**How to Market Your Small Church: A 9-Part System for Every Pastor**

**By Paul Maxwell**

Let’s get real about marketing your small church—leveraging your “marketing team” is extremely straight forward.

Your marketing team’s name is “Steve.”

And your name is Steve.

Steve is you.

You are your marketing team.

If you can find room for it in your budget, you might be able to subscribe to one or two services that enable you to take aim at marketing your church really well.

Here’s the good news:

You can still implement a highly effective marketing strategy that gets you new visitors, higher quality engagement, and better brand professionalism.

You can accomplish 90% of what big-budget churches can accomplish with a shoestring church budget. And, quite honestly, a large percentage of big church budgets are wasted on vanity deliverables that see a very low return on investment (ROI).

The difficult part for you, as a small church, is discerning what’s worth your efforts, what’s worth your money, and how to leverage your resources best to help your church grow, mature, and thrive.

In this article, we’re going to dive into nine tips to market your church like a pro.

1. Learn to like marketing

This is the biggest obstacle for most pastors.

It’s important to distinguish between two kinds of “small” churches and small church pastors.

Old churches with older pastors

Church plants that are small because they are young

The first kind of small church is simply seeking to stay relevant enough to its geographically specific demographic not to be outperformed by a cooler church down the road.

The second kind of small church is setting high goals for growth, needs to build a building in the near future, and has its aim set on becoming a high quality, high-growth church.

If you are the pastor of the first kind of church, then you need to learn to stop being embarrassed by marketing. A lot of older pastors don’t like marketing, because they are worried they will be seen as the church version of a used car salesman. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It’s very possible to do marketing the wrong way: by adopting all of the shallow optics of marketing and none of the substance.

But good marketing is simply about knowing your audience, spending your time and resources in the right place, and crafting an excellent church communication plan with measurable and realistic goals for engagement and growth.

If you are the pastor of the second kind of church—a younger church planter—then you likely already realize the power and necessity of becoming a marketer in your early phase of church planting.

Your first goal should be gaining market share in your community, evangelism, reaching out, meeting needs, connecting, networking, and looking professional enough that people are intrigued by your church and desire to visit.

What’s the takeaway?

Small churches—old and new alike—need to start liking marketing if they are going to either (1) survive or (2) thrive.

Marketing is the connection point between a church’s goals for relevance and growth and those goals becoming realities.

Don’t be shy about marketing.

Throw yourself into it.

Learn the trade.

Learn the lingo.

There’s a reason marketing is a growing industry—it works.

And if small churches had to choose one business skill to achieve their relevant goals for growth and sustainability, they should choose marketing.

People respect good marketing.

People are attracted to good marketing.

People want and look for good marketing.

Even from small churches.

2. Become a “full-stack” marketer

There is a way of talking in the software development world that refers to “back end,” “front end,” and “full stack” developers. Back end developers write the kind of code you see in The Matrix. Front end developers design all the pretty bells and whistles that people actually see. “Full stack” developers are those who can do a little bit of both—enough to do it all, even if not as deeply or well as everyone else.

In marketing, we can speak the same way.

A “full-stack” marketer is someone who can build a marketing strategy, write copy that converts web visitors into physical first-time visitors, and do enough design work to pass as semi-professional when someone sees your websites, signs, and literature.

Whether you’re a solo team, or you have the budget to outsource tasks here and there, knowing how to do everything a little bit is better than diving deep into one area at the neglect of others.

Know enough to know what you don’t know so that you can strategically partner with professionals to make it look like your church has an entire communications team.

3. Create a brand guide

A brand guide should include the following elements:

Your mission statement (under 140 characters).

Your core values

Your color palette (no more than 3 colors)

Your logo (and how it should appear in multiple contexts).

Your Header 1, Header 2, and Body font.

Key words that express the heart of your church culture.

It’s possible to go into depth more deeply with a brand guide, but it’s ideal to set up your one-page brand guide to direct all of your marketing efforts first. Then, if necessary, you can add, specify, extrapolate, nuance, and change as needed.

The fundamental purpose of creating a brand guide is that you want to create a consistent, unified brand experience for your church.

Everything your print or post should look like it fits together.

Everything you say should make sense based on your values.

Everything program you create do should make sense based on your goals.

Digital and print should align.

Sermon notes and on-screen graphics should align.

Sermon messaging and Sunday School messaging should align.

Potluck, accounting, discipleship, and evangelism should all dovetail into one another in color, font, messaging, values, and key words.

In your brand guide, which should be exportable as a single PDF document, you want to store and package all of the original files of your digital assets.

If you have any Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, PNG, or SVG files, those should all be stored, zipped, and saved as the same file in multiple cloud locations, both for security and for reference when training new staff or on-boarding a communications team volunteer.

4. Reach out to your community

This is the face-to-face element of marketing.

Everybody wants to know the pastor.

As a pastor, your invitation to have somebody visit your church is worth more than anyone else’s invitation.

You are a more powerful force for creating new visitors than anyone else.

Your personal touch will add a lot to a prospective visitor.

You should be out and about in your local town or city, meeting and inviting every single person you meet.

People understand that you can’t be best friends with them.

But the personal touch from the person in charge means something.

Your time is valuable. People know this. It costs you nothing to spend 15 minutes listening to someone’s story so that you have the relational credibility to invite them to church.

Of course, it’s important to have a funnel in place so that when they visit your church, there is a clear and easy on-ramp to becoming involved in your community as a member.

Nevertheless, your personal efforts at invitation and evangelism, networking with business owners, and making yourself a known, generous quantity in your local community, will be critical component of your church’s marketing success.

5. Run digital ads

Churches often overlook digital ads, because they think they don’t work.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The most effective audience for a church’s digital ads are \*drumroll\* … people who just moved to your area.

They are, as marketers say, “bottom of funnel.” This means they are alone, looking for community, and ripe to become plugged in with your community. They are high-value, high-conversion audience that will have a high yield for digital ads.

What’s great about digital ads is that you can optimize them for people who are moving.

You can’t do that with a billboard ad.

You can’t do that with a newspaper ad.

He who is strong with digital ads will have great fortune in church growth.

That’s either from the book of Proverbs or a fortune cookie I imagined. I forget.

6. Don’t try to play a big church game with a small church budget

Don’t spend money on equipment that will only become a liability.

Invest in a few assets that you can leverage to achieve stripped down excellence.

If you have a church in your town that’s the Rolling Stones of churches, you can still achieve significant growth.

Common costs (with very low ROI) that eat up a small church budget are:

Super fancy website that requires lots of maintenance

Over-the-top audio and video production equipment (you can get a great setup for less than $500)

Advanced marketing subscriptions and softwares that don’t add much to the overall quality of your production

Instead, you should focus on:

Tithe.ly ChMS

One digital asset subscription (like Envato Elements)

One Adobe CC Subscription

A shoestring video/audio setup

To build your communications team, go to local universities who have Christian clubs (like Cru, RUF, or IVP) and ask if any of their communications students are looking for internships.

If you have the budget, you might even be able to get a high quality college junior/senior looking to get early church communications production experience.

These student interns can be a great help to you, and can also help you learn the ropes of communications to help you become a full-stack marketer for your small church.

7. Remember that some people prefer small churches

Don’t feel insecure about the size of your church.

Not every church has to “feel” like a megachurch.

Sometimes, feeling small is what people are there for.

Double down on your strengths.

Make the experience about community.

Open up your sermon for a Q&A period at the end.

Encourage community participation, mid-sermon “Amens,” and other small qualities that enrich, rather than diminish, the smallness of your church.

8. Partner with your aging population (don’t disdain them)

One major mistake small churches make is that, out of insecurity, they double down on youth acquisition and neglect the things that its aging population loves.

This is a mission critical error.

Older people have money.

Do not ostracize your donor base.

Do everything you can to nurture relationships with them, help them continue to feel at home at your church, and help them understand the importance of reaching youth and young families to the mission of church growth.

9. Use scalable church technology

Some church technology works well for small churches, but becomes exponentially more expensive as the church grows.

Make sure that whatever church technology you use for church giving, church management system, event registration, and your church website remain affordable even at scale.

A great option for churches of all sizes that doesn’t become exponentially more expensive is the Tithe.ly ChMS. This ChMS helps you manage events, members, volunteers, text marketing, email marketing, and even worship planning.

Over to you

Remember—as a small church pastor, you have a lot on your back.

Don’t burden yourself with becoming the world’s best marketer.

At the same time, recognize that as a small church pastor, marketing ultimately falls on your plate—either to execute directly or to delegate partially.

Find a way to market your small church well so that you can attract new visitors, grow new members, and mature your church’s discipleship and resources together.

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This article may not be written by an Apostolic author, but it contains many excellent principles and concepts that can be adapted to most churches. As the old saying goes, “Eat the meat. Throw away the bones.”