

## **STAFF DISCUSSION PDF: Why Marketing isn't evil—or doesn't need to be anyway**

from Yvon Prehn, <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>

What follows is an excerpt of an excerpt that is in the process of being republished as a larger book, *The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing, to enable your church to fully fulfill the Great Commission*. Though this book is probably 4-6 weeks away from completion, I wanted to share this chapter now because as churches go into the holiday season, you will be doing lots of marketing. My prayer is that you will do it well for the glory of God and in ways pleasing to Him.

I trust this material will provide a biblical basis for staff discussion and prayerful implementation. As you plan and prepare your church for holiday outreach this should help clarify your view of marketing and enable you to answer staff questions.

### **Chapter Four: Effective Church Communication Marketing**

Intro note: The following material is from the book, *Ministry Marketing Made Easy*, by Yvon Prehn. The book is currently being revised and updated. You have my permission to pull out this chapter, copy or reprint it and pass it on to those with genuine concerns about marketing. It might also make a valuable discussion topic at a church staff meeting.

Some church people are genuinely concerned about marketing and wonder about the appropriateness of marketing in the church. This is a valid concern and an important one to address. This chapter presents a biblical view of respectful marketing and provides biblical and practical examples of appropriate uses of marketing in the church.

I strongly recommend you take time to go over this chapter as a staff and with the leadership of your church. If you don't and people in your church have concerns that are not answered, you can be certain they will come out and often, not in pleasant ways.

You want everyone (as much as is possible) in the church to be of one heart in your communication and marketing efforts. Yes, it takes time to explain why you are doing what you are doing, but the oneness of heart that should be the result is worth it.

If you put the reasons why you are doing what you are doing and your reasons for marketing on your church website, it will always be there for you to refer to and your people to look at. To help you in that, you have my permission to copy and post anything (or all, if it helps) of this chapter on your website—or of any other materials in this book or from my website. I'd appreciate it if you would add this citation: from Yvon Prehn, <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>

#### **Marketing misconceptions defined and defused**

*"Nonprofit organizations are involved in marketing whether or not they are conscious of it. They are involved in various markets and use certain operating principles in dealing with each market. These operating principles define their marketing. The issue is not one of whether or not nonprofit organizations should get involved in marketing, but rather how thoughtful they should be at it."*

Phillip Kotler, *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations*

**You will find this chapter helpful if people in your church are asking these questions:**

*"Wait just a minute! What does marketing have to do with ministry? Marketing is worldly; ministry is spiritual."*

*"Ministry and marketing—can the two go together? Is Ministry Marketing really a skill we should learn or is it just an oxymoron created to sell a book?"*

These are good questions and valid concerns. To answer them without emotional baggage, let's start with an objective source—dictionary definitions:

### **Marketing defined**

First, let's look at Webster's definitions of the terms "ministry" and "marketing." Then read my modified definitions for the purposes of this book.

### **Webster's definitions:**

**ministry:** *the act of serving*

**marketing:** *the total of activities, involved in the moving of goods from the producer to the consumer*

### **My definition of Ministry Marketing:**

Combining the two definitions above and adapting them for the church results in this working definition:

*Ministry Marketing: a servant ministry that consists of the total of activities, every action and communication that makes up our story, involved in moving the good of salvation, from the God who produced it by the death and resurrection of Jesus and helping the intended consumer, lost humanity, to accept that salvation.*

Or, said another way:

***Ministry Marketing: everything we do in communications and actions as servants of Jesus to share his story and to invite people to join us in the eternal adventure of living it.***

One of the most important elements in this definition is the word *everything*. Ministry Marketing involves everything we do, including all communications, publications, media, and public actions of your church. You cannot create any publication, communication, or media in your church and not have it affect your marketing in either a positive or negative way.

### **Misconceptions about Ministry Marketing**

Even with a good definition, many church people have four misconceptions about marketing. Let's define and address these misconceptions with the definition of Ministry Marketing that was just given in mind. The rebuttals to these misconceptions should remove any objections to instituting a more intentional marketing program in your church.

**Marketing Misconception #1:** Marketing's primary purpose is to draw attention to itself.

**Marketing Misconception #2:** Marketing is somehow unspiritual. At best it is a worldly tool that is used to manipulate people into making decisions that they would not otherwise make.

**Marketing Misconception #3:** Marketing only involves the communications created on paper or for the web.

**Marketing Misconception #4:** The task of marketing is a job for professionals only. It involves lots of time, money, expensive research, statistics, demographics, tools, and techniques beyond the resources of most churches and ministries.

**Marketing Misconception #1: Marketing's primary purpose is to draw attention to itself**

To address this valid concern, it is important to emphasize the adjective *ministry* to describe the kind of marketing we do in the church. Again, to minister means "to serve." Ministry marketing, church marketing is first, last, and always a servant ministry. It does not exist to draw attention to itself or to the people who produce the publications.

Our goal is not for people to say, "Wow, what a visually beautiful newsletter or website!" Our goal is not to win design awards or to impress people with cool typeface selection. Success in Ministry Marketing is measured differently than success in secular marketing. Success in Ministry Marketing is measured in lives changed, not in compliments heard or awards won. The measure of success for Ministry Marketing is the people who come to know Jesus as Savior and grow to maturity in their Christian lives. When it does this well, Ministry Marketing is a somewhat invisible ministry in the church.

You don't remember marketing if it is done well. Instead, you celebrate the results as the church grows, more people attend events, and the ministry prospers. While the pastor may be congratulated for his or her great talk, the trainer thanked for the educational workshop, the evangelist praised for the revival, few notice or thank the people who worked hard to do the publicity and marketing for that was responsible for getting people to these events.

**Check your motivation for doing ministry marketing**

This reality reveals an important ministry caution: Don't go into Ministry Marketing and communications if you need public praise and thanks to keep going—you won't get it. If you work in church communications and marketing, the only time that you will be publicly acknowledged for your work is when you make a typo that makes somebody really angry. Then people will know who you are. Then you will be publicly recognized.

Marcie, a new church secretary, experienced this situation when she mistakenly published the wrong date for an upcoming event in her church. A gentleman in the church had not been terribly enthusiastic about some of the changes she'd made to the bulletin in recent weeks and he thought that her publication style was too youthful and modern. His disgruntlement had even led him to complain about the situation to the pastor. On the Sunday when what he considered a particularly unforgiveable mistake appeared, he found it and yelled from his pew during the announcement time, "Pastor, tell people the correct date for the church anniversary picnic. Our new church secretary Marcie messed it all up."

Marcie slumped in her pew and wanted to die. She was ready to quit her job.

When Marcie shared her story with me, I understood why she felt the way she did. That sort of treatment is unkind and uncalled for, but sadly, in one form or another, is a common experience for those who work in church communication and marketing. In an attempt to encourage Marcie, I remind her that being involved in Ministry Marketing is a bit like being a Levite in the Old Testament times: the Lord is your only reward. In the Old Testament, the Levites couldn't own any land (Deut. 14:29). All the other tribes could, but not them. Like the Levites, the Lord is the only one who rewards you for much of the Ministry Marketing work you will do.

I also reminded Marcie that, though she might be the brunt of criticism and unappreciated work today, helping people come to know Jesus, even the behind the scenes, is truly the way to become a star. Recall Daniel 12:3 *"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."*

Marcie was encouraged. It helps to have an eternal perspective on the value of Ministry Marketing and to focus on what will bring about eternal rewards.

In order to correct the first Ministry Marketing misconception, remember that Ministry Marketing isn't about drawing attention to itself, it's about bringing people to Jesus. Others may not recognize you for your work now, and they may even criticize you. But it won't always be that way. To encourage yourself in your work, put a little note above your desk that says, "Someday I'll be a star!"

### **Marketing misconception #2: Marketing is not spiritual**

It's important to address this misconception because we certainly don't want to do anything that displeases the Lord. In voicing this fear, many people relate the story of Jesus chasing the money changers out of the temple (Matt. 21:12-13). Some people are afraid that anything that is even remotely connected to commerce should not be conducted in the church.

To address the concern, we need to remember that in the story about Jesus cleansing the temple, the individuals who sold livestock and exchanged currency had nothing to do with marketing the gospel message. They were just selling their stuff. Ministry Marketing wasn't the issue in that situation. There are, however, valid, positive examples of Ministry Marketing in scripture, as well as solid examples in today's church. Here are some of them:

#### **Biblical Ministry Marketing Example #1: The Apostle Paul**

The Apostle Paul was one of the greatest marketers of all time. As Paul traveled, he usually went directly to the synagogue to speak. In this setting, he knew his market well. Acts 17 describes his visit to Athens. Here it was different and in Athens, Paul engaged in some careful market research before he shared his message.

Look closely at his process. First he went around the city and carefully studied the pagan idols. This was not easy for him to do. Paul was raised with "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and "Thou shalt not make any graven image." Despite his background, Paul carefully studied what was personally repulsive to him because what he studied was important to the people he wanted to reach with the gospel message. Paul even took the time to memorize some of their poetry. *When it came time for him to speak, instead of pronouncing curses on the worship of idols, Paul said, "I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you"* (Acts 17:22, 23).

This is Ministry Marketing in action—studying what is important to the audience you are trying to reach and then using that as a bridge to the gospel message.

#### **Ministry Marketing Example #2: Jesus**

When Jesus began sharing his message publicly, he didn't stay home in Nazareth and post a little sign outside the carpenter's shop that said, "Interested in eternal life? Knock on my door."

He didn't stay in Nazareth and wait for people to come to him. Instead, he was in the public arena each day, sharing and marketing his message in a way that was appropriate to his day and audience.

### **Ministry Marketing Example #3: Joshua**

One last example on the spiritual value of marketing comes from a devotion by Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon begins by retelling the story of the children of Israel's battle with the Amalek (Exodus 17). In the story, Joshua is down in the valley fighting and Moses is up on the mountain with his hands raised in prayer. So long as Moses holds up his arms, the Israelites win. However, as Moses tires and his arms drop, the army begins to lose. So Aaron and Hur help hold up Moses' arms and the battle is won.

Spurgeon comments that we often use this story as an example of the importance of prayer in our spiritual battles and that is a good application of the Bible story. But we must never forget that while Moses is up on the mountain praying, Joshua is in the valley fighting bloody, hand-to-hand combat. In all that we do for the Lord, Spurgeon continues, we must always do two things: We must pray, because every victory is ultimately God's, and we must also fight.

### **Don't just pray without taking action**

This story is incredibly important for you to remember as you do the work of Ministry Marketing. The story of Joshua illustrates a recurrent problem in thousands of churches. The steps that make up the problem often follow this pattern:

1. The church staff plans and envisions great and glorious activities, church growth events, and outreach programs.
2. The staff prays about the plans. They discuss. They hold committee meetings. They pray some more.
3. They recruit the people to put on a worthwhile ministry event. The event's details are perfectly in place. The program leaders practice and are ready to go.
4. The day of the event comes and almost nobody shows up.

Sound familiar? This is what happens far too often in churches when it is a modern-day situation of Moses praying, but no Joshua fighting. This book will help equip the Joshuas in your church to do their part.

The following story illustrates a real-life event that underscores the reality of the story above. It reveals problems in marketing church events and what happens when we pray and use expensive production media without simple, but intentional marketing strategy and tools.

### **Real life story about the limitations of prayers and good intentions**

In this instance a church was experiencing great numerical growth. It had grown from 600 to over 1800 in attendance in three years. The Sunday service was spectacular, with seeker-sensitive music, drama, and powerful Bible-based and need-centered preaching. Individuals were making decisions to become Christians every week and the church was growing in numbers. They were doing many things right.

Though grateful for the growth, the church staff was concerned because the growth was primarily reflected in Sunday morning service attendance. The leadership realized that people also needed to grow in Christian maturity and that meant getting them into spiritual growth opportunities outside the Sunday morning service. The staff decided to address this issue by initiating a men's ministry.

The staff prayed fervently about and planned for the kick-off event for the new men's ministry. They advertised it for four weeks in the bulletin and newsletter, on PowerPoint during the church service, and through lively announcements. The staff expected at least 100-200 men to show up. The night came for the event. The twelve men from the church staff and the planning leaders enthusiastically set-up tables and chairs for 200, expecting a great response.

Three men came who were not part of the leadership team.

What went wrong? The staff did all the right things, spiritually. They followed a biblically-sound ministry model, they planned and prayed, and then they prayed some more. They held more meetings and prayed more.

### **The marketing plan for the men's ministry and what went wrong**

Though they did all the right things spiritually, the staff didn't do effective Ministry Marketing. They were a committee of Moses members with no Joshua doing the tough work. This is how they marketed the event and following this list (which may appear adequate at first glance) we'll look at why it wasn't effective and what would have made for effective ministry marketing in this situation.

1. They advertised the study for four weeks in the newsletter and bulletin. Their belief concerning the effectiveness of these communication pieces was that the most important criteria for success, according the church staff, was how the pieces looked. Therefore, without regard to cost, the pieces were produced by a professional advertising agency in full-color on glossy paper. The only limitation was that because the designer convinced them that the most important parts of the bulletin were her graphic excellence and white space, there was little room for text.
2. The content of the announcement was the same in both the newsletter and the bulletin. It said, "Men's Bible study starting Sept. 8. All men of the church are encouraged to attend. Sign up in the church lobby."
3. They announced the event from the pulpit in the same way for three weeks, and used PowerPoint each week to illustrate the announcement. The PowerPoint presentation was attractive and well done.

### **What looked right and what went wrong**

At first look it seems like a good way to market the program, so what went wrong? Here are some of the most obvious problems:

1. Though the event planners advertised the event a total of eight times in their printed material (a good number of times), the announcement was virtually worthless because it didn't give the complete information details that would enable the men to attend the event. The planners did not tell the men the time the event was going to start or where it was going to be held. I am not making this up to make a point—they really didn't publish that information.

It doesn't matter how beautiful the graphics are in a communication piece if essential details like these are left out. All of the details must be included every time and as a part of every announcement of an event if you want people to attend. It is the details of time, location, date, duration that actually connects people with an event—just remembering something is happening, sometime doesn't get people there.

2. They made a number of incorrect ministry marketing assumptions: The staff assumed that men would find out the information regarding starting time and location, and would write it down and remember it when they went into the church lobby to sign up for the study. That was a huge mistake.

If you want to give any event the kiss of death and guarantee no response at all to any event or ministry, tell people to "sign up in the church lobby." Nobody does, especially guys.

After church is over, does any man go to say to his wife (please forgive any implied sexism in this illustration), "Honey, would you please wait for me in the car while I find out where to go sign up for the men's Bible study?"

It doesn't happen. I know my own husband's most pressing thought after church is—food—where are we going for lunch and how little the donut was in-between Sunday School and the church service. Following the thought of food, he's wondering about football, basketball, or hockey, depending on the time of year. My husband is a godly, committed, bi-vocational pastor and a very involved man in the church but once church is over and he doesn't have a ministry responsibility, he's out of there. Most men I know, godly guys that they are, are similar. In addition, remember this is a church of 1800 people—realistically how will even a tiny fraction of the men fit around a sign-up table? Will the men stand in line for a chance to sign up? Will any of them even look for the table?

When the choice is between brunch or to stand in a line to sign up for an event I'm not even sure I want to attend and won't find out anything about until I wait to get to the sign-up table, what choice do you think most men would make?

### **It may be a godly event, but you've got to convince busy humans to attend**

Any time you require people to take a second step (call the church office for more information, sign up in the lobby, etc.) to find out essential details that they need to show up, you will drastically cut down attendance at your ministry event. People don't have or don't care to take the time to do this. Remember also that the event you are working to get people to attend is not nearly as important to the church members as it is to you and they will usually not take any extra time or effort to do something that is primarily important to you.

### **Summary of incorrect ministry marketing assumptions in the launch of the Men's Ministry**

There were so many things that went wrong here that represent similar situations in many churches, so let's review them:

- The staff assumed that men would remember the details from the PowerPoint announcement presented every Sunday. Most men don't. PowerPoint is great for song lyrics; to set a specific mood for worship, or for graphics to reinforce a story or theme, but few men (women or teenagers) sit in worship, pencil in hand, ready to take notes off of a PowerPoint presentation. And you don't remember connection details from seeing them on the screen once or twice. The amount of work it took to create a PowerPoint presentation or how engaging the image on it has no correlation with the ability for people to remember the concrete details on it.
- The staff assumed that having the pastor encourage the men to come to the event meant something to the men, and would make them want to come. It usually doesn't. Pastoral leadership doesn't have the influence it once did. We live in an irreverent age, an age that doesn't admire authority. A personal invitation from a friend can be powerful, but pleas from the pulpit are seldom heard, let alone acted upon.
- The staff assumed that men would want to come to a Bible study. Most men don't. There was nothing in any of the advertising that told potential attendees what they would study, what it would do for them, or if it would change their lives or benefit them in any way.

- The staff just assumed that a Bible study meant as much to the new Christians and unbelievers who attended the church as it did to the church staff. It doesn't. Remember: The number one question people ask when they get an advertisement for anything from the church or elsewhere is, "What's in it for me?" If that question isn't answered quickly, clearly, and in a way that meets a need, people don't show up.

Some of the previous comments might seem rather unkind and somewhat brutal, or cynical. You may be thinking, "You shouldn't talk about church Bible studies that way! People do what our pastor says! I just know people are impressed with the PowerPoint slides we make before the service starts."

I'm certain my observations aren't true in every instance. Please know that I'm not sharing these observations from a cynical heart, but from a heart that cares passionately about the church of Jesus Christ. We have to start being honest in the church about what works and about what doesn't work if we are going to market our message effectively. We are losing the hearts and souls of people to every imaginable philosophy and religion, other than a saving trust in Jesus. If some people make a decision for Christ, so often they remain baby Christians all their lives because the church doesn't seem to offer them anything more interesting and often less challenging than what is on TV or the web. This has to change for the church to become the powerful, life-changing force it should be.

Our attempts to get people to church and involve them in activities of the church are not working very well in most cases and people must become involved in more than Sunday morning if they are to grow up in the Christian faith.

### **What the men's ministry planners should have done**

In the example above, the church leaders needed to pray, but they also needed some marketing savvy and some common sense. They should have:

1. **Given complete information** (time, location, duration, cost) each time the event was mentioned in writing. Remember, "The message is the message." It doesn't matter if you spend a pile of money for four-color printing if you don't give the time something starts or the location for the event each time you advertise the message.
2. **Sent out a series of postcards** to the men of the church, in addition to providing the newsletter and bulletin announcements. Postcards, if done correctly, tend to get carried directly from the mailbox to the refrigerator. Once posted, an announcement on the refrigerator is a far more likely to illicit a response than an announcement in a discarded church bulletin. In addition, often times wives get the mail and can assist the church in encouraging their husbands to attend.
3. **Send out email blasts, text messages, social site notices** to those who prefer to receive reminders that way. To some folks today, if it isn't on their Blackberry, mobile phone, Twitter, or Facebook page, it doesn't exist. You may need to do a little upfront surveying of your people to find out their preferred method of receiving information, but any time spent doing that will be worth it in increased response.
4. **Provided food and advertised it.** A good, hearty, regional favorite food (and lots of it) at the kickoff event is an example of being market savvy. Food is a draw not only because people like to eat, but it is a great ice-breaker for any new spiritual training event. Attendees might think, "I'll just come for the great BBQ and leave before the serious stuff starts," but if the food is great and the interaction positive during meal time, they will most likely remain for the spiritual part.
5. **Made it an event that would appeal to unchurched men.** Starting the Bible study series with a locally popular speaker (a sports figure, perhaps) that the men would want to come and hear would have



also been a good idea. The advertising should have prominently featured the food, the speaker, and the benefits that the men would experience from the event. Most unchurched men and many church men have no innate burning desire to know the Word of God better; most of them don't scour the bulletin looking for Bible study opportunities. It might be what they most need, but until they have an opportunity to actually interact with godly men and see the relevance of God's Word to their lives, most see little value in it.

These changes would have provided the Joshua contribution. The church staff still needs to pray and plan just as intensely, but the addition of sending out some postcards and text messages, the promise of great BBQ and an inspiring speaker, along with the prayer makes for a Ministry Marketing victory.

Unclear announcements of a Men's Bible Study with no details and nothing other than a Bible study offered are the ingredients for disappointment.

### **Marketing misconception #3: Marketing only involves the communications created on paper or for the web**

If only it were that easy, I could share with you pointers on how to create your print and web media and we'd be done with it. Even though I have lots of great ideas in those areas and thousands of wonderful examples, great-looking examples aren't the end of the story. Ministry Marketing doesn't stop with our printed or web-based communications. It is part of everything we do.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "You will be my witness." Sometimes we interpret that verse as if being a witness were an option. It isn't. Individuals may be good witnesses or bad witnesses, but once a person becomes a Christian, people know. Christian behavior is judged. It's amazing how people who are not Christians have some pretty firm ideas on how Christians are supposed to act.

Nobody ever says, "Oh isn't it horrible that rock star is acting that way!" Expectations for rock stars are pretty lax. But if a Christian makes the slightest misstep, the charge of hypocrite is loudly invoked. Once someone becomes a follower of Jesus, he or she becomes a walking advertisement for the faith. For good or ill, a person's faith is judged by his or her actions.

In the same way, people have certain expectations about churches. People come to church hoping for healing and acceptance. If they meet grumpy people and messy bathrooms, they are likely to assume the Christian faith is grumpy and messy. While this may be an unfair judgment, it happens.

**Remember: Ministry Marketing consists of a "total of activities."** Effective marketing is made up of many things, from signage to web sites, from post-cards to email, from bulletins to training programs—every imaginable communication format. Ministry Marketing spills over from the web and the printed page and into more permanent aspects of church life, including the condition of the parking lot and the availability of handicapped parking.

Getting this area right is a continual challenge, but the destiny of eternal souls is at stake, do all the work needed so that as much as is possible every part of your church communicates the love of Jesus in the best possible way.

### **Marketing misconception #4: Marketing is costly, difficult, and for professionals who have the right equipment**

In truth, effective Ministry Marketing is possible for every church, and can be done in cost-effective, relatively easy ways. Great marketing can take place in tiny churches, mega-churches, and everything in-between. It can be accomplished with pennies or thousands of dollars.

One especially damaging part of this misconception is the belief that Ministry Marketing is successful only if marketing professionals do it.

Some marketing professionals can and do provide great advice and ideas, but they aren't the only source of marketing success. The difference between these two approaches is a bit like the difference between a meal cooked by a great, trained chef and one cooked by your grandmother. Professional marketing advice is like the meal produced by the trained chef. It can look picture perfect, satisfy your hunger for the exotic, and at times be a great inspiration.

My grandmother's approach to cooking was different. She was raised on a farm and she never had a cooking class in her life. A little of this and that, hours in the kitchen, and a lot of hard work produced a Sunday dinner of Mennonite brown beef and gravy over fried potatoes, garden- raised cabbage Cole slaw with sweet cream dressing, homemade rolls with strawberry jam, corn and green beans, bread and butter and watermelon pickles. Strawberry and Rhubarb pie topped with sugar and cream and dark strong coffee finished the meal.

**There's more than one way to fill a tummy, and more than one way to approach successful ministry marketing.**

Your Ministry Marketing may take the professional chef's approach, with slick, glossy publications and a big marketing budget. Or you may go the grandma path—little of this and that, hours on the computer and a lot of hard work that produces your own materials. Either way can work.