



Purpose, Personas and Process

Taking the Mystery Out of Church Marketing



By Justin Wise,
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Does your church give people a reason to choose it over all the other places they can spend their time?

About the Author

Justin Wise and his team consult with businesses, organizations, individuals, churches and other nonprofits to help them bring their messages to their intended audiences and achieve measurable results from their marketing programs. Vanco has invited him to contribute this white paper to further assist churches with their efforts to reach out and make a difference in today's world.

Introduction

Today, churches don't always compete with other churches for members. Rather, they're fighting for a share of busy people's time and attention — adults and children alike. Technology tethers people to work, kids' schedules are crammed with activities and some prefer Sunday brunch to Sunday services. Church just isn't the commitment it used to be.

Does your church give people a reason to choose it over all the other places they can spend their time? Are you clear about your mission? Do you know who your members are and what they want? Can you attract and keep them?

To answer those questions, your church must:

- **Define your purpose** – the unique reason your church exists.
- **Understand your ideal personas** – the people who make up your congregation and the community.
- **Create a marketing process** – the tactical means by which you reach members and potential members with your messages.

The first two steps are the most important. **Purpose** and **personas** make up the strategic foundation for your marketing and communications. The last one, your marketing **process**, is a byproduct of the first two. The more thought you put into determining your purpose as a church and the personas of your members, the more apparent the process of drawing them in will be.

Let's get started!

Clarifying your purpose isn't a luxury; it's a necessity if you want everyone to understand what you're all about.

Purpose

As a church, you may assume your **purpose** is obvious: to worship God, teach biblical doctrine, provide a place of fellowship and reach out to others. But what does your church offer specifically to the members of your community or denomination?

While churches have common elements, they also have unique callings. Many churches in this country are struggling and frustrated, and not because they don't have caring pastors or committed members. The problem is that nothing distinguishes them from the church down the street. Churches can't just fling open their doors and expect people to show up. They need to have a purpose that differentiates them from others.

In marketing terms, it's called your unique value proposition. It answers some critical questions: Who are we? What do we bring as a church? How do we make an impact on our community?

Focus on your particular mission

The number one challenge churches face when figuring out their purpose is how to make it specific to them. Many end with a mission statement that is too generic and too broad. You don't want it to fit just any church; you want it to define only yours. Clarifying your purpose isn't a luxury; it's a necessity if you want everyone to understand what you're all about.

Consider the following mission statement:

Our mission is to be an active Christian community of followers of Jesus Christ and his teachings.

That sounds reasonable, right? But it also could be the mission statement of virtually any Christian church. Few people would argue that it's inaccurate, but would many be drawn to this church because of it?

Now consider this one:

We exist to change the lives of people in [town of church] because everyone else has given up.

This church has defined a specific purpose, and everyone who encounters it will understand exactly what it's focused on — and why. It also looks outward, not in, which is a key tenet of thriving churches.

The specific process for developing a mission statement isn't as critical as who's involved in it.

Make sure key leaders are involved

In the decade that Think Digital has been consulting with churches, we've developed a process to create a mission statement that typically involves a meeting with five to 10 leaders who tell us their church's story. We help them craft what we call a "to-by-through" statement, structured as: **We exist to** [do what?] **by/through** [what action?]. We ask questions and remove obstacles so church leaders can come to their own conclusions about what their church's purpose is.

However, the specific process for developing a mission statement isn't as critical as who's involved in it. Senior leadership — both the organizational head of the church and the spiritual head, too — must be willing to participate right from the start. If they aren't, it never works. If other, more junior members of the team go through this process and then report back to senior leaders, they often don't buy into the conclusion, and the effort falls apart.

Consider using an outside facilitator

Churches can often benefit by using a facilitator who's not a member to help develop a mission statement. We've found that it's usually more difficult to reach a conclusion if a staff or church member, no matter how good his or her skills might be, is facilitating meetings.





Spend time to figure out who your members are and what they need from your church.

Personas

The second step is to develop **personas** — profiles of your members and their attributes, what concerns them most and what attracts them to your church.

Unlike businesses, which thrive when they figure out who their customers are and how to reach them, churches are often uncomfortable with the idea of determining their ideal personas. The concept sounds secular, rather than spiritual, and exclusionary, as if a church will end up with a homogenous member base that may not welcome others.

That's not the intention. Rather, it's an acknowledgement that churches are made up of the people who are in their front yards. The reality is, most people don't want to drive more than 15 minutes to church, according to research in [The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting](#). Focusing on the immediate neighborhood doesn't mean a church ignores others. But those neighbors are the core group of people a church will draw from.

To be successful at identifying personas, the process must be intentional. Spend time to figure out who your members are and what they need from your church; either interview them directly or work with people who know them well.

Questions to ask may include:

- **How old are they?**
- **What do they do for a living?**
- **Are they well-off, comfortable or struggling financially?**
- **What's their education level?**
- **Do they have families? If so, how old are their children?**
- **Are they in the neighborhood for the long haul, or are they transient?**
- **What do they do outside church?**
- **How do they feel about organized religion?**
- **What's their general outlook on life?**
- **What does the future hold for them?**

By answering those questions, groups with like attributes will emerge. After you flesh out a handful of personas that are most common in your church, you can use that information to minister to members more effectively and make better decisions concerning programs and activities. Understanding them also will help you communicate with them successfully. If you're trying to reach everyone, you'll end up reaching no one.



The kind of communication that will work best for your church depends on your goals, your personas and your resources.

Process

And that leads us to your marketing **process** — the tactical means by which you reach members and potential members with your messages.

Your church no doubt already is communicating through a variety of tactics: bulletins, emails, website, social media and so on. But if you're ready to take your marketing communications to the next level, we have some suggestions for you.

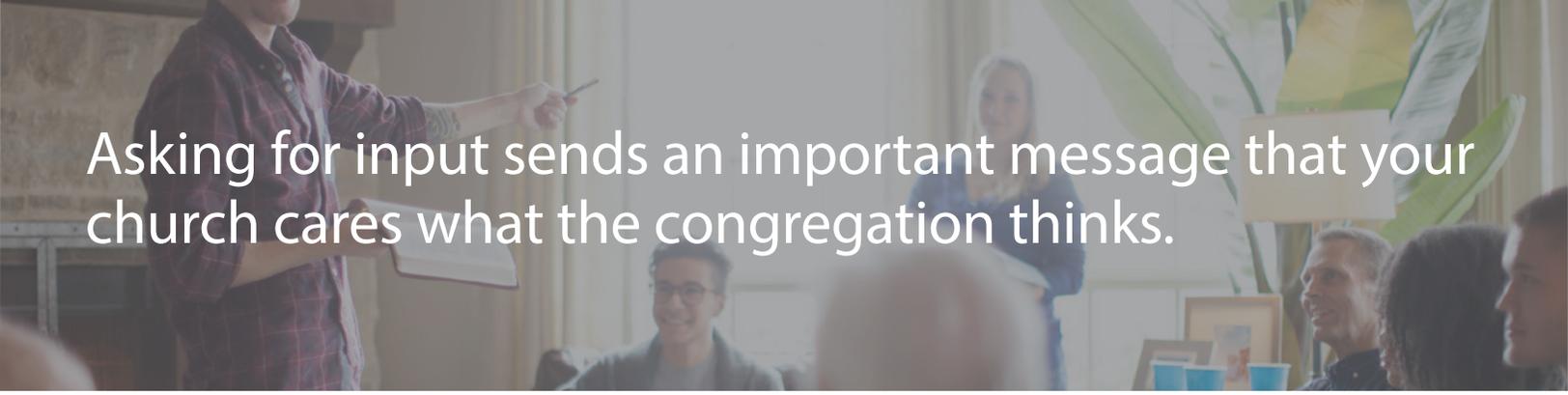
Analyze

The kind of communication that will work best for your church depends on your goals, your personas and your resources. If you're wondering whether a reboot is in order, begin with an audit of current efforts. Once you've identified what you're doing well and where gaps exist, you can integrate new tactics into your outreach.

Plan

If you don't have a written marketing plan, now's the time to create one. In addition to organizing work, a concrete plan ensures that everyone who has a stake in communications is on the same page. To structure the plan, establish:

- **Goals** – What you want to accomplish with your marketing efforts. Goals should align with and contribute to achieving your purpose.
- **Objectives** – How you're going to measure the results of your activities. Objectives can include increases in membership or program participation, for example.
- **Audiences** – Who you're going to communicate with. Audiences should align with the personas you've created.
- **Messages** – The key points you want to make with your audiences; what you want them to remember, learn, do, etc.
- **Tactics** – The specific way in which you're going to reach people — an email campaign, newsletter article, newspaper ad, outdoor signage, etc.
- **Budget** – The finances designated to fund all of your marketing efforts.
- **Timeline** – The beginning, middle and end of your proposed marketing efforts. Timelines should consider goals, objectives and tactics.



Asking for input sends an important message that your church cares what the congregation thinks.

Consider new ways of doing things

Time marches on, and so does the way we communicate.

- **Could you use some interactive content — forums, blogs, podcasts and surveys — on your website?** Such content can encourage people to spend more time on your site and explore it more fully.
- **Is it time to record and post sermons or stream services live on your website?** Creating video sermons has become common and livestreaming is on the rise, especially among large churches.
- **Would you benefit by segmenting your email communications by persona?** For medium-sized to large churches with varied demographics, more sophisticated email marketing approaches such as segmentation — sending different content to different groups of people — can personalize that outreach and improve results.
- **Should you try new forms of social media?** Facebook and Twitter are relatively old, as social media goes, especially if you're interested in a younger audience. To reach them, you need to participate on Instagram and Snapchat — and stay on top of social media changes in the future.
- **Are you texting to reach members?** Ask your members to opt in to receive texts and use them to deliver bite-size information that is of immediate relevance to them, such as weather-related cancellations or special event reminders.

Make communication a two-way street

If you're on social media, don't just post. Respond to comments and questions and repost and retweet what others have to say. Get information, opinions and feedback from members via churchwide polls and surveys. Engaging and asking for input sends an important message that your church is working to meet the needs of your community and cares what the congregation thinks.

Measure

Setting measurable objectives for your marketing efforts during the planning phase is one step. But technology can help you see whether individual emails and other communication tools are doing the job for you. For example, online providers such as MailChimp and Constant Contact can tell you whether people are opening your emails and clicking on links in them. As the saying goes, you can't improve what you can't measure. Technology just makes it easy.

Developing your church's purpose, personas and marketing process takes time, but you'll find that it's worth it.

In closing . . .

Church marketing doesn't have to be a mystery. Developing your church's purpose, personas and marketing process takes time and effort, but you'll find that it's worth many times more than what you put into it. Your church will have a new focus, and so will your communications, which will be far more effective with a solid plan and measured results. Churches need all the tools available to them to capture people's drifting attention and bring them back into the fold. Use those we've discussed here and discover the difference they make.



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Justin Wise helps transform organizations through results-driven digital marketing.

At [Think Digital](#), Wise and his team help clients through done-for-you digital marketing. He speaks on digital marketing strategy at national conferences such as the NRB Research Symposium & Expo, CLA Internet & Ministry Technology Summit, and the Nonprofit Leadership Academy. Wise lives in Des Moines, Iowa (by choice), with his wife and three children.



About Vanco Payment Solutions

Vanco Payment Solutions helps churches effectively manage and grow financial stewardship. Working with more than 20,000 churches, we're the largest provider of electronic giving and payment solutions designed especially for faith-based organizations. For nearly 20 years, we've listened to our loyal, long-time family of customers, understood their giving needs and supported them through every step of building a complete electronic giving program. We can help your church select the right combination of services and grow e-Giving across your congregation.

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