

BRANDING YOUR CHURCH

Issues involved in branding existing churches
and church plants

by Sherri Brown

Article Summary

Every church has a brand, whether they've planned it or not. Effective branding of your church requires that you present your church—its purpose and mission—to the congregation and the community accurately and with excellence. This paper discusses the process of creating an excellent brand, maintaining the integrity of the brand and handling crises well so that your church may present itself well to a lost world.

Further Reading

[Creating Strategic Alliances and Partnerships for Planting New Churches: Issues Involved in Sharing Information and Resources toward Greater Evangelism](#)
by Sherri Brown

[Becoming a Church Planting Church: Issues Pastors Address When Leading a Church to Birth a Network of New Churches](#) by Sherri Brown

When Tim Ahlen became pastor of the struggling **Forest Meadow Baptist Church** in Dallas, TX (<http://www.fmbcdallas.org>), the congregation's outreach-minded mission statement and logo were prominently displayed in the hallways. In spite of plans the congregation had made, many of the 30 active members were ready to close the doors.



TIM AHLEN

"They were discouraged, ready to quit," Tim recalls.

Tim was the full-time pastor at the church while also working as director of church planting for Dallas Baptist Association. When he accepted the job as pastor, he saw it as a church planting opportunity.

"I looked at it like a church plant core group that had seven acres and a debt-free building," Tim says. Church members didn't change their mission statement nor did they follow the one hanging on the wall. "No one paid much attention to it then," Tim admits. But the church did make changes. "We are surrounded by the largest and densest multi-family housing in Dallas. We went to work," Tim says.

Five years later, the church has played a role in starting four generations of churches totaling 33 different congregations and representing 28 different people groups. Four churches meet in the original building. Today the original church building houses 33 different churches representing 28 different people groups. Each church meets in the same building. "We have flags surrounding the auditorium representing countries that are affiliated with us. That's the first thing we've displayed that says who we are. Our purpose statement is clear. It's the Great



At Fellowship Meadow Baptist the Great Commission is clearly part of the mission statement and church branding.

Commission." Tim says, "It's not about what the signs say, it's about what you produce."

As members of Forest Meadow Baptist Church discovered, a church's brand is more than a professionally designed logo and an impressive website. The brand is the reputation a church has in its community. It's what the church does, who it is. While branding a church may sound corporate and business-like—and it does take a marketing strategy to do it well—it's no less than communicating an eternal truth to a lost community.



Why Brand Your Church?

In one sense, churches are already branded, says Jesse Palmer, owner of **The Very Idea Group** in Birmingham, AL (<http://www.theveryidea.com>). "Whether we like it or not, the name 'Christian' is a brand and a label. Much of my work is ultimately helping churches and faith-based organizations develop a brand that fairly and favorably represents the vision, values and virtues of the organization. That isn't always easy. Sometimes it's difficult. Brand is first and foremost connected with the label or name of the organization. Sometimes those labels suffer from stereotyping. For instance, what do you conjure up in your mind if I say something about First Baptist Church of some county seat town or, perhaps, The Greater North Gardendale Apostolic Holiness Church of God in Christ? Since for most of us perception is reality, we'd better recognize our responsibility as stewards of the mysteries of faith," Jesse says.

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A church has a brand, whether the leaders know it or not. The decision to brand a church is the decision to take control of the way a church is perceived.



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Brands are built over time.

BRANDING IS LIKE A REPUTATION FOR A PERSON, IT'S BUILT OVER TIME.

“Two steps into a church building, a person has a sense of the church’s personality. That’s the brand,” says Mary Tomlinson, owner of **On-Purpose Partners** (<http://www.on-purpose.com>) and former Disney marketing executive. “Churches don’t feel alike to visitors and members. The brand is the answers the questions,

‘How do I feel when I’m at church’ ‘How am I treated?’ What am I leaving with?’”

“Branding is like a reputation for a person, it’s built over time,” Mary says. “Nike, Apple, Coca-Cola—those brands come up all

the time. Those companies have done a lot of strategic marketing work. But even if you don’t do that kind of work, you’ll still have a reputation. People will define you based on scraps of information that they have. If you don’t brand yourself, others will.”

How Does a Church Brand Itself?

Dictionary definitions define branding as a name, slogan, logo and design scheme associated with a product or service. However, while branding includes those elements, effective branding also captures a purpose and puts it in a format that others can understand.

Mary teaches that the essential parts of a brand include:

- **How you perceive yourself.** *The SWOT marketing analysis is a useful tool to use in identifying your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. (See appendix for more on using the SWOT analysis.)*

- **Who your customers are and what they say about you.** *Often a brand—for a business or a church—is defined very differently by the customer than it is by the organization. Define your target audience—the people attending your church.*

“You have to identify your target audience so you know to whom you are speaking, what’s important to them and how to speak their language,” Mary says. “You’ve got to make some hard choices. You don’t talk to an 18 year old the same way you talk to a 60 year old, it doesn’t work. If you talk to everybody the same, you’ll talk to nobody. What you say isn’t interesting to everybody.” This may mean you have some difficult choices to make regarding the people you want to reach in your community.

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MARY TOMLINSON

- **Understand the competition.** *Know what is going on around you, including how your competition—the other churches in your community—perceives you. Differentiate yourself from those churches using your brand. What makes people want to attend your church on Sunday morning over another?*

Chip Riggs, Missions Pastor of six-year-old **Hope Baptist Church** in Las Vegas, NV, (<http://www.hopebaptistchurch.com>) found himself and the Pastoral team working to define

the church's brand first to the congregation. "The church started with eighteen people, now six years later, we've got 1,600 people. The leadership team began to realize we were becoming programmatic and we felt that at times that was diverting us from the main task. We wanted to define the one thing we were about."

Although the church already had a vision statement, a purpose statement and nine core values, the leadership realized that no one could

quote them. "There were buzz words, but there was no clarity," Chip says.

The church hired an outside branding company to help develop a logo and a "look," but Chip soon realized that wasn't what was needed. "Your brand includes your look and your logo, but that's not all it is. It's your

vision. The branding group we hired helped us to boil down what we are about, which was to connect people to live the life of a Jesus follower. People know what that means at our church. Everything we do can be brought into that statement: We connect people to God, to each other and to the world."

The process of defining the church wasn't easy, Chip admits. "We took nine values and in two and a half days boiled them down to four values. That was extremely painful. But now our mission is so simple, you can draw on a napkin who we are. Our goal is for people to come into our church and see clearly the path that the church is walking. If people encounter a hodgepodge of 'Here's a mission trip' or 'Here's an opportunity' it's too much to process. At heart, it's not what we

do, it's who we are. Along the way you discover specific opportunities for service."

Five years ago, **Highland Oaks Church of Christ** in Dallas, TX (<http://www.hocc.org>), a 152 year old church, set out to refine its mission, then to communicate that mission to church members and the community.

When Tim Spivey joined the Highland Oaks staff as senior pastor in October, 2002, the church had declined in membership. "At one time the church had an average attendance around 4,000, but there was a slow bleed over ten years and they were down to about 875 people," he said.



TIM SPIVEY

It was the right time to begin developing core values and rethinking the church mission statement. Because the church had been in a decline, Tim found members open to the changes—and challenges—he proposed. As the congregation began to hone the core values and mission statement, it became obvious that there needed to be a new logo and web site. There wasn't much to work with, Tim says. "Highland Oaks had a long, long way to go to catch up technologically. For instance, the church did have a web site, but it still had staff members listed who had been gone for years."

Working with his staff members, Tim cast a vision for a new brand for the church. Then he hired a church marketing consultant to help with designing a logo, web site and other materials. Although he was working with professionals, even the design process was more complex than he expected. "We were looking for a comprehensive brand, but the designs that came to us were too contemporary or too stodgy or just

YOUR BRAND INCLUDES YOUR LOOK AND YOUR LOGO, BUT THAT'S NOT ALL IT IS. IT'S YOUR VISION.

Highland Oaks
Church of Christ



plain bland. It took months of sending ideas back and forth. The process was a lot longer than we expected,” he says.

When the first design of three interlocking oak trees came across his desk, Tim knew immediately it was the best way to illustrate the church’s new goals. The three interlocking trees also made three crosses, emphasizing the Christ-centered focus of Highland Oaks. “It said it all— communion with God, authentic community, servanthood and relational outreach,” he says.

The trees became the logo representing the church on everything: the side of the building, printed materials and throughout the church programs, as well. The preschool program became “Little Acorns”, the youth ministry was renamed “Rooted.” The church book club became the “Living Water Book Club.” Even the coffee bar took on the new brand with its name: The Well.

Through that process, Tim realized that branding his church helped focus the purpose and the mission of the congregation. “I realize that branding is about identity, but it can also be a teaching tool because it gives us word pictures. We call our preschoolers little acorns and sure, that’s cute, but it also reminds us that they are our future oak trees,” Tim says.

How Do Successful Church Planting Churches Brand Their Offspring?

When churches plant a new church they decide whether the church plant will share a brand or identity with the mother churches. There are many successful ways to do this. Some church plants decide to carry the brand of the mother church, while some take on their own branding. There are advantages and disadvantages to each choice.

In the 1980s **Perimeter Church** in Atlanta, GA (<http://www.perimeter.followers.net>) started satellite churches and branded them as part of the mother church. “We had one church with many congregations. We had Perimeter Church Intown, Perimeter Church East, and Perimeter Church Metro. While we had a lot of branding in terms of the look, including the logo, there was also uniformity in terms of philosophy of ministry,”

says Bob Cargo, church planting director at Perimeter Church. However, by 1990, the mother church chose to make each satellite congregation an individual church and began emphasizing church planting.



“Today, when it comes to church planting, we’re not trying to brand any of our church plants with a Perimeter brand. There needs to be contextualization relating to the church plant and community where that church is planted. Now when we plant a daughter church, we don’t make them feel the same. We think it’s a huge mistake to do everything the same from church to church. We want each church to reflect the geographical area and to develop its own identity,” Bob says.



BOB CARGO

While Perimeter’s church plants don’t have the same look or feel and may have different types of programming, that’s not to say that they don’t have the same values as the mother church. Perimeter Church does expect its church plants to reflect its values including:

1. *Every church plant is missional and evangelistic.*
2. *Every church plant is highly committed to discipleship and has a strong relational element.*
3. *Every church plant is committed to the ministry of the laity. The pastor’s primary job is as a leader and equipper.*
4. *Every church plant focuses on leadership development.*

The leaders at **Hill Country Bible Church** in Austin, TX (<http://www.hcbc.com>) take a different view of branding their church plants. The first seven church plants have kept the same name and identity as the mother church.

“It’s good. People in Austin are starting to know us and that’s been positive. For instance, one of our elders mentioned our church to a business associate and he responded with, ‘I think there’s one of those franchises near us.’ We realize that



The first seven Hill Country Bible Church plants kept the name and brand of the mother church.

when we have 25 or so church plants, we won't be able to do this, but for now, we have a clear purpose and vision—to reach every man, woman and child in the city—and that's well known within the congregation" says Tim Hawks, senior pastor of the northwest campus of Hill Country Bible Church.

Future church plants may not take the Hill Country name—especially church plants that are not in the same geographical area—but for those that claim the same identity, there are many advantages, Tim says. "I did radio spots at Easter and didn't specify any one particular Hill Country Bible Church. All the churches benefited from that and we were able to promote the season and the churches more economically and efficiently."

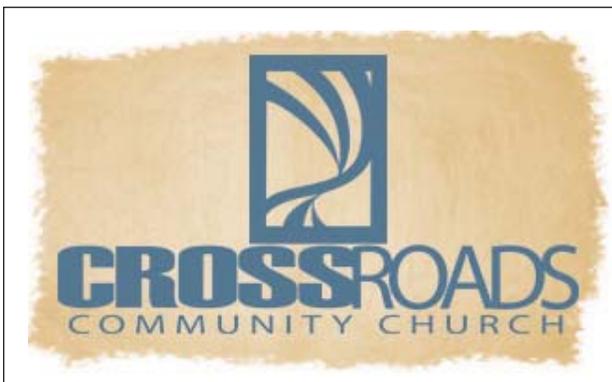
While Hill Country Bible churches have the same names, the same look on each web site and the same vision statement, Tim knows that just shaping a brand doesn't make it meaningful. "You can brand whatever you want, but if you're not

executing it, it won't matter. You can't just throw a brand out there, there's got to be evidence behind it," he says.

Tim admits there are some negative sides to producing multiple churches with the same brand—the names of the churches are so similar there can be some confusion. "With names like Hill Country Bible Church Georgetown, Hill Country Bible Church Northwest, Hill Country Bible Church Pflugerville and more, it can get confusing. And, the other negative is, of course, if any one of our churches messes up, it will affect all of us," he says.

How Can a Church Maintain the Integrity of its Brand?

Once a church has a defined vision and then developed the graphic elements of logos, web sites and a "look," the challenge becomes maintaining the integrity of the brand. Often churches hire a communications director who



Some of Hill Country Bible Churches have similar names with different brands like Hill Country Bible Church UT while some have both a different name and brand like Cross Roads Community Church.

oversees the production of every printed piece, as well as video and web sites. If that option isn't feasible, some will hire a freelance artist—often someone who is a member of the church.

Leaders at **Summit Church** in Estero, FL (<http://www.summitlife.com>) chose to hire a design team to develop a logo for the church. Once the logo was defined, the church hired a graphic artist to maintain the integrity of the new look. "We work as a team," explains Todd Milby, mission leader and teaching pastor at Summit Church. "When we plan a piece, we have an initial meeting to unpack it all with the graphic designer. It's a team creative effort."

The church decided that no printed piece would be distributed in the church unless it came through the graphic design process set up in the church.

"No one can distribute something that hasn't come through us. If I see something on a table and it's not up to our standards, I'll pick it up and throw it away. You have to be ruthless," he says.

Tim Spivey, at Highland Oaks Church of Christ, is equally as serious about maintaining the integrity of his church's brand. "It is not uncommon for me to rip a poster down and bring it to a staff meeting. I guard the printed materials heavily," he says.

Both Todd and Tim admit that keeping up the standards of printed material can be difficult. People often produce their own flyers and brochures and can be offended when they are deemed unacceptable. But it has to be done to protect the brand, Todd says. "We're committed to protecting the brand. What we're communicating is timeless," he says.

Protecting the Brand When Crisis Happens

In 1982, seven people in suburban Chicago died after taking Extra Strength Tylenol capsules that had been laced with cyanide.

When investigators discovered that someone had tampered with Tylenol capsules and replaced

them on shelves, the company issued a recall to destroy all Tylenol capsules. In Chicago suburbs, police officers went up and down streets speaking over loudspeakers to warn residents not to take Tylenol.

It was potentially a huge financial and marketing disaster for Johnson and Johnson, the makers of Tylenol. Instead of shutting the brand down or producing a new brand, Johnson and

Johnson chose to rescue

Tylenol by inventing gel caps, the first tamper-proof capsule. In later years, the company introduced tamper-proof packaging, now an industry standard. Although Tylenol sales plummeted in the year after the seven deaths, within several years Tylenol became the top-selling analgesic of all times.

A few years later, in 1985, Coca-Cola introduced New Coke, a new formula of the flagship cola. Although extensive marketing tests had shown that people liked the new flavor, the newly packaged, newly formulated cola wasn't "Coke" to its fans. For 79 days the original Coke wasn't available and people protested by not purchasing the new product.

Coca-Cola executives quickly saw the writing on the wall and pulled the "new" version, replacing it with the original Coke, re-named "Classic Coke". Since 1987 it's been the No. 1 selling soft drink.

These two potential marketing disasters were salvaged in different ways. In the business world, it's about market share, but in the Christian community it's about decisions that affect eternity. There are times when a church brand faces a crisis—moral failures by church leaders, a financial crisis or even a church bus wreck can put a church in the limelight.

The best response to any kind of crisis is simple—tell the truth, says Jesse Palmer of The Very Idea



Tylenol has become an industry standard for tamper-proof packaging and regained the integrity of its brand after a near tragedy in 1982.

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Group. “If you don’t do your own public relations, someone else will—and it won’t be the way you wanted it.”

Jesse, who has worked as a church staff member for more than 20 years, has been called on before to lend his expertise to churches in crisis. “I tell them to deal with it

truthfully, honestly and redemptively. Churches are not unlike much of the general population.

We’re not a bunch of perfect folks. It’s good to own up to the fact that you’re a congregation and your leaders are imperfect. There are skeletons in most closets and when you open the door they’re going to fall out and surprise people. We

have to be ready for the time when something is going to blindside us. There needs to be some kind of protocol.

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“If you live in an area where there are snowstorms, then you set up a plan to deal with it. In the same way, you need some

kind of protocol to deal with a crisis. Make the decision to tell the truth. Don’t try to hide things. It’s far worse for bad news to leak out—and it will.”

Jesse worked with one large city church whose leaders discovered the pastor had been having an extramarital affair on and off for several years. “I met with the pastor and leaders of the church and told them he better come clean. Tell everything and speak for yourself.”

But prevailing opinions agreed “don’t air your dirty laundry,” and the church chose to hire a lawyer to speak for them

“So then the secret gets out, of course, and it showed up on the front page of the Birmingham newspaper—and then the national news. The lawyer they hired—who was not a media

lawyer—was quoted referring to ‘that woman.’ It didn’t end well,” Jesse recalls.

Dealing honestly and redemptively with an issue can also serve as a tool to share the gospel, Jesse says. “Just because you deal with something honestly and also determine to be redemptive, doesn’t necessarily mean that the pastor who is having affairs with six women gets to keep his job. But it is an opportunity to demonstrate to the world how to care for people. Every time we shoot our wounded, we tell hurting people that the church is not a safe place to show your wounds. It speaks volumes to the world. Truth is the best policy. It sets you free.”

Terry Wilhite, an Alabama communications and multimedia specialist with a background in television news (<http://www.terrywilhite.com>) agrees. “You have to tell the truth. Most people put their fear in releasing bad news. The real fear, however, resides in the rumor mill. After 20 years of television experience, I’ve seen that the worst bad news is not nearly as bad as what the rumor mill will crank out,” he says.

In his work, Terry has developed a fundamental strategy for churches in crisis:

1. **Take a stand.** Cite the baseline standard, which, for Christians, is Scripture.
2. **Admit what has happened.** You’ve deviated from the standard. Don’t make excuses and don’t speculate about the reasons. You may not tell all you know, but admit what has happened.
3. **Take swift and appropriate corrective action.** Then let people know that you’re taking swift and appropriate corrective action.
4. **Suggest what might be put in place so that it doesn’t happen again.** Name these corrective actions if you know them.

“Media gravitate to and pursue any hint of the evasive ‘no comment’ answers. So be forthcoming. However, the best strategy is to be proactive, releasing the bad news yourself, not letting the press discover an impropriety on their



According to Terry Whilhite the best media strategy is to be proactive and avoid evasive “no comment” answers.

own. This proactive posture allows you to have some control of the moment as well as the ability to frame the issue,” Terry says.

Of course, the best strategy for a crisis or a public relations nightmare is to prevent it from happening in the first place, Terry says. “Transparency and accountability have to be a regular part of doing business—whether that’s the church as a whole or the pastor. It’s true that ‘your sins will find you out.’ It’s not a matter of if, but when they will. Get help with your troubles before they become a public nightmare.”

Develop a crisis plan

In the midst of a church crisis or even a national crisis, such as the 9/11 tragedy, the media will often seek comments from local clergy. “The church needs to use every opportunity it has to clearly and succinctly present the message of peace and hope,” says Terry.

He has a basic checklist for speaking to radio and television media:

1. **Speak with a calm and reassuring voice.** *Television and radio will amplify your tone of voice and facial expressions. A calm voice and gentle mannerisms allow listeners to hear what you say. Viewers will listen to someone who is human, yet has a good grasp of Scripture and relates authentically. However, if viewers sense you are judgmental, they’ll be flipping channels or turning pages and you’ll miss your opportunity.*

2. **Make it relate to what’s happening now.** *Ask: What is important to say right now? Although it’s more difficult to do through a camera lens, it’s important to be compassionate, especially in times of pain.*

3. **Stick to the script. Be brief.** *There is no room for personal opinion or editorials. Offer a message of hope within the confines of a few seconds. Put scriptural nuggets of truth in your own words and speak them from the heart.*

4. **Make it personal.** *Listeners are looking to put what they see on CNN, FOX and other networks in a spiritual perspective. However, be warned, prophecy as it relates to current events can be particularly difficult to communicate in the short windows of time that the media offers. Further, terms like salvation, redemption, justification and propitiation will mean nothing to the majority of your audience. Put Bible terms in everyday language. If necessary, have a descriptive phrase memorized for each term. For instance, sin is disagreeing with God.*

5. **Offer peace and hope.** *Be ready for tough questions, but don’t get bogged down in a theological debate. When you’re asked a controversial question, acknowledge it with a short answer, but get back to the fact that one can have peace and joy through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, even in the midst of a crisis.*

For one Virginia church, a national issue became a personal issue and church leaders found themselves in the limelight, working to make the issue clear and redemptive. **The Falls Church in Falls Church, VA** (<http://www.thefallschurch.org>) was forced into the national press when it voted overwhelmingly to disaffiliate from the Episcopal Church in the United States of America and to affiliate with the Convocation of Anglicans in

North America (CANA), under the Anglican Church of Nigeria.

In 2003 the Episcopal Church, at its General Convention, voted to consecrate Gene Robinson as bishop, and rejected resolutions affirming the authority of Scripture. Robinson's election was controversial because he was openly and actively engaged in homosexual activity. It was a decision that The Falls Church did not embrace, because of the flagrant denial of the authority of Scripture and the rejection of Jesus Christ as the one and only Lord and Savior of the world.

"We stayed in until the next General Convention in 2006 to see how the leadership of The Episcopal Church would respond," says Rick Wright, senior associate rector. However after the 2003 General Convention, the church did join the Anglican Communion Network, a coalition of Episcopal dioceses and churches that protested the recent decisions of the church. "After the next General Convention of 2006, it became clear that the Episcopal leadership was committed to a revisionist agenda. At that point, we could no longer stay in the Episcopal denomination," Rick says.

The church spent 40 days in prayer about the issue. Then, in December, 2006, more than 90 percent of the congregation voted to align itself

with CANA and the Anglican Church of Nigeria. That move immediately put the church in the limelight.

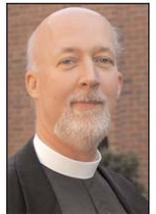
The issue became even more volatile when the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia and the national Episcopal Church announced their intent to sue the church (and ten of its sister churches). Episcopal churches are all a part of an area called a diocese. The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Virginia claimed that they owned the church property and buildings. However, The Falls Church, founded in 1732 as an

Anglican congregation, argues that it was a church before The Episcopal Church or the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia ever existed, that the deeds to its property are in the name of the trustees for the church, and that a specific state statute gives it the legal right to leave the denomination with all of its property, and continues to defend these lawsuits.

Almost immediately, the church found itself in the middle of a national public fight.

"We had one person screen all the media inquiries. If he thought it was a reporter open to an honest story, then we worked with that reporter. We trained a team to deal with the media and then divided the jobs. One person was designated to work with television and I was given radio interviews. That decision was made because he did best on television and radio seemed to work well for me," Rick explains.

With the help of an outside media agency they eventually hired, the group developed talking points—a few basic points that each person wanted to clearly communicate in any interview. The church also became proactive by writing their own press releases and sending them to media groups.



RICK WRIGHT

"We realized this was not just about the good name of The Falls Church, but it was also for educating people about the Anglican Communion," Rick says. "The biggest mistake you can make is to assume the media is the enemy and not have anything to do with them. That becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy."

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With his experiences, Rick suggests a few strategies to successfully relate a crisis story to the media:

1. *Responding quickly to media inquiries and engaging in conversation with a reporter will lead to more accurate and fair coverage.*



The Falls Church spent almost 40 days in prayer before deciding to leave the Episcopal Church in America.

2. *Be aware of a reporter's deadlines. It may be important to respond within an hour or two, as some stories may have a quick deadline the same day, while some may have deadlines later in the week. Waiting too long to respond may result in a one-sided, inaccurate story.*
3. *If there is a reporter or someone familiar with the media in your congregation, enlist that person.*
4. *Appoint a single point person to deal with the press. It should be someone who sees that the press can be an ally, but also someone who clearly understands the issues and the church's position.*
5. *Don't assume someone will automatically slant a story—for good or bad. One of the most balanced articles we got was in *The Gay Blade*, a Washington DC homosexual newspaper.*
6. *Be wise as serpents and gentle as doves. Pray without ceasing.*

Branding your church, touching the lost world

Every church has a brand, whether they've planned it or not. Effective branding of your church requires that you present your church—its purpose and mission—to the congregation and the community accurately and with excellence.

A church that presents itself inaccurately on a web site and in print is being dishonest, says Todd

Milby from Summit Church. "Some places have really cool brands. You see a web site and a mailer with cool people and then you go to the church and it looks like a circus. You feel like you've been taken for a ride. Your brand has to express your environment," he says.

In addition to developing a solid brand for your church, it's important to maintain the integrity of the brand. That will require someone willing to oversee everything that is printed, distributed and designed in and for the church.

Protecting your brand also requires a crisis communication plan. The reputation a church has built—no matter how positive—can be destroyed with one poorly handled crisis. With a strategy in place, even the worst kind of crisis can be handled well, says Jesse Palmer.

"I've seen churches handle it well," he says. "It was a large church in an Alabama county seat town. The pastor was accused of harassing women with bad language and threatening phone calls. One of the women went to the police with it and they arrested him. The church leaders showed a lot of maturity, though. They set up a nine-month process of restoration, which included a month-long stay at a Christian clinic for the pastor. He wasn't to see anyone from the church during that time and he didn't. It was a well thought-out process that could have eased him back into pastoring the church, but some of the women couldn't get past what he had done. It didn't end well for the pastor, but the church had a lot of integrity about the process."

Creating an excellent brand, maintaining the integrity of the brand and handling crises well will help a church present itself well to a lost world. In the end, that's the best reason for branding your church: the eternal consequences.

APPENDIX

SWOT

The SWOT analysis is one of the most commonly used marketing strategies. It helps organizations determine Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The following questions have been adapted to help your church identify its strengths and weaknesses and begin to address its opportunities and threats.

Strengths

- 1. What do we do consistently well?*
- 2. What advantages do we have?*
- 3. What are our best resources?*
- 4. What do church members see as our strengths?*
- 5. What makes us stand out from other churches?*

Weaknesses

- 1. What could we do better?*
- 2. What complaints and criticisms do we hear?*
- 3. What are we doing poorly?*
- 4. What are some of the unmet needs in our congregation? In our community?*

Opportunities

- 1. What opportunities do we know about, but don't take advantage of?*
- 2. Are there emerging trends that fit with what we have to offer?*
- 3. Is there a need that churches are not offering in this community?*

Threats

- 1. Are any of our weaknesses likely to make us vulnerable?*
- 2. Is there anything blocking our progress?*
- 3. Is there significant change coming in our membership, our neighborhood, our region?*
- 4. Are there any economic challenges that could be detrimental?*

How to Determine Your Target Audience

Mary Tomlinson, owner of On-Purpose Partners, provides a few questions that she uses to help businesses determine a target audience. The questions have been adapted for churches.

- What is the age range of the people who want this service?
- Which gender would be more interested in our church?
- What is the income level of my potential church member?
- What level of education do they have?
- What is their marital or family status?
- Is this church something they need or is it a luxury item?
- What will draw them to this church? (Easy availability? Personalized attention? Special features?)
- Which, if any, features are most appealing?
- What do they like or dislike about the church in general?
- Where do they gather their decision-making information? (The Internet? Newspapers? Magazines? Books? Television?)

How to get your church in the newspaper

Often, people complain about how the media portrays the church, however, there are ways to get positive stories in your local newspaper.

1. *Know what “news” is and what it isn’t. The example familiar to all journalists is: “Dog bites man” isn’t news. However, “Man bites dog” is news. In other words, the ordinary and expected isn’t news. The unexpected and extraordinary is what reporters need.*
2. *Most small and mid-size newspapers have a community calendar. Find out how to submit calendar items to announce revivals and other community events at your church.*
3. *Senior pastors and staff members of large churches are often called on for comments about national stories, especially those related to religion. If you choose to respond, be available to reporters. Whenever possible, Return calls immediately.*
4. *If you want to publicize your event or church ministry, look at it from a unique angle. Feeding the hungry in itself may not be news. However, if one person has made Thanksgiving dinner for 100 people for the past 20 years, then it is a story. Be sure to suggest the story at least a week (or two) before an event. An event that happened last week is ancient history to a reporter.*
5. *Newspapers often write feature stories about people. Find out who covers religion stories at your local paper and let that reporter know when you have a story idea. For instance, someone who has taught Sunday school for 20 years probably isn’t going to be considered for a story. However, a 90 year old who is still teaching preschoolers—some the grandchildren of her students—is a story.*
6. *Churches doing what churches are supposed to do isn’t going to be a story. However, if your church is involved in a unique ministry, consider letting a reporter know about it. For instance, if your church has a tutoring ministry with a public school and that school credits volunteers from your church with turning state test scores around, that’s a story. Let your newspaper know about it.*
7. *A few more things to remember: Know the name of the reporter you need to talk with about religion stories. If you receive a call from a reporter, return it promptly. If there is an error in a story, let the reporter know immediately. If the story is well done, send an e-mail or make a call to express your thanks.*



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Leadership Network’s mission is to identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.

** Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NIV translation.*