

## Why New Churches Should Have Broad Appeal

Having a broad appeal may be the best strategy for growing a new church.

The Christian world has had a love-hate relationship with marketing. While certain publication and parachurch areas of Christendom have no qualms about marketing, the local church has traditionally been hesitant to employ it. However, there is evidence that marketing has become increasingly accepted by local churches (McDaniel 1986), (McDaniel 1986); (Barna 1988). Though some churches may maintain the historical aversion to marketing, they probably in some fashion or another engage in marketing. Thus, regardless of the acceptance of the terminology and/or tenets, the idea of marketing must be examined by all who would be involved in church planning.

In secular marketing strategy, a key distinction is between niche marketing and general marketing. Niche marketing means differentiating one organization (or church) from another by convenience and/or improved service. In this strategy, each church seeks to distinguish its unique features and tries to establish different perceptions of itself in the public eye. Niche marketing might promote more convenient service times, a large music ministry, more strict doctrine, added programs, children's services, and/or youth ministries. Philosophy of ministry statements, sometimes called church personality statements, are often drawn up by churches to promote this type of niche marketing (Hunter 1997), (Westing 1993), whether the congregation realizes it or not.

General marketing on the other hand appeals to the broadest sector possible. General marketing stresses a fairly broad repertoire of services. And, it downplays distinctives and accentuates broadly appealing factors.

In the marketing world the commonly accepted strategy is that new organizations should not compete directly with existing organizations. Thus, new organizations are best served by utilizing niche marketing, especially when there are a number of similar organizations nearby. Therefore, new organizations should define who they are in very precise terms, seeking to identify with a niche or segment of the community.

To see if this theory holds true for congregations, marketing researchers Lowell Busenitz, Stephen McDaniel and Chung-Ming Lau studied new churches less than six years old in the Southern Baptist denomination (Busenitz, McDaniel et al. 1991). To their surprise, the opposite appears to be true. Newer churches seem to achieve greater numerical growth by ignoring niche marketing, and appealing to a broader segment of the community (i.e. a general marketing strategy).

**REALITY IN ACTION:** What this means is that a new church should not try to target a limited niche of the community, but rather embrace a generalist approach. Instead of distinguishing the church as a Boomer church or Gen.-X congregation, it might be better to promote the church as a place where everyone can feel at home.

In addition, offering multiple services as early in the development of the new church as feasible may offer the flexibility and stylistic ranges that can appeal to a bigger segment of the unchurched people in an area.

And if yours is a young church, don't be overly specific in your philosophy of ministry statement. A philosophy of ministry statement answers the question, "What is the unique

personality of your church?” Allow the specifics of a philosophy of ministry statement to mature and naturally develop over time.

Though the accepted strategy has been for secular organizations to start out concentrating on a specific niche and then moving toward a generalist strategy, the opposite appears true for churches. New congregations should begin by reaching out to the largest segment of the unchurched population as possible and then through growth, maturity and the Holy Spirit’s guidance naturally develop into the specific niche the church will occupy in the religious life of the community.

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“...if yours is a young church, don’t be overly specific in your philosophy of ministry statement ... (research shows) this may be a premature exercise for a new church.”

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