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**Christian Marketing**

**By Phillip A. Ross**

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"Remember, everything we do gets hijacked by marketing." That was the warning Sun Microsystems Inc. Chief Researcher John Gage had for developers working on emerging grid computing standards at the Global Grid Forum in Seattle in June, 2003. His comment reflects a general truth about what might be called marketing creep, the tendency toward the domination of marketing as the ultimate concern of every organization, including the church.

Church Growth, or the application of business marketing principles to the church, has been a thriving business for at least 25 years. I have studied and pondered the ways, means, issues and applications for most of that time. But something has troubled me about the effort to market Christ's church. A dissonance in the pit of my stomach caught my attention early on, but identifying the source and nature of the my concern has proven to be difficult.

After all, I want the Lord's people to reach out to lost sinners with the love of Christ. I don't want churches to keep their proverbial lights under a bushel basket. We need to share our faith for the greater expansion of Christ's church and the glory of God. These are all good things. The aim and purpose of church marketing or church growth appears to be a good thing. But is it?

I'm sure you can hear my hesitation about this noble effort to increase God's Kingdom and Christ's church. But please know from the outset that my hesitation is not related to the expansion of Christ's church in the modern world. Lord knows, we need to capitalize on everything that will move the Kingdom forward. This article is not against evangelism or church growth.

Having worked in the area of secular marketing for a number of years now, an insight and perspective about the problem with modern the Church Growth Movement has jelled in my brain. The issue may be hard to see—as it has been for me. Please bear with me.

## Christian Marketing

I attended my first Church Growth workshop in 1982. There we learned how churches have failed to extend the most rudimentary business oriented hospitality to visitors. Visitors were described as potential customers for the services that churches should provide to their members. We learned about name tags and signage, parking and accessibility, friendliness and follow-up. In short, we learned to treat visitors and members like customers, and to better provide for their needs.

Honestly, at that time the people from the churches in attendance at that seminar were astonished by the lack of concern and attention to the needs of people in worship, which is often the main attraction or venue for generating additional members. How could the churches be so out of touch with the people they professed to love and serve? We all went home with new resolve to become more visitor and customer centered in our worship and programs.

The initial insight about name tags and signage, parking and accessibility, friendliness and follow-up was well received, as it should be. There's nothing inherently wrong with these things.

As the Movement continued to develop momentum it began to apply its concern for church members and visitors more and more widely, even to the content and choreography of the worship service itself. As marketing principles became more widely used in worship planning and execution, I became increasingly disillusioned. But I could not put my finger on the nature of my concern.

The small churches that I served as pastor increasingly saw Church Growth principles as potentially answering many of their small church concerns. Noses and nickels became increasingly important to the governing boards, particular as they saw so many of their own young people abandon them and turn to modern churches that employed customer-centered marketing principles to every aspect of church life. Everything in such churches was done from the perspective of customer friendliness and ease of use. After all, these principles have clearly established themselves as engines that can—and have—grown phenomenal businesses and churches. Who can argue with success?

Nonetheless, some dissonance remained for me. I was not willing to turn the church over to the marketing department—denominational, local or parachurch. Something smelled wrong about it, but what was it?

Then it came to me in a flash.

Church members (or visitors) are not customers to the church, any more than family members (or children) are customers to their respective families. The church is not a business, it's a family. Now, that does not mean that business and marketing principles cannot be successfully and effectively applied to churches. They can! But how they are applied makes all the difference in the world. There is nothing wrong with name tags and signage, parking and accessibility, friendliness and follow-up in and of themselves. Nor is there anything wrong with new church music.

However, the church is a service organization, not a sales organization. The purpose of the church is not to serve its members, but to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Members are not to be the objects of service, but the vehicles of service. The difference involves a shift in philosophical or theological

perspective.

If the old adage that the "customer is always right" is true, then church members cannot be customers, nor can church visitors be construed as customers. Rather, God is the only customer of the church. God is the only Person who is always right. And God is the One to receive the service, whether it's a worship service, a prayer service or service to the community. It is done for the Lord, not primarily or directly for His people. We are to satisfy God, not ourselves or our church visitors.

This insight about church practice comes from the study of the Bible and its use and interpretation through the centuries. The traditional understanding of church practice was that the church is to be God-centered, not people-centered. God is the object of our service, not ourselves or each other—nor even the wider community.

With that fundamental insight the application of marketing or business principles can indeed be applied to the activities and practices of churches. But such application must always take a back seat to the prior concerns of God's Word, historically understood and practiced.

In fact, the concern for church history is essentially a business marketing principle itself. Businesses

keep records, and reports are made from those records. Any business worth its salt will know how it has performed in the past, so that it can endeavor to make improvements. And no business will simply abandon its past practices, but will only make well-planned, small, incremental adjustments to its activity or practice. History is a key element for business success, and is an essential element of Christianity.

The essential insight is that the worship and life of the church are not to be centered around the needs of its members, visitors, or the wider community, but around service to God as defined in the Bible. The people who attend worship are not themselves to be served. Rather, we worship as a service to God, just as we pray as a service to God, and reach out to a lost world in the service of God.

However, the bulk of the Church Growth Movement and its materials do not reflect this perspective. Rather, the Church Growth Movement has succumbed to marketing creep. Secular Marketing principles and practices now dominate the Church Growth Movement, and have eclipsed the biblical call to faithfulness. Faithfulness, not broad community appeal, is the highest priority of Christians and their churches.

Christian Marketing services are available.

### **Christian Business Opportunities Bring Relief to Your Daily Routine**

**By James McHugh**

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Christian business opportunities can literally transform your life. You'll be able to balance your personal and professional responsibilities, increase your sense of financial security, and integrate your Christian beliefs into your workday.

With a Christian Home Business, you can make your own meals instead of purchasing expensive restaurant food. You'll save money on gas, parking, and other commuting expenses. You won't need to purchase an expensive wardrobe of fancy clothes. You can take your child to the park, pick up your elderly mother's prescriptions from the local pharmacy, or meet your spouse for lunch without worrying about the security of your job. You create a schedule that will allow you to work at home and have the lifestyle you've only dreamed of.

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Anyone who is looking for a career change. If you're tired of corporate politics and interested in a more fulfilling career opportunity, you'll be pleased to learn that there are many Christian home business opportunities that were created by someone who shares your commitment to Christian values. If you've been the victim of downsizing or an unstable job market, self-employment can provide the security you've been searching for.

If you're new to the business world, you can also benefit from a Christian work at home business. There's no need for previous sales, marketing, or business experience with many of them. You'll be provided with valuable training and an extensive support system to help you achieve your goals from many of the Christian business opportunities. You will learn marketing techniques that will show you how to reach thousands of potential customers who are also looking for Christian businesses from the comfort of their own homes.

Because of its amazing flexibility, seniors and other people interested in obtaining a source of supplemental income can achieve their goals with a powerful Christian business opportunity. You can work full-time or part-time, depending upon how much money you wish to earn. If you enjoy activities such as traveling or volunteer work, running your own Christian business can help you find time to pursue your passions. So begin your exciting research journey right away! You can find many Christian work at home opportunities by searching Google.com or any other search engine you prefer.

James McHugh is a noted home business author. He is a professional representative for Advantage Conferences, a Christian home business that offers high value educational products. You can learn more at



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