

CHURCH COMM. PLAN PRIMER

A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't effectively communicate a church's message. Churches are diverse communities of faith, and each segment of a congregation deserves a customized approach. Furthermore, not all church communications are equal; some messages are a greater priority. Understanding who you are as a church and what you hope to accomplish will establish your priorities, enabling you to make the most of your limited time.

1. WHO ARE YOU?

A church's personality dictates its brand identity, the voice and style of its written messages, and what programs are priorities.

In what areas do you excel and focus? Are you mission-focused, always planning overseas trips and striving to help those in need? Are you seeker-friendly, obsessed with ministering to the lost and creating new disciples? Maybe you're more of a community center, a church known for its community impact and willingness to offer space to various groups. If your church members consider each other family, you're probably a relational church. These are just some of the possibilities. Discerning who you are and what that means for how you'll communicate is the first step.

2. WHO'S YOUR AUDIENCE?

In addition to identifying the various segments of your congregation, you should identify whom in your community you'd like to target.

Are you trying to reach more millennials? Does your community have a large population of people who do not speak English? Perhaps your congregation should strive to be more racially diverse. Personalized messages are better received, and impersonal messages are often ignored. Identifying your audience as specifically as possible will help you craft the best messages, and thereby, receive the best outcomes.

3. WHAT NEEDS DO YOU MEET?

Church communication is about more than generating attendance at the next potluck.

What can you do for your congregation and your community? There are plenty of churches to attend, so why should somebody attend yours? Approaching communications from the perspective of your audience yields the best results. Millennials, in particular, will reject transparent, self-serving messages, but nobody likes them. Instead of begging for volunteers, explain why volunteering is enjoyable and beneficial. These days, less people are attending church because other sources are meeting their needs. Don't let that be the case for you!

4. WHICH CHANNELS WILL WORK BEST?

To successfully reach people and communicate as effectively as possible, you have to tailor your message to individuals.

Certain channels work best for certain audiences and certain messages. Do NOT be the church that throws the kitchen sink at its congregation because it's afraid people aren't paying enough attention. Identify which channels work best based on what you know about your audience and any data you may have. Expect the need for trial and error in order to refine your methods.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Where are you now and where would you like to be? By evaluating your church's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats you will know where you currently stand and what potential outcomes the future holds. It's helpful to conduct a SWOT analysis for your church as a whole and for your church's communications.

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STRENGTHS

When we know our strengths and use them to our advantage, we set ourselves up for success. Is your church good at hospitality? Does your church have a killer music program? Maybe your pastor has very powerful sermons. Each of these strengths can be used to market a church to potential members.

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WEAKNESSES

Where do you have room for improvement? If your church has a lousy Christmas service, you need to be aware of it. It's easy to oversell a weakness and disappoint someone who buys into your hype. Moreover, being self-aware enables you to make better choices for your messaging and prioritize areas of focus.

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OPPORTUNITIES

Where do you see untapped potential? Is there an underserved section of your community you could cater to? Perhaps you need to invest more in a solid program that simply hasn't taken off yet. Are there underutilized congregation members or underutilized talents of a staffer? Compare yourself to neighboring churches to gain perspective on steps you might take next.

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THREATS

Declining attendance and decreasing budgets are the two biggest threats most churches face. By identifying specific causes for these threats, you will understand how to best neutralize them. Youth sports, for example, often force families to choose between church and sporting events. If your church doesn't offer enough value, you may get bumped from someone's schedule.

SMART GOALS

No more nebulous goals! The best goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timed.



SPECIFIC

Let's say you want to increase attendance. That's a good aim but a poorly defined goal. How much do you want to increase attendance and for what exactly? Increasing attendance by 25% among a key demographic like Millennials is an example of the amount of specificity required.



MEASURABLE

Strengthening a congregation's faith is an excellent aim, but it's a lousy SMART goal because it's hard to measure something so intangible. In order to create a SMART goal for strengthening faith, you would first identify tangible signs of faith and seek to quantify them.



ACHIEVABLE

This is, perhaps, the most common sense letter in the SMART acronym. While it's okay to "shoot for the moon" to an extent, it's important to set achievable goals to limit discouragement. Reflecting on whether a goal is achievable also serves to bring potential obstacles to light.



RELEVANT

Priorities, priorities, priorities! Some goals are seemingly worth pursuing but inconsistent with a church's bottom line. A relevant goal will fit nicely into the scheme of things. If your goal doesn't align with previous goals and your church's overall plan, it needs to be reconsidered.



TIMED

Deadlines can be daunting but they provide a much needed sense of urgency. As long as you remember to keep your goals achievable, this letter is a cinch.