Creating A Buzz:
*Giving the People of Your Community Something to Talk About*
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**SYNOPSIS**
Buzzzzzz. It can happen on any given day. Buzzzzzz. It may be at the grocery store, soccer practice, or at the local elementary school. Someone asks where I attend church and I tell them. Buzzzzzz. Almost every time I smile as I listen to them. They know about our church, they've heard of it, and now, they want to know more. Getting people talking about your church is a key component to your ministry success in the community. There are ways you can purposely create an environment of excitement and celebration in the community you serve, producing a buzz not only among people involved in your church, but also in your entire community. Let's dive in and get your community buzzing.

**MARKETING THE CHURCH**
Cultural and social shifts drive the need for new outreach strategies.
1 Corinthians 9:19

Twenty years ago the concept of marketing a local church had hardly been considered. Today marketing is a hot topic for pastors and church leaders. The conversation has moved beyond how to be a good communicator and how to write a good press release. Now, church marketing is an issue of reaching the lost and presenting the gospel in ways they understand.

Pioneering this issue has been George Barna, who insists that most Christians do not truly understand the culture that surrounds them. In this culture, marketing the church and presenting the gospel in understandable terms will continue to grow in importance as baby boomers age and younger generations take on leadership. Here are five shifts that have made marketing essential:

1. **Secularization has created a new kind of person: a seeker.** Young people today are the first generation in America brought up with no religious ties whatsoever. Therefore, church leaders cannot begin with religious language, concepts, or liturgy to gain a hearing. It's not that seekers reject religious people—to them, religious people are irrelevant.

2. **The megachurch is more appealing than the denomination.** A cultural trait of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) is an inherent distrust of large institutions. To them, denominations and their local churches are relics of institutional, bureaucratic religion. Boomers prefer independent, unaffiliated large churches.
(megachurches) where they can come to know Christ but not have to carry what they consider as baggage from centuries of tradition. Trends shifting, i.e. Willow Creek

(3) An increasingly affluent culture that values personal freedom wants more choices. People have become accustomed to options from a menu of choices. They bring that same attitude to church—expecting a wide range of choices for family members with varying interests.

(4) Open immigration policies have brought a flood of new cultures, languages and activities, especially to urban centers. Today, nearly every large or medium-size city has a sizeable and diverse ethnic population, representing nearly every part of the globe with various cultural practices, languages, and dialects. People in each ethnic group must be reached through methods that connect with them.

(5) The Internet is changing the way churches connect to their communities. Websites are a popular and easy way for curious people to discover churches in their area. While some churches have gone so far as to allow “virtual members,” many others rely on their website to nurture community and to provide the information prospective visitors are looking for. With this rise in popularity, a new set of competencies is required in church ministry.

Marketing seeks to understand people’s felt and actual needs and link them with benefits offered by a product. In the church’s case, we learn their needs and minister the Gospel to their situation.

READY, AIM, OUTREACH!
Setting specific goals will allow your church to minister more effectively.
Galatians 2:8

Too often, church marketing programs begin with the wrong question: “What do we want to tell people about our ministry services and programs?” Rather, since the church is trying to meet the needs of its community, the first questions should be: “To whom are we marketing? What matters to them?” In essence, the first step in developing a marketing approach is to clarify the message and the target audience—making sure the two are carefully matched.

Many church leaders resist the practice of targeting ministry to specific groups, believing that the local church must preach the gospel to all people. If they make an honest assessment of their own congregation, however, they will find that it attracts a certain kind of person. God calls and equips churches to reach out to defined groups.

Sometimes people confuse marketing with a specific advertising campaign or specific methods. Those are events. Marketing must be an ongoing activity. A marketing plan should cover at least an 18-month period. During its life, a marketing plan will employ a variety of approaches.
MARKET RESEARCH FOR CHURCHES
Evaluate your congregation and community before you launch a marketing campaign. Proverbs 13:16

Marketing is part of a strategy for outreach. Use the questions below to shape an effective strategy for reaching, and rescuing, the lost.

Know Your Church
Understanding a church’s individual identity can help focus marketing and outreach efforts for maximum effectiveness. When evaluating your church’s identity, here are some important questions to keep in mind:

- What is your church known for in the community?
- What is the perception you’d like the community to have about your church?
- What is your mission? How is it being communicated to the congregation?
- Does your identity connect with unbelievers as well as believers?

Know Your Community
In order to attract guests—particularly unbelievers—to a church, it is important for the church to know its community. This includes geographics (Who lives where?), psychographics (What are their interests and attitudes?), and demographics (such as age, family size, income, ethnicity).

Close Your “Back Door”
While many churches are very successful at attracting visitors, the real measure of outreach success is retention. The key to connection is having an intentional plan to make it happen. Here are some questions to ask:

- Does your church offer regular events where relationships can be built?
- Do you have an established assimilation process for visitors?
- Does your church have connection programs for people in various life stages such as small groups, classes, or specialized programs?
- Is there a culture of acceptance and connection at your church?

Make Outreach Easy
Are the people and ministry team equipped with the attitude and aptitude to invite an unsaved friend to church? Equipping is much more than an admonition or a guilt trip. People usually don’t reach out because they fear they won't be able to answer spiritual questions, but almost everyone can invite a friend to a barbecue, a class, a concert, or another special event.

Creating a Buzz Through….

Marketing 101
- Brand Your Ministry
• Knowing your target audience (Prizm)
• Send one clear, key message
• Know what programming works and what doesn’t

Don’t Ignore Existing Members
• To attract new members, focus on your existing members. Meet their needs and turn them into “Brand Fans” who naturally share positive word-of-mouth about your church to others. Most people come to a new church because of a personal invitation.

Word of Mouth
• Identify the “Connectors” in your church and encourage them to do what is natural.
• Use interesting stories or testimonials to bring your ministry impact topics to life. Whether it be on your promo materials or on your website or in your services, oftentimes this has more impact than the sermon.
• Encourage your church marketing evangelists to tell two friends about you, not just one.
• Be an evangelist for your evangelists. If there is someone you know who is making a difference in bringing people in to your church then point them out so others can learn from what they’re doing. You would also do well to praise them in front of others. Make them feel special, as they are.
• Let your marketing evangelists know you’re listening. Comment on their blogs, invite them to marketing planning meetings or to your office for a VIP meeting to hear their ideas.

Advertising
• Make it easy for people to find you (i.e. yellow pages, signage, website, free advertising sources, paid advertising sources).
• Do something unexpected and generous for your congregation—send a free item (include an extra one for them to pass along to a friend) just for being a valued member of the church. This can include T-Shirts, Sermon CDs, Books that the church finds foundational, etc.
• Give your congregation business card holders packed with referral cards.

Visitor Assimilation
• Greeter Ministry
• Visitor Packet
• Don’t Embarrass them
• Follow-up by lay people
• Follow-up by staff
• Paths to Belonging
• Pasta with the Pastors
Experiences

- Remember to market/promote your Children’s Ministry programs.
- Create experiences. Your services should be experiential.
- Develop a Mystery Worshipper Program

Church Property

Internet and Social Media

- Make it easy for people to easily spread the word about you.
- Create clever 30-second viral videos and post to your home page. Poke fun at yourselves. Do something fun. Spoof a popular TV show. Talk about something in current culture. Engage the audience.

Community Outreach

- Days of Caring
- Random Acts of Kindness
- Special Events
- Holidays
- Life Experiences

Email Marketing

- Include the most important content towards the top of the email, “above the fold.”
- Use brief, consistent subject lines. Avoid general Spam trigger phrases, such as “click here, go here, free, unsubscribe, …” and avoid the use of CAPS and excessive punctuation marks (e.g. $$, !!!, …).
- Provide your physical mailing address and phone number, as well as a link to your website.
- Send emails early in the week. Tuesday morning works best.
- If possible, try to keep images smaller than 200 x 200 pixels at 72 dpi, particularly header images.
- Use “confirmed opt-in” (aka “verified opt-in” or “double opt-in”) practices to ensure subscribers want to receive mailings as well as easy-to-follow unsubscribe information in each mailing.
- Create a weekly, brief message from the pastor or other church staff member or ministry leader announcing what will be happening in these next week’s services and other ministry gatherings. This is ideal for music ministries, children’s ministries (sent to parents) and youth ministries.
- Use email to develop a list of prayer ministers and send the weekly prayer concerns electronically to this designated group.

BE A HIT ON THE INTERNET
Create a Web page members and nonmembers will find useful.
1 Chronicles 16:8
The Internet is an excellent tool for reaching out and publicizing your church. Many church websites offer free Bible lessons, daily verses of Scripture, announcements, a schedule of events, and a directory for contacting the church. Websites are relatively inexpensive and, at their best, can deepen a church’s sense of community. With millions of sites and billions of pages to choose from, here’s how to make your church website attractive and keep visitors coming back.

Tips for a Successful Church Website or Facebook:
• Offer your church newsletter or bulletin online.
• Make downloads of recent sermons available.
• Provide links to other churches in your denomination or fellowship.
• Update regularly with announcements.
• Post a devotional daily.
• Offer information that visitors would be interested in (for example, directions, staff profile, statement of faith, what to expect on a Sunday morning).
• Periodically highlight different ministries.
• Judge success by return users, not by the total number of users over a given period.

USING THE AIRWAVES FOR OUTREACH
Utilize this free service to publicize your church events and newsworthy items.
1 John 1:3

Reflect
1. What are three kinds of marketing our church currently uses? What are three more types that we could realistically begin to use?
2. What are some reasons to be cautious of church marketing? What are some reasons to be excited about its possibilities?
3. How can we gather information about, and address, the spiritual needs of our congregation and community?
4. What are the different groups in our area that we could target?
5. How does our church match a specific audience with a message crafted especially for that group?
6. Is our church marketing strategy ongoing or event-centered? What can we do to make our marketing strategy a distinctive of our church?
7. What is our church’s target audience (or audiences)? What are the needs, fears, and goals of these groups?
8. What is the demographic breakdown of the congregation? Based on neighborhood demography, what does this tell us about the areas in which we minister most effectively?
9. List three events our church can host to make outreach easier for the congregation.

FURTHER EXPLORATION
Books and resources to help your marketing and public relations

- LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.
- eChurchMarketing.com. This website compiles a list of marketing services available to churches from many different companies.
- ChurchMarketingSucks.com An online resource center for improving the way in which churches communicate.
- The Habits of Highly Effective Churches: Being Strategic in Your God Given Ministry by George Barna. Details the principles and practices that characterize many strong, growing churches. (Gospel Light Publications, 2001; ISBN 0830718605)
- Ministry Marketing Made Easy: A Practical Guide To Marketing Your Church Message by Yvon Prehn. How to get the most out of what you’re already using (bulletins, announcements, newsletters), and how to move into less traditional forms of marketing—all at low cost. (Abingdon Press, 2004; ISBN 0687057337)
- ChurchMarketing 101: Preparing Your Church for Greater Growth by Richard L. Riesing. Offers marketing strategies particularly geared toward helping churches reach out to their neighbors. (Baker, 2006; ISBN 0801065925)
- Church Communications Handbook: A Complete Guide to Developing a Strategy Using Technology, Writing Effectively, Reaching the Unchurched by Wanda Vassallo. Learn how to create a well-rounded plan for communication in your church. Topics include: advertising, use of audiovisuals, interpersonal communication, and communication with the news media. (Kregel Academic & Professional, 1998; ISBN 0825439256)