

mirroring your community

How to Market Your Church: Fellowship Church, Continued



Death. Birth. Marriage. Divorce. Moving. Crisis. We will all experience defining moments in our lives. Events like these often stir us to “check out” God more than at any other time. To most people, “checking out God” means checking out a local church. How will they know to check out your church? What will they find when they get there? The statement “You may be the only Jesus they ever see,” reminds us of the huge cost incurred whenever a church does not effectively show the relevance of Christ in the real world.

On our visit to Fellowship Church of Grapevine, TX, one thing that clearly stood out was their ability to show people the relevance of Christ. We asked Fellowship’s Director of Communications, Lawrence Swicegood,

for some practical tips about how a local church can effectively “market” to their community. The tips he shared are important for any church to consider, whether you’re a small start-up or a large mega-church.

identify your community

Ask yourself, “Is my church really attracting people from our whole community, or is it just reaching one major group?” Drive around... what do you see? What kind of people groups are within your church’s immediate sphere of influence? As you get to know **WHO** the people are around you, you will be more prepared to know **WHAT** is important to them and **HOW** to effectively reach them. For example, Fellowship commissioned pollster and consultant George Barna to conduct research and report on the demographics of their surrounding community. Among other things, they discovered that 48% of the population around Fellowship Church is single. Keeping this in mind, Fellowship not only invests time and resources in a strong singles ministry, but they are also careful to keep the worship services relevant to singles as well. For example, they found that too many “marriage” illustrations can keep singles from feeling connected with the Message. In a church culture that often appears to cater to married people, Fellowship wanted to be careful to avoid this perception. As a result of Fellowship’s special attention to this large group of seekers, their attendance closely mirrors the community with about 46% singles!

Fellowship has also found that a large portion of their surrounding population is made up of young professionals. To provide an atmosphere that is familiar for this group, Fellowship designed their campus with a contemporary, modern look that fits in with the community. They’ve been careful to do design, construction and interior styling with the excellence that is common in that area.



finding fish

Fellowship Church attracts over 18,000 people from its community per weekend. According to independent surveys commissioned by Fellowship, 12% of the people attending considered themselves as “unchurched!” Lawrence’s marketing approach is simple: “We’re not trying to reach fellow Christians. Fellowship Church is trying to reach the lost.”

Ask, “Where are non-Christ-followers likely to be?” This doesn’t have to be hard. Although they may not congregate at Christian bookstores or religious events, they can still easily be found at schools, colleges, gyms, movie theaters, shopping malls, local events, and other such places.

Once you’ve thought about where they are, think about how to reach them there. One way that Fellowship has

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Community Event Hosted by Fellowship Church

before you ever advertise.”

It starts at the top; the senior pastor has to carry and share the vision of making church relevant. It’s crucial that you keep objectively looking at your church from an outsider’s point of view. Is what your church has to offer relevant and done with excellence? Can the people in your community relate to what you are doing? Are you speaking their language? If so, your members are probably already inviting and bringing their friends to church. On the other hand, if people aren’t excited about bringing people to church, you have to consider whether they truly feel it is worthwhile and relevant to changing lives. It’s just like a great restaurant – if people love it, they’ll recommend it or even bring their friends

“the key is coming up with creative components to engage to the community”

to share the experience! On the other hand, if people feel that their friends and neighbors would not relate or get anything out of your church, they will not feel comfortable inviting them. If people do come to your church but your “product” seems irrelevant to their lives, you’ve lost the opportunity. It’s a huge responsibility because with some people, you may only get one shot!

been reaching people where they are is by running slides in theaters before the movies begin. The relevance of the slide is crucial. Lawrence says, “Don’t put [a slide] of your pastor in his suit and a big church steeple up there. That’s perceived as irrelevant to that market.” When they have a special kids event coming up, they create a promo slide to run before a kid’s movie. Last summer, Fellowship held their annual Vacation Bible School program, “Adventure Week,” which they advertised before G and PG-rated movies. They go fishing where the fish are!

what do you have to offer?

While Fellowship uses various creative and targeted outlets to reach the community, the number one reason people visit Fellowship is simply because someone invited them (a whopping 89%) “It starts with the product itself,” Lawrence says. He has seen direct mail pieces from churches that look great, but are not consistent with what is really happening in the church. “It’s false advertising,” Lawrence says, “Fix your product

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DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE CULTURE



Lawrence Swicegood

Our passion at Fellowship is to reach the lost and make them full-court followers of Christ. Although, as Christ-followers, we are to be separate from the world, we should still look around to see what people relate to and the trends that influence them. Not sure where to start? Just start by paying attention to the surroundings:

- retail
- videos
- music
- ad campaigns
- community trends
- malls & movie theaters
- concerts
- sports

Recommended by Lawrence Swicegood, Fellowship Church

look for expertise under your roof

A lot of churches say they don't have the staff for that kind of creativity. Regardless of the size of your church, Lawrence recommends that you first take a look at your members' expertise. Do some digging. Who already attends your church? Do you have ad-buyers? Graphic artists? Radio personalities? Writers? Printers? Lawrence himself (who has a very interesting background in marketing and public relations including working as the Press Lead for former president George

Bush) initially started out as a member at Fellowship who volunteered his services. When people in the church see that their gifts and expertise can really make a difference in people's lives, they will be motivated to help.

“Don't just improve on an existing idea, do something different!”

Whether conceptualizing a whole series campaign or designing a worship guide for the weekend, Lawrence says, **“Don't just improve on an existing idea, do something different!”** For example, many churches use the same image every week in their worship guide because someone in the church “loves the old cross on the front.” In this day and age, when graphics are constantly changing in the culture at large, using the same image all the time becomes stale. “We want the cross to come alive,” Lawrence says. Finances, staffing and time can be obstacles, but instead of saying, “We can't do it,” the Fellowship team operates on the attitude “We can do it, now let's figure out how to do it.”

keep training

Keep exposing yourself to new creative ideas and successful campaigns. Lawrence recommends going to secular training on advertising and marketing. Learn about what's working for everyone else. He says that sending their designer to a recent conference has already paid for itself many times over. She came back with four suitcases full of samples and ideas to try - several of which they have already used! Pay attention to the colors and styles used in malls, restaurants, concerts and other public places.

if an idea isn't working- “chunk it”

Fellowship has tried a wide variety of ideas, some of which have been successful, and some that have not. That's OK, but if an idea isn't working, chunk it. For this reason, Fellowship does very little newspaper advertising. It didn't really make sense for them because church advertising often gets stuck together in the religious section. “This isn't where non-believers are

usually looking,” Lawrence says, “So why be there?” Phone book advertising has the same drawback, so instead, they focus those resources on ideas that are effectively reaching the unchurched.

hosting community events

Hosting community events gives members a great opportunity to invite their friends and neighbors. Hosting such events can often provide opportunities for free press from the media announcing (and perhaps even covering) your event. Again, if it’s relevant to the community, the community will respond. For example, Fellowship hosted a special patriotic service last spring, celebrating freedom and praying for the men and women serving in Iraq. This service was covered by the Ft. Worth Star-Telegram and FOX4 News.

Also last spring, Fellowship hosted a weekend event they called the Fellowship Four-Mile, a fun-run held

in conjunction with a health fair and blood drive. Baylor Medical Center came to the church to do health screenings. They added “Taste of Fellowship,” where they invited restaurants within a two-mile radius to come on campus both Saturday and Sunday. Many times local restaurants welcome the opportunity to set up stands because it is a great opportunity for them to promote their restaurant to a large number of people frequenting their area.

Lawrence cautions churches to be realistic when they hold such an event: People make the classic marketing mistake of having an event on Saturday, and then on Sunday they look at their attendance and see only a few new faces. They wrongly conclude that the event wasn’t successful. The crowds that come to an event may not actually come to church until a crisis point in their lives reminds them of their need. In the meantime, a seed is planted when they show up at your church event to find

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Fellowship's Events Target Specific Audiences

*continued from "CSI & DNA:
the branding of your church" pg. 15*



organization

Every ministry organization is uniquely equipped to achieve certain goals. This is not to say that hiring strategic personnel can't help you accomplish certain projects or reach certain objectives. Yet, there is a core dynamic to how an organization functions that helps determine your DNA. Many programs that fail in a church fail not because of lack of effort by those involved, but simply because the organization is not structured to support that kind of program.

culture/personality

Just as each person has a unique personality, so does each church. Some are more formal, some more casual. Some are driven more through emotion; others tend to be analytical. In my own church, fellowship is a major part of our culture. Thus, our lobby is nearly as large as our auditorium and we serve food nearly every time the doors are open. This is simply a way that we support a characteristic that is part of our DNA. The personality of your church is probably the biggest factor that will draw someone to your church over another, because his or her personality fits into the church culture.

As you examine these areas, realize that some aspects of your DNA can be changed. You can change your location, you can alter the organizational structure, etc. The key is to examine who you are currently and strive to bring these four areas into harmony to be exactly who God has called you to be. Never try to be something you are not, simply because it is the trendy thing to do. That is no more than a recipe for poor execution of ideas and, ultimately, failure.

Again, our ultimate goal is effective communication. As you determine your DNA, you can identify your target audience. Then you can strive to effectively communicate to that audience. The type of communication you use will create your brand in the community. It is up to you to let that brand be a reflection of your church DNA.

In this issue of VISION, you see how The Moody Church is using media to communicate their message more effectively. They have identified their DNA and use media to enhance who they are, not to try to be someone they are not. In contrast, Fellowship Church is using media in an entirely

different capacity. The media tools are simply that... tools. The use and execution of those tools should be determined by the DNA of your church and how it can enhance your worship experiences.

When shaping your brand, keep in mind that everything communicates. The appearance of your building inside and out, the dress of the people on stage, even the location of your dumpster on your property is as much a part of your brand as your logo, church sign, or brochure. The goal is to strive for excellence in the shaping of your brand and the presentation of the Gospel message. As you identify your DNA and create your brand, never lose sight that excellence and creativity are reflections of God's character and will open people's hearts and minds to Him. **V**

To Learn More About Marty Taylor, Visit www.vision-mag.com

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community" pg. 26*



relevance to their lives and friendly people they can relate to.

start where you are

Finally, one of the most important things any church can do, suggests Lawrence, is to start with where you are and with what you have. This is exactly what he did when he joined the staff at Fellowship. He looked around to find assets they

the key questions you need to answer for your church are:

- Who are you trying to reach?
- What effective marketing methods are you using to get them to your church?
- What will they see and hear when they arrive at your church?
- How do you creatively and effectively communicate to them once they're there?

weren't using. In their case, they had numerous light poles positioned near the street which they were able to use for signage. Fellowship also has an interesting location smack-dab below the flight pattern of runway #13 at DFW airport. Fellowship took advantage of this extra exposure by painting their web address on the roof of the church large enough to see from the air. Thousands of passengers look out and see "www.fellowship.com". Fellowship intentionally uses their website as a tool to reach seekers. It gets **over seven million hits per month on average!**

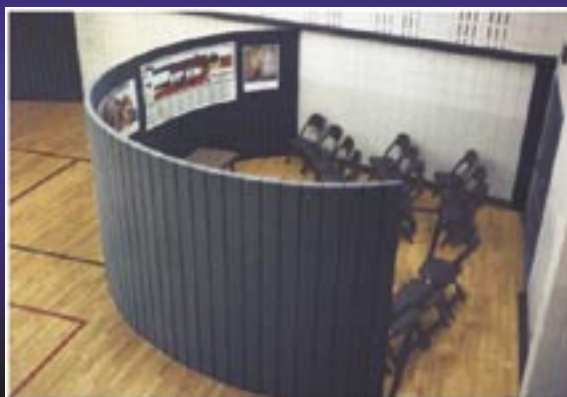
Reaching the lost in your community never happens on its own or by accident. It takes careful planning and effective work. The key questions you need to answer for your ministry are:

- Who are you trying to reach?
- What effective marketing methods are you using to get them to your church?
- What will they see and hear when they arrive at your church?
- How do you creatively and effectively communicate to them once they're there?

Sometimes, it's a matter of trial and error. The more you discover about your community, the more you will come across unique ideas to reach your specific community.

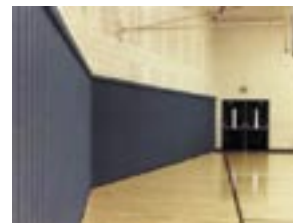
We hope these tips have been helpful to your ministry, and invite you to share with VISION Magazine ideas and strategies that your church is using to reach people where they are in your area. **V**

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