

MODERN PHILOSOPHY OF MEDIA IN CHURCH

A manifesto on the significance of utilizing modern Media in the Christian Church.

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Making an impact. Reaching the lost. Growing believers.

And then, repeating the cycle.

Isn't that what we're required to do as believers? Then how much more important is it for the leadership of the church to find new, creative ways to make the cycle have a wider swath after each iteration?

I know when I say "*if a church isn't growing, it's dying*" is interpreted by many to mean "every church needs to be big." However, I'm not saying that - directly. Big attendance without spiritual growth is not enough.

But consider this: the church I attend *is* huge - around 12,000 every weekend. I hear about how great my church is constantly. Want to know what I think? I think we're not doing enough. In the context of the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, 12,000 people equates to about .003% of the population.

Now before you think I really am talking about "big church", let's get to the crux of the message: communication.

We are to reach out and preach the good news. OK, that seems simple enough. Jesus said that if we lift Him up, He'll draw men unto Himself. That's true. Here's the question, though: *How* are we lifting Him up in today's society?

The one (perhaps main?) area that most churches focus on is the weekend message. That's where the time is spent by the senior Pastor to "beat a path to the cross" and teach Biblical truth to those who attend.

Yet this one area has been the sole function (usually) of the senior Pastor. Why?

Sure, a gifted speaker can "work an audience" and be considered "really good." But ask any of your church attendees - believers and those who are just searching - to tell you about the previous week's message, and many (most?) can't. *WHY?*

Here the entire week is spent preparing for this major weekly event - countless hours go into it - but all too often the results are minimized. *WHY?*

Years of training, reading, studying, teaching - all for diminished results. *WHY?*

"But just one person saved is worth it," some will reply. Yes, one *is* worth it; but why be satisfied with only one? *WHY?*

What if a team of people helped craft a message every week? What if concepts and ideas were developed by several people instead of just the senior Pastor? What if the theme, metaphors, examples and content were pre-planned so that each member of the team could prepare - instead of just the senior pastor?

What is it about crafting a weekend message that limits the Holy Spirit to completing the message on a Friday or Saturday night (or - *sigh* - Sunday morning)?

I've heard it explained before that God is the God of order; not chaos. God *could* have done Creation in .000000000001 nanoseconds. But He *chose* to take his time. He planned. Wow. Why don't many churches?

The main reasons I see are lack of leadership by pastors and lay church leadership, lack of vision by these people, the politics of money and "turf protection" in the church and the blind adherence to "traditions" that are man made and not scripturally mandated.

"Our Pastor/staff/leadership doesn't understand how long it takes to produce quality media," some might respond, *"so we can't use Media like the mega churches do."* Have you gently shown them what is possible if you have time? Have you explained the time-sensitive nature of producing compelling media?

"We're a small volunteer-run church," reasons another. *"There isn't the staff to do the planning."* Really? Lay leadership would, I bet, be thrilled to be involved with something as awesome as a weekend service!

"We don't have the money," states a third. Have you asked for it? Has a vision been cast by the leadership to use the effective retention-building tools of modern Media? Does the congregation understand the need and value of reaching out and reaching in with greater results?

If it is indeed this simple to implement, why aren't more churches using media?

Because, I believe, most find that it's just easier to "do church as usual." It doesn't require change. It doesn't rock the boat. It doesn't make waves.

It's time many churches changed, rocked the boat and made some big waves with modern media!

WHAT DO I BELIEVE ABOUT THE USE OF MEDIA?

What is "Media", then, in churches? It's the same thing you'll see everyday. Print, Video, Film, Pictures, Multimedia (DVD's, CD-ROM's), Websites, Signage (Billboards, Digital signs), Radio and TV.

Different Media augments and supports various communication forms that churches use everyday. To not use Media is like only preaching every third word in a sermon – too much good information is missing.

The "build it and they will come" attitude of many churches does not work. Putting up a church and waiting for people to arrive will not work in today's world. Amazingly

enough, there are many churches out there that recognize this fact but still do not care about changing. They would rather "feel comfortable" with themselves and blame the inactivity of their church on others. We all need to be "uncomfortable" in the pew, knowing that the work is not done, that there is an urgency to share Christ with others. Thousands and thousands around the world will die each day without knowing Him. That should make everyone feel uncomfortable and willing to use whatever means necessary to reach as many as possible.

Media, therefore, is never the message. It is an undeniable **need** for churches to utilize the appropriate media for their target demographic in *support* of the overall message of the Cross.

So, the answer to the question "*What can the church do to reach the unchurched?*" is that it **should** start with a personal invitation and Christ-like behavior for our friends/peers. However, **in addition** to using the personal touch, churches must learn to communicate to the unchurched in a language they understand.

In fact, this is a Biblical principle; Jesus used the main communication of his day - the spoken word - and the most appropriate message-retentive format of his day - parables (stories) - to get His message across.

Today, there is no doubt that media is the universal language of the world that transcends all dialects and all cultures.

Yes, Jesus lived it out for all to see - but he didn't limit his ministry to reaching the lost by only talking one-on-one or living a life of example. Part of Jesus' *marketing strategy* (he had a message he wanted others to listen to and act upon) was using the media of his day.

In terms of technology, Jesus was brilliant. He used the water as a sounding board to reach people who were seated on hills that made up a natural amphitheatre. No electricity, but a PA system nonetheless.

The methods of communicating were different, but the same principles can be applied today. Our culture isn't too excited about sitting on a hillside near a lake to listen to a guy on a boat. But they sure will listen to a guy who's on a big screen in a theatre-style auditorium supported by top-notch music. They may not get the message the first time - but by using the communication tools that our culture relates to, they will come back again and again, and God will use each time to touch their hearts.

WHY IS MEDIA IMPORTANT?

In 1 Corinthians 9:22, Paul says, "*To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by **all possible means** I might save some.*" Or how about 1 Corinthians 14:19 "*But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.*"

Yes, Paul was talking about speaking in tongues, but the principal of the issue is that in many churches today, an unchurched visitor may only see and hear what might as well be a foreign language. By not using the communication tools that our culture has accepted, we are limiting the opportunity to reach the media-savvy.

We can use these tools without losing the message. It is the message that is pure and eternal, not the medium through which it is expressed.

I would also ad Romans 10:17. Yes, I know that it says that faith comes from hearing the Word. But there is no doubt that "hearing" encompasses so much more in today's society. It is seeing as well!

The United States probably has the most media-savvy audience in the world. Hollywood's movie industry, the top-notch commercial advertising and state-of-the-art entertainment facilities have raised the level of "acceptable" media to a staggeringly high level.

So how can a church compete with that? I don't believe we have to produce \$1 million commercials for the Super Bowl, but we *can* use the same media/production *techniques* that Hollywood uses.

Passion for the work being produced leads to quality. Those are key. It is that passion and quality that attracts people. They want to be a part of something exciting. What is more exciting than knowing what has been done for you by Jesus? If that passion and quality rather than apathy and mediocrity are present, the Holy Spirit will move within us to reach others through media.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO GO FROM GOOD TO GREAT IN MEDIA WORK?

I'm reminded of a print comic of a guy being called into his boss's office and told, *"I have been impressed that you have done so much with so little, that I want to promote you to doing everything with nothing."*

For example, most people do not realize the amount of time it takes to produce a short 2 minute testimony video. It's like listening to a CD – the work has already been done – all you had to do was hit "play". In the same way, a short 2 minute testimony video can take 6-10 hours to plan, shoot and edit.

This is a real danger when churches start using media to not give the media team the right tools to accomplish the assigned tasks. If the desire is to utilize prerecorded video testimonies, sermon introductions or other video productions, then a camera, microphones, lighting kits, tripods, video tape and a non-linear (computer-based) editing system are all required.

Sound expensive? It may be for your church. However, start simple and grow through experience. A computer, video projector, screen and DVD and VHS players can be the start of using media.

The challenge to go from "good to great" in media is not about equipment. It's about vision, people, time **and** equipment.

Really, here in America, we're in competition with *"Grey's Anatomy"*, *"MTV"*, *"ESPN"*, and every new "reality show" on the TV. Don't be fooled into thinking your church is competing with the church down the street or across town. The World is your competition for the unchurched person's time and attention.

But to really use Media to its fullest extent, the Pastor and leadership must have a **vision** and **passion** about how their church will use Media. Without having the leadership behind this exciting ministry, the results will *always* be minimized.

WHAT CAN A MEDIA MINISTRY ACCOMPLISH?

Some of my favorite verses touch on the fact that we can do nothing, we can accomplish nothing on our own. It is the working of the Holy Spirit in us that allows us to accomplish God's will.

Ephesians 3:8-11 *“Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Philippians 4:13 says, *“I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”*

At its best, a successful Media Ministry is an extension of every other ministry and the voice of the church. Remember that the Media is a support tool for everything that happens – be it a mailer about a Youth Camp, a website with free community events, streaming sermons for those not yet ready to step into a church or high quality audio, lighting and video for a Worship Service.

Really, each church will need to define how they can best use Media to reach their community. Understanding *target demographics*, those people who your church can most effectively reach, will help set the foundation for what aspects your Media Ministry can assist and develop.

Be sure that this support team gets the full support of the staff and leadership, as it's a vital ministry that does so much “behind the scenes” that many times people forget to minister **to** this group and provide fellowship opportunities that involve the members and staff beyond manning the audio console or setting up the projector and screen. Yes, they're a support ministry, but no less important than the Music Ministry or Children's Ministry.

Also, make sure that this group is grounded in the Word on a regular basis, whether in their own Bible studies or in a church Bible study. It is so important that for the Media team to see the big picture and know the importance of their work.

WHAT ARE REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS?

If your church is new at using Media, consider hiring a Church Media Consultant to help define the scope and costs associated with this oft-misunderstood ministry. Media Ministries are relatively new in the church (notwithstanding Television Ministries that have been around for years), and most churches aren't sure how to structure, staff or budget for a new media ministry.

Perhaps the most difficult part of setting realistic expectations is understanding the time and talent commitment. Technical systems require technical people, and this is further complicated by non-technical people needing the support.

Therefore, my strong recommendation is that churches starting to seriously use Media hire a qualified Media Director or, if the call and spiritual maturity are present, a Media Minister. This staff position is very new, but the technology changes so fast that not having this person in place *will* limit the effectiveness of this ministry.

For smaller churches, find volunteers with the commitment and passion to serve. Also make sure that they have the basic technical and creative skills. When hiring a new pastor, always determine if he is on board with the use of media and whether he has any skills that can be used in that area.

HOW CAN A CHURCH JUSTIFY THE COST OF A MEDIA MINISTRY?

I ask this question: *“What is the cost of irrelevance and ineffectively reaching our media-savvy culture?”* The justification of any new ministry is directly tied into the perceived value by the Pastor and church leadership. This is where the **vision** and **passion** for using Media comes into play. The value is different for individual churches because the *application* of Media is not the same across the board.

As to the money argument, I don't care how much your church spends on Media in order to bring a person to faith - it is worth it. I think the parable of the talents is a good model here. If God has given you much, invest it (in people via programs, media, etc.) and return large dividends (in souls) to Him. If He's given you little, don't use that as an excuse, invest it and return dividends (in souls) to Him. Media can be expensive, but its effectiveness cannot be questioned when applied with quality and passion.

Only your church can justify the costs and full scope of services that a successful Media Ministry will “be worth” to your church and community.

WHAT SHOULD A CHURCH LOOK FOR IN A LEADER FOR MEDIA MINISTRY?

Perhaps the single most difficult part of establishing a vibrant Media Ministry is finding the very unique person capable of displaying leadership qualities, servant qualities, technical aptitude and creative thinking.

It's important to note that the Media Minister should be either on the Executive (decision making) staff or just under that level of staff. Far too often I see these people relegated to near Janitor status. The right person in this position will be a tremendous vision casting person to have on management staff, as they help define how technology and communication is implemented church-wide.

Right now, few Bible Schools or Seminaries are training Media Ministers. They're slow to change curriculum, and this need is relatively new. Really, a proficient technical person with a strong work ethic is more valuable (especially early on) than a Seminary trained person with zero Audio, Video and Lighting experience. I prefer to find people who have completed a school like Full Sail (A/V and Film trade school) or worked for an A/V rental and staging company and have a servant's heart.

As Media Ministry becomes more main stream in today's churches, we'll slowly begin to see some dedicated degree programs to help fill this very important position.

WHY IS MARKETING NOT UN-SPIRITUAL?

Jesus had a *marketing strategy*: He had a message he wanted others to listen to and act upon. That's marketing.

Does "Marketing God" make you nervous? I don't think it should. I think it's exactly what the apostle's did in their day with the most effective methods of communication that they possessed.

This I believe is a fundamental lack in the church as a whole: We don't "Market God". Or we do it so poorly that most are indifferent to our words, some are outright turned away by them, and a tiny few tenths of a percent are actually drawn by what little effectual marketing is produced.

By using the communication tools of *our day*, we can reach a world that relates to this new digital culture and teach them about the redemptive power of Jesus Christ.

THINGS I SEE CHURCHES DOING THAT DRIVE ME CRAZY!

So many churches design new buildings without planning for technology – audio, video, lighting, tech power, network cabling – infrastructure. It is so much more expensive to go back and "fix" a room for using Media than it is to design it with that purpose in mind from the start.

To that end, hiring a consultant(s) for Audio, Acoustics, Noise & Vibration, Video, Lighting and cable infrastructure is a *cost-savings* measure. The cost of those consultants will be **saved** by eliminating mistakes *before* they are made.

If there is a "#1 thing that drives me crazy", that's it!

THE #1 THING CHURCHES CAN DO TO IMMEDIATELY IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS MEDIA MINISTRY?

PLAN FOR A MEDIA MINISTRY. Learn what the vision of the church is for the implementation of Media, and then research the costs associated with fulfilling the vision.

For those churches that already have a Media Ministry, but are not seeing the results they expect from them, take the time to bring in the entire staff and make sure the vision of the leadership matches the vision of the Media team. In fact, this is a great idea to do with *any* ministry.

Set goals, set expectations (be reasonable), listen to the technical challenges and implement an action plan to facilitate change. When the Media team feels the support and strong vision for their ministry coming from the Pastor, and are given the appropriate tools to carry out that vision, you won't be able to hold them back!

But if you're just plain "stuck" in a rut, and don't know what to do, **hire a Church Media Consultant!!**

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