

**Effective Church Communication
Position Paper**

**Why newspaper
church ads don't
work and three
alternatives
that do**

**by
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about Effective Church Communication Position Papers

These pieces represent the opinion of ECC on a variety of church communication topics.

They will be published periodically on the web and in a downloadable PDF format, free for ECC Members and available for purchase for non-members. They are designed to be printed off and discussed at church staff and communication meetings.

You are granted permission to print as many as your church needs.

Current topic:

Why church ads in the newspaper don't work and three alternatives that do

Though the use of newspaper ads for churches is declining, they are still one of the key pieces of advertising considered by church staffs. Though your church may want to run one an ad on special occasions if you have the extra money, it is the position of Effective Church Communications that church ads are not the best use of your outreach budget, nor are they the most effective.

We suggest some alternatives in the following pages:

First, if you are going to purchase newspaper ads, don't place them in the religion section.

Second, focus on equipping and inspiring your people to reach out. People are your most effective communication medium—always have been; always will be. Equip them with a simple tool to share the gospel and you'll be amazed at their reach.

Third, tell your message with technology combined with print—a useful website and all the digital media you can comfortably create, but don't forget in the midst of all this technology, there remains a tiny, paper-based communication piece that can make a powerful impact if used properly. That tiny, powerful communicator is the business/invitation card.

For more on these alternatives to newspaper ads for reaching people and growing your church, read on—

Take a realistic look at your unchurched audience

If you are a person who does not go to church, who has never had anything to do with church, but as St. Augustine said, you have a restless heart that you suspect only God can fill, where would you go for answers?

Sadly and honestly today, most people don't immediately think, "Oh, I'll look at the religion section of the Saturday paper and see what church looks like it would be a good place for me to attend to find answers to life."

Unchurched people are usually not great fans of the Saturday religion section and even if they go to it, there is usually little that will appeal to an unchurched person. Most of the ads are full of church jargon and many of them today promise the same things, "A friendly church, upbeat music, and a great children's program!"

Not every seeker today wants friends, likes church music, or has kids. What they want are answers.

In addition, some of the church ads even have embarrassingly similar sermon topics. Particularly around the holidays if a number of the same pastors in a town are downloading the same sermons from Sermon Central or pastors.com, it can be hard to distinguish one church from another.

Some churches with big ad budgets and catchy slogans will attract church shoppers/hopper who are looking for something "more" at church than their current church offers them or a different place to attend if the pastor in their current church wasn't inspiring enough or if the music became a bit boring, but what appeals to a church shopper/hopper will seldom draw in an unchurched person.

A few final bit of advice about church ads, before moving on to a possibly more effective outreach tool:

Take the money that you would spend on a church ad and with the help of someone who is recently converted, come up with an offer that would appeal to someone who does not attend church and put it somewhere in the paper other than the religion page ghetto. Our local paper will give the religion rate to churches for placement any day of the week in any section. If your newspaper doesn't offer that, ask, newspapers are desperate for ad dollars these days.

For example: put the ad on Friday in the Entertainment Section and maybe say something like:

*Tired of your usual weekend? Come to **the encounter**, a coffee, music, and discussion time on Sat. night, 7-9pm at The Journey Church, at Main and Telegraph—thought-provoking answers to real life questions. For more about us, check out our website at: www.yourwebsitehere.com.*

In the sports section what about:

*Had enough of playing games with life and people? The men at **OUR CHURCH** are inviting the men of the community to hear local sports star talk about "How I decided to get real with God and people." Join us for a BBQ and talk, details at (again give website and other contact details).*

One more location: Garage Sale listings:

Looking for treasures? Undiscovered items of incredible value? The Bible talks about a “pearl of great price” that is worth giving everything for. Want to find out more? Check out our website: www.whateveritis.org and find out how to get into a discussion with people who can help you find the real treasure of life through a relationship with God.

An alternative to ads: equip your people

It might be difficult to connect unchurched people with any advertising in the newspaper, but one thing they are certain to come in contact with are other people.

While it is sadly true that once someone becomes converted, they soon have few friends who are not believers, that doesn't mean that they totally withdraw from the world. Most people still work at secular jobs; everyone has many contacts a week with people in the business community, such as:

- the waitress or waiter at the coffee shop,
- the Starbucks employees,
- the clerks at various stores,
- the person standing next to them in lines at airports, the bank, or the driver's license bureau,
- the person sitting next to them on the bus or subway.

These brief moments are often filled with casual chatter, but that casual chatter could redirect an eternity with a simple statement such as this..... “Yes, I agree our world is a mess today, but you know, this week we've having a Saturday night discussion (or a Sunday talk, or a Wednesday soup and classes or whatever) and our topic is 'How to be at peace in an unpeaceful world— I'd like to invite you to come.’”

What happens next is incredibly important, because what moves that encounter from a pleasant, momentary conversation to a potentially life-changing connection, is a an invitation card.

Invitation cards, a low tech connection tool with high impact

An invitation card is simply a business card you have created with your church's information on it: location, meeting times, map if necessary AND most important of all these days, your website and email.

This in itself is simple to create, you've got the technology in your church to do it, (more on that later) but what is important is that this provides a very nonthreatening link to more information about your church and Jesus.

It does this for two reasons:

First, because it provides essential connecting details:

A business/invitation card can give the person you are chatting with the specifics of time, location, address, etc. to actually get the invited person to your church event. Without this specific, connecting information, a nice verbal invitation is easily forgotten no matter how appealing it seemed at first. It doesn't matter how big, small, prominent or interesting your church is; it doesn't matter if you could

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under construction
 Men's ministry at First Church

555 Any Street
 Your Town, CA 55555

All men invited to:

Telegraph	
126	
Darling Rd.	
★ S. Starkey Ave	
Telephone Rd.	

★ Sample meeting, Wed., 5-7pm
 ★ Monthly Breakfast, Sat., 8-9:30am
 ★ Activities as announced
 ★ Child care available
 ★ Call or email Pastor Paul
 555-555-5555
 Paul@example.com
 For more:
 www.website.com

All meetings held at
 First Church
 555 Any Street



In addition to these cards for the Men's Ministry, this e-book has many more examples and how-tos and is available on: www.effectivechurch.com

find it in your sleep, many people don't know it exists or how to get there. What is important to you, is not important to a stranger to your church.

When that person gets up on Sunday morning and considers visiting your church, if they have a card that gives them the specific time it starts and how to get there, the chances of them actually making it to your church are much greater than if they vaguely remember a nice chat with a pleasant person.

In addition to providing information about your church overall, a card like this can function as a mini-brochure for individual ministries in your church. The sample card (front and back illustrated) on this page, shows how much information you can pack on to a business card.

Second, because it links to your website.

In our culture today, when we want to check out anything from a national car company to the latest movies, to airline prices and restaurant reviews—we check out the website. Websites are great because they allow the viewer to not be pressured, to

maintain their distance, and yet explore a product or service without commitment.

Of course to be useful to a curious, exploring, unchurched person, your website must have more on it than a list of service times. If you are actively giving your people business/invitation cards with the intention of driving lots of unchurched people to your website, this should be a great motivation for you to reevaluate your website and make sure it has on it information that is complete, up-to-date and in language understandable and appealing to an unchurched person.

In addition to the basic information, your website should contain invitations to specific ongoing events of interest to an unchurched person, answers to their questions and an email connection for more information or questions. On your website you can get as complex and innovative as you want with links to blogs, podcasts, on-line discussions, email newsletters, videos, music, whatever your church creates to share the good news about Jesus.

Your church might have the most engaging, exciting, seeker sensitive website imaginable, but how are people outside your church going to find your content-rich website or your sensitive, interactive blog? The humble little business/invitation card can make that link.

Use the statistics from your web provider to give you a good idea of how effective your invitation card outreach is

- Link an outreach campaign with a specific section of your website. For Easter (or any other holiday) or any special outreach event.
- Make up enough cards for every person in your congregation to have 10 of them.
- Encourage them in the coming week to give a card to anyone they meet in the course of life and to their friends and neighbors. No pressure or intimidation, just share the card.
- Have a challenging message on the card, something like: "Everybody feels like they will live forever.....the question is, in what neighborhood? Check out our

website for some options and an upcoming event.....”

- In addition to informational links on your website also have a confidential email address with volunteers who will interact with seekers promptly.
- Monitor your web statistics to see what happens.
- Report the results to your congregation and challenge everyone to pray for the people who receive the cards.
- Make the creation of invitation cards an ongoing ministry so people expect them, pray about them, and look forward to seeing how God uses them in your church.

How to create church invitation cards

You can easily create your own business/invitation cards. MS Word and MS Publisher are two programs that have templates for creating them. On the Microsoft website, www.microsoft.com, under downloads, there are many templates of business cards. On www.effectivechurchcom.com are videos that illustrate why and how to use them and how to create them, plus how to create logos for them and how to create the cards themselves. All of this is under the tab: Core Communications and then Church Invitation Cards. Some material is free; some available to members of Effective Church Communications.

You can easily print off the cards you create using your inkjet or laser printers.

Another way to create them is to use one of the online print programs such as www.vistaprint.com. There are many more, but this is one I have used successfully as have many people who have taken my seminars. With these services you have the option of having glossy, very professional looking cards, but since you created them, they will be personalized and specific to your church, not a cookie-cutter version of something perhaps other churches in town are using.

Finally, never underestimate the power of little things

I imagine the day the little boy packed up his lunch of loaves and fishes and headed off to see Jesus, he had no idea what would happen. He gave what he had and Jesus used it to feed 5,000 people.

I think the little business and invitation card we create are like that. They don't seem like much, but if we create them with prayers and love and then give them over to the Lord as we give them to people—be prepared for amazing results.

About Effective Church Communications

Effective Church Communications is a ministry that provides training, resources, and inspiration to help church communicators

fully fulfill the Great Commission. The hub of our ministry is the website: www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Our definition of effective church communication is communication that fully fulfills the Great Commission—that helps people come to know Jesus as Savior and helps grow them to mature discipleship.

Our approach to church communications includes more than design and communication construction how-tos, though we have lots of them. It includes foundational, biblical teaching related to communications, communication leadership, and church communication teams. We constantly remind church communicators that we have been entrusted with the words of eternal life and the eternal destinies of people depend on how well we communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though we work hard to stay current with technology (our training is web-based, we tweet, podcast, and are moderate tech junkies), we value and teach timeless communication skills and principles. The majority of our training has application in every communication channel from print to podcasts.

We believe churches of every size, from tiny house churches to mega-churches benefit from clear, effective communication. We strongly encourage churches be who they are in their communications and to reflect their unique denomination and heritage. We encourage them to speak personally to their congregation and community rather than copy the latest mega-church or marketing trend.

We do not allow, encourage, link to, or promote in any way, irreverent, profane language or snarky, cynical approaches to church communication or in the discussion of it. We serve a holy God and we seek in all we do to walk worthy as we communicate a worthy message.

We strongly believe church communicators, from any size church, who use any software, with any skill level, can do all the work they need to, with the people (staff and volunteers) they have, to create the communications needed at their church. We also believe church communicators from churches of every size and description be an encouragement and help to each other.

Though we encourage church communicators to pour their hearts, minds, and souls into the hard work of communicating the words of eternal life, we are constantly aware that our words will only accomplish eternal results because of His blessing of them and His working through them, by our eternal God.



About Yvon Prehn

Yvon Prehn is the founder and director of the training site for church communicators, www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Yvon has worked in communication ministry for over 25 years. She was a free-lance newspaper reporter and religion writer for the *Colorado Springs SUN*. She was a top-rated, national trainer in desktop publishing for Padgett/Thompson, the nation's largest one-day seminar company when desktop publishing was first invented. She worked as a communications consultant and trainer for many of the ministries headquartered in Colorado Springs and was senior editor at both Compassion International and Young Life International. For fourteen years she traveled full-time all over North America teaching seminars on church communications.

Yvon has written for many of the major Christian magazines. Her most recent books include: *Church Bulletins, how to create and use them to touch and change lives*, *Church Connection Cards*, and *The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing*, all available at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn.

Yvon has a master's degree in Church History and has done additional extensive graduate work in theology and communications. She has taught high school English and was an adjunct professor in church history at Regis University. She is the wife of a bi-vocational pastor and does the secretarial and church communications work for her husband Paul, in addition to co-teaching in a variety of ministry settings at the church they work with in Ventura, California.