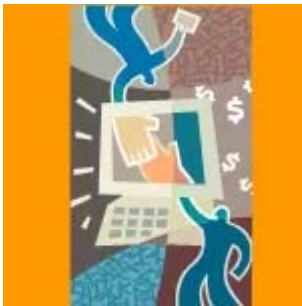


Multi-channel communications advice from the publisher of USA TODAY



We live in a time of Multi-channel communication and here is advice on how to work together as a team to make the most of it.

When Larry Kramer, founder of the successful MarketWatch website, took over as the new publisher of USA TODAY he made some comments that provide a challenge to communication ministries in churches when he talked about how he wants to give people the news. He said, “The paper will build ‘closer relationships with our readers’ through new uses of technologies. ‘We’re going to give people what they want, when they want it, where they want it. You want it on your watch, I’ll give it to you. Or inside of your sunglasses.’ ” (<http://wapo.st/Jw8EBg>) In the church, we may not have all these options to communicate through all the channels available to Kramer, but we have a world to reach with the gospel, so what can we do?

We don’t have the money, but we have the resources

Individual churches don’t have the money to provide communications in the multitude of channels—print, digital, and every variation imaginable in both these areas—in the ways that USA TODAY can. But that doesn’t mean churches can’t keep up with this constantly changing communication revolution with the resources that make them successful in every other ministry endeavor. That way is to realize that the task of providing communications in every channel needed for the church, isn’t a one-person job, but a challenge for the church body. No one person can keep up with technology; no one person can create all the communications needed for a church communications that ministers to all the people at all the church. In practical terms this means:

You need a communications team made up of people who are proficient with the various channels

Quit looking for one person who can do it all. You need a team made up of some who love print; some who dream in HTML code; some who love images; some who love type and words in order; some who can create a great postcard and others who can text with their eyes closed, some who love the discipline of a monthly newsletter with consistent columns and articles, others who gravitate to the free-flowing forms of social media. You need people who are good in person-to-person communications, people who love the web, and people who manage databases effortlessly.

Please reread the paragraph above. Many churches today think they only need to work on what they consider “cutting-edge communications” and that they need to get the youngest, most tech savvy person available to do them. But the church is made up of many people of many ages and skills, of many degrees of access to different technologies. As a church body, we must be committed to serving all of them.

As you do that, here are ***Four Suggestions on how to create and manage multi-channel church communications:***

Suggestion #1-People tend to create best and promote the channels and methods they personally love and are comfortable with.

You can't force a word-processing only church secretary to be excited about working on the website (although she might enjoy it with adequate training). It would probably be just as difficult to have someone who communicates primarily in text messages create a detailed, printed church employee handbook or a correct Sunday bulletin.

Find out what channels people prefer to communicate in, what they are good at. Encourage these communication strengths and give them training in new skills if they want to learn new areas.

Suggestion #2-Don't make the mistake of assuming people of a certain age are more interested or proficient in certain areas than others or that any age can't learn new things.

There are grandfathers who programmed since the days when a computer filled a room and there are teens who are tired of technology. There are baby boomers who run the gamut of the super-tech savvy to the completely computer phobic, as was the case in our home until I told my pastor husband I wasn't answering his emails for him anymore. I've used computer, as a writer, from when they were first invented. In contrast, computers were not in use when my husband attended seminary. Today we have his and her laptops. I caved in about the email—I still answer most of his email, but he now knows how to access them and how to do Bible research online.

Suggestion #3-The skills and ages don't matter; respect and mutual encouragement do

Age is unimportant in church communication channel skills, what matters is that the church communication team members mutually respect each other and realize that every channel can be and is used today to communicate the gospel message. Team members must not allow expertise in any tool or technological skill to be a source of pride. A person who tweets is no more valuable than one who writes postcards to the home-bound. Remember Jesus could, at any time, raise up the stones in the parking lot to communicate more effectively than any of us are able.

None of us have a skill or ability that is not a gift from God. We are all servants of the same Master and we are to constantly build each other up in our work and to never make someone feel small or inadequate. Newer tools do not necessarily make superior communications.

Suggestion #4-Don't worry about changing the content of your message as you adapt it to different channels

The content of your message needs to be consistent. Your communication team can then take that content and put out the message using the various channels. For example, perhaps your content is a campaign to get the congregation involved in small groups. The communication team members, using the same content and similar colors and images, can create a variety of communications to carry out your ministry goals including: a print brochure, a bulletin announcement and insert, a PowerPoint presentation, a website directory of small group times and locations, a Twitter feed, a Facebook page, a print directory with the same information for the welcome center, an email newsletter designed to inform and encourage people to sign up.

This is important because if you are not consistent with the basic core content and look of your communications, people will think you are advertising different events. Repetition of the same event at least seven times is important for people to notice it and attend. If you doubt the importance of repetition of a similar message, think about how many times you see exactly the same preview for upcoming movies on television, often months before the movie is released. The media companies that produce them have done huge amounts of research and they know that repetition is vital if you want people to show up. Notice also how often they put out exactly the same message. If the message is constantly changing, it can be confusing to people who may not be paying attention totally.

Consider the dozens of times you see a movie advertised; consider also that many churches think that to put the same message out more than twice in the bulletin is too much. This might be part of the reason that movies get much higher attendance than church events.

Final advice

Encourage each other to perfect your skill areas and cross-train, not only because you want to be able to share the load if someone gets sick or (gasp!) might actually go on vacation from church work, but because it can be fun and exciting to learn a new skill in communication.

Spend time praying together as a team that the Lord will give you wisdom and insight into what communication channels will work best for the people in your church and that the Lord gave you to reach.

Finally, be thankful for the tremendous riches in tools we have to share the words of eternal life.

Yvon Prehn
www.effectivechurchcom.com

Share this:

