse, I thought), mailed and gave them out. The event was a huge success.

My personal preference in design style meant little in the success of a flyer that met needs

I learned an important communication lesson from that experience.

I learned that if you are a lonely single person and you find out about an event that is free, that nice folks will be at it, that the event has food and free child care, and you get a flyer that clearly communicates all of this—do you really care what typeface is used?

Or how many pieces of clipart are on the paper?

Or that it doesn't pass "quality design" standards?

Of course not.

The core message was there, it told you what was going on and how to get to the event. People came and their lives were blessed, even by (what I considered) an ugly flyer.

I realized then that a church communication ministry could have two production levels for success and less stress for all involved

One level could be carefully managed to produce materials that needed to be a certain quality for the church overall. Though his flyer worked to get people to the event, something like that turned in to the church office to promote an event to the church overall would not have been appropriate. But there were many things going on in the ministry where this would be appropriate. Another level of communication creation could consist of projects you could joyfully turn loose and encourage—the flyers, postcards, reminders that were essential to get people to events that were distributed within the group. Having more than one standard for success in communication creation was liberating mentally and in practice.

As time went on we developed a communication team for the second level and a number of people developed skills in communication ministry. In the long term, many of the people on the team have since gone on to other churches and ministries and the training they received as part of the communication team there has been useful. In the short term, the Single's ministry flourished and I didn't have so many communication production projects to try to fit into my crazy schedule.

In similar ways, I have found many churches are able to accomplish all the communications they need to create all Five Steps and fully fulfill the Great Commission if they divide their communication ministry into two production levels.

The Two Production Levels of Effective Church Communications are:

1. The PR Communication Production Level

2. The Ministry Communication Production Level

It is important to understand these two levels in terms of:

1. The communications produced in each one

2. The communications producer in each one

3. The guidelines and standards for each one

The requirements for both of the levels are described following. Keep in mind the communications produced in each level, can and need to be, in both print and digital formats.

PR Communication Production Level

1. Communications produced

In this level, the communications produced include the overall pieces that represent the church or ministry area, such as the logo, stationary, business cards, primary bulletin, newsletter, major outreach pieces and major ministry brochures. In the case of a ministry within the church, the primary pieces and the pieces that interface with the church communications program overall would also be included. In the digital world, the primary website and primary social media communications that represent the church or ministry should also be in this area.

2. Communications producer

For this level it is usually a staff person, whose job may or may not have other responsibilities in addition to producing communications. The larger the church, the more it is recommended that the church hire someone specifically to create and oversee communications. This could also be done by a volunteer who has the time and commitment to work closely with the church staff, or

who is in charge of a ministry communications program within the church as I was with the Single Adult group discussed previously.

Training responsibilities: In addition to being the primary producer of communications, this person should also be in charge of training staff or volunteers in the various ministry areas of the church so they can create the volume of materials that are needed to complete all The Five Steps. No matter what the staff person at the church uses to create the primary church communications, MS Publisher, is my recommendation for volunteers to use to create most print church communications. On the Effective Church Communications website are demonstrations of MS Publisher and an ebook that illustrates all you can do with it, plus resources to purchase the program at significant church discounts.

Some church communicators feel that for the church overall they need to use Adobe Creative Suite and that may be true for the materials that are produced at this level, especially if you interface with an outside printer. But it is rarely realistic to expect volunteers to purchase and learn to use Creative Suite.

Note to designers who have never used MS Publisher and who don't think it can produce "quality" communications: try it! You would be amazed at what you can do with this program! I learned design on the Mac with all the Adobe software and loved it. But then as I started to teach seminars and actually started doing communication work it the church, I realized if I wanted to work with real people in real churches, I needed a PC and needed to learn MS Publisher. After some initial grumbling and more than a few tears when I sold my Mac (I did not have the discipline to use the PC when the Mac was in the same room), I came to love MS Publisher. Over the years as I've used it more and more, I've been on somewhat of crusade to push the limits of what you can do with that program and now I create all kinds of publications with it, including hi-end glossy printing, website graphics, headers and ads, book covers and every imaginable kind of church publication including banners, posters, and signs. All of the editable templates and ready-to-print church publications on the Effective Church Communications website, all of the graphics, sidebar ads, thumbnail and other images, all my church website materials, all the covers for my book are all created with it. The only thing I still

use the Adobe programs for is book layout for longer books and typesetting for publication.

The ECC website, has training in many areas that are useful for church communication teams including advice on the use of MS Publisher, some of the free software for image manipulation, as well as resources for free images. In addition, it has lots of church-specific tips for using a variety of programs, plus lots of ready-to-modify and print templates for church communications. Membership in the training resources of the site is only $9.99 a month or $99 a year and both the communication director and volunteers can use the site because the membership can be shared. Also, as a member you have permission to use any of the materials on the site (videos, lessons, templates) to train your volunteers. For basic and detailed training in the use of MS Publisher as a program, I highly recommend http://www.lynda.com.

Create templates and delegate: The person in charge of communication for the church can create templates and the volunteer team can update them as needed. For example, the church may want to create a flyer/postcard/give-out piece that advertises the men's ministry activities each month. The person in charge of communications might design the overall logo and layout and set up a template. Then the volunteer communicator could track down the monthly details, write and edit and create the monthly piece, then email it back to the church to be printed and distributed.

Lead in inspiration and motivation: In addition to providing training in the how-tos of church communications, the person in charge should work hard to instill in volunteers excitement about their work, a ministry perspective, and Biblical passion for creating church communications. The eternal destiny of people is affected by church communications and we need to remind each other of the joy and responsibility of that. We need the Lord's help, wisdom and strength as we do our work. The book, *Devotions for Church Communicators* (available in download format on the Effective Church Communication website and in print form on the amazon site) provides weekly devotions and thought-provoking essays that will help churches create a communications team with the necessary ministry motivation to create communications that will change lives.

I highly recommend that before you start meetings on communication projects that you take a few minutes to read a devotion or Bible passage and pray about your work together. Remember as church communicators you are involved in spiritual warfare for the souls of people and you need the Lord's help, protection and peace as you work. Take time to acknowledge him and ask for help. Pray also for peace among the communication team and church staff and that the Lord give grant insight into your communication choices so that you touch hearts, meet needs, and motivate people to action in ways that are pleasing to our Lord.

3. Communications Guidelines and Standards

Communication standards need to be somewhat strict at this level, as these pieces reflect the overall vision and reputation of the church or of a ministry within the church. Also, this is the level where the standards are set for what is expected in all other communications.

As part of standard setting, though it is a significant amount of work, churches should consider creating a Style Guide.

A Style Guide will solve many problems upfront by setting standards and expectations. It can be as simple or as detailed as you want, but should contain:

 How the logo, purpose statement or slogan of the church is to be used, colors, sizes, etc.

 Key terms in the church, what is capitalized, how to use them, e.g. "elders" or "Elders," titles of pastoral staff: Rev., Right Reverend, Pastor, or Father, Brother or Sister, First Lady, Bishop, whatever is appropriate for your church. This is far from standard and will help people new to your church or denomination. If someone works in the church office who does not belong to your denomination, this will be a life-saver.

 What is acceptable for the over-all bulletin, church website, social media sites, in terms of content, who can post or contribute, style, any other guidelines important to the church.

 What needs what level of approval before various pieces need before they are shared with the church body or used as outreach?

Though a Style Guide can be very helpful, don't let it become a stifling force

Especially past this first PR Production level of church communications, e.g. the church bulletin in contrast with the postcard that goes out to remind the guys of a church work day, be much more flexible in your standards with the postcard than you are with the bulletin. If you try to be too strict in areas other than key communications, people just won't do the needed communications or they'll do them and avoid the church office entirely. A bit of trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the lives your people is useful here.

Many people in your church have a computer and printer and if you make it too difficult for them to get a flyer approved for a simple ministry event that only involves a small group within the church—they will simply ignore you and do it anyway. Instead of creating rules that cause resentment, work hard to create an atmosphere of encouragement and training for everyone.

Ministry Communication Production Level

1. Communications produced

The communications in this level includes everything else in the church outside the key, core communications listed above, including very simple notices, lessons, flyers and announcements to more complex communication projects. Also included are the many, many pieces that are needed within individual ministries of the church.

Some communication pieces that come to mind include those that make up the children's, youth, women's, men's, missions, singles, various other ministries in the churches. So often these ministries need communications done for people to be fully informed about what is going on and to enable people to join in the ministry, but the church staff simply does not have time to do them. They may not get done if standards are too tight or the church staff is expected to do everything. As a result, events aren't promoted or explained, people don't show up, and the overall ministry suffers and the church members miss out on opportunities that help them grow to mature disciples. Resentment over some ministries getting communications pieces done and others not getting the same amount or quality of PR or support materials can also happen and that's never good for the spiritual health of the church.

2. Communications producers

THIS IS IMPORTANT: here a staff person or perhaps a key volunteer may oversee, train, encourage and help, but the staff person cannot do everything needed for a complete communications ministry in the church, nor should one person do it all for the whole church. Ideally, every ministry in the church (children's, youth, men's, women's, etc.) should have at least one person who can help do the communications needed for that ministry. Usually that person is a volunteer. At this level, the overall ministry communications staff member becomes a coach and encourager.

In addition to the advice in the previous section on training your communication volunteers, the materials provided by Effective Church Communications can enable the communications coordinator of the church to train the volunteers in ministry areas of the church to do their own communications or to modify templates created by the church office.

3. Communications standards: much more flexible

You do not need the same standards of design or perfection for a one-time postcard to remind the guys of the men's breakfast that you do for the four-color, outreach brochure for the church. You don't need the same control of the content of tweets sent out to the youth group that you do for the content on the primary website of the church.

If you are too hard on volunteers or try to control them too closely, they'll quit. People do improve in communication creation skills with time, training, and encouragement. The ministry communication staff person needs to decide what is really important in standards and what is simply picky, personal preference. Train to bring up to important standards and let the personal preference issues slide.

I know this is hard—I was raised in a German Mennonite household—flexibility does not come naturally to me. But I have learned that if I want to train people in church communications and ministry overall, that the hard and fast standards I was taught in housekeeping, need to flex a bit when it comes to communication creation.

Remember, the Lord put us into a body in the church, in part so our gifts can help and build up each other. The Two Production Levels of Effective Church Communication gives you a way to practically live out this biblical reality.

For the Two Production Levels—be sure both groups have a way to produce their communications

It's one thing to create a communication piece, for example, a brochure for the women's ministry, it is another to get it printed and distributed to all the women in the church. Far too often church pieces produced by volunteers are printed at home on inkjet printers and personally handed out.

This is an ineffective and often unfair practice. It is unfair because home inkjet printers are the most costly and time-consuming way to print any church publication. A volunteer should not be asked to assume that time and cost. The church office should do the printing or allow the volunteer to come in and use the church equipment to print what they have created. One very effective way to do this is for the volunteer to save their publication as a PDF, send it to the church office via email, and then the church office staff or a communication production volunteer can print and distribute the piece.

The PDF format allows a publication to be printed by the person receiving it even though they may not have the same programs or typefaces. Though Adobe Acrobat is a high quality program that can do this, most volunteers don't have it or want to spend the $200-400 it costs to get the program. The newer Microsoft Publisher programs allow you to save in the PDF format. This can work well and the process of saving and sending materials as a PDF should be part of the communications training process.

The challenge comes in when volunteers create their programs in Print Shop and other programs that don't have a built-in PDF creator. Fortunately there are excellent free PDF creation programs available. Cute PDF (dumb name, great program, available at: http://www.cutepdf.com) is one of them. Volunteers simply download the program and install it in their computer. It installs as a print driver and when a publication created in any program is printed with it, a PDF is created. This PDF can then be emailed to the church office and printed on the copier or digital duplicator.

On my training website, is a video that illustrates how to download the Cute PDF software and use it. There are numerous additional articles on church communications teams on this site also.

Your standards of perfection are not what ultimately results in communication success

This is hard to share because I know from many conversations and emails that some people in the church feel that if all the communications are not perfect (according to their definition of the term) that the church cannot be successful. In other instances some people feel if their publications contain one typo they have somehow let down the church and the Lord. Following is an article that may be helpful:

Perfection in church communications, inspired by Jesus

Sometimes people don't think they are doing all they can for the Lord, that they aren't excellent or perfect enough in their communications ministry unless what they produce is done in slick, full-color printing, preferably produced by an outside design company, or in the case of a website, one that is professionally programmed.

Sadly, since the standards of design and production are so high, it also often means that no one in the church is considered good enough to create the communications in print or on the website, so an outside, professional firm must be hired to do it or only products purchased from a professional company are used. Or, if done at the church, only a select person or two in the church is good enough to produce the quality needed.

But being expensive and professional, as defined by using the standards of a professional ad agency isn't the only standard of perfection for the followers of Jesus.

If we honestly look at Jesus' life, what sort of standards of perfection did he have?

If we honestly want to follow Him, let's look at three areas where we see his choices in quality and perfection

First, his disciples: the ones he chose who would be trusted to carry out his message were a pretty scruffy group and they didn't get much better in three years. Not one of them was a professional religious person.

Second, his meetings: they weren't very organized affairs. There were often little kids running around, not enough food, constant interruptions by sick people—not what anyone would consider a professionally managed event.

Third, his succession plan: when he left his remaining disciples with the task of evangelizing the world, he didn't leave them with a plan even vaguely perfected. The Great Commission could be summed up as "tell people about me and help them grow in the faith." For a perfectionist manager today, those parting words have a tremendous about of wiggle room that would allow wildly divergent attempts to apply it.

It wasn't that Jesus didn't care about excellence, but he obviously had a different standard of perfection than what we might consider communication perfection today.

The true standard of perfection

Though perfection in service is an admirable goal, the primary goal in all ministry areas, communications included, is love. First Corinthians 13 helps us take love out of the realm of theory and make it practical in the challenge of perfection in communication ministry. In 1 Cor. 13, the chapter starts out talking about doing all sorts of things, one might say, with perfection: speaking in the tongues of men and angels, etc. The chapter continues by saying that if all of this is done without love it's just making noise and the chapter ends by saying that the greatest attribute we can have is love.

Love is also what matters the most in our church communications

I see a lot of communications today, in print and online that are perfectly beautiful and that express love in a variety of ways.

Right now I'm looking at a sample from my files of church communications: it is a professionally printed folder, done in gorgeous full color printing and it has 2 DVDs inserted in the folder so visitors can see the worship service and hear the praise band. It also has a coupon for a free coffee from their coffee cart (one of my favorite ways of showing love). It is professional, beautiful, and yet very

friendly and non-pretentious. No question this would fit anyone's standards of perfection in a visitor piece.

I'm also looking at another church bulletin sample that is perfect and loving in another way. This one was not produced with a computer. The church is small and very poor. The bulletin, with service information and weekly activities clearly described and listed, was produced on a very old word processor and the clipart hand-pasted on. It was reproduced on a copier that had obviously seen better days. Though she knows the limitations of the equipment, the person who shared it with me also shared that the church secretary who produces it each week wants it to be special for the church and visitors. She carefully prepares and proofs it and after her paste-up job she prints it on colored paper. She then collates it by hand and does a 1/3 of the page offset fold on each piece of paper. Down one side of the cover fold, she hand-cuts (with the scissors you use to cut scrap-booking pages) a fancy edge. She hand-cuts and hand-assembles each one. Her love and care for the congregation and Jesus in this labor-intensive production brought tears to my eyes.

These church publications are very different in surface ways, but at their core and what comes through most loudly is that their creators loved the people they were creating publications for.

A couple of final observations, commentary and final application notes on how Jesus gives us lessons on perfection in communications:

Observation #1: Jesus always focused on the needs of people in his communication, not on impressing people or showing how great he was.
He could have created a little world in the palm of his hand as a demonstration of his power; he could have had stars fall from the sky to demonstrate his might; he could have healed all the sick in a city with one booming command, but he didn't do any of those things to show his perfect godhood.

He showed us what God was like by meeting needs of his creation. He bailed out an embarrassed groom who ran out of wine at his wedding feast; he made little kids comfortable; he healed a woman humiliated by a chronic disease.

Commentary and application:

Perfection in communications doesn't come from showing people what a big-deal perfect church you are or how you can create communications that are more expensive and fancier than the church down the street.

Jesus idea of a perfect publication, if we follow his plan, would be one that made sure it addressed the needs of people. It would be one that told them why the event would help them, how it would serve them, how their lives would be better because of it. It would give them all the details necessary to attend without having to take an extra step of calling someone or looking it up on the web or jumping from link to link if it was an email. Those details would include the time, location, name of person in charge, directions, child care provisions, and cost would all be there and easily accessible.

One area that I see this "perfection" lacking in so often today is in the area of church websites. I've recently observed a number of websites that were created using professional groups that supplied a fancy, flash-enabled, website with photos of smiling people on the nameplate, great colors and buttons to push to hear sermons. But try to find the details of what or where small groups are meeting or what time to get your kids to a youth group meeting and where it is being held or what the church really believes about anything and it can be an impossible task.

People do not go to church websites to be wowed by flashing graphics and bright colors or cheesy pictures of ethnically-diverse, grinning people, they go to have needs met. If they can't get those needs met quickly and easily, your website is far from perfect no matter how slick the home page is.

Observation #2: Jesus focused on potential perfection.

When Jesus called Peter, he was not anything like the Rock he would become. He was more of an irritating pebble in Jesus' journeys.

But every time Jesus called him, "Peter", Simon had a vision of what he would become. I imagine each time he heard that, he stood up a little straighter, perhaps determined to follow Jesus more closely. Eventually, he became the leader and pastor, the Rock, Jesus knew he would be.

Commentary and application

Your volunteers and staff members doing ministry publications seldom come into that job with any training at all. They are like Simon, far from, but growing into a Peter.

They are often far from perfect in communication knowledge about design ideas or execution. Focus on encouraging, equipping, and providing opportunities. Love them lots. Give them time to try things and to grow up in their skills. Provide training and tools and they will often amaze you at what they produce. Never pre-judge someone based on age either as being too young or too old to learn any communication skill—with interest and proper training I have frequently seen church leaders astounded at what their own people were capable of.

Regarding training, I was recently talking to a lady whose church had spent several thousand dollars (a typical amount) to have their website professionally designed. In spite of the money spent, they were having all sorts of problems getting their church content to fit into the design and the costs kept mounting with each modification they asked for.

Knowing there were other options for getting this done (such as doing it yourself with WordPress, my strong recommendation), I asked her, "How do you think you could have done if the money spent on this company had been used to train you and give you time to implement what you learned?"

She just sighed.

This situation is repeated far too often and it shouldn't be. Your people have tremendous potential and with time, money and training they will not only accomplish great things for the church, but you will have participated in growing them in skills and service. To invest money and time in your people instead of a quick, "professional" solution may take more time, but the results will be much more lasting.

Observation #3: Jesus protected and encouraged his people

"Fear not!" "Be of good cheer!" Reminding his followers that the hairs on their heads were numbered—all of these and many more were the protecting and

encouraging words Jesus continuously shared with his disciples. He reminded them he was their shepherd, vine, bread of life.

Commentary and application

Doing church communication work can be scary and discouraging. Complement your church communicators for every step of learning; encourage them to try new things and support a less-than-perfect effort if done with enthusiasm.

- Take extra care to shield them from negative and nasty people when helpful comments become hurtful criticism.
- Remind the critics to pray and contribute to the communication program at the church.
- Remind them that all of us are pilgrims and we haven't arrived at perfection in anything as yet, but that we all need love and encouragement as we progress to becoming more and more like Jesus in the perfecting of our service to him.

Conclusion to the two levels of communication production

At first, splitting your communication work, standards and team into two levels may seem like a lot of unnecessary work. Even thinking about bringing in volunteers might seem like too much of a headache. However, if you want your church to grow in numbers and your people in discipleship maturity, it will take many pieces of communications to do that.

There are limits to how much you can and should carry this work load. Especially if you are starting out as a church or are a smaller church, set the basics in place for a communication team and volunteer delegation. Working with one or two people is much easier than a team of thirty and your chances of church growth and the needs of a larger team will be much higher if from the start you have enough people working on communications to get done all that need to be done.

CHAPTER FOUR
STRATEGY #3: ALWAYS BE WHO YOU ARE, WHERE YOU ARE

God called you to a specific church, in a specific location, with a specific audience to reach for Jesus. As part of creating communications specifically for your audience, don't try to make your communications look like those from any other church and be cautious in the use of glossy, pre-done, nationally sold pieces.

The same advice applies to websites. There are many companies that sell expensive templates that mostly contain magazine-quality, good-looking, grinning, thin, mostly young, and predominately white people (with various ethnic groups added in for political correctness) in the website headers. Few people that go to my church look like that. Even if they did, this is a false image—being a follower of Jesus doesn't mean you are always upbeat and happy—or predominately white and thin. I doubt if the Apostle Paul or any of the saints described in Hebrews 11 would find anything in common with the picture of the church represented in these images.

Paul's picture of ministry:

"As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything"(Corinthians 6:3-10).

Hebrews 11 description of those "commended for their faith"

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

These were all commended for their faith"(Hebrews 11:32-39a).

Both of these pictures of the church leaders or heroes of the faith have no similarity with mass-produced PR or website templates so prevalent today. Perhaps if we were more honest with people before they come to our churches about the demands of the Christian faith, or the kinds of people that make up our church, we would have more committed disciples and members who live in service and sacrifice after attending our church.

If people come to your church expecting immediate happiness and prosperity and you don't produce it quickly, they'll quickly wander off to the next church

with the more appealing advertising. It is not that the gospel does not produce wonderful results of great joy, but sometimes the greatest saints and the most faithful churches won't experience those things until after this earthly life. We can't presume in our PR, the timing or extent of the Lord's blessings. Our communications shouldn't make promises today that only our Lord can deliver in eternity.

Not only in the look of the congregation or false prosperity promises, don't communicate deceptively about the size, style, and location of your church

Don't be guilty of bait and switch in your communications wherein you send out some slick, fancy printed piece, or display an over-designed, glitzy website if you're a little church plant meeting in a basement. Big, glossy and professional is not always more appealing—many people are looking for a real, intimate, and honest interaction about God. They might miss you if you come across looking too slick and professional. Worse, if they come expecting a big, fancy church and find you meeting in the church basement, they might assume that if you lied about who you are in your advertising and outreach, you might be presenting a false picture of God, Jesus, or salvation.

This is especially important for church plants. YOU DO NOT need to spend a lot of money on slick advertising. One of the best outreach pieces you can do is a simple business card that describes your church, tells people when you meet, how to get there and has your website, and social media info. Give them to your current members and tell them to share with their friends and the people they contact as they go about their daily lives. Every invitation becomes a personal one and is far more effective.

Keep in mind the parable of the talents

Jesus did not expect a person with one talent to do the work of the five talent person, but Jesus expected the one-talent person to make the most of what he or she had. If you are a tiny church with few resources, don't feel you have to create publications or a website like the ones you saw at whatever big church conference the staff most recently attended.

You could be burying your talent in a purchased design because it would not be an honest reflection of your church. Be who YOU are, communicate to your people with the resources you have, and the Lord will bless your efforts.

Variety is standard in professional communication

Contrary to what some communication companies want you to believe, there is no ONE perfect way to create any one communication piece. There is no ONE way to do any communication that is THE PROFESSIONAL way to do it. There is tremendous variety in all professionally created communications depending primarily on the target audience they want to reach with their message.

An excellent example of this is the variety in magazines. Go to your local Barnes and Noble or other big book store and look at the magazines. The design, style, and even the paper used for example, is very different for Architectural Digest than it is for Car and Driver. Both are professional, well-designed publications, but both serve different audiences and their style reflects that audience, not some absolute, unrealistic standard.

For the editor of *Car and Driver* to think he'd be more professional, or cutting edge if he created an issue of his magazine in the same style as *Architectural Digest* would make about as much sense as it makes for the pastor of a small neighborhood church pastor of a 250-member church in a farming community to attend a mega-church creativity conference in Dallas, come home and decide the church needs to create publications that look like the ones the mega-church in Dallas created. That is just goofy.

Why conference clones don't make a successful church communications program back home in your church

Goofy or not, the attempt to create communication conference clones happens all the time. I am continually asked by church communicators what to do after their pastor comes home from the big conference with a stack of samples or the notes from some design or web breakout session the pastor attended (usually given by a staff member of the mega-church who has absolutely no concept of the resources and realities of a smaller church or church plant communication ministry). The pastor is thrilled, impressed, and imagines what would happen at their church if they could only create communications that look like this. The pastor might be very excited, but the person asked to create these conference clones is usually a church secretary or communication volunteer who is overwhelmed with her current work and has no idea how to implement what is now asked. In addition, that person often knows that the proposed cloning of communications:

- • requires a financial outlay in terms of software, images and reproduction systems that the smaller church cannot afford,
- • will create materials that might have worked for the conference-sponsoring mega-church, but are not appropriate for their little local church,
- • requires the current communication person possess skills or software and a budget they don't have to create the desired results.

All of this can result in arguments, misunderstanding, and frustration on both sides. Calm discussion, prayer, and an honest attempt to understand all this issues involved is needed.

Buying inappropriate materials is not the answer

The sponsoring church has a way to solve the problem if you are not able to produce communications at your little church like the big host church—you can buy them! The mega-church offers templates, PowerPoint slides, and graphics for sale on their website. To buy them is goofy multiplied.

For a little church, in a different state, with a completely different culture, to suddenly start handing out slick communication clones from a mega-church half a nation away will not automatically make you a big, impressive church. Visitors and spiritual seekers want authentic encounters with real people and purchased PR and communications isn't the way to do it.

Doing our best does not mean imitating someone else

We all want to do the best we can for our churches, but to imitate communications created by a completely different church in a different setting, with totally different resources and target audience, is not the way to do it.

It's easy to forget that the big church currently admired, didn't create the fancy stuff they do now when they were a little church. The fancy, professional, slick communications they do now are not what got them to where they are when they sponsor the conference.

I've seen this reality first-hand. I got my inspiration for The Five Steps from a Saddleback Church conference, many years ago. One other thing I have from that conference is an 8 ½ x 11 manila envelope I purchased at the conference Resource Tent. It is filled with some black and white photocopies of examples of the communications Saddleback Church used to grow the church when it

was first starting over twenty years ago. Needless to say, they are all very different than the pieces they use today.

What they used then was appropriate when they were a much smaller growing church; what they use today is appropriate for the mega-church in Southern California they are today. Don't confuse what is appropriate for a church at a different time and place in their growth process with what is appropriate for your church and where you are in the process of becoming what the Lord called your church to be.

In being yourself, keep in mind your church culture

By culture, I mean everything that makes your community and congregation unique. Your uniqueness can include everything from denominational distinctives, to ethnic mix, local interests, and popular media choices for either the church itself or the audience you want to reach. I can make suggestions and give you practical tips, but you know your people best. Always create your communications with both the people in the church and those you want to reach in mind and tailor everything you do to appeal to them.

For example, I live in Southern California. For many years my husband and I were involved in a ministry targeted to older single adults. The way my husband and I created communications for that ministry group, in our location, would obviously have a different style and approach than communications created by a church staff for all age groups at a large mega-church in New York City and both of ours would be different than the communications created for a college-age ministry in Kansas. We have since worked with a several other churches and for each one, I created totally different communications. Even though they have all been in the same area, the denominations, age groups, and ministry programs were all different. The communications needed to reflect these differences.

Often the style that works best for your location is one that does not stand out—the appropriateness of the design simply fades into the background so the message emerges clearly. An event at a Purpose-Driven conference held at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University illustrates what I mean about the often invisible importance of appropriate design and its effect on the message delivered. Rick Warren and Jerry Falwell (who is now with the Lord) were the

co-leaders of the conference, and though united in their passion to reach the world for Jesus, they were very different in their dress style.

Rick Warren, a pastor in Southern California, is known for preaching in casual Hawaiian shirts—many preachers here in S. Cal wear them and no one notices—it is part of our culture. For us, if the pastor has on long pants, not surfer shorts, he is dressed up for the pulpit. Because he was from Southern California, the people at the conference on the East Coast hardly noticed Rick Warren's casual attire—that is what they expected from him.

However, a pastor in the pulpit at Liberty University in Virginia requires an entirely different dress code. A suit, white shirt and tie were the standard, and the uniform Pastor Falwell wore at the conference. No one noticed or commented on what either man wore because it was congruent with who they were, their church, and message.

Then one morning they walked on to the stage with Rick Warren wearing a suit and Dr. Falwell wearing a Hawaiian shirt. The audience exploded in laughter before they said a word. I don't remember how long the laughter continued, but I'm certain neither one of them was able to say anything of substance for quite some time. I don't even remember the point they were making, but I'll never forget how out of character each one of them looked.

Keep that image in mind when you are tempted to imitate the communication style of another church. You might think you look important, but to your audience you'll look as unnatural as Rick Warren did in a suit and as silly as Dr. Falwell looked in the Hawaiian shirt.

To be most effective, also create communications for the different cultures within your church

Appropriateness in the style of your communications is as important within the church as it is for your outreach outside the church. The style of communications that will be effective for the youth group mission trip is not the same style that will work for the pre-school play group, or for the men's ministry, or for the ladies tea. Not only individual events, but most ministries within a church have a distinct personality and communications to that group will be more effective in direct measure as to how closely they understand and speak to the culture of that group.

The obvious way to make them most effective is to have someone who is part of the group be a member of the communications team of the church. People can be trained (not always quickly or easily, but it can be done) to use MS Publisher, to proof materials, and to get things in approximately on time, but it is very difficult to train someone in the culture of a group. To expect the church secretary, who has been at her job for 30+ years and does an incredible job at the church bulletin and basic church publications, to create outreach materials that the 20-something group will appreciate isn't realistic or kind to either the secretary or the 20-something group.

I cannot recommend strongly enough that you train people within various ministries to do their own communications.

To give them a sense of ownership and to have them experience the success of consistent communications is worth the time and expense involved. The bottom line is that when every ministry in your church is communicating (print, web, blog, tweet, newsletter, invitation cards, emails, postcards, Facebook, whatever it needs) every ministry will grow and the kingdom of God will expand.

CHAPTER FIVE
STRATEGY #4: DON'T LET MONEY BE A DETERMINING FACTOR

The Five Steps can (and I have seen examples of this many times) can be implemented in any size church and on any budget. If you have (or are) a faithful communication creator who uses only MS Word, or WordPerfect, or MS Publisher, or whatever bargain basement or free website program you might have—wonderful, useful communications can be created. You do not need to use high-end, expensive design programs.

The Adobe Creative Suite, Quark and other high-end programs can produce amazing things, but if you aren't trained to use them incredibly well, someone who is well-trained in MS Publisher, can produce materials of comparable, or even better, quality. It is never the program that determines the quality of the final piece; it is the person who uses the program.

My personal favorite for communication creation for most churches is MS Publisher. On the ECC website are many materials that explain the benefits of MS Publishing including the ebook: *9 Reasons why MS Publisher is a great program for churches to use for print and graphic creation*. The ebook is a free download for ECC Members. The ebook shows what the program can do, has a comparative example of an MS Publisher Publication and one created with

InDesign that shows how many of the high-end design features can be easily duplicated, how MS Publisher can create advanced graphics for print and web (one of the least understood features of the program and great fun to use), plus how to purchase it at a fraction of the retail cost for church pricing.

Uses for Adobe Creative Suite

Some very large churches with complex print needs may need Adobe CS. I use Adobe products to lay out the books I produce that have lots of images because MS Publisher doesn't handle longer documents as well as formerly PageMaker and now, InDesign does. However, book layout with lots of images is a fairly specialized task and even churches that might use a more expensive program for some church communications, benefit from using MS Publisher to equip their communications team.

One more note on book layout—for text-only books, MS Word works great. The later editions of it do a much better job in handling text than earlier ones did. In addition, converting books to ebook or digital format is easy with MS Word. This book in all formats: digital, ebook, Kindle version and print was created in MS Word. The important point here is that MS Word comes with almost every computer or it can be purchased inexpensively as part of a nonprofit pricing package of MS Office software.

Deciding whether to use MS Publisher or Adobe CS is an almost moot point, because most churches cannot afford Adobe Create Suite for staff and volunteers. The Adobe programs, depending upon which configuration you get, cost in the range of $500-over $1,000 per person. In addition, the learning curve for all of them is steep and very time consuming.

In contrast, MS Publisher is a great program, costs very little, (around $100 for the non-profit pricing and great deals on bundles can include the entire latest version of MS OFFICE) and it will create just about anything you can think of inexpensively and professionally. Training is inexpensive and fairly easy and because so many of the commands, terms, and actions are similar to those in MS Word.

Other low-cost and free print publications programs

There are a number of inexpensive or free programs available, Open Office, the Print Shop line and others that some churches use. If they work for you—great!

I don't specifically recommend them only because I haven't worked with them, but my hesitations shouldn't limit your use of them if you find them useful for your church.

In addition to being able to inexpensively create print materials, creating many web-based communications creation programs are FREE

Even if you have no money, you can create incredible blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and all sorts of social networking communications for no cost, other than time and internet access. You can create great websites and have them hosted for no cost using WordPress. Podcasting costs very little (just the cost of a microphone and a $29 one from Target is what I use to record mine) to create and nothing to distribute. Extraordinary artwork, images, and photos are all available on the web, legally and free. You can then create slick, glossy, professional publications and have them printed in days for bargain prices through online publishers. The ECC website gives you practical instructions, how-to videos, and resources on all these areas. Enter "free clipart" into the search box on the home page for a listing of the many posts related to this, including ones on how to find free images and how to modify them.

Loving people and Jesus and being in tune with what works for your folks, in your town, at your church, to the audience you are called to reach is far more important than attempting to create communications to meet some generic, professional publication standard, created by slickly marketed, high-end software, or buying communications from some company who tells you they are the answer to your needs if you will just spend a certain amount of money to do things for you. YOU DON'T NEED TO DO THAT!

There is almost always a very inexpensive or totally free way to create all the communications you need to. It might take a little more time and work, but you can do it. The ECC website is continually updated with how-tos and resources to help you in this area. If you have suggestions and resources you've found useful that aren't on the site, please let me know at yvon@effectivechurchcom.com and I'll pass them on.

Spend your money on what is eternally important to Jesus

You will always be tempted to spend more money for some new tool, software, or to buy some promised successful outreach program, but the training of your

people and their commitment to fully fulfilling the Great Commission are the most important ingredients required to create of communications the Lord can use to change lives—you don't need much money to do that. If you have extra money, use it to feed hungry kids.

That last statement was not a gratuitous Christian remark. When we stand before Jesus, he will not ask us what software we used to create the glossy, four-color bulletin or if we pulled off a website with scrolling images in the header. We do have to let him know about what we did about hungry kids.

CHAPTER SIX
STRATEGY #5: MAKE THE MOST OF SEASONAL EVENTS

As has been mentioned many times previously, our world is increasingly post-Christian, sadly often anti-Christian and invitations to simply "come to church" have little appeal to many. At the same time, though people may not respond to an invitation to come to church for religious reasons, everyone still celebrates holidays and special events. If your church provides a free holiday events and special event celebrations, many people will come to your church to celebrate who would never consider attending a regular church service.

Seasonal and special events are one of the best ways to get people to begin the process of connecting people with the church. If the event is enjoyable and welcoming to visitors, if you tell them about your church, and if you give them specific invitations to come back to your church, they will probably visit regular services after the event. In addition, if you used connection cards and got contact information at your event and if your church follows up in a positive, consistent ways, visitors will continue to attend and become part of your church.

Visitors to the church are not the only ones who benefit from Seasonal and Special events

Seasonal and special event outreach, if done strategically, can have an important impact on your congregation. They can become a key tool in how you grow your people in discipleship. This can happen because even though your congregation members may be hesitant to do aggressive evangelism (e.g. confronting someone with their sinfulness or presenting the way to God through a tract), most are willing to invite friends to special events and holiday celebrations.

In addition to learning how to invite friends to events, church members will grow spiritually from their involvement with outreach, including their work in volunteer jobs at the event, and from seeing their friends become involved with your church and Jesus. If you are intentional and strategic in your outreach at these times, this process will become a part of the DNA of your church as you continuously invite the unchurched to seasonal or special events, equip your people to be inviters, follow up and welcome new members into your church.

Though this can and has happened at many churches, it doesn't for many because most churches don't understand and work to implement the entire process for achieving success at seasonal and special events. Because most churches only do one or two parts of successful outreach and create the communication pieces needed to support them, many churches don't experience lasting growth following seasonal or outreach events. Following is an overview of the tasks of the various parts of the church and the communications needed for successful seasonal and special event outreach.

For seasonal and special event success—it takes the whole church to grow the church

Everyone in the church needs to be involved for seasonal and special events to be successful. Everyone needs to be part of and feel responsible for the outreach and growth of your church. When Jesus said:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" *(Matt. 28:18-20).*

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

He did not qualify these commands by saying:

"The command to be my witness and to reach your world is only for paid pastors and for rich churches with huge PR budgets."

No—outreach, witnessing, sharing your faith is every believer's task and seasonal celebrations and special events are a great way to be obedient to Jesus' command to be his witness and reach our world. Though everyone should be involved, various parts of your church need to be involved in different ways, meaning in practical terms that the church leadership, communication team, and congregation each have different primary responsibilities. Following is a suggested breakdown of each group's tasks:

Church Leadership
The church leadership decides which events will be celebrated and when. With the communication team, they determine an overall theme and activities not only for the event itself, but how they are going to involve the congregation, follow-up, and evaluate the results. Leadership needs to provide the spiritual guidance and prayer direction for the event. Leadership needs to continuously encourage, motivate, and thank those involved in the event. Leadership needs to decide on the goals for the event and assure accountability for measuring and evaluation to make each event and each year more effective than the last one.

Communications Team
Based on their guidance from the church leadership and their knowledge of the community, the communications team creates print and digital communications for before, during, and after the event that both the church office and the congregation will use. Advertising, website support, PowerPoint, and every social media avenue should be used repeatedly to assure communication saturation. The communications team tracks materials created, sent, frequency, and response to the type and number of communications. During the process, the team continuously prays for wisdom and insight as they

create communications for their congregation and for audience receptivity and positive response.

Congregation

The congregation should be involved in every step of the process: motivated by the leaders and equipped by the communication team to pray for the events, volunteer to make them happen, invite their unchurched friends, help evaluate and follow-up with visitors. The congregation has the primary responsibility for inviting and bringing unchurched friends to the event, interacting with them at the event, and following up with them afterwards. This process needs to be continuously taught and reinforced, until it becomes part of the DNA of the church. When the congregation looks at seasonal and special event celebrations with anticipation as opportunities to share the joy of the Christian faith with their unchurched friends, you will experience natural church growth in numbers and in your people in spiritual maturity.

What this whole church approach avoids

In far too many churches:

- Seasonal celebrations are events the church leadership puts on for the entertainment of the congregation.
- Church tradition is more important than church outreach, so no attempt is made to make seasonal events understandable to unchurched people if they do show up.
- Little to no outreach is done for some holiday events because they are viewed as sinful and worldly.
- Outreach is viewed a commodity purchased, not an ongoing ministry in the church. Because of that, if the giving is down, outreach is not done.
- Outreach is something that the staff is supposed to do and if the church is not growing it is the pastor's fault or the worship leader's or somebody who is paid to be upfront.
- Seasonal celebrations are seen as promotions put on by professionals—congregational involvement is primarily to provide money to make the production possible.

These attitudes and actions are all unbiblical and ultimately unsuccessful if you want to grow your church and people. They are also deeply sad because the congregation does not experience the joy of sharing the gospel and their

church and the community does not experience the joy of getting to know your church and Jesus.

For the holidays and special events to be more than traditional church family celebrations, the entire church needs to be involved in new and creative ways; we are all to be Jesus' witnesses. The seasonal times of the year are a great way to reach out. We are all responsible if our church is growing or not. Now let's get practical about how to do that. Following is a brief overview, the ECC website has detailed instructions, communications, tips, and ideas for all the major seasonal and special events celebrated in the church.

The communications needed for successful seasonal and special events
In its most condensed form, what is needed are:

1. Pre-event communications
To motive and prepare your people and communications for your people and the church to use to invite your community to your events. Invitations, postcards, bulletin announcements, inserts and flyers are all needed.

2. At the event communications
 To explain the event and your church specifically and the Christian faith overall. In addition, connection cards, tailored to the event are essential to provide a way for the church to follow up with attendees on an ongoing basis.

3. Post-event communications
To follow-up with attendees and solidify their relationship to your church and the Christian faith. Assuming you collected contact information follow-up mailings or emails keep in touch with guests and invite them back to church.

Samples, ready to print PDFs and editable templates for all major holidays and many special events are available on the Effective Church Communications website.

In addition to these post-event communications, it is also important to take time to evaluate the communications created by the church for the event, how your people used them, the response of your community both to the event itself and how many continued a relationship with your church following the event. The book, *Church Communications: Planning, Measuring, Evaluating*

from Effective Church Communications provides detailed advice and charts to help you in this area.

It's important to create communications in all three categories above, but a problem with the seasonal celebrations put on by most churches is that most churches only do the first step, that of inviting people to the event. If the event doesn't make sense or if people don't come back to church, the fault is often laid at the feet of the community—that they don't care, aren't interested, etc. While this reaction is understandable, it is not correct.

Conclusion to the use of seasonal events

If you want to use seasonal and special events as significant times of outreach, church growth in numbers and growth in the spiritual lives of your members, it does take more work, but it is a proven effective method to grow your church in numbers and your people in discipleship. The ECC website has lots more on effective seasonal communications; go to the tab marked "seasonal" for listing of the various holidays and access to all the communications created for them. In addition, be sure to sign up for our email newsletter because a book on seasonal event strategies will be out later in 2012.

CHAPTER SEVEN
STRATEGY #6: DO NOT CONFUSE IRREVERENCE FOR RELEVANCY

We serve a holy God.

There is a tendency today for some in church communications circles to use shocking, profane, flippant language or advertising with the rational of making the church appeal to the unchurched, or to make their communications appear edgy, professional, and contemporary.

This is wrong. Categorically, totally, completely, wrong.

As Jesus' ambassadors and representatives our words and lives are not to reflect the tone and words of our world, but to reflect his character and holiness.

The Bible is clear in what should characterize our communications:
"Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. . . . Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. . . . . Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness,

rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malic"(Eph. 4:1; 25-31).

"Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4: 6).

Graceful, worthy words, no corrupt communication, are just a few of the many, many worthwhile terms that should characterize our communications. As obvious as these passages seem, their message of holy, worthy words is not universally accepted in all circles of church communications today.

Some believe that it is OK, in the interests of sharing the messages of the church, to use language that shocks, offends, or frustrates. In addition to language that would have caused my mother to wash my mouth out with soap, some of this persuasion believe sexually suggestive images on billboards and sermon topics will get people to church—where of course then a proper biblical message will be preached.

This is an unbiblical and unworthy approach.

There is much that can be said about this, but as politically incorrect, old-fashioned, or out-of-it, as it may seem today, our communications need to reflect holiness and a holy God. Jesus somehow mastered the ability to be totally relevant and yet completely without sin. Perhaps if we study him more, rather than aping what appears to work in secular marketing, we might become better at relevance without irreverence.

One fallout of the trend to use secular marketing techniques indiscriminately has been that pastors who care about the biblical foundation of the church and a current number of books being written to call churches back to that foundation have strongly attacked marketing in the church as one of the causes of current moral decline and a host of other problems in the church. Though I greatly respect the men who have written these books and find much in them helpful, this labeling of "marketing" as evil is unfortunate because it robs the church of a valuable tool, if used properly.

Marketing is simply a tool; just as preaching is a tool. Preaching can be used to proclaim either a heretical, foolish, soul-destroying message or to share the words of eternal life. Marketing can be manipulative, false, and self-indulgent

or it can be a servant communication that honestly, clearly, and consistently leads people to the church and the Savior. Don't discard tool—use it properly and in a Christ-honoring way.

Snarky, profane, and cynical is the default mode of secular communications, not Christ's followers

This is not easy to refrain from being snarky, profane, and cynical.

This challenge is more than theory to me. I personally struggle greatly with it. I grew up the daughter of a WW2, drill-sergeant, career military father, whose language was colorful, to say the least, and often critical. Like most kids, I naturally talk like my father, and it is a constant challenge to make my speech and communications reflect my heavenly Father rather than my earthly father. But that is what they must be if I am to communicate for Jesus.

Whether part of our upbringing or not, it is easy to reflect the cynical, critical, superior tone of contemporary secular communications. That is the default tone of our sinful nature. To pick apart, to find fault, and to laugh the superior laugh of those in the know as opposed to those who create church communications that don't please our refined taste, can be delicious fun, especially if we can share it with like-minded cynical souls.

To carry that attitude into our church communications, to reflect the flippant, irreverent attitudes of the secular world in our communications then becomes the goal.

Thinking we have to communicate like the world to communicate to the world seems to be the savvy thing to do—but it isn't

In addition, it isn't a successful way to share our faith. When the church mocks itself, it doesn't draw people to Jesus. It gives people outside the church permission to mock the church and our Lord. It is extraordinarily, spiritually dangerous to model to those outside the church that it is acceptable to mock the King of Kings and Lord of Lords before whom we will all bow. I worry that

those who do this, do not have a correct view of the Savior that their church says they are sharing. We all need a renewed vision of the majesty and glory of the God we serve, if we want to correctly communicate His message. We aren't alone in this need. Isaiah the Old Testament had been communicating as a

spokesman for God to the Jewish people, for a number of years, when he had a new vision of the God he represented:

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim,. . . And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:1-8).

We all need to pray for a vision of our holy God. We need to pray that we will have a correct perception of his majesty, purity and power. When we get a glimpse of that, we need to repent where we have fallen short in representing Him. We need to pray that we will learn from Jesus, around whom sinners were comfortable and who was a welcome host at parties, but when he asked, "Who can accuse me of sin?" no one could answer. We need to pray that we will always do our communications in light of an audience of One—our Lord Jesus and with our eyes on him receive the wisdom for how to communicate his love for the world he died to save.

Peace should permeate our communications

In addition to the negative influence of current communications trends in the church itself, as I write this an ugly, vicious tone of public discourse has entered our world. Though each person is ultimately accountable to his or her Lord, I humbly believe from my study of scripture that there is no excuse for people

who call themselves followers of Jesus to blast every foe or perceived political offense with slanderous, true or untrue, angry tirades. I do not see anywhere in the Bible were there are exceptions to these verses:

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay, ' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' "(Romans 12: 17-21).

"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king" (1 Peter 2:16-17).

We were taught as children that we could disagree without being disagreeable. We would do well to remember that advice as adults.

An attitude of kindness in communications won't always be appreciated

When I tried, gently I hoped, to challenge someone who was making some rather strong, nasty statements about a church situation and those in authority, he responded angrily that Moses talked like that to people, so he had every right to do that.

"Maybe so," was my reply, "but you aren't Moses."

If we haven't been commissioned by God out of burning bush to deliver a message, we need to be careful that our tone does not exceed our authority.

You will speak in response to the voices you hear—be listening to the right ones

Whether we intend to or not, we all naturally mimic the voices we listen to the most. If you spend your time listening to angry talk radio, television, and reading inflammatory or snarky blogs and editorials, you may, without thinking, assume this is the way to communicate.

Because the human heart is so naturally attracted to what is self-serving and so easily deceived, as Christian communicators we need to take extra care that

the primary voice filling our hearts and minds is the Word of God. The public reputation, air time, or title of national celebrities matters little if their words do not reflect the words, tones, and attitudes of the Bible. This does not mean that a person can quote a verse out of context (as is frequently done) and that quoting that verse means they speak for God. Remember the devil can quote scripture and twist it for his purposes. When this happens, as it did to Jesus in Matthew 4, we should respond with the proper, peaceful, appropriate words of God.

You will only achieve the needed peace and wisdom in these situations, if you spend significant time each day in God's Word.

God's Word must saturate your life for you to be able to respond appropriately to, and communicate correctly about, the issues and challenges our world faces. To be able to do that, my personal primary spiritual discipline is to read through the Bible every year in chronological order. You need to know the entire Bible, its themes, its values, and its voice for it to influence your communications. There are many online programs (just do a search for "read through the Bible in a year") that will send you an email of a daily plan to read through the Bible in a year either to your computer or mobile phone.

In addition to the value of reading the Bible every day, listen to it. There are many websites that have audio Bible readings. Our Bible was initially written to be read out-loud and throughout most of human history hearing the Word was the primary method people accessed it. Download the Bible into your mp3 players and listen to it as you walk, work-out, and work. If even if you read it regularly, hearing it will give you another level of understanding and will again permeate your mind and heart so that the Bible's voice will be the primary one you listen to.

Jesus reminded us that "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks," and out of that same heart, the computer creates church communications. What's inside you will come out in the tone and content of your communications. Let the music and poetry, the truth and majesty of God's Word, be the primary influence on your words.

Make it a matter of prayer

In addition to the work of consciously making God's Word a part of your life, pray for discernment in your choice of content, so that the words and images you choose reflect our holy God in all you create in your church communications. Pray for discernment so you will create what is pleasing to the Lord as your primary audience, not an online coterie of witty communication critics.

This is an extremely serious issue, not one to be taken lightly or to be relegated to matters of taste or to dismiss it as the viewpoint only of old, out-of-it folks who don't know how to relate to the younger generation.

No matter what age group we attempt to reach, how we initially communicate the gospel message will have a lasting effect on how people live out their faith. If Jesus is presented using profanity, snarky, irreverent, or off-color language, or overly sexualized advertising (which some members of the Christian communication community do and if you are not familiar with their work, consider yourself fortunate), how can we ever, with integrity, challenge these believers to purity in speech and life? How can snarky become sanctified?

We must go beyond bad language and a critical attitude to make sure our communication correctly portrays Biblical reality

If Jesus is presented as the giver of your best life now and all the goodies you can desire from parking places to first class upgrades are yours if you follow him, what will we say when the new believer who bought into this version of Christianity is laid off with no health insurance and his wife discovers she has cancer? Or when a drunk driver kills a child? Or when work is downsized, hours cut, and even feeding the family becomes a challenge? How do you explain believers in other nations who are starving or the victims of genocide?

It is nearly impossible to guide new believers to Christian maturity if you misrepresent the foundational truths of the Christian faith. Once again, if you don't know your Bible well, you may not even know when you are communicating falsely. But ignorantly creating false communication does not make it any less false. Bait and switch in any area of advertising results in resentment and anger. Bait and switch in the presentation of the gospel can have eternally harmful consequences.

We can create professional, beautiful, and effective communications without reflecting the voice and values of the world around us

We are to be salt and light. This isn't easy to do, but it is what we must strive for. No matter how we do it, at the end of the day we always need to look at what we have created in our church communications and always ask:

- Does this reflect a holy God?
- Does it echo the words of Scripture or the howls of inflammatory media?
- Is it the representation of timeless truth or contemporary culture?
- Is this Christ-honoring?

In contemplating these questions, I'm reminded of one of the prayers of the early Christians. As they waited in the dungeons below the amphitheater before they would be taken out at dawn to be torn apart by wild animals, they knew what awaited them. There would be a huge crowd surrounding them, screaming for their blood. They would die a horrid, painful death.

We know from their prayers they were also very aware that how Christians faced that death, in a time when public preaching was forbidden and churches met in secret had caused many people to consider the claims of Christ because of the witness given by his followers in the arena as they died. As they anticipated being torn apart by animals, they knew that this would be the last time they could demonstrate what it meant to follow Jesus. As they waited in the darkness, probably as trembling and afraid, as we would be, they prayed:

"Lord Jesus Christ, don't let me cause you shame."

May that always be our prayer as we create communications for Jesus.

CHAPTER EIGHT
ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ADDITIONAL
EFFECTIVE CHURCH COMMUNICATION LINKS

About Yvon Prehn

Yvon Prehn is the founder, director, and primary content creator of the training site for church communicators: http://www.effectivechurchcom.com, a website that provides practical training in print and digital communications to help churches fully fulfill the Great Commission. Yvon has degrees in English and education, a MA in Church History, in addition to attending seminary and doing graduate work in communications.

Yvon worked in communication ministry for over 25 years. She was a free-lance newspaper reporter and religion writer for the *Colorado Springs SUN.* When desktop publishing was first invented, Yvon was a top-rated, national trainer in desktop publishing for Padgett/Thompson, the nation's largest one-day seminar company and she wrote the first book on desktop publishing for the church*, The Desktop Publishing Remedy.*

She worked as a communications consultant and trainer for many of the ministries headquartered in Colorado Springs and was senior editor at Compassion International and Young life International. For fourteen years she traveled full-time all over North America teaching seminars on church communications to thousands of church communicators.

Yvon has written for many of the major Christian magazines. She has written the books: *The Heart of Church Communications, Church Business & Invitation Cards, outreach, PR, caring and information all in one,* and *Connection Cards, connect with visitors, grow your church, pastor your people—little cards, big results,* and many others on church communications.

Currently, Yvon is creating articles, books, videos, blogs, and other training to educate, equip and inspire church communicators. Yvon and her husband Paul, a bi-vocational pastor live in Ventura, CA, where Yvon teaches an adult Bible class and puts into practice what she teaches creating a website and communications for their ministries

For additional resources for Effective Church Communications and to connect with Yvon Prehn

Effective Church Communications Training website: http://www.effectivechurchcom.com

Yvon Prehn's Print books on amazon: http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_athr_dp_sr_1?_encoding=UTF8&sort=relevancerank&search-alias=books&field-author=Yvon%20Prehn

Yvon Prehn's blog: http://www.churchcommunicationsblog.com

Twitter: http://www.twitter.com/yvonprehn

Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/EffectiveChurchCommunications

YouTube videos: http://www.youtube.com/yvonprehn

LinkedIN: http://www.linkedin.com/in/yvonprehn

Smashwords: https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/yvonprehn