



Market Your Small Group Ministry

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How to Use This Resource

One of the most important responsibilities you have as the small-group point person is helping people get connected into groups. It's a big job, and it's of critical importance. This resource will give you the tools you need to create a plan that works for your church and take the steps necessary to implement it.

Create a Plan

Experts like Mike Mack, Carter Moss, and Bill Search will help you articulate your plan and consider your church's unique context and culture. Work through the questions and keys presented by these people who have served as small-group pastors.

Implement Your Plan

These articles will give you the specific how-tos for implementing a marketing strategy. Learn how to create video ads, share stories of life change, run a successful campaign, and more. Make specific goals for when you'll implement these action points.

Need more material or training on another small-group ministry topic?

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Build Your Small-Group Marketing Strategy

Make an intentional plan.

By Michael C. Mack

Even in a healthy, effective small-group ministry, with a larger percentage of your church members connected in groups, you still need to invest in an intentional marketing strategy. How you communicate about groups is key in continuing the health of the ministry.

Strategic Questions

Here are three questions to consider as you plan your marketing strategy:

1. Why do we want to get people into small groups?

Can you articulate this clearly and concisely? Does your senior pastor have the same answer as you? Your small-group coaches and leaders?

2. How will we get people into groups?

Jesus formed his "small group" by personally inviting people. This is still the best method to move people into groups—but you can't personally invite each person through an announcement at weekend services. Consider how you can help people feel personally invited through a number of communication methods that work well in your context. What has worked well in the past? What hasn't worked well?

3. Who are you trying to get into groups?

Jesus did not go after the religious types. Instead he invited fishermen, tax collectors, and some political rabble rousers. In short, he invited everyone—especially those whom people never expected him to invite. Think through communication methods that will appeal to different groups of people in your church. One method won't work for everyone, so consider multiple means to reach everyone.

Key Reminders

These seven reminders will ensure you're on the right track:

1. Think Stewardship.

As you begin to strategically plan your marketing efforts, remember that the people in your congregation belong to God. He has entrusted them to you, and so you partner with him to connect them in meaningful groups. Take Proverbs 16:3 to heart: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." Stay connected with God through prayer as you develop your plans.

2. Check your motives.

What's your motivation for connecting people into small groups? If you're simply trying to hit a numerical goal or keep people from leaving your church, you're missing the point. Jesus had compassion for people who were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Jesus desired for these harassed and helpless crowds to be connected with a shepherd. His heart of compassion led him to ask God to send workers. As you look at the people in your church, what do you see? Do you see harassed and helpless people in need of some shepherding? Everything you do should come out of this same compassion that Jesus had.

3. Develop Shepherds.

If you want to connect the crowds, you've got to start with shepherd-leaders. First, ask the Lord of the Harvest for small-group leaders. I have made prayer for new leaders a regular part of my ministry, and God has always supplied abundantly.

If you want more leaders, you need to focus on creating healthy disciples. Healthy, disciple-making small groups breed leaders. Your best soon-to-be leaders are sitting in small groups right now. Make sure that leaders are sharing responsibilities with others in the group so that new leaders are being apprenticed.

4. Cast a Compelling Vision.

I share our vision for launching new groups for new people (a vital part of our strategy), and ask leaders and coaches to be involved. I share my compassion for the crowds with them and ask them to begin asking the Lord of the Harvest to send workers. I do this three to six months before we plan to launch new groups. I also visit small groups and ask group members if they sense God nudging them to step up to lead a group. I am amazed how many people say yes! In the months preceding a small-group launch, I tell groups about the campaign and our need for leaders. Many of the leaders for those new groups come from people who are already helping out in their small groups.

5. Get Out the Calendar.

As you prayerfully develop a strategy for connecting people into groups, you'll need to think about putting all your plans on a calendar. Begin with the biggest pushes, like campaigns and kick-off events. Then schedule your smaller pushes, leader-training events, coach development, and other events and training. Without this, it will be difficult to get everyone at your church on board.

6. Launch Short-Term, Plan Long-Term.

We have used several campaigns tied to sermon series to group new people. The success of these campaigns, though, lies in using these short-term groups as a way to get people involved in small groups for the long haul. To make the invitation to these short-term groups feel more personal, we have leaders and group members available in the foyer to

meet with and talk about groups. New people are able to meet the leader in advance, which means a lot to them.

For us, September and January work best, with early summer a great third choice. These campaigns launch four- to six-week groups that are led by experienced group leaders who intentionally identify and apprentice new leaders from within the group to lead after four to six weeks. We ask many current group leaders to develop leaders during this time in two ways: by leaving their group in the hands of an apprentice leader, and by leading a short-term group with the goal of apprenticing a new leader to take over. When the four to six weeks are up, the new leaders take over and the more experienced leaders return to their original groups and coach the new leaders.

Midway through these short-term groups, we start talking about a follow-up series (usually a study on a popular topic, not sermon-based), and we ask group members to recommit to their groups. The retention rate is extremely high, and we've found that if the groups stay together for this second series, they easily transition into long-term groups. More than 70 percent of these short-term groups continue on to be healthy long-term groups with coaches in place.

7. Provide Opportunities to Meet and Invite Unconnected People.

We provide a variety of different opportunities for group members to interact with and invite people not yet in groups. Consider ways that unconnected people in your church can mingle with those who are connected. There may be some great existing things in your church that will work well. Here are some methods that work for us:

- **Starting Point:** This is our class for people who want to know more about our church, what we believe, and how to become a member. Participants sit at tables, and each table is led by a facilitator, a leader, or member of a small group. The discussion times give participants an opportunity to experience what a small group might be like and to meet other people from our church. Many people join a group right out of Starting Point and new groups often form there as well.
- **Short-Term Electives:** We provide a number of short-term groups and ask our current small-group members to attend, not only for their own edification but also to meet others and offer invitations.
- **Short-Term Groups:** Like our short-term groups formed during campaigns, we've found that inviting people to check out a group for a short period of time has really helped connect people. Some folks won't sign up for anything that seems like it lasts forever. As people bond in these groups, which they almost always do, the facilitator asks if the group would like to stay together to study another topic, transitioning them to a long-term group.
- **Picnic:** Through the year we provide a variety of social gatherings such as summer picnics. Last year we organized several picnics based on where congregants live. The

small groups that met in those geographical regions hosted the event and intentionally invited people to join.

- **Affinity-Based Gatherings:** Throughout the year, a variety of affinity-based events such as zip lining, mountain biking, or even picnics for newly married couples. These events naturally connect people who have similar interests or are in similar life stages. As people get to know one another, personal invitations to groups are possible.
- **Serving Opportunities:** One of the best ways to grow stronger together is to serve together. We've found that people often get involved in a church by serving in one of our many ministries. People in small groups can then meet and invite others to join their group.
- **Group of the Week:** For several months, we featured one small group a week. The featured group made its own poster and met people before and after services in our foyer. We promoted the group in our bulletin, on our screens in service, from the stage, and on our website. This gave the group an opportunity to meet new people and for people to get more information about groups.
- **Website:** We use [Church Teams](#) as our small-group database, communication tool, and online directory of groups. This helps us keep track of what our groups are accomplishing and also helps us easily connect new people with existing groups.

Our strategy has been to use multiple entrance ramps into small groups, but to use very personal, invitational methods for doing so. The best tool you have for marketing your small groups is the people in small groups. Their personal invitation will go a long way in connecting unconnected people.

—MICHAEL MACK is the founder of [SmallGroups.com](#) and the author of 14 small-group books and discussion guides. He also consults with churches through his ministry, [Small Group Leadership](#); copyright 2013 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Work through the three strategic questions. What lessons have you learned in the past that you can apply to your marketing strategy? Which of these areas do you need to work on most?
2. The first two reminders deal with the condition of your heart. How often are you connecting with God about your small-group ministry?
3. What current events does your church have that serve as natural entrance ramps to small groups? How can you maximize those events? What new ideas do you want to try?

Effective Marketing for Small-Group Ministry

Four ways to get more people into small groups

By Carter Moss

Small groups are one of the greatest ministry tools we have. They provide opportunities for spiritual growth and discipleship. They provide an environment for real friendships to form, for relationships to build, for people to experience community—regardless of how big a church's weekend attendance grows. And they can provide a way for people to live out their faith on mission together in community rather than struggling to do it alone. I know this, and you know this. But how do we help the people in our churches know this? Because if they don't know it, believe it, and act on it, they'll never get to experience all that our small groups can provide—no matter how amazing our small-group ministry is.

As I talk to churches around the country about small groups, one of the challenges we *all* struggle with is figuring out how to get more people grouped. So the good news is you're not alone. The bad news is there's no silver bullet. But there are things we can do to make small groups such an integral part of the culture of our church, so easy and compelling to join, that we see more people connected than ever before. Imagine if small groups became the norm at your church—so much so that new and current people alike assume that joining a small group is integral to their faith, that they actually feel like they're missing out if they're not connected.

I believe it's possible. And even though achieving this is far more of an art than a science, there are some important and proven practices we can integrate that will help more people connect into small groups. So let's talk through the four Cs of effectively marketing our small groups to our churches.

Capitalize on Key Times

One of the biggest barriers to grouping people is that it's just plain hard to get people to add anything new to their schedules. Think about your own schedule: how easy is it for you to suddenly add a new weekly commitment that wasn't there before? It's really hard to add anything new. But it *can* be done. Just take a look at kids' sports: people are willing to add two weeknights of practice and a Saturday of games for their kids to join a new sport. They see enough value in the sport to rearrange their schedule. So how do we get people to see the same value in small groups?

One important fact for us to recognize (and stop fighting against) is that people already live their lives according to a natural rhythm. And, I hate to break it to you, but it's not your church's ministry or fiscal year. People generally tend to operate their schedules around the

calendar year and the school year (regardless of whether they're in school or have kids). So the two times of the year that prove most effective to market your small groups are September (when the school year starts) and January (when the calendar year starts, and a new school semester starts).

So every September and January, do anything and everything you can think of to promote small groups. Put guides that list all of your small groups on every chair during weekend services. Talk about small groups from stage. Launch some brand new groups and highlight them. Have existing groups choose to start a new study so that new people can jump in at the start of something rather than in the middle. Capitalize on these natural times that people are rearranging their schedules.

The other key time to capitalize on is any time you have a brand new group starting. Some churches operate all groups on term schedules, so the start of each new term becomes their key time. But for those who have year-round groups, whenever you have a brand new group, advertise it. Let people know about this new opportunity. Besides the difficulty in making time in an overly packed schedule, many people are nervous about joining a group because they feel all the groups are already established and the group members already know each other well. If you let people know about new groups they can join, they'll often jump at the opportunity to get in on the ground floor.

Be Consistent

While there are key times to capitalize on, the other important practice for effectively marketing our groups is consistency. People should hear about your small-group ministry more than a couple of times a year. How often is up to you. Churches range from a monthly focus on small groups at weekend services small-group highlights every single week. You need to choose what works best for your church's rhythm. But it's your job to push and fight to ensure that small groups do get some consistent focus.

Consistency doesn't have to be boring, though. You could have different small-group leaders on stage every week for a brief story about how their group is impacting them. You could also create a short video that shares a cool small-group story from the previous week. Or you could highlight these stories in your church e-mails, newsletter, Facebook page, or bulletin. Find a way to regularly share small-group stories. And don't be afraid of over-communicating. We have a saying here at COMMUNITY that if we feel like we've talked about something until we're blue in the face and are sick of hearing ourselves, that means we've *almost* communicated enough.

Be Creative

Here's where this whole promoting thing gets fun—you get to be creative in how you communicate about your groups. At COMMUNITY, we've done things like hanging big

signs from the ceiling in our lobby showing different zip codes or neighborhoods, and then having the leaders who host groups in those areas standing under them, so that people can quickly find a group near them. We've had small groups give out hot chocolate or pancakes or cans of pop or anything we don't normally serve at weekend services, so it creates extra energy and buzz at a weekend service (which is a win for your pastor and the rest of your church, too). One great example of this is when a couple of our men's groups handed out Dad's Root Beer at services over Father's Day weekend. The group members were visible and the fun connection gave them a talking point. That same idea works with other groups, too. Empower your group leaders to be creative and come up with a fun idea.

The point is to try different approaches, and take risks. You might even consider having people sign up for groups in a new way to see how people respond. We usually have people fill out a card in their weekend program or stop by our welcome center, but we've also tried having leaders walk around with clipboards and sign-up sheets, creating different flyers to place on every chair during service that they can fill out, and even having people walk to certain areas of the sanctuary *during* services to meet leaders and sign up. Let God ignite your imagination for ways you can connect people into groups.

Create a Culture

The biggest difference I've seen between churches that are able to effectively group a high percentage of their people and those that aren't is having a small-group culture. In other words, churches must make the decision not to be just a church *with* small groups (where groups are just one of many programs offered). Instead, they must become a church *of* small groups—where small groups are the core ministry of the church. To really get there, you have to create a culture of small groups, where they are the priority and the norm.

This is challenging but necessary. Start with your church's staff: Are all staff members involved in or leading a small group? If not, it will be difficult for others to see the value. We can't ask our people to do things that we're not modeling for them—leaders must go first. But getting involved in small groups isn't just about modeling. When your entire church staff is involved in small groups, you'll all have real, current, and personal stories to share with others in the church. These stories will come out in sermons and as people lead their own ministries. No matter where people are involved in your church, they'll be hearing stories of how small groups are impacting lives.

Next, consider how small groups are talked about in your weekend services. At COMMUNITY, we have at least three messages each year (often more) that are focused on the value of community and how God designed us to live in relationship. We promote small groups big-time on those weekends. But even when the weekend message isn't focused on small groups or community, the person teaching will share a story from their small group as an illustration, we'll feature a small group doing cool things in the community, or the

worship leader will share something he or she learned in small group. These casual mentions about small groups are all part of creating a culture of small groups.

Third, track what you value. If we don't measure it, then it's probably not that important to us. What do you track in regards to small groups? At COMMUNITY, our goal is that at least 75 percent of our adults are connected in small groups. Some of our campuses hit that, some are at 50 percent, and some are 100 percent or more! But everyone knows it's our goal. And when we talk about it to the rest of the church, we tell them our goal is to have *every* person experiencing life in a small group, that their spiritual life will even feel incomplete without it.

Even though connecting people into groups will be a constant challenge (especially as your church grows), it's always worth our time and effort—*if* we believe small groups are as valuable as we claim they are. And because we're dealing with real people who are unique, we can't rely on a one-size-fits-all strategy to group everyone. The more we integrate ideas of capitalizing on key rhythms in people's lives, trying creative ideas, and being consistent to create a culture of small groups, the more people we'll connect into life-changing community.

—CARTER MOSS is a campus pastor and the small-group champion for Community Christian Church and an editorial advisor for SmallGroups.com; copyright 2013 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. What are the key times for your ministry? How might you capitalize on them?
2. How can you consistently talk about small groups in your church? What creative ideas can you come up with?
3. Are you a church *with* small groups or a church *of* small groups? What steps can you take in the next month to move toward having a stronger small-group culture?

Seven Tips for Marketing Well

How to keep small groups in front of your congregation

By Trevor Lee

A long-time member of our church expressed with frustration, "I didn't even know small groups were starting let alone how to get into one!" I was shocked. We had just started our community groups and had strongly encouraged everyone in the church to get involved. We'd made announcements in services and passed out information sheets. Then we'd asked people to sign up at the information table or online. We thought we'd communicated the vision and the timeline clearly, but a number of people in the congregation felt blindsided by the new groups.

Small groups are an important part of the life of a church, and we know it's important to help move unconnected people into small groups. We try to make connecting into a small group as easy as possible, and we usually feel like we're doing a good job. However, we were clearly missing the mark. We realized that it takes a lot more than the few things we were doing. We've learned a lot along the way. Here are seven suggestions for marketing small groups in your church:

1. Over-Communicate

One of the problems we suffered from was forgetting that as staff, we already knew the importance of community groups—and that led us to assume everyone else in the congregation knew it as well. We had talked to each other about small groups so much that we assumed everyone knew about them because we did. The reality was that we had under-communicated to the congregation.

To make sure you've communicated clearly and sufficiently, ask some people in the congregation what they know about small groups. Ask both long-time members and new people. When the majority of people you ask can tell you why small groups are important, what they do, and how to get connected, you'll know you've communicated enough.

2. Diversify

Marketing small groups effectively requires using as many means of communication as possible. Announcing the groups on Sunday morning is important, but if that's your only strategy don't be surprised when people don't know about small groups. The possibilities for communicating about groups are endless. Consider your context and determine what will work well for you. You might use a video, place information on the website, hand out small-group business cards at all church gatherings, or post on Facebook and Twitter, and

e-mail your congregation. Each church is unique, so consider all avenues available to you and make use of them.

It's also a good idea to get feedback on which lines of communication are most effective. When people sign up for small groups, ask them how they heard about the groups. If you see patterns emerge, you can put the most effort into the means of communication that have the best payoff.

3. Make Kickoffs a Big Deal

Doing a sermon series focused on small groups leading to a big kickoff event is an effective way to garner attention. Kickoffs give people a point in time to make a commitment to small groups. But if you're always letting people know that you'd like them to join a small group, it's likely people will put it off. If the message once or twice a year is, "Small groups are essential to our church and your growth and *today* is the day to get connected," people will be more likely to take action. It's a similar dynamic to people signing up for the gym at the beginning of a year. They know they need to exercise, but until there's a day that calls for action, they find reasons not to. Don't let people put off small groups—give them a call to action.

4. Tell Stories

One great strategy for keeping small groups in front of your congregation throughout the year is having people tell stories about small groups. When the people in your congregation hear how small groups are impacting others, they will be motivated to get involved. Tell small-group stories through live testimonies at weekend services and other church events, and through videos and short social media posts.

When you have people tell their story live, it's important that you coach them. Help them narrow the scope of their story with prompts like these: How have small groups helped you grow spiritually? Talk about a relationship you've developed in your group. How is your life different now than before you got connected to a small group? What would you say to someone who's putting off joining a group? Talking ahead of time ensures their success in sharing well and encouraging others to connect to a small group.

5. Get Creative

Our churches are often filled with marketing noise. At times there are so many things being announced and communicated that small groups can get lost in the cacophony. A common human response to the saturation of marketing is to tune out. Grabbing your congregation's attention takes creativity.

The options are only as limited as the ideas your team can come up with. You could do a skit, host a small-group meeting in the foyer as people come in for weekend services, or pass out candy with an invitation to a group attached. The key is to do things people aren't expecting. That will help you cut through the marketing noise.

6. More than Announcements

A sure way to show that small groups are essential to your church is to highlight them in services in other ways than an announcement. One way to do this is to focus on small groups during your prayer time. Praise God for specific things that have happened in small groups and pray for the health and growth of your groups. Another approach is to use stories from small groups as sermon illustrations. Talk with your senior pastor about working in a few stories. When people hear about small groups during a prayer or sermon they pay attention because it's not expected and shows their importance.

7. Make a Plan

Emphasizing the importance of small groups requires keeping them in front of people *throughout* the year. So sit down with your team and schedule the ways you'll raise awareness about small groups throughout the year. If you don't have a plan it's likely you'll fail to market intentionally and with consistency. Consider: How many high-profile kickoff days will you have? How will you build up to those? How will you remind people of the importance of small groups in between the big days? What "on ramps" to small groups will you provide for people to get involved?

Planning is especially key because it leads to consistency. Making a big splash with a kickoff day or using a creative method to connect with people is great, but without consistency you will fail to maximize your gains. Consistency is more important than anything else, no matter what strategy you use. So make a plan and stick with it.

—TREVOR LEE is the pastor of Mountair Christian Church; copyright 2013 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. What methods do you currently use to communicate about small groups? Which ones are especially helpful? Name three new ideas for communicating about small groups.
2. How well do your marketing efforts reach a wide variety of people?
3. How often do you share stories of small groups impacting people? How can you share them more effectively or often?

The Right Technology Options for Your Church

Market your church through these helpful online tools.

By Lauren Hunter

With more than 80 percent of American adults online, churches of every size can benefit greatly from a variety of technological tools. An increase in options during the past decade has led to more advantages—yet it's also caused confusion for many churches. Pastors and staff often feel overwhelmed by the sheer amounts of work involved just to keep up with changes.

Let's look at several technology-related options, broken down by church size (although all of them should be considered by churches at all levels), that can help your church reach its goals for small-group ministry without becoming overly complex.

Small Church (less than 100 members): Tweets, Blogs, and Facebook

If your church is just getting started, or it's been around for a while but doesn't yet have a strong presence on the Internet, several simple and inexpensive technology projects can help you build awareness for your church, keep in touch with people within your congregation, and achieve broader communication goals.

Start Posting

One of the easiest projects that can perhaps have the most benefit to your ministry is to start a blog. Blogger by Google (blogger.com) is surprisingly simple to set up, create posts, and upload images and videos. Another bonus: Blogger is free. With a blog, your pastor or church leaders can write about points not mentioned in the sermon, discuss ministry aspirations, hint at goals for the future, and even bring up personal issues to begin a more authentic communication channel within your church.

Start Tweeting

Twitter (twitter.com) is now the second-largest social networking website, next to Facebook, and can be an effective tool for ministry. Twitter is known as a micro-blogging service because it allows users to send and read other users' updates (known as tweets); you can publish text-based posts of up to 140 characters. Users send and receive updates for free from any device with an internet connection, making it incredibly simple to share what you're doing, what your ministry is working on, and things people can check out on your blog and website to extend the online hand of friendship. To simplify the amount of things to keep track of, consider a free, simple service like Seismic Ping (seismic.com) or HootSuite (hootsuite.com), which allows you to connect your blogs and social networking accounts and update them simultaneously via e-mail or text message.

Start Networking

Facebook ([facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com)) can be a wonderful, free tool to connect with people online. You'll quickly find that many people in your congregation are already members. After you set up an account for your church or small-group ministry (and Facebook now offers a direct way for groups and businesses to set up a page at [facebook.com/pages/create.php](https://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php)), you can "friend" members who also are on the site. Next, look under the "Applications" area of your home page for "Groups." Here, you can set up a group for small-group members to join and interact. There are other social networks out there, but Facebook is the most popular network with the broadest range of ages from preteens to octogenarians.

Resources:

- [blogger.com](https://www.blogger.com)—Blog platform
- [wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com)—Blog platform
- [twitter.com](https://www.twitter.com)
- [twitterforchurches.com](https://www.twitterforchurches.com)
- [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com)

Medium Church (100-500 members): Websites, Management, and Donations

As a mid-sized church, you may have a technology budget that allows you to take on a few more projects that extend beyond what's free. As your church grows, you'll find that building a more interactive and purposeful website is critical; that using a web-based management system can make ministry run smoother; and that the ability to take online donations becomes critical.

Start Building

According to [FaithHighway.com](https://www.faihighway.com), 85 percent of the people that view your church website will end up visiting your church. What does your website say about your church and your small-group culture? Does it reflect your church values, missions, and even physical presence? There are a number of good website options out there that range from a low, one-time setup price and monthly fee to thousands of dollars upfront to completely customize a website. Work with a company that specializes in the church market and builds sites that are innovative, interesting, and easy to use. It's great to use a provider that offers a content management system, which allows anyone (with or without tech training) to make updates and layout changes with ease. The overall win is to find a solution that allows your site to:

- Integrate social community
- Provide a place to log in to your web-based church management software
- Implement an online calendar, online donations, and online registrations

Start Connecting

The Internet has spawned a new generation of church management software (ChMS) applications that are completely web-based and offer many new features. Social networking and project workflow tools are now available in ChMS solutions, in addition to managing church membership data and financial records. A web-based ChMS is hosted online, in a secure environment, and does not require monthly software updates since everything is done online. With most pastors and leaders on the go, the ability to access data from the web is critical for maximum efficiency. Most ChMS providers charge according to the number of records or members, making it an affordable option for nearly any sized church. Imagine the possibilities of using ChMS to help connect people into small groups.

Overall, effective web-based ChMS packages seek to:

- Provide multiple access points to data
- Reduce the duplication of work
- Streamline tasks and workflow so that people at your church don't slip through the cracks
- Integrate more easily with the church website in order to get more people connected and involved

Start Accepting

Providing online giving through your church website can increase the size, frequency, and regularity of giving. In February 2009, Faith Direct said its comparisons of giving between July 2008 and January 2009 showed an increase in electronic giving, a slim 12-cent decrease in average gift size, and no decline in user retention and participation, despite the country's fall into economic recession.

There are fees involved with nearly every option, so it's important to take a close look at the costs and processes for setting up a merchant account, and what the percentage fees are for every transaction. The majority of web-based ChMS providers now offer online giving, in addition to the ability to take online registrations and payments for events. However, it's wise to evaluate stand-alone online giving providers in order to weigh all options. Security is something to pay close attention to: an online giving provider should be Payment Card Industry Compliant (pcisecuritystandards.org) in order to protect your members' credit card data, and to help protect your church from liability.

Church website resources:

- ["Web Makeover, Church Edition"](#)
- extendplatform.com
- ekkleisia360.com
- faithhighway.com

Web-based ChMS resources:

- ChurchCommunityBuilder.com
- Churchteams.com
- FellowshipOne.com

Online giving resources:

- ServiceU.com
- simplegive.com

Large Church (500+ members): Streaming and Integration

Many large churches have the same ministry desires and goals, but do things on a much bigger scale. As a church grows, the technology needs to drastically change. Most large churches and megachurches incorporate cutting-edge technologies into their ministries; in fact, many ministries grow to megachurch size because they incorporate technologies and tools often used by secular organizations to impact people with the gospel message.

Start Delivering

One way large churches use technology well is by creating an internet and media ministry team for multi-site streaming. When churches grow beyond their physical facilities, some open additional locations and stream the same live sermon message from a video feed sent through the Internet. This allows churches to duplicate their efforts in order to reach more people. As of 2008, there are about 2,000 multi-site churches across the country, according to MondayMorningInsight.com. This figure is up from 10 multi-site churches in 1990.

Some of the most valuable streaming features include a robust Flash player that has multiple display settings and control options, and an AJAX-driven playlist with features such as stream sharing with others via e-mail, support for multiple media formats, and even simple tools to e-mail the speaker or pastor with additional questions.

Many churches of all sizes also use audio and video podcasting, creating online audio and video files of sermons and making them available for listening, watching, and downloading online. This can be a very effective way of enlarging your ministry beyond the four walls of your church. Many churches use iTunes to podcast sermons and link to this from their church website. iTunes allows churches to podcast for free.

Start Integrating

Ministry done well is a ministry whose right hand knows what the left hand is doing. It's easy to have disjointed departments as the church grows steadily, but at some point, it is necessary to integrate all ministries so that everyone is on the same page aiming to meet the same goals. Technology can accomplish this, either through a ChMS that offers task management and workflow, or through online collaboration tools, such as Basecamp by 37

Signals for a reasonable monthly fee or for free through Google Documents. The end result is a website that pulls together the public and private sides of the church to form one unified organization that engages everyone in active participation.

Resources:

- streamingforjesus.com
- itunes.com
- podfeed.net
- basecamp.com
- docs.google.com

—LAUREN HUNTER is a freelance writer and owner of Lauren Hunter Public Relations, and blogs at ChurchTechToday.com; copyright 2009 by Christianity Today. This article is adapted from *Your Church* magazine.

Discuss

1. Which of the highlighted technologies do you want to look into for your small-group ministry? Who do you know that currently uses that technology?
2. Which of these technologies do you personally use? How might they be used for small-group ministry?
3. How might you better use the technology your church already uses to promote small groups?

Plan a Successful All-Church Campaign

Focus on the benefits and work through the challenges.

By Bill Search

My favorite burrito is nearly 1,000 calories and has almost 40 grams of fat. Thanks to the company website, I was able to check out the nutritional value (or lack thereof) of my typical lunch at a popular restaurant. I was shocked and appalled—especially because I assumed that the burrito was healthier than other fast-food options. I was wrong.

The health disaster discovery was made after a friend gave me some advice in the weight room. "Bill," Dennis said, "If you really want the full impact of weight training, you need to watch what you eat as much you work on your lifting routine." After complaining that it's hard to eat healthy, quick, and cheap, I was encouraged to go online and check out the menu options. I was surprised how many good options are on fast-food menus and alarmed at all the bad ones I normally consumed. Dennis reminded me that regular exercise might build muscle, but if I am following it up with junk food, I will not get the full benefit.

It boils down to this: you cannot hit the gym and the French Fry Hut and expect to see dynamic physical change. That makes sense, of course, when we really think about it. But for some reason we think we can take the same approach with our spiritual lives.

Too many church dwellers figure that an hour a week in a worship service will eventually turn them into a spiritual dynamo, or at least a strong believer. They are often disappointed when they realize the truth—that our spiritual lives need to be holistic.

That's why connecting the weekend message to a spiritual community and to our personal devotions has exponential power—much like a great workout routine matched with a healthy diet. An all-church campaign is like that. It combines the intensity of the weekend message with the community and trust of a small group.

The Benefits

There are three significant advantages to an all-church emphasis:

Focus. Be honest, do you remember the last sermon you heard? After laboring on a message for hours, the preacher delivers volumes of significant information in half an hour. Within a day, the hearers forget most of the message. This is tragic when you consider the importance of the message.

But when a sermon is linked to a group Bible study, it encourages hearers to take notes, listen with keen ears, and think about questions relating to the message. We pay more attention when we know we need to discuss what we are hearing.

Application. Small groups provide time and support to help church members apply the lessons learned in the sermon. Sermons share lots of great information, illustrations, and explanations of biblical texts. And many even include two or three application points. However, the application has to be vague, since it has to apply to all hearers.

When a group connects with a weekly sermon, a natural outcome is to ask how the sermon applies directly to each life in the group. It is energizing and enlightening when we hear about how others are applying God's truth to their unique contexts. Often those applications help us better apply the truth to our lives.

Growth. People do not like to be left out. When attenders from your church realize that the typical pathway for your church is to listen to the sermon and participate in a group that discusses the theme further, they do not want to miss it. This is especially true if the all-church emphasis occurs only once or twice a year. When the pastor stands before the congregation and explains that a particular topic is so important for this church that everyone should participate, it creates a higher incentive for people unconnected to join a

group. In the years I have participated in all-church campaigns, everyone has produced an increase in group participation.

The Challenges

Pulling off a successful all-church emphasis can be tricky. It requires hard work and coordination. There are a few items to consider as you enter the exciting world of campaigns.

Timing. Regardless of where you live, launching an all-church campaign in June is seldom a good idea. School lets out, members head toward vacation spots, and life gets a bit crazy in the summer. The fall and winter tend to be the best times for a successful emphasis. With September and January, you capitalize on the start to a new school semester—plus families are less prone to travel.

Frequency. Most churches that are experienced at campaigns will insist that once or twice a year is plenty for an emphasis. More often than that and it will not feel special.

Leadership. Because campaigns often produce a growing number of people interested in small groups, you will need to be prepared with new leaders. Don't skip over training them in the essentials of leading a group well. Do move quickly to harness the energy of the campaign.

While there are plenty of other issues in developing a campaign, these simple steps will get you started. This approach to church synergy and group development is exciting and potentially explosive. It is worth every ounce of energy you throw at it.

—BILL SEARCH is author of [Simple Small Groups: A User-Friendly Guide for Small-Group Leaders](#). Copyright 2009 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Has your church held campaigns in the past? If so, how were small groups involved?
2. What times of the year do you feel would work best for an all-church campaign at your church? Why?
3. Who do you need to talk to about implementing a campaign? How can you team up to maximize this effort?

Create a Small-Group Culture

Communicate the importance of small groups through stories.

By Will Johnston

As Small-Group Pastor at National Community Church, I have one primary goal: Create a small group culture. I want small groups to regularly be on the hearts, minds, and lips of our congregation. I want group participation to be so fundamental to who we are as a church that it would actually seem strange *not* to be in a group.

But we've still got a long way to go, and it's going to take a lot more than designing the slickest bulletin inserts or having the best online group finder money can buy. Those are great tools, but they only tell people that we have groups. They don't tell people *why* we have groups, and they don't make people want to be in groups.

You've got plenty of people in your congregation who already understand the value of being in a small group. They know the value of community, and all you really have to do is point them in the right direction to get them connected. If everyone were like them, you'd already have a small-group culture.

But you've also got plenty of people in your congregation who don't understand the value of community—who don't want to join a small group. And no matter how much you lower the barrier to entry, they're not going to sign up. Those are the people I'm trying to reach. I want to help everyone understand that they need community and that they can find it in small groups.

A Quick Review

To prep us as we help connect people into small groups, let's review why small groups are so important. God exists in community. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one being, but they are three persons and exist in relationship with one another. When God created us, he made us in his image and instilled in us a need for relationship that reflects his communal nature. Some of the very first words God speaks in Scripture are: "It is not good for man to be alone." Our need for community is at the very core of our being. It's our job as small-group champions, directors, and coaches to stir-up that longing inside of people—to help them understand how much better life is when it's lived together.

Tell Stories

If you want to move someone, tell them a story. In *Made to Stick*, Chip and Dan Heath write about a research project that sought to figure out whether stories or statistics were more effective in raising money. The researchers presented people with the problem of child poverty using three approaches: statistics, a story, and a combination of the two. Some

people were simply given stats about children living in poverty. Others were told a story about a child in poverty. And the third group was presented with both the story and the statistics.

Unsurprisingly, the people presented with merely the statistics donated the least to the cause. More surprising was which group donated the most: those who were presented with *only* the stories. You'd think that the combination of the personal story tugging on the heartstrings coupled with the data explaining the scope of the problem would be most effective. But most people don't care about statistics. They care about stories.

So I take every chance I get to tell stories about small groups. I leverage our tools (including our small-group promotional materials) not just to tell people that we have groups but to tell them stories about our groups. I make sure that each group directory has a story about one of our small groups, whether it's a group that pooled its money to pay the medical bills of a group member who didn't have health insurance, or the significant personal growth and transformation that happened during a group, or even a group whose members have truly gotten to know one another and are finding joy in sharing life together. I sprinkle vignettes throughout, simple one or two sentence stories or quotations that communicate the power of community.

But just telling stories in our group guide isn't enough. We only promote groups three times per year for three to four weeks. If you want create a small-group culture, you have to talk about groups over and over and over again. As Andy Stanley says, "Vision leaks," so we have to keep pouring it on. We have to tell stories about small groups in sermons, videos, testimonies, personal conversations and any other way you can imagine.

I realize, though, that if you're not the senior pastor, you don't have the authority to just make all of those things happen. And even if you are the senior pastor, you don't control all these areas. So how do we embed small groups in our culture?

Find Your Influencers

We all have some folks in our church who are more influential than others, and we all know who they are. (If you don't, find out soon.) To create a small-group culture, you have to get these influential people on board. Once they're on board, others will follow their lead. And you do that through telling stories, too.

At our weekly staff meeting we share wins: testimonies about what God is doing in our various ministries. I'm always in search of stories about our groups, and anytime I hear one, I share it with the staff. I want them to be excited about small groups.

Over the past few months as I've become more intentional about telling these stories, I've noticed other staff members sharing their own group stories. Honestly, I don't know if they've always been telling them and now I'm just more attuned to it. But I can't help wondering if my storytelling has served as a catalyst for others to tell their stories. And that will ultimately result in more stories shared as people get excited about and join groups.

If the influencers in your church are excited about groups, they'll join them, talk about them from the stage, recommend groups to new people, and spend extra time supporting and encouraging group leaders. The more you can get people talking about them—and not just during a sermon or sermon series on small groups—the better. Sermons on small groups are great, but I'd rather have small groups mentioned casually in every sermon of the year than have a four-week series dedicated to community.

A few months ago, our senior pastor told a story about an experience he and his son had on the way home from group. The story wasn't really about the group, but for me this was a huge win. The offhand mention of his group let the people in our congregation know that the senior pastor thought small groups were so important that he actually participated in a one.

As more and more people champion small groups, be sure to celebrate and thank them for their support. Whenever our senior pastor mentions groups, I send him a thank you e-mail. I want him to know that it's noticed and appreciated so that he'll keep doing it.

Creative Communication

I've realized that we church leaders like to beat people over the head with ideas. But Jesus told parables that captivated people and left them with questions. Shows like *Mad Men* force viewers to fill in the blanks about what's going on and draw their own conclusions. I wonder if the engaging storytelling we see in popular television shows is actually a more effective way of communicating.

Take Christian movies for instance. Most have a very clear lesson that you're supposed to learn. A teenage girl gets pregnant, and her life becomes really difficult. Along the way she says something like, "I should have listened to my pastor and not had sex until I was married." It's not enough that the movie is telling a story that already makes the lesson painfully obvious. Then they actually verbalize the lesson just to make sure the viewers don't miss it.

I can't speak for anyone else, but this just leaves me feeling preached at. And in my opinion, it makes for a fairly cheesy movie. It's clear that the movie isn't about telling a good story but about teaching a lesson. (I've certainly seen big budget Hollywood films do the same thing, and I don't like it any more when they do it.)

I've realized that some of my storytelling about small groups has probably been a lot like those all-too-cheesy movies, and that's one reason why I'm more interested in having our senior pastor mention small groups in a sermon that's not about small groups than preach a bunch of sermons about them. Don't get me wrong. I'm not against sermons or sermon series about small groups. I'm all for them, but I think we need to be a bit more subtle, a bit more nuanced, and a bit more creative. After all, great advertising isn't great because it tells you to buy something. Great advertising is great because it makes you want it.

So right now, National Community Church is in the midst of transforming the way we communicate about small groups. We're changing our group directory from a catalog of groups to a magazine full of stories.

Another project that I'm quite excited about is a silent film we're producing. We've just started the process, but the plan is to make a three- to eight- minute short that tells a story that makes people want to be a part of meaningful community. It won't be something super-obvious like showing a group of couples sitting in a circle and someone's marriage being reconciled. We want to be far more subtle to create something that stirs the soul and draws out that fundamental longing for community that exists in each of us. It's a creative challenge, but it excites me. We could all strive to be more creative in our communication about small groups.

If you're going to communicate about small groups in a compelling way, you have to believe at your core that they're critical to our lives. You have to truly believe that God created us to live in community, that he designed us for meaningful relationships. If you don't buy into that yourself, you're just manipulating others.

If you're convinced that small groups are important, if you've experienced deep community, if you believe that God created us for it and you want to help other people understand that concept, then begin creating a small-group culture where everyone shares stories about why life is better together.

—WILL JOHNSTON is the Small Group Pastor for National Community Church in Washington, D.C.; copyright 2013 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. How can you become more aware of the impact small groups are having on people in your church? How will you hear these stories?
2. How well do you share stories about small groups? How can you share them more often? How can you get your senior pastor or teaching pastor on board with sharing small-group examples in sermons?

3. What might look different about your marketing strategy if you focused on telling compelling stories rather than presenting lists and reasons to join groups?

Communicating So People Hear You

Five ways to keep communication fresh

By Ben Reed

You want people to value your communication, right? This isn't a pride thing. If you send an e-mail, you expect people to read it. If you call someone and leave a message, you expect they'll listen to it.

But you wouldn't be reading this article if every one of your communication pieces were already being read or heard. Communication is frustrating because so few people read and absorb the words we spend such effort crafting. And if you're trying to get the word out to your congregation about small groups, that's a message worth hearing, right?

I'm convinced that if we keep our communication efforts fresh and we use multiple mediums, we'll get people to listen. Here are five ways to keep communication about small groups fresh.

Shoot a Video

- Find a photographer in your congregation (or at least someone who can hold a point-and-shoot camera). Ask him or her to help you take pictures that capture the essence of small groups such as community, fun activities, studying the Bible, service, and prayer. Be clear on the kind of pictures you want. Then put the pictures together in a video. Videos can really motivate people and get them excited about group life.
- Make sure your video is less than two minutes. If it's longer than that, people will check out. Keep things short and to the point.
- Post the video to YouTube. And while you're at it, create a YouTube channel. It's free and lets people know where to go for all your ministry's videos. Plus, you'll be able to share your videos outside of weekend services.
- If you've posted the video to YouTube, grab the "embed code" and paste it into the body of an e-mail to your leaders. This way people don't have to click off of the e-mail to view the video. You could also have your lead pastor e-mail the congregation with a short encouragement, pasting the video's embed code into the body of the e-mail.

Start a Blog

Blogs are a great way to offer regular content. Whether it's announcements, vision casting, devotionals, or stories you want to share, a blog is a perfect way to communicate to your church. Blogs are also very easy to set up. A blog is the perfect place to point people who are curious about your small-group values and studies. You can also provide information on how to plug in. Here are a few tips:

- Use either Wordpress or Blogger. These are the industry standard, and are super easy to customize and to post new information.
- Post regularly. Whether you're sharing small-group stories that leaders have submitted, truth from the Bible on the value of community, or a brand-new curriculum that people may be interested in seeing, post regularly so people are encouraged to visit the site often.
- Share prolifically. Add your blog address to your e-mail signature so that group leaders are reminded to visit the site every time they get an e-mail from you.
- Encourage all leaders to sign up to receive updates automatically, either through RSS or via e-mail. (Need an explanation of RSS? Check out the [Wikipedia explanation](#).) This way, all of your leaders are receiving the most current information, and are able to share that with those with whom they have influence.

Utilize Social Media

If you don't have a Facebook account yet, go do that right now. I'll wait! Social media is a great way to get information out about small groups—whether it's Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, or Google+. Find out what your church attendees are using and start there. To make the most of it:

- Update your status with a Scriptural truth about the value of community.
- Announce upcoming small-group signups.
- Link to your blog (and on your blog, tell people how they can follow you on social media).
- Create a Facebook group for all of your leaders to increase excitement about group life.

Snail Mail

There *are* times when sending snail mail makes sense. We've used mailers when inviting people to key events. We've also used snail mail in sending out thank you notes to leaders. If you use them sparingly, they work. Plus, because very few people send hand-written letters these days, this type of mail is honoring to receive.

- If you've got small-group signups or connecting events coming up, consider sending out a mailer to those in your church not currently involved in a group.
- Send a personal letter to your small-group leaders thanking them for all the work they do.
- Encourage small-group leaders to send notes of encouragement to group members.

Communicate More than Once

When we hold ConnectNow (our event that helps people sign up for and begin small groups), we start announcing it weeks earlier at weekend services. We like to announce things at least three weeks in a row. If you have people that don't show up every week,

announcing small-group signups once will not catch every potential person who could sign up. And if your goal is to catch the people not already committed, then you've got to expect that they're probably not at your weekend services every week. Don't hinge something as vital as small groups on a single announcement or a single blurb in the bulletin.

Use Every Available Option

There are multiple options you could pursue other than the ones I've listed. Get creative and think about what might reach the people in your context. Don't be afraid to use unusual methods. Brainstorm the various ways your church disseminates information about key events, happenings, and service opportunities. When it comes to promoting small groups, consider using each of those pipelines to saturate people with the message that becoming part of a small group is vital to their faith. To get you thinking:

- Have your choir change the words to a popular song to make it about small groups.
- Have your puppet team create a story that has those dolls laughing about how they haven't yet joined a small group.
- Have your drama team act out some funny scenes about being in a small group.
- Have your creative arts team create a short video about being in a small group.
- Have group members share their experiences with small groups at weekend services.

—BEN REED is the Pastor of Community Groups at Long Hollow Baptist Church and is an editorial advisor for SmallGroups.com; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Which of the author's five ideas are most appealing to you? What do you need to do to make it happen?
2. Which of these ideas are you already doing? How can you maximize your efforts?
3. Do you need to recruit someone to help you with social media, a blog, or other methods of communication? Who might you delegate these responsibilities to?

Twelve Tips for a Successful Church-Wide Campaign

A step-by-step guide from a campaign expert

By Steve Gladen

Having lived through many campaigns in my time as Small-Group Pastor here at Saddleback, I have discovered that a strategy is only as good as the foundation and follow-through that surrounds it. As they say, the devil is in the details. That's why our [Saddleback Church Campaigns](#) come with full instructions on how to run the campaign from start to finish. The instructions explain what types of teams you need to develop in addition to providing a calendar timeline and training DVDs.

Here's another thing I've learned: a church-wide campaign will be an exponential experience for any church. It can be exponentially positive or negative, depending on how you approach it. So, based on my experiences (and a few battle scars), here are 12 tips to ensure a positive outcome for your church.

1. What's the Compelling Question?

When you run a campaign, you need to know which question the campaign will answer. To give you an example, the question for our 40 Days of Purpose Campaign was, "What on earth am I here for?" The compelling question gives your people a reason to join a small group and attend the corresponding weekend services. It provides your group leaders with motivation to invite others into their small group. Without a compelling question, the congregation won't understand the central theme or the reason for the campaign.

2. Align Children, Student, and Adult Ministries.

A lot of churches that run a campaign miss the power of alignment by only doing it for the adults. When your children and student ministries memorize the same Scriptures, read about similar themes, do projects together, and listen to the same weekend message, everyone is on the same page. Discussions naturally flow into the home from parent to child and child to parent.

3. Stick to the Principles and Apply Your Own Methodologies.

When aligning your campaigns for children and students, you need to adapt the material to their learning level. So if the adults are memorizing a Scripture, the children may learn part of the same Scripture instead of the whole thing—because that is appropriate for their level.

The same principle needs to be applied to your entire church. Weekend messages need to be adapted to your church's context and culture. Small-group questions can be adapted to

your needs. If your campaign includes a church-wide service project (or a project for individual small groups), it should serve your particular church and community. For example, if your church has a strong presence in the homeless community, then stay true to your culture and serve those same people as part of your campaign.

4. Language Matters.

One of the most significant things we learned through recruiting for our Saddleback campaigns is that language matters. Campaign material is delivered through small groups, so it is vital that you have plenty of people ready to lead a small group—but leading can mean different things to different people.

When we asked for lay pastors, that didn't work well because people didn't feel they were pastors. We then changed the term to shepherd leaders, which failed because they didn't connect with the term "shepherd." Next we tried small-group leader, but nobody wanted to be the leader due to perceived inadequacies or lack of time. Then we asked for H.O.S.T.'s. We told people: "If you have a Heart for people, are willing to Open your home, can serve a Snack and Turn on a DVD player—then you can host a group of people." All of a sudden we had plenty of volunteers!

Interestingly, we never changed the duties of a small-group leader, just the language. It was enough. All of the preconceived notions of what it takes to be a leader just fell away. If hosts continue with their group after the campaign, we enter them into our Small Group Leadership Development Pathway. This pathway then provides them with the relationships and resources to nurture and build their leadership skills.

5. Employ Various Avenues of Learning.

The campaign strategy takes a common theme and helps people learn that theme through different learning styles. People learn through listening to the weekend services, discussing topics in their small groups, doing hands-on projects, memorizing Scripture, and reading as they work through the campaign materials in their small groups and on their own.

6. Once a Year Is Enough.

I am a college football fan. As much as I love the college football season and hate to see it come to an end, there is something about the wait and anticipation of the next season. If college football was off for a month and then back on, it wouldn't be as good from month to month. Players couldn't prepare, and I just wouldn't look forward to the coming of fall like I do now.

It's the same way with campaigns. When you do too many campaigns in a year, two things happen: 1) The volunteers who pulled it off won't be able to manage another campaign so soon, and 2) Your congregation won't experience the anticipation of an upcoming event.

7. Provide a Clear Start and End Date.

At Saddleback, our campaigns last 40 days. This is a short enough commitment that most people are willing to make it, but long enough to instill good habits. When you have a clear start and end date, it gives people an end in sight, which means they are more willing to come along for the ride.

8. Expect High Intensity for Staff, Volunteers, and Members.

The secret of a successful campaign is sustaining high intensity for 40 days and then backing off to allow staff and volunteers to recover. This recovery time also helps group members process the experience. Give your small groups time to stabilize.

For a campaign to happen successfully, you must clear the calendar for the duration of that campaign. You need to stop programs and events that could be distracting. Sometimes *good* programs can stop *great* things from happening in a campaign.

Also, with a campaign comes the beginning of many new groups, which means that afterward you will need time to assess where those groups are at. Some will continue and some will stop. But without the margin and infrastructure to check in on these groups, you will start a lot of groups and lose the same amount.

9. Remember to Celebrate!

Oftentimes churches are great at recruiting and getting things finished for a campaign, but terrible at celebrating a job well done. After the campaign, be sure to hold a celebration and express your gratitude for all of the hard work done by staff and volunteers. Take time to remember and celebrate God's work. Share stories of success and gratitude.

When you don't take the time to celebrate, you are increasing the possibility of burnout in your staff and volunteers. In the Bible we read of many instances when God had people stop and remember the miracles he accomplished. Why? Because God knew people would forget. When you celebrate, you etch God's work on your people's heart.

At Saddleback, we often give out little reminders or mementos, such as key chains, so that when people see them, they will be reminded of how God moved. Help your people

remember what God has done and celebrate the campaign they put so much time and energy into achieving.

10. Understand the Delivery System—Small Groups.

At Saddleback we have two delivery systems: weekend services and small groups (which comes from Acts 5:42). It is a two-punch system to help people not just learn, but also apply the Word of God. Our small groups are the delivery system of all the components of the campaign. Group life is not optional at Saddleback. It is vital.

We use a funnel to depict the strategy behind how we apply the five biblical purposes throughout the church:

- The weekend service establishes the five biblical purposes through the preaching of the Word.
- The classes we offer explain the five biblical purposes.
- Small groups give people the opportunity to experience the five biblical purposes (they help you take information and turn it into transformation).
- The life of an individual (a Purpose Driven Life) expresses the purposes.

For all of this to work, **you need some kind of infrastructure in place.** An infrastructure helps your new groups not go it alone. At Saddleback, we have Community Leaders who oversee new small groups. What they do is simple—check on the new groups regularly and offer encouragement and prayer. The DVD curriculum provides the material, but the Community Leader gives the moral support.

You also need a Leadership Development Pathway in place. Your small-group hosts/leaders need to know where you want them to go. If they continue to lead, what will be their journey and final destination? How will they be trained? Not providing clear direction is like asking someone to come over to your house and only giving them a city, not the address.

Also, **give your groups a next step.** Before you let a group get through a campaign, have them make a decision on what their next step will be. Will they continue to meet, or will they part ways? Around week four of the six-week campaign, we encourage groups to determine what their next study will be. We give them curriculum suggestions and encourage them to get the new material as soon as possible. Very often, just avoiding "down time" can make the difference in whether a group continues or not.

11. Give People an "Out" When the Campaign Ends.

In a campaign, you need to give people permission to stop their group. Let me be clear: I want every new group to continue, and I want to give them every possible reason to stay together. But I don't want them to feel guilty if their group doesn't continue. Why? Because

when they do what you have asked, you need to reward them and thank them, not pour on guilt for not continuing. I have learned when you give people permission to stop meeting at the end of the campaign, they will be there for the next campaign. And during the next campaign, they just might stay with the group.

12. Budget to Remove Financial Obstacles.

When we run a campaign at Saddleback, we pay for everything. We provide the devotional reading books, memory key tags, prayer guides, small-group DVDs, and study guides to anyone who joins a small group. If people commit to a small group, we give them everything to make a spiritual impact on them—they just need to join. It's a lot of money up front, but it brings huge dividends on the back side. Invest in your church. It shows your people you not only care about them, but you are also willing to put your money where your heart is.

—STEVE GLADEN is the Pastor of Small-Group Community at Saddleback Church and founder of the Purpose Driven Small Group Network; copyright 2010 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. How might you align multiple ministries in the church—including those for children and students—with your small-group campaign?
2. When is the best time to launch a campaign at your church? How long should it last?
3. Who do you need to have on your team to help make this a reality?

Promoting Small Groups Through Visual Media

It can be done with less effort than you think.

By Rick Lowry

Churches need to understand how the use of video can improve both the promotion and operation of their small-group ministries. Below you will find several suggestions and examples.

Learn to Use the Media Tools Already on Your Computer

Anyone can create reasonably high quality media with the standard software available on most computers. Here are a couple tools to look for:

- **iMovie.** I know of a pastor with no media budget who taught himself how to use iMovie (a program that came on his Apple computer). Right in his office he created an update for his ministry leaders. It included him talking in person, photos, and lower-third title screens. He could even edit out mistakes he made while speaking. (iMovie is an Apple computer program; if you have a PC, the equivalent software is called Windows Movie Maker.)
- **PowerPoint.** Most people know this as the "slide presentation" program, but it can also run transitions and moving pictures.
- **Quick Time.** This comes free with most software packages; if not, it can be downloaded for free. Quick Time can do audio and/or video productions.
- **Cameras.** Many new computers come with a camera already built in. For those that do not, decent cameras in the \$20–50 range can be purchased and plugged in.

Recruit a Volunteer with Experience

For higher quality video productions, find a volunteer who is a familiar with professional video-editing tools. (These days, there's at least one in every church—start by asking around among the under-30 crowd.) If they are willing to make a longer-term commitment, it may be worth the price to invest in professional video-editing software so they have the tools they need to do the job. Church discounts are often available, so be sure to ask.

You or your volunteer should also be connected with the various video-hosting websites out there. One example is www.Vimeo.com. Membership is free, instructions are easy, and you can post up to 45–50 minutes of video per week without charge. Just add the link to your own website or Facebook page, and you don't have to worry about your website being able to handle large files.

Use Different Types of Videos

Consider experimenting with a diverse range of videos as you learn more about your tools and your team, including:

- **Testimonies.** Shoot a video of someone telling about the good things that happened in their life as a result of being part of a small group. Choosing a video version over a live testimony is helpful for the person giving the testimony because they don't have to worry about remembering their talk in front of a large crowd, and they don't have to be present for every worship service. Having the testimony on video also helps worship planners control the length of the service.
- **Skits.** Create your own video skits about small groups. (Again, this removes some of the potential challenges related to live skits.) Some churches write their own skits, while others purchase material. If you do purchase a skit, be sure that the copyright permission extends to all the places where you want to use it, such as websites or Facebook.
- **Slide presentations.** An attractive presentation about small groups doesn't have to be elaborate. A PowerPoint slide presentation with 10–15 slides of groups in action could be flashed by during an announcement encouraging people to join a small group.
- **Training videos/announcements for group leaders.** One of the best sources of promotion for small groups is your current leaders. Use video to pique their interest about current events related to small groups. Most churches have some kind of written text newsletter/update that is sent to small-group leaders on a regular basis; why not communicate with them using visual media, as well?

A simple two- or three-minute update can be done with the camera that comes pre-installed in most new computers. Recording can be done at any location, usually in one take. The video can then be posted on a websites such as YouTube or Vimeo.com, which both allow you to post videos at no charge. Send the leaders the link, and in a couple of clicks they'll be watching you on screen. (In my opinion, it's much easier to share your heart and inspire vision using this visual method than with written text only.)

Display the Videos in Multiple Places

Just like you want to use different types of videos to announce/promote your small groups, you should display those videos in different places to maximize the amount of people who see them. Some suggestions include:

- **TV monitors around the church building.** In most churches, promotion in the worship services continues to be the best way to get the word out, but there is not enough time during worship for every church ministry to receive as much promotion as they would like. A popular alternative is a feed to television screens around the building that are running a continuous loop of current program promotions. (Both moving pictures and slides can be included.) For many program directors, these screens are where they catch the attention of a large number of people because members and guests pass the screens in the hallways before and after weekend

worship; they also see them as they come to the building during the week for activities. Plus, the weekly loop for these monitors can also be shown on the screen(s) in the worship center before and after the main services.

- **At your booth.** You can also set up a booth in the church lobby that plays a continuous loop of your church's promotional content. This is a great set up because you can include a volunteer to answer any questions that viewers may have (and to sign people up for groups when they are ready).
- **On the church website.**
- **Facebook.** If your church has a Facebook page, post a link to your videos promoting small groups. A special Facebook page can also be created just for your small-group leaders. Announcements can be posted there, along with links to videos you have created for promotion and training. You could even run a Facebook chat once a week for all group leaders. Don't forget to encourage your leaders to share the videos.
- **Electronic access to group-leader training.** Consider posting basic training for small-group leaders on your church's website. You'll want to include accompanying material such as handouts. Online education is used heavily by both universities and business, so your group leaders may already be accustomed to learning in this way. This helps with promotion and recruitment because potential small-group leaders know in advance that they won't have to carve out extended times for live training, making it easier for them to make the time commitment to lead a small group.

—RICK LOWRY is the Small Groups Pastor at Crossroads Christian Church in Newburgh, Indiana; copyright 2010 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. How has your church used videos in the past? Do you already have equipment? A YouTube channel? A Vimeo account?
2. Who in your church could help you with videos for small-group ministry?
3. Name three ways you could use videos to market your small groups. What is one step you can take this week to make those ideas reality?

Further Exploration

Resources to help you . . .

SmallGroups.com. We specialize in equipping churches and small-group leaders to make disciples through life-changing community.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. A website with practical training tools for various church leadership roles.

CTPastors.com. A website offering practical advice and articles for church leaders in pastoral roles.

WomenLeaders.com. A website ministering to women leaders in the church.

Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture

Andy Stanley and Bill Willits

Multnomah, 2004

The authors describe how they established a small-group culture at North Point Community Church.

Building a Life-Changing Small Group Ministry

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson

Zondervan, 2012

Learn how to create a great small-group ministry in your context

The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson

Zondervan, 2005

Learn how to troubleshoot common issues