

SHAREGRACE

A PHILOSOPHY TO GUIDE A CHURCH'S ONLINE COMMUNICATION

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

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WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON, WISCONSIN

AUGUST 2016

Abstract

Marketers understand that methods available for moving people to take action are limited by the communication vehicle. The speaker has one set of communication tools. The writer another. The videographer yet another. That principle also applies to online communication.

Research has discovered that for people to be moved to action by online communication traditional selling techniques (that is, interrupting a potential customer in order to seek to convince her that she needs a particular product) do not work with online marketing in our current culture. Instead marketers must develop ways to earn the trust of potential customers so transactions are based on positive relationships, as well as superior product.

This research has important implications for churches that are seeking to share the gospel in their real and virtual worlds. As the Church learned to use door-to-door canvassing, printed flyers, as well as newspaper and television advertisements to share the gospel in the 20th Century, it must learn to use today's new media to share the gospel in our 21st Century age of the internet.

The message of God's grace freely and fully provided to every human being will always remain the same. But the vehicles for broadcasting that message have transformed the way humans communicate. Online media has enhanced the reach of those messages, as well as their impact.

Online communication has the potential to touch more people with the gospel than ever before in the history of the world. But the way Christians communicate there is limited, restricted by factors that are governed by that media. This thesis explores a philosophy of online communication that empowers churches to work within those boundaries to proclaim the gospel's good news to those who are living without it. In addition this thesis suggests applications to this principle for churches' online efforts to reach the world with the gospel.

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Jesus, Mark 16:15).

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Introduction

Social media has conquered the globe.

- By 2017 it is expected that 68.6% of the worldwide online population will access social networks, up from 64 percent in 2014.¹
- In 2015 there were 2.04 billion social network users worldwide. In 2010 there were 0.97 billion users. The projected social media users in 2019 are 2.72 billion.²
- 73% of Americans go online daily.³
- As of January 2015, 52% of online adults used two or more social media sites. This was a significant increase from 2013, when it stood at 42% of internet users.⁴
- As of January 2015, more than half of all online adults 65 and older (56%) use Facebook. This represents 31% of all seniors.⁵

Social media has had an influential role changing political and social shifts in a variety of countries. The world has become keenly aware of how radical Islamic groups have made significant recruiting advances via social media.^{6 7} During June and July 2016 alone the planet was rocked by ISIS inspired attacks in Germany, France, and the United States, not to mention numerous attacks in the Middle East.

¹ Statista, *Social Network Penetration Worldwide from 2014 to 2019* (undated)
<http://www.statista.com/statistics/260811/social-network-penetration-worldwide/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

² Statista, *Number of Worldwide Social Network Users* (undated),
<http://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/> (accessed May 12, 2016).

³ Pew Research, *One Fifth of Americans Report Going Online Almost Constantly* (December 8, 2015),
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/08/one-fifth-of-americans-report-going-online-almost-constantly/>
(accessed May 12, 2016).

⁴ Pew Research, *Social Media Update* (January 9, 2015),
<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/social-media-update-2014/>, (accessed May 12, 2016).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert Spencer, *300 Muslims in Every State in U.S. Using Social Media to Recruit for Islamic State*, (December 2, 2015), <https://www.jihadwatch.org/2015/12/300-muslims-in-every-state-in-u-s-using-social-media-to-recruit-for-islamic-state> (accessed April 21, 2016).

⁷ CBS NEWS, *Isis Recruits Fighters Through Powerful Online Campaign* (August 29, 2014),
<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-uses-social-media-to-recruit-western-allies/>(accessed April 21, 2016).

Mirae Yang⁸ reports on the impact of social media in 2011 during the *Arab Spring* that began in Tunisia and spread across a number of Arab nations, during the uprising against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's regime, and during the London riots in response to Mark Duggan's fatal shooting by Metropolitan police. She also notes the wariness of some nations, including China, Iran, Thailand, and Tunisia that has prompted them to shut down access to social media during times of turmoil.

Yang documents the use of social media by Americans in the face of perceived injustice. "The *flash mobs* phenomenon—where social media is used to organize groups of teens and young adults to quickly ransack and loot various retail stores—began to occur sporadically throughout the United States over the past few years."⁹ Within the last year, American cities have seen social media fuel large protests over the deaths of Freddie Gray in Baltimore¹⁰, the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri¹¹, and the deaths in Milwaukee of Derek Williams while in police custody¹² and Dontre Hamilton¹³ at Red Arrow Park. Within the past weeks social media has called crowds to protest police shooting in Louisiana and Minnesota and emboldened a sniper to kill five Dallas police officers.

Social media has become a significant marketing tool in presidential campaigns.¹⁴ It allows candidates access to citizens to a degree unknown in the world's history. It allows them to tailor their message to specific demographic segments. Social media has provided immediate

⁸ Northwestern Journal of Technology and Intellectual Property, *The Collision of Social Media and Social Unrest: Why Shutting Down Social Media is the Wrong Response*, Fall 2013, Volume 11, Issue 7, Article 7, 708-711.

⁹ op. cit. Northwestern Journal of Technology and Intellectual Property, p 711.

¹⁰ Matthew Hilburn *Social Media Plays Mixed Role in Baltimore Unrest* (April 30, 2015), <http://www.voanews.com/content/social-media-plays-mixed-role-in-baltimore-unrest/2743297.html> (accessed April 21, 2016).

¹¹ Jim Axelrod, *How Social Media Galvanized the Community in Ferguson*, (August 14, 2014), <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-social-media-galvanized-the-community-in-ferguson/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

¹² Occupy the Hood-MKE (undated), <https://www.facebook.com/OccupytheHoodMKE-268550996522816/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=dontre%20hamilton> (accessed April 21, 2016).

¹⁴ Lauren Brousell, *Why Social Media Could Swing the 2016 Presidential Election* (August 27, 2015), <http://www.cio.com/article/2976083/social-networking/why-social-media-could-swing-the-2016-presidential-election.html> (accessed April 21, 2016).

video coverage of breaking news events.¹⁵ Twitter has secured the rights to live stream the 2016 Republican and Democratic National conventions.

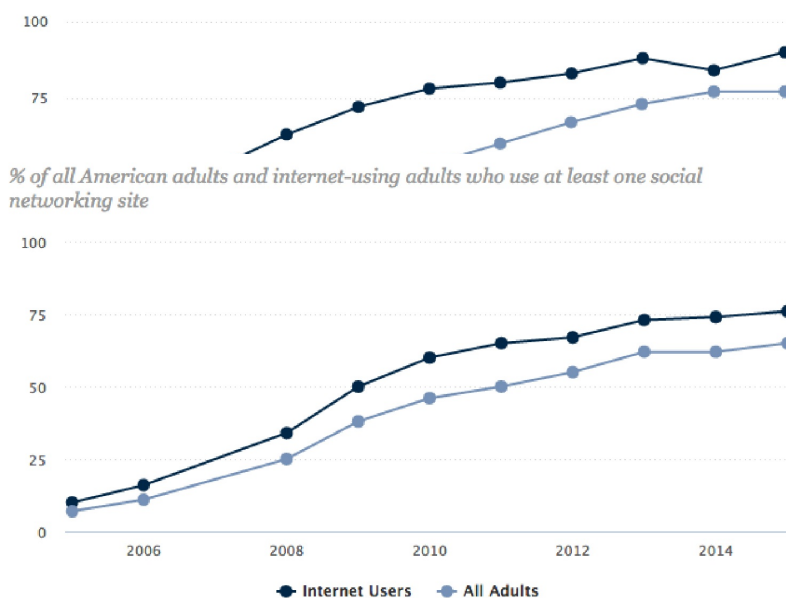
Social media is responsible for helping millions find love, sometimes simply lust.¹⁶ It provides people with medical information, education, travel, and news. Social media is increasingly exploited as an avenue for marketing products.¹⁷

According to *We Are Social* (wearesocial.sg) of the world's population of 7.416 billion, 3.419 billion are internet users and 2.430 billion actively use social media.¹⁸

Americans on social media echo the worldwide numbers.

- 65% of American adults use social media.
- 68% of American women use social media; 62% of men use social media.
- 35% of all American aged 65+ use social media; up from

Among all American adults, % who use social networking sites, by age



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2005-2006, 2008-2015. No data are available for 2007.

¹⁵ Monica Anderson and Andrea Caumont, *How Social Media Is Reshaping News* (September 24, 2014), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/24/how-social-media-is-reshaping-news/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

¹⁶ Nashville Bizblog, *How Social Media Has Changed the Way People Find Love Online* (February 10, 2014), <http://www.bizjournals.com/nashville/blog/2014/02/how-social-media-has-changed-the-way.html> (accessed April 21, 2016).

Aaron Smith and Monica Anderson, *5 Facts about Online Dating* (February 29, 2016), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/5-facts-about-online-dating/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

¹⁷ Jayson DeMers, *The Top 10 Benefits Of Social Media Marketing* (August 11, 2014), Forbes, Entrepreneurs, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2014/08/11/the-top-10-benefits-of-social-media-marketing/#213771572a4d> (accessed April 21, 2016).

¹⁸ Simon Kemp, *Social Media for Travel Brands*, (April 18, 2016), Slide 7 of 110, <http://wearesocial.sg/blog/2016/04/social-media-travel-brands/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

2% in 2005.

- 73% of Americans go online daily. 21% of Americans are online almost constantly. 41% go online several times a day¹⁹.
- 15 times a day is the average American mothers check social media
- 93% of American mothers use Instagram at least once a week; 68% use it daily.
- 169.2 million is the estimated number of Facebook users that will exist in the U.S. by 2018.
- 1.7 hours per day is the approximate amount of time social media users in the United States access those sites.²⁰

Online shopping continues to broaden its scope²¹. Internet users tend to do extensive shopping on the internet prior to major purchases. The Pew Research Center reports, “81% of internet users have used the internet to do research about a product they are thinking about buying, with 20% doing this on the typical day.”²² This also applies to shopping for a church online before visiting.²³

This is important news for Christ’s Church as it carries out the Great Commission in the 21st Century. In today’s web-connected world, local churches are able to do evangelism

¹⁹ Andrew Perrin, *One-fifth of Americans Report Going Online ‘Almost Constantly’* (December 8, 2015), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/08/one-fifth-of-americans-report-going-online-almost-constantly/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

²⁰ Statista, *Usage Duration of Social Networks by Country* (Undated), <http://www.statista.com/statistics/270229/usage-duration-of-social-networks-by-country/> (Accessed July 13, 2016).

²¹ AnythingResearch, *2016 Market Research Report on Online (Internet) Shopping Industry*, 2016 <http://www.anythingresearch.com/industry/Online-Internet-Shopping.htm> (accessed April 21, 2016).

George Gao, *Holiday Shopping: Love it or Hate It, More Do it Online* (November 27, 2013), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/11/27/holiday-shopping-love-it-or-hate-itor-do-it-online/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

Aaron Smith, *In-store Mobile Commerce During the 2012 Holiday Shopping Season* (January 31, 2013), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/01/31/in-store-mobile-commerce-during-the-2012-holiday-shopping-season/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

²² John B. Horrigan, *Online Shopping* (February 13, 2008), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2008/02/13/online-shopping/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

²³ Noble Kuriakose, *When Easter and Christmas Near, More Americans Search Online for “Church”* (April 18, 2014), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/18/when-easter-and-christmas-near-more-americans-search-online-for-church/> (accessed April 21, 2016).

Kurt Steinbruek, *How People Find a New Church* (March 17, 2009) <http://ezinearticles.com/?How-People-Find-a-New-Church&id=2109828> (accessed April 21, 2016).

worldwide. Consider our denomination's exciting online work in Central America through Academiacristo.com, WhatAboutJesus.com, and 316NOW's online Bible institute (316NOW.org).

In addition, WELS churches throughout the United States have unprecedented access to the families that live in their parish area through social media. For example, Google, Facebook, and Twitter provide information, as well as opportunities to contact, individuals living near a church. The potential audience expands exponentially when we broaden the definition of social media to include websites, email, texts, Skype, Periscope, and many other online communication vehicles. In addition, through these online resources local churches are able to influence their own members on a daily basis with God's Word.

Churches can no longer be satisfied to reach their parish areas with a street-side sign. They can't be satisfied to have a static website that lists service times and denominational affiliation... and that hasn't been updated in six months.²⁴ Churches, to be taken seriously, must have a vibrant presence online.

That vibrant presence should be guided by a philosophy of internet outreach. This paper posits an online presence that I call a ShareGrace philosophy. This thesis explores that philosophy and the ways it impacts a church's outreach efforts, a church's website, and a church's presence on social media and related forms of online communication.

The goal of this thesis is to provide congregations with a strategy for internet use that will enable them to positively represent themselves and their Savior as they practice this ShareGrace philosophy.

²⁴ "Because of this access to real-time information, we've become intolerant of outdated information.... Outdates and irrelevant information is now a sign of our demise—and that's why you can't use the pace of change as an excuse to drag your feet in responding to change." Kivi Leroux Miller, *Content Marketing for Nonprofits* (Jossey-Bass/John Wiley and Sons, Inc., San Francisco, CA, 2013), 12.

Perspectives on Inbound Marketing and Outbound Marketing

Marketing

Businesses in our capitalistic culture recognize that having an exemplary product does not guarantee commercial success. Without marketing no customers will know that product exists and that it can enable them to overcome a particular pain point in their life.

According to the American Marketing Association, “Marketing is the activity, [the] set of institutions, and [the] processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”²⁵ Kotler & Armstrong define marketing as “a social and managerial process whereby individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others.”²⁶

Neil Kokemuller, a professor of marketing at Des Moines Area Community College, fleshes out those definitions:

Marketing typically begins with identifying customers who best align with a company’s core strengths and capabilities. The ideal market segments have compelling needs or preferences that the business is equipped to service. By clearly defining the nature of the marketplace, a company can develop appealing solutions with distinct benefits relative to competing brands. When the time comes to promote its offerings, a company with a well-defined target market knows who it is talking to and what messages are likely to resonate.²⁷

Although the Lord’s Church would separate itself from the abuses that some businesses have used to market their products, the Great Commission requires that the Church finds God pleasing and culturally appropriate ways to proclaim the gospel, to “market” the good news of God’s grace in Jesus. Of course the Church doesn’t create and exchange products with others in

²⁵ American Marketing Association, A Definition of Marketing (July 2013), <https://www.ama.org/AboutAMA/Pages/Definition-of-Marketing.aspx> (accessed April 29, 2016)

²⁶ Kotler & Armstrong: *Principles of Marketing*, 9th edition. 5; http://www.swastapriambada.lecture.ub.ac.id/files/2013/04/Kotler_Principlesofmarketing.pdf (accessed April 28, 2016)

²⁷ Neil Kokemuller, *Basic Principles of Marketing*, (undated), https://www.ehow.com/list_6030926_basic-principles-marketing.html (accessed April 28, 2016)

order to receive some value in return, but it does have a gift to share that provides souls with fullness of life here and heaven in eternity. For that reason churches engage in a sanctified form of marketing that we call evangelism.

Marketing strategies change over time and from place to place. In the 1950s door-to-door sales sold countless encyclopedias and vacuum cleaners. But no longer. More recently telemarketing interrupted countless family suppers. But no longer. With the internet muscling into every area of American life, marketing has changed again. Inbound marketing is what most successfully reaches customers today. The premise of this thesis is that a form of inbound marketing is also best suited to reach souls for the gospel.

Inbound marketing

Jo Lynn Deal, president of myMarketing Café, writes,

Marketers in the second decade of the 21st Century are realizing that the free access to information the internet affords their customers has forced a dramatic change in the way they must approach buyers. The former strategy for selling, outbound marketing, is finding a shrinking audience. Inbound marketing is the strategy to which most customers in most situations are responding. Inbound marketing is a marketing strategy that began in 2006 and uses high-quality content to bring “interested” prospects to your company door. That means instead of chasing prospects, they actually come looking for you.²⁸

“Inbound marketing refers to the process of creating quality digital content – such as ebooks, white papers, reports, blog posts, newsletters, social media material, infographics, videos, microsites, and so on — in an effort to attract target audiences towards an organization’s website.”²⁹ According to this definition of inbound marketing, a seller’s strategy is to share online digital materials that a potential customer will value. Appreciation for those materials will create a relationship of trust and will encourage a customer to purchase through that company’s website.

²⁸ Jo Lynn Deal, *Inbound Marketing for Nonprofits: The Key to Acquiring Qualified Leads* (December 18, 2014). <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/inbound-marketing-nonprofits-jo-lynn> (accessed April 27, 2016).

²⁹ Tatiana Bertolo, *7 Reasons Why Nonprofits are Implementing Inbound Marketing* (March 30 2016), <http://arjunasolutions.com/7-reasons-nonprofits-implementing-inbound-marketing/> (accessed on April 22, 2016).

Similarly, the Content Marketing Institute defines this approach as “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive action.”³⁰ Forrester Research (forrester.com) agrees. It calls inbound marketing a “marketing strategy where brands create interest, relevance, and relationships with customers by producing, curating, and sharing content.”³¹

Hubspot (Hubspot.com) has become a significant voice for inbound marketing.³² It maintains that

Inbound marketing is about using marketing to bring potential customers to you, rather than having your marketing efforts fight for their attention. Sharing is caring and inbound marketing is about creating and sharing content with the world. By creating content specifically designed to appeal to your dream customers, inbound attracts qualified prospects to your business and keeps them coming back for more.

[Consequently, an inbound marketing approach will]

- Create targeted content that answers prospects’ and customers’ basic questions and needs, then share that content far and wide.
- Tailor ... content to the wants and needs of the people who are viewing it. As you learn more about your leads over time, you can better personalize your messages to their specific needs....
- Approach... people where they are, in the channel where they want to interact with you.
- ...Focus on publishing the right content in the right place at the right time.³³

³⁰ Joe Pulizzi and Frank Barry, *Nonprofit Content Marketing 2015: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America*, 4 (2015). http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2015_NonProf_Research.pdf (accessed July 23, 2016).

³¹ Michael Gerard, *Building the Case for Content Marketing* (February 26, 2016) <http://www.curata.com/blog/building-the-business-case-for-content-marketing/> (accessed July 23, 2016).

³² HubSpot coined the term *inbound marketing* in 2006. Hubspot, *State of Inbound—2014: The Data You Need to Budget, Plan, Execute And Measure Inbound Marketing and Selling* (2014), <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/53/file-1589882006-pdf/HubSpot-State-of-Inbound-2014.pdf> (accessed July 23, 2016).

³³ Hubspot, *The Inbound Methodology* (undated), <https://www.hubspot.com/inbound-marketing> (accessed April 22, 2016).

Inbound marketing compared to outbound marketing

Zac Gregg of *Vital* (a company specializing in web strategy, brand development, and graphic design) suggests the biggest differences between outbound and inbound marketing fall into these categories:

Interruption-based vs. Permission-based.... Outbound marketing is interruption-based marketing. Its premise is to find a medium with a large following and periodically interrupt that following with disassociated ads.... Examples: TV, Radio, Direct Mail, Newspaper, Billboards. Inbound marketing is permission-based marketing. There are two premises here: First, communicate via mediums in which the audience has given you permission to communicate. Second, answer the questions people are asking and proliferate those answers around the web in anticipation of the question. Both of these premises are permission-based. Examples: subscription based email marketing, social media, blog subscribers, webinar attendees,... keyword targeting, landing page strategy, [and] content/blog strategy.

Footnote vs. Story With outbound marketing you are always the footnote. You are forced to stick out or not be seen at all. It makes your relationship with your customer based on attention grabbing rather than value.... To stick out in traditional advertising you usually have to sacrifice your message for a gimmick and hope that some of the people who see the gimmick look closely enough for the footnote.... With inbound marketing, you are the story. You are the keynote speaker. Inbound marketing is all about creating great content to share with your audience. It's about telling stories and speaking to your audience where they want to be spoken to, how they want to be spoken to. It's about delighting them, educating them and engaging them in an open and transparent way....

Linear vs. Holistic With outbound marketing, the strategy is very linear. You only have so many marketing mediums to choose from like radio, TV, direct mail, tradeshow, billboard, sponsorships, etc.... You begin to attribute higher percentages of your budget to the more effective mediums and leave out the least effective mediums. You create a unified message across all mediums, and your job is done for the period.... With inbound marketing, the strategy is holistic.... It takes simultaneous usage of all the digital channels, continuous strengthening of the website, development of effective content and implementation of measurement tools all in concert with one another to achieve these

unparalleled results....

Obfuscate vs. Educate With outbound marketing, the message is inherently obfuscated, duplicitous and full of ****. It has to be.... The goal of outbound marketing has always been to stand out. And in order to do this, to be a clutter buster, the relationship with the client is compromised.... It's all one big hoax. Misdirection. It's pulling that shiny quarter from behind your ear.... With inbound marketing, the message is specific and useful. Rather than forced upon you, the message is instead offered up on a nice shiny silver platter — ready for you to consume whenever convenient. This message contains quality content that educates and engages. It's meant to answer a consumer's question, to fill in the blank.

Renting vs. Owning.... With outbound marketing, you are always renting your distribution.... With an outbound campaign like direct mail, the leads come in for a couple weeks when the mail's hitting households. Once those leads are processed and the mail is distributed, you need to start again, new message, new distribution.... With inbound marketing, you own your distribution and it depreciates much more like an asset. You build up your subscription-based email list, you earn a top ranking on product-related keywords, you build a following on social media and voilà: you are creating assets. There is a cost of acquisition (creating the content), but it is iterative and it keeps working for you long after you stop the acquisition/creation phase.

Immeasurable vs. Quantifiable With outbound marketing, the success of the marketing is hard to measure.... The measurement of outbound marketing lacks complexity and a lack of complexity leads to a lack of results.... With inbound marketing, everything is digital, and everything is quantifiable.... An inbound marketing strategy is highly measurable. It allows for analysis of everything from the ROI [return on investment] of various distribution methods to whether the size and shape of a CTA [call to action] button is more likely to attract a customer or not.³⁴

For graphics with comparisons of inbound and outbound marketing see Marketing Techblog and the Social Media Today infographics in the appendices.

³⁴ Zac Gregg, *Inbound Vs. Outbound: Why Is Inbound Marketing Better than Outbound Marketing?* (undated), <https://vtl.design.com/inbound-marketing/inbound-marketing-vs-outbound-marketing/> (accessed April 22, 2016).

A paradigm shift

In summary, inbound marketing requires a paradigm shift from the business-first philosophy that fuels outbound marketing. Inbound marketing has a new direction for marketers. Its demands that a business serves its customer rather than uses its customer to serve that business. Eric Qualman, author of *Socialnomics*, writes, “The marketer’s job has changed from creating and pushing messages to one that requires listening, engaging, and reacting to potential and current customer needs.”³⁵ Doug Kessler, the co-founder and creative director at Velocity Partners adds, “Traditional marketing talks at people. Content marketing talks with them.”³⁶

Rick Burnes describes that shift in these words, Inbound Marketing is marketing focused on getting found by customers. In traditional marketing (outbound marketing), companies focus on finding customers. They use techniques that are poorly targeted and that interrupt people. They use cold-calling, print advertising, T.V. advertising, junk mail, spam, and trade shows. Technology is making these techniques less effective and more expensive. Caller ID blocks cold calls, TiVo makes T.V. advertising less effective, spam filters block mass emails, and tools like RSS³⁷ are making print and display advertising less effective. It’s still possible to get a message out via these channels, but it costs more.

Inbound Marketers flip outbound marketing on its head. Instead of interrupting people with television ads, they create videos that potential customers want to see. Instead of buying display ads in print publications, they create their own business blog that people subscribe to and look forward to reading. Instead of cold calling, they create useful content and tools so that prospects contact them looking for more information. Instead of driving their message into a crowd over and over again like a sledgehammer,

³⁵ Erik Qualman, *Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business* (2nd edition), (John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken, NJ, 2013), 297.

³⁶ NewsCred, *Content Marketing 101: Strategy, Design, Delivery* (June 1, 2015), <http://www.slideshare.net/etsarkov/content-marketing-101-strategy-design-delivery>, 4 (accessed July 23, 2016).

³⁷ RSS is a digital vehicle that allows websites to alert subscribers regarding updates to blog entries, as well as updates to news headlines, audio files, and video files. RSS stands for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication.

they attract highly qualified customers to their business like a magnet.³⁸

Benefits of inbound marketing

Inbound marketing benefits from a dialogue between marketer and customer. Zac Gregg maintains, “Inbound marketing succeeds because it allows you to talk to people who have given you permission, and to tell your story in a holistic, educational way on your own distribution platform, with quantifiable metrics....”³⁹

Jacey Gulden, a web designer for SyneCore Tech, also describes importance of inbound marketing’s two-way communication, “To stay competitive in this changing marketing landscape, you must [not only] create campaigns that place your brand directly in front of your target audience. You need to be able to answer questions, address pain points, give expert advice, and entertain with fresh, original content.”⁴⁰

Marketo’s *Definitive Guide to Engaging Content Marketing* lists these benefits of content marketing:

1. You build awareness for your brand. Your audience can’t buy from you if they can’t find you – and up to 93% of buying cycles start with a search online. Traditional advertising and outbound marketing can be an effective way of building awareness, but content marketing allows you to build organic awareness. When your valuable content ranks highly on search engines, or is shared widely on social networks, that’s “free” brand awareness. And because your content will only rank highly or be shared when it’s relevant, your audience will be less inclined to tune it out.
2. You create preference for your brand. Once you’ve established awareness, you need to establish preference. Engaging content marketing creates preference through thought leadership – it makes you a trusted source of information and education. You can also create preference through relationships, which are

³⁸Rick Burnes, *Inbound Marketing & the Next Phase of Marketing on the Web*, (November 18, 2008), <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/4416/Inbound-Marketing-the-Next-Phase-of-Marketing-on-the-Web.aspx> (accessed April 22, 2016).

³⁹ Op. Cit., Zac Gregg.

⁴⁰ Jacey Gulden, *The 4 Basic Elements of Inbound Marketing* (August 19, 2014), <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/4-basic-elements-inbound-marketing-0> (accessed April 27, 2016).

strengthened whenever your content entertains or helps your buyers. All other things being equal, people are more likely to buy from companies with whom they have relationships. Of course, this requires you to create content that people like – or even love.

3. You reach more buyers and customers, at lower costs. According to Forrester research, today's customers distrust and resent marketing that interrupts or intercepts them. Engaging content marketing is part of a natural conversation with current and potential customers, is relevant to their interests and behaviors, and builds a continuous story over time. Unlike traditional marketing, content pays dividends for a very long time, and this effect multiplies as you create more and more content. Note that this means that content marketing is not a short-term strategy – results will be small at first, but will grow over time.⁴¹

Michael Gerard, the Chief Marketing Officer at Curata (curata.com), a company that assists businesses with marketing, makes this comparison between outbound and inbound marketing. [Note that Gerard's use of the term content market is equivalent to inbound marketing.]⁴²

The “old” way of using content was a one way communication by marketers to their prospects, solely focused on how great their company and products are and why people should buy their products. This type of content certainly still has its place towards the bottom of the [marketing or sales] funnel; however, today's content marketing involves also creating content that is educational, entertaining and relevant to an audience at the middle and top of the funnel, and even before our prospects enter the funnel/buying process. The best marketers get this new way of creating and curating content, and have stopped egocentric marketing. Today's content marketing is intended to build trust and a lasting relationship with prospects, so that they will look to your company when they are ready to enter the buying process. In many cases your content

⁴¹ Marketo, *Definitive Guide to Engaging Content Marketing*, (2014), <https://www.marketo.com/>(accessed July 23, 2016).

⁴² Content marketing is the term was originally used to described an approach to promoting a product that rested on giving away valuable information to customers. Over time inbound marketing was coined to take on that meaning, while content marketing described the method inbound marketing uses. However, many marketers continue to use the terms interchangeably. Confer Hubspot, *The Difference Between Content Marketing and Inbound Marketing (and Why It Matters)* (September 22, 2014). <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/difference-between-content-and-inbound-marketing> (accessed July 13, 2016).

may not even have anything to do with your company's product.⁴³

Attraction 101: Content Marketing, an Act-On eBook, maintains,

Marketing has changed The main strategy for finding new prospects for the sales funnel used to be entirely a push strategy: Push brand messages in front of as many people as possible, as often as possible, and via as many channels as possible – print, TV, radio, direct mail, display ads, phone calls. And it worked. Brands enjoyed huge economies of scale by capturing more customers than they aggravated ... and the latter had few options to cause much of a ruckus about it. Those days are gone.

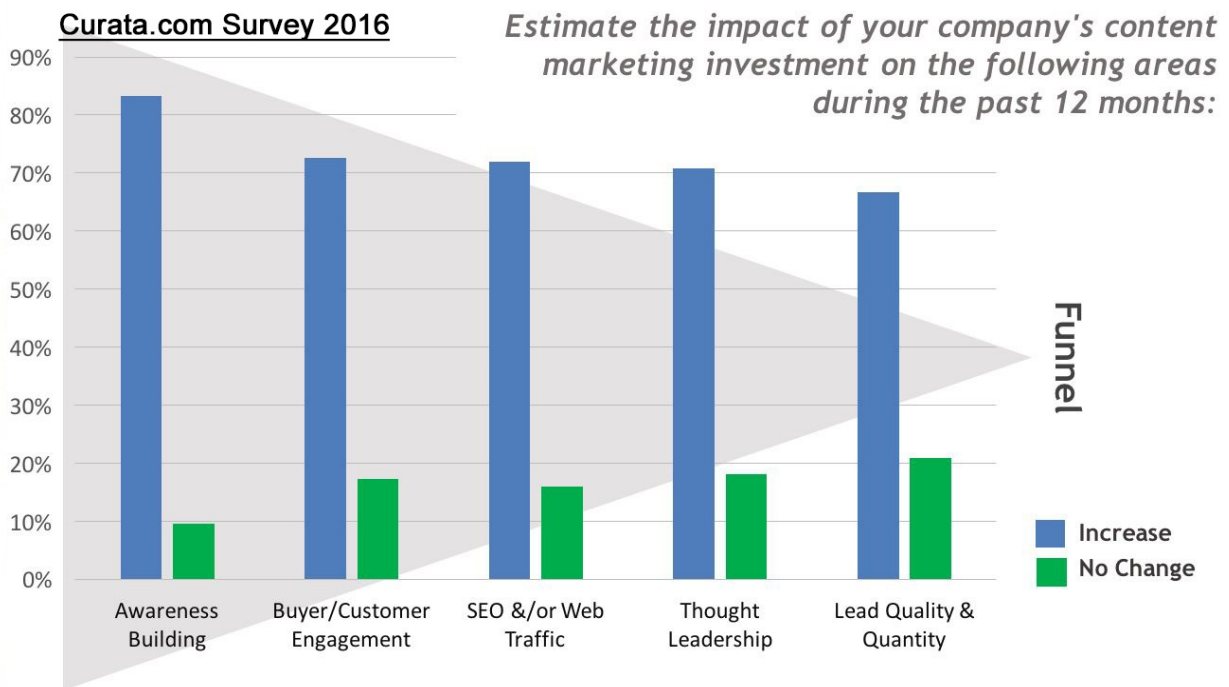
Today's buyers are online, engaged, empowered, and in full control of their journey. They're far less responsive to "push" marketing, and they're far less likely to give you a second glance unless you appeal to what they need and want ... when they need and want it.⁴⁴

Curata emphasized another benefit of inbound marketing. "From a marketing strategy perspective, content marketing provides value to awareness building, lead generation, sales enablement and revenue. Curata asked 600 marketers about the impact of content marketing investment on each part of the pipeline. Two-thirds or more of marketers indicated a positive impact on each area."⁴⁵

⁴³ Michael Gerard, *Building The Business Case for Content Marketing* (February 26, 2016), <http://www.curata.com/blog/building-the-business-case-for-content-marketing/> (accessed April 22, 2016).

⁴⁴ Act-On Software, *ActOnEbook– Attraction101: Content Marketing* (December 2014), Act-On.com, (accessed April 22, 2016), 3.

⁴⁵ Content Marketing Forum, *Building the Case for Content Marketing* (February 26, 2016), <http://www.curata.com/blog/building-the-business-case-for-content-marketing/> (accessed July 21, 2016).



Source: *Content Marketing is Working*, Curata (February 2016), <http://www.curata.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ContentMktgIsWorking.png> (accessed June 12, 2016).

Inbound marketing for nonprofits

The Church Planters' Guide to Social Media insists, "Traditional advertising no longer works. TV and radio ads are useless, and print advertising is costly and less effective every day. The shift has been subtle. But during the last decade traditional advertising died, and modern, digital advertising took over. This new type of advertising meets people where they are – on the Internet – and allows them to consume only what they want, when they want it."⁴⁶

Many nonprofits employ an inbound marketing philosophy to promote their mission, to share their story, and to gain support. According to a 2015 survey by Content Marketing Institute and Blackbaud, 61% of nonprofits in North America promote themselves through content marketing.⁴⁷ Those nonprofits say they use inbound marketing to build brand awareness (87%), to increase engagement (84%), to enhance constituent retention and loyalty (82%), to increase constituent acquisition (79%), to assist with fund raising (68%), to enhance advocacy

⁴⁶ Causely, *The Church Planters' Guide to Social Media* (undated) <http://www.causely.com/reach/blog> (accessed July 23, 2016).

⁴⁷ Institute and Blackbaud, *2015 Nonprofit Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—north America*, Content Marketing (2015), http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2015_NonProf_Research.pdf (accessed April 28, 2016), 4.

for their cause (61%), and to deliver their programs (56%).⁴⁸

Jacey Gulden provides “three reasons why non-profits should... look to inbound marketing tactics to spread their mission and accomplish their work.”

Inbound Pushes Content Creation Non-profits need to give the consumer a reason to care. Content – relevant, humanizing content – can do that.

Inbound Fosters Transparent Sharing ...Non-profits are not excluded from the opportunity that social media provides. [But] be strategic about what channels you use. Think about your target audience; understanding who you are trying to reach should inform which social media channels to focus on.... Social media can help your non-profit connect on a more emotional level with its audience. They are great platforms to further show and expose you unique culture and mission.

Inbound Converts Attracting and sharing is great, but how do they translate into donor action? This is where inbound marketing really shines for non-profits. The... examples listed above serve to draw prospects in and keep them coming back to your website; once there, lead nurturing campaigns move them closer and closer to committing to your organization - on their terms.

Takeaway ...Inbound marketing can help your non-profit connect on a meaningful level with donors on their terms, making them more willing to commit time and resources to your mission.⁴⁹

Ironpaper (an agency that helps businesses with marketing, design, technology, and strategy) maintains, “Inbound marketing is an excellent way for nonprofits to boost support for their organization. When applied correctly, this strategy can help you attract more website traffic, grow your database of prospective members, volunteers, and donors; and achieve the goals that are most important to your organization.... Plus, it’s less expensive than traditional marketing methods – and substantially more effective.”⁵⁰

Sunny Popali, the SEO Director at Tempo Creative, an Arizona inbound marketing agency, insists, “Inbound marketing is a powerful tool no nonprofit should pass up. For

⁴⁸ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁹ Jacey Gulden, *Why Non-Profits Need Inbound Marketing* (June 30, 2013), <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/why-non-profits-need-inbound-marketing>, (accessed April 27, 2016).

⁵⁰ Ironpaper, *Does Inbound Marketing Work for Nonprofits?* (September 11, 2015), <http://www.ironpaper.com/webintel/articles/inbound-marketing-work-nonprofits/> (accessed April 27, 2016).

organizations considering their website as an enabler of growth, the marketing efficiency behind these tactics are well documented. It is a more efficient and cost effective way of reaching interested, qualified people. The ROI [Return on Investment] from inbound marketing will far surpass ROI created by outbound marketing efforts.⁵¹

Luke Summerfield of Savvy Panda, a company committed to training individuals to successfully manage their online presence, has written on his blog, “If you look at the concepts and principles that drive Inbound Marketing’s success in the B2B [business to business] or B2C [business to consumer] industries, they are perfect for application in the nonprofit.” Then he adds several examples.

Tells The Story and Shows Contributions If you’re like most nonprofits, you probably have an amazing story of those in need that you want to share with the world.... At its core, Inbound Marketing is all about creating amazing and inspiring content.

Drives Membership, Activism, and Donations ... Inbound Marketing does an great job of getting your organization out there for people to find. Inbound Marketing activities like blogging, SEO, social media, etc. will ensure that your org’s message is seen by anyone who is looking [and even some who might not be looking yet]. Once found, these individuals can determine their involvement level, from simply donating money to the cause to actively getting “into the trenches” and giving a helping hand.

Measure Results ...You can track exactly where and what is bringing people to your website, how they are being nurtured down the funnel and how they are converting into members or donors. You can track the impact your org’s events are having and make it very transparent to the impact you’re having.⁵²

The ability to accurately measure the impact of a church’s outreach vehicles is a significant advantage of online marketing. Measurement is not as easy to determine with traditional advertising (e.g., billboards, commercials, newspaper advertising). Online, however, information on social media shares, comments, and downloads are readily available. The number of website visitors, the time they spent on the site, and pages they visited are also easily tracked. In addition there are a number of reputable companies that will provide much more

⁵¹ Sunny Popali, *Effective Inbound Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations* (October 31, 2012) <https://lodestar.asu.edu/blog/2012/10/effective-inbound-marketing-nonprofit-organizations> (accessed April 27, 2016).

⁵² Luke Summerfield, *Is Inbound Marketing Right for Nonprofits* (September 9, 2013), <http://savvypanda.com/blog/Inbound-Marketing-For-Nonprofit> (accessed April 27, 2016).

information for a fee. When a church knows what parts of its online marketing are optimal and which require retooling, it is able to reach the most people with the least investment.⁵³

What should churches measure? The Content Marketing Institute and Blackbaud survey reports that nonprofits most measure these metrics: Increased event attendance (55%), website traffic (54%), increased fund raising (49%), increased number of people served (40%). Increased supporter loyalty (38%), qualitative feedback from supporters (38%), and time spent on website (33%).⁵⁴

ShareGrace: A Gospel-centered alternative

The Lord's Church, of course, is not in business to turn a profit or sell a product. She exists to make disciples by sharing the extraordinary news of God's grace through Jesus. But the Church must function within its culture's expectations for how best to share that news. In our current American culture that requires embracing a form of inbound marketing.

ShareGrace: a definition

“Marketing,” inbound or otherwise, is not a term that describes the purpose or plan the Church uses to evangelize its culture or nurture its members. For that reason, I purpose the term: ShareGrace. ShareGrace avoids the negative implication that the Church is engaged in selling a product by focusing on the privilege and responsibility of giving away God's undeserved love to God's world. Grace is at the heart of Christianity and the driving force behind the ministry of the Christian Church. God intends that his grace motivates whatever a believer does and thinks, as well as what those believers join together to do. Sharing that grace with others is central to how, when, and where Christians do outreach.

Sharing grace with other Christians is both the reason and the way the Church nurtures the faith of other believers. The “share” component of ShareGrace emphasizes that the Church has a gift to give away. Grace is not a product the Church hawks in order to enrich its bottom line. But the fact that there is a named concept like ShareGrace also recognizes that for the

⁵³ In a 2015 survey of companies across the globe that do inbound marketing, HubSpot found that “leading marketers check their analytics frequently.” The report continues, “We all know the adage ‘what gets measured gets managed.’ But is it true? According to our data, it is. Respondents who achieved greater ROI in 2015 than the previous year were approximately 20% more likely to check their marketing analytics three or more times per week (or have someone on their team do so).” Hubspot, State of Inbound 2015 (2015), StateInbound Hubspot2015pdf at <http://offers.hubspot.com/2014-state-of-inbound> (accessed April 28, 2016).

⁵⁴ Op.Cit., Institute and Blackbaud,11.

gospel to be spread the Church needs a culturally attuned philosophy and strategy for sharing its good news.

ShareGrace is a philosophy for sharing the gospel. A philosophy describes why an organization does what it does. Consequently, a ShareGrace philosophy directs the activities that bring souls to listen to a church's proclamation of the gospel. It recognizes what marketing experts have learned about communicating in the age of the internet: to gain an audience for a product an organization must build trust. It does that by giving away help that people perceive to be relevant.

The ShareGrace philosophy is “a Scripture based concept that undergirds a strategic online evangelism approach that is motivated by God's grace in Jesus and focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent gospel content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to welcome that audience into a faith relationship with Jesus.” This definition is based on a definition of content marketing developed in 2014 by Content Marketing Institute.⁵⁵

A ShareGrace outreach philosophy recognizes the limitations of outbound marketing techniques churches used in the past. ShareGrace acknowledges the research that demonstrates how attempts to gain people's attention through traditional advertizing (e.g., direct mail, flyers and posters, as well as radio and television commercials) or through activities that disrupt people's lives (e.g., canvassing, cold-calling, and telemarketing) are not received positively today and are often counter-productive.⁵⁶

In place of traditional advertising, ShareGrace promotes ways to politely ask people to opt into the services a church is offering, to increase the trust levels among a church's audiences, and to offer those audiences help that they deem desirable. ShareGrace recognizes that the souls churches are working to reach have access to much more information about spiritual matters

⁵⁵ CMI defines content marketing as “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive action.” Content Marketing Institute, *2015 Nonprofit Content Marketing: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America* (2015), http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2015_NonProf_Research.pdf (accessed July 23, 2016).

⁵⁶ Gregg asks, “Why try to buy customers with traditional ‘outbound marketing’ when consumers aren't even paying attention? 45% of direct mail never gets opened, 200 million people are on the national Do Not Call Registry 85% of people fast forward through commercials 84% of 25—35 year-olds are likely to click off a website with excessive advertising You have a better chance of surviving an airplane accident than having someone convert on a banner ad.”
Op.Cit., Zac Gregg

than ever before. Most of that information is biblically inaccurate and misleading or blatantly false. Unfortunately, the unchurched perceive it as useful information. The orthodox Church’s task is to create a relationship with those people so, by the Spirit, they are willing to listen to Biblically accurate teaching. ShareGrace philosophy encourages churches to earn the attention and trust of prospects. To do that churches will seek to use the internet in a way that draws people to their online offerings by providing Scripture-based and gospel-dominant content that visitors judge interesting, relevant, and valuable.

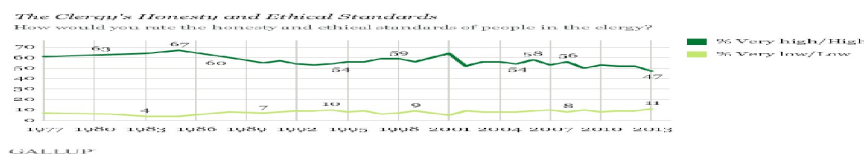
Restructuring the relationship between church and prospects

This approach to outreach changes the conversation between prospects and a church. Since a church is giving its “product” away, prospects lower their sales-defenses (there is no sales to defend against). That frees prospects to receive on their own terms the good news the church is offering.

A ShareGrace philosophy is not a new approach to outreach. The Church has always sought to give away God’s grace in Jesus. ShareGrace is a fresh application of that principle in our current internet age. ShareGrace rests on Jesus’ I-serve-you model rather than a you-serve-me model. It focuses on what a church will do for its prospects, rather than on what prospects can do for the church. More than talking about the free gift of God’s grace, ShareGrace demonstrates it.

ShareGrace philosophy seeks to portray and proclaim grace to people at every stages of the grace journey. The goal of ShareGrace philosophy is to attract audiences by offering them the right information or tools at precisely the time those audiences feel a need for it. ShareGrace requires that a church understands its audiences, as well as the challenges and needs they face. Armed with that understanding and the gospel, a church can create online campaigns that attract, move to action, and delight its target group.

ShareGrace philosophy encourages churches both to proclaim and to live out God’s grace. This produces a willingness within a church’s target audiences to trust a church’s offers to help and to listen to its message. Those audiences, in turn, learn to trust that church and desire to hear more from it.⁵⁷ The motto of ShareGrace philosophy is “How can we help?” in



⁵⁷ American churches, particularly their clergy, face the lowest levels of public trust. According to a December 2013

opposition to “This is how you can help us.” It demonstrates a church’s willingness to assist others, to listen to its audiences tell it what they need or want, to work with those audiences in the ways they prefer, and to help in every way that is appropriate for Christ’s Church. This motto is driven by God’s grace in Jesus.

A new emphasis on every member participation

A congregation’s online outreach efforts are further enhanced by equipping members to participate. Qualman observes, “With the growing reliance on social media, we no longer search for news, or the products and services we wish to buy. Instead [these items] are being pushed to us by friends, acquaintances, and business colleagues.”⁵⁸ Qualman titles this phenomenon *World of Mouth*, a digital advancement and global expansion of word of mouth. He says it comes with these advantages: (1) it disseminates the information quickly and globally, (2) its digital aspect allows the original integrity of the message to remain intact, and (3) it is traceable to an original source.” Consequently, he continues, “businesses don’t have a choice on whether to do social media; their choice is how well they do it.”⁵⁹

The thesis discusses the role of church members in online outreach more thoroughly in the second section of this paper under *A strategy that is designed to lead souls to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ*.

Summary

In these early years of the Third Millennium after Jesus Americans live much of their days connected to the internet. To interact with them, for-profit businesses, charities, churches, and political parties must use online media.

Today’s American culture has come to expect that businesses will generally approach customers following an inbound marketing model. Our culture has the same expectation of

report by the Gallup Organization, “Americans’ rating of the honesty and ethics of the clergy has fallen to 47%, the first time this rating has dropped below 50% since Gallup first asked about the clergy in 1977. Clergy have historically ranked near the top among professions on this measure, hitting a high rating of 67% in 1985” (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/166298/honesty-ethics-rating-clergy-slides-new-low.aspx>). Churches dare not assume that people in their parish areas trust their motives are pure and their words truthful. A ShareGrace approach to online presence insists on actively building trust levels among a church’s audiences.

⁵⁸ Op.Cit., Erik Qualman, 28.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Erik Qualman 28.

churches and other nonprofits. Since the Church does not have the same profit motive as a business and since God's grace in Jesus compels the Church's service,⁶⁰ a more sanctified approach to inbound marketing is required. The ShareGrace philosophy provides such an approach.

ShareGrace keeps the concept of God's undeserved love as the focus of a church's outreach efforts. It aligns a church's online evangelism strategy with its overall evangelism message. Its reduced cost compared to traditional media provides better stewardship of congregational resources. Online outreach also allows a congregation to gauge the effectiveness of its strategy and to determine how best to improve it. And since online communication is based on a community model where acquaintances interact with and influence other acquaintances, a ShareGrace model of online outreach provides church members an essential role in sharing Jesus with their online community.

⁶⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:14, Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died (NIV).

ShareGrace in a church's online presence

The second half of this thesis examines how a ShareGrace strategy will impact a church's online presence. We will limit the discussion to a church's outreach use of its website and of social media. Although we could include media such as blogs, email, online video, vlogs, and podcasts, our focus on websites and social media will adequately demonstrate how ShareGrace applies to all the vehicles a church may use for its online communication.

ShareGrace characteristics

The ShareGrace philosophy is “a Scripture based concept that undergirds a strategic online evangelism approach that is motivated by God's grace in Jesus and focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent gospel content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to welcome that audience into a faith relationship with Jesus.” Based on that definition, the following characteristics will mark a church's online communication.

1. An understanding of and commitment to its target audience(s).
2. A grace-prompted willingness to help, to provide for, and to strengthen its audiences' spiritual life.
3. A strategy that is designed to lead souls to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.
4. An emphasis on God's grace in Jesus.

An understanding of and commitment to its target audience(s).

The understanding of a church's target audience begins with a demographic study of the people living in the church's parish area. Churches will seek to know the predominate age range, gender breakdown, marital status, education levels, occupation types, and income levels of the people who live around them.⁶¹ But beyond analyzing the quantitative information demographic data provides, churches will also gather qualitative data on their parish areas. Churches need to know the kinds of questions their neighbors are asking about life, the challenges they confront, the fears they face, and the pain points (sometimes called felt needs) of those individuals. This will require personally asking a representative sampling of people

⁶¹ This information is easily obtained from sources such as Factfinder.census.gov, Google Analytics, Movoto.com, and Gallery.alteryx.com/demographics.

about those issues. Churches will want to know the best places to interact with their neighbors online or in the community. Churches will also determine the best way to engage people in their parish area wherever it is they congregate.

Businesses recognize that their product will not meet the needs of everyone. Not everyone is shopping for a new car, shampoo, or a baby's pacifier. So they identify the segment of the population that could make use of the product they produce. Their qualitative and quantitative research enables them to identify the type of individuals they should market to. Usually business will use their research to develop a persona of the idealized customer. See an example of a persona a church might develop in the appendices (Personal Description).

A church will also identify the segments of the population that it is best positioned to serve. No church is equipped by the Spirit to reach every one of the seven billion souls in the world or everyone of the 30,000 souls in its parish area. Although a church will proclaim as broadly as possible, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24), socio-economic barriers, racial barriers, cultural barriers, as well as distance, language, and age barriers limit a church's ability to share the gospel with everyone.⁶² Churches practice the best stewardship of the gospel by staying aware of opportunities to share the gospel everywhere, while concentrating their efforts on the people segments in their areas of influence they are best furnished to touch with the gospel.⁶³

A church's qualitative and quantitative study of its parish area will identify places where the Spirit has given it natural intersections with people. For instance, a church with an average age of 70 is probably not positioned to reach 18-25 year olds, but retirees in its parish area could feel comfortable there. The question then becomes where do those retirees live, what are their interests, what do they need, and how is that church able to help address those pain points? Of

⁶² The Apostle Paul's mission strategy provides an interesting example of identifying of target audience. Paul did not attempt to personally share the gospel with everyone. Rather he focused on key urban centers that attracted visitors from throughout the Roman empire. Commerce brought the unsaved to Ephesus, Corinth, Rome and other cities; the gospel many of them found there not only transformed them into saved souls but sent them home to share the treasure they had found. For a fuller discussion see David Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980), 96-100.

⁶³ Perry Marshall demonstrates this stewardship principle as it relates to a business focusing on the appropriate segment of the population to which to market its product. "Selling to the right person is more important than all the sales methods, copywriting techniques, and negotiation tactics in the world. Because the wrong person... doesn't care. The wrong person won't be persuaded by anything. Perry Marshall, *80/20 Sales and Marketing: The Definitive Guide to Working Less and Making More* (Enterprise Press, Englewood, NJ, 2013), 17.

course a church of 70 year olds might still be led to reach 18-25 year olds. In that case, those older Christians will have to know what 18-25 year olds in their parish area are like, to be willing to make their church comfortable for young adults, and to develop ways they can provide a ministry that intersects with the lives of people the age of their grandchildren. Those principles of demonstrating Christ-like love to people in a church's community will also apply online.

A ShareGrace philosophy leads a congregation to learn the language of its audiences. Sometimes that requires mastering Spanish or Mandarin, along with the cultural values that reflect those languages. But most often the language American congregations must learn has to do with the social values of Millennials or empty nesters or the unemployed. Congregations dare not assume that because their audiences speak American English that those audiences will understand Christian values and worldviews. "Translation" of those values is essential to reach a target audiences.

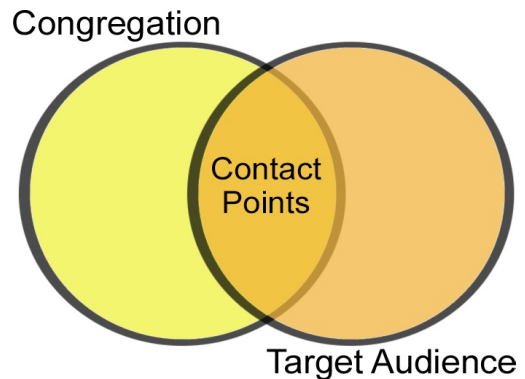
"Each target audience has a different tone, different vocabulary, and in some cases specific social slang. If you want your audience to engage with you..., you need to speak their language."⁶⁴ A church will study its audiences so it can tailor the vocabulary, cultural references, imagery, and tone of its online communication to the cultural and spiritual level of the demographic it is seeking to reach.

Churches will also recognize that people who are not believers are driven entirely by their old Adam. Their primary question is, "What's in it for me?" Act-on urges, "Put yourself in the shoes of your customer.... If you are asking people to share your content or give up their personal details for an ebook, you need to know what the motivation is for them to do so: emotional, educational or material.... Know what motivates your audience to engage, and reward that motivation."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Act-On Software, *10 Tips for Creating Engaging Social Content* (2014), http://mktg.actonsoftware.com/acton/attachment/248/f-0fed/1/-/-/-/10tips_creating_engaging_social_content.pdf (accessed July 18, 2016), 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Act-On Software, 3.

The bottom line is that, for a church to understand and then commit itself to serving a target audience, it needs to know that audience. It also needs to know itself, its history, its spiritual and cultural heritage, its strengths and weaknesses. The points where a congregation's and its audience's shared experience, culture, and dreams overlap are the contact points a church can use to begin a conversation about who our God is and what he has so graciously done for us.



Kivi LeRoux Miller emphasizes the need for churches to have properly identified the audiences it can best serve when she tells nonprofits, “All your communications should be rooted in the answers to three questions: 1. Who are you communicating with? 2. What is your message to them? 3. How will you deliver that message.”⁶⁶ Note the order of these questions. Before a church can determine how to frame its message or where to publish that message, it must know its audience.

A grace-prompted willingness to help, to provide for, and to strengthen its audiences' spiritual life.

Second, a ShareGrace philosophy of outreach will show itself in a grace motivated willingness to help, to provide for, and to strengthen its audiences' spiritual life.

The necessity of demonstrating concern for online followers has not been lost on the business community. “Educate customers before you try to sell them a solution. Your content must help your audience see how they can overcome their challenges and achieve their aspirations.”⁶⁷ How much more concern, how much more love will followers of Jesus demonstrate for their online communities.

Outreach, like love, requires sacrifice. Outreach requires that Christians push beyond the boundaries of their own comfort. Outreach requires willingness to face rejection. If left to our

⁶⁶ Kivi Leroux Miller, *Content Marketing for Nonprofits* (Jossey-Bass/John Wiley and Sons, Inc., San Francisco, CA, 2013), 7.

⁶⁷ *Transformational Inbound Marketing: Your Secret Weapon for Acquisition and Retention*, page 7. 2015 Marketo, Inc. Accessed July 21, 2016. <https://www.marketo.com/ebooks/transformational-inbound-marketing-your-secret-weapon-for-acquisition-and-retention/>

self-centered old Adams, such requirements would be left unfulfilled. Only an appreciation for the measureless depth of God's love, in spite of our determination not to return his love, can properly motivate sharing his good news with others.

The Apostle describes for the Corinthians how the gospel drove him to proclaim Jesus as Savior. "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:14,20). That same force works today in God's people to compel their outreach efforts. It is what energizes a ShareGrace approach to online evangelism.

Since "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them," a church's online presence will proclaim that God "has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). Its posts will highlight how that reconciliation came to be, but also the results of not having sins counted against us: the loving fellowship Christians have with each other, their joyful determination to listen to and live out God's Word, and their desire for everyone to share in these blessings. A church will expend great effort so everyone who meets it online will find free access to an abundance of helpful resources that meet their needs, answer their questions, and invite them to explore a relationship with Jesus.

A strategy that is designed to lead souls to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

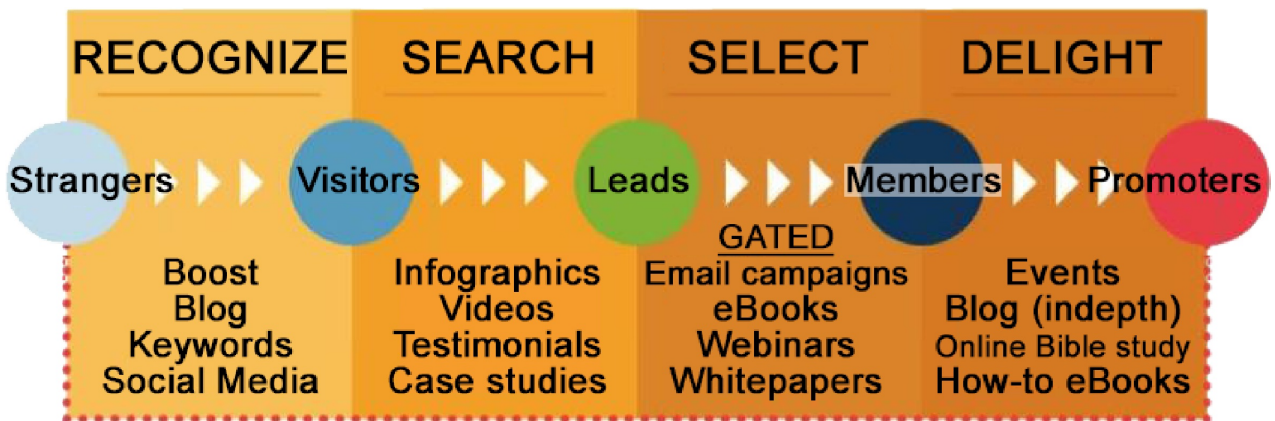
Only the Spirit working through the gospel brings people to faith in Jesus. We discuss that in the next characteristic of a ShareGrace philosophy. But churches will work to ensure that nothing they are doing in their online outreach efforts frustrates the Spirit's work. Churches will think through the online journey (we will call it a "grace journey") someone from their parish area will take on their way to a faith relationship with Jesus and membership in the congregation. Churches will consider the spiritual issues their particular outreach audiences wrestle with, the questions they have, and the pain points from which they seek relief. Churches will study how their social media posts and website resources can assist individuals in identifying the sin-generated problems in their lives and the gospel-given solutions found in Jesus.

Gordon Diver's advice for a congregation that wishes to implement an inbound marketing plan is helpful. "Determine who the audience is. With inbound [marketing] we talk

about the buyer’s journey, in your case, it’s relevant, but let’s call it the spiritual journey. Are you looking to connect with potential new members, revitalize lapsed members or increase the commitment and activity of the current membership.... Focus on where the person may be on their journey and what information you can share with them to help them move along.”⁶⁸

A NewsCred blog urges nonprofits to “move users through the journey.” The article explains: Every campaign or web property’s goal is to educate the user and incentivize them to continue deeper into the journey towards becoming a customer, donor, or brand advocate. This is where content that’s mapped to the journey will help pull them through to the next stage. For example, in our newsletters, we provide Awareness stage content that is completely free to access, but we will also include more in-depth content from The Academy [NewsCred’s online school] that requires the user to fill out a form and give their email address and company. For this second step we mix both Awareness and Consideration stage content that attempts to marry our solution with the user’s problems in their own career or industry by answering their questions while demonstrating how our products can address them.”⁶⁹

For a graphic example of a person’s grace journey, consider the graphic below. It is



Based on a graph by thewholebraingroup

For an explanation of this chart, see the footnote 66.

⁶⁸Gordon Diver, *How to Use Inbound Marketing to Grow My Church* (undated), <https://inbound.org/discuss/how-to-use-inbound-marketing-to-grow-my-church> (accessed July 13, 2016). Driver is the principal at Driver Achievements, <http://diverseachievements.com/>.

⁶⁹ Neil Barlow, *How Non-profits Can Use Content Marketing + the Buyer’s Journey to Grow Donations* (undated), <https://insights.newscred.com/how-non-profits-can-use-content-marketing-the-buyers-journey-to-grow-donations/> (accessed on July 23, 2016).

based on research by thewholebraingroup.⁷⁰ A church is potentially able to share its website with the majority of the seven billion people in the world. Because of language and distance barriers, only several hundred million may be available to visit the site. The church's effective parish area limits that amount to less than 20,000 or 30,000 in an urban area, several thousand to several hundred in rural areas. These people would be "Strangers" on the graph. They don't know the church and the church doesn't know them. But every friend people have today at one point was a stranger. So the church designs online materials to introduce itself the strangers in their audience and to assist in developing relationships with them.

Here is where a church's understanding of its audiences' pain points is essential. For example, a church's audience might feel a need to improve their marriage, to enhance their parenting skills, to protect themselves from danger in the community, or to access health care. A church uses these perceived needs as opportunities to provide help their audiences find relevant. Online resources like a list of health care facilities, blog posts about improving communication between spouses, or a series of articles on parenting could help meet these perceived needs. But beyond addressings these issues, a church will begin a conversation about

⁷⁰ An explanation of this grace journey graphic:

- Strangers come to a church's website with no knowledge about the organization. The church now comes onto the strangers' radar and they "recognize" the church. The website also "recognizes" these guests are new to the site and provides them with introductory materials (short blog posts/articles) about the congregation. In addition, the congregation endeavors to invite "strangers" to visit by buying access to them (boosting their posts on social media), ensuring their site is optimized so search engines will easily find it. Finally, congregations will have an active presences on social media sites.
- Visitors are strangers who have returned to a church's website for more information. Churches understand they are "searching" for additional information. Churches that have correctly identified their visitors will know what information that is. This information can be packaged in a number of forms: infographics, videos, testimonials, and case studies are examples.
- When visitors become "leads" or prospects they are willing to share contact information with a church. Consequently, the church will "gate" the information intended to meet the needs of prospects. Gated information asks for at least an email address prior to a prospects downloading the information. The information provided to leads will be more detailed. Containers for this materials include ebooks, webinars, and whitepapers. Leads will also be willing to receive regular emails from the church. Leads who have demonstrated interest in a church's message have identified themselves to a church as ready to visit the campus, attend worship, and participate in a church activity. They would be comfortable with a personal contact, perhaps even an invitation to a membership course.
- Once people have begun to regularly attend worship and Bible study, and, certainly, after they become members, a church's website continues to have a role in cultivating their spiritual life. These materials will be written for believers and will be intended to help them grow in their relationship with the Savior.
- More than growing members spiritually, however, a church website also will encourage "members" to become "promoters." Promoters have found delight in God's grace and will seek to share the gospel with as many as possible. A church website will help to encourage promoters, as well as train them to share the gospel.
- Throughout this grace journey congregations will solicit feedback from their website guests and social media followers. Those insights will inform the types of content the congregations will post, as well as their frequency and design.

how God's grace shapes solutions and prompts action.

Once "strangers" begin to find some value in a church's online materials, they become "visitors" to the site. "Visitors" investigate to see if there are more materials they might use. For "visitors" a church provides somewhat more extensive materials. These materials could be presented in infographics, videos, testimonials, and case studies.

The frequent "visitors" will become "leads" or prospects. They will have consumed much of the offerings a church has offered online, will have had many of their questions answered, but recognize their spiritual hunger is not satisfied. For "leads" churches will provide even more in depth materials, packaged in vehicles like regular emails, ebooks, webinars, whitepapers. But "leads" are also people who have become comfortable with a church and who will respond to invitations to a more personal relationship with a church. Calls to action (CTAs)⁷¹ on the church website are the tools to invite them to worship, a Bible study, or an activity on the church's campus. When "visitors" become "leads," they welcome a personal, rather than virtual, contact. It is at this point in the grace journey that invitations to a Bible information class and church membership are accepted. It is at this point that a faith relationship with Jesus begins to blossom.

When a person joins a church (i.e., is identified as a "member" on the graph above) another set of disciple growing opportunities begins. A church wants all its members to delight in God's grace and in the family of believers they have joined. Many on-campus activities assist in creating that delight: worship, Bible study, fellowship activities, and Christian friendships.

A church's online ministry to its members assists the spiritual nurture of those believers. More than that, online ministry can help transform them into promoters. Because of the connection most Americans have with the internet, churches are able to have daily contact with a growing percentage of their members. Through these regular touches, churches not only can share information but spiritually empower God's people by sharing his Word. Empowered Christians will promote to others the extraordinary benefits they have received from a

⁷¹ The BusinessDictionary.com defines a call to action call as "words that urge the reader, listener, or viewer of ... message to take an immediate action, such as "Write Now," "Call Now," or (on Internet) "Click Here." A retail advertisement or commercial without a call-to-action is considered incomplete and ineffective. The Business Directory, *Call to Action* (undated), <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/call-to-action.html> (accessed July 14, 2016).

relationship with Jesus through their faith-family.⁷²

Every church member connected to the internet has an important role in their congregation's online efforts to proclaim the gospel. With 73% of Americans going online daily⁷³ and with most of those having many email contacts⁷⁴ and social media friends that number at least in the hundreds,⁷⁵ church members are positioned to serve as a trusted conduit between the people they know, their congregation, and their Savior. Personal evangelism is no longer limited to face to face relationships at work, school, recreation, or home. Christians have significant opportunities to share God's grace through their online relationships.

Marketo, a company that specializes in marketing automation software, notes:

A recent Nielsen Survey showed that only 33% of buyers believe what a brand has to say about itself. Because people view any brand-to-buyer communication as an advertisement, your customers are less likely to take your word for it. In contrast, the same study showed that 92% believe what their peers have to say about a brand. That is what you should be focusing on. We think the real promise of the social explosion for marketers isn't about updating your feed for hundreds or even thousands of fans. We think it's about getting your voice heard by the millions of people out on the social web in a different way – by turning your customers into an army of powerful advocates for

⁷² The wholebraingroup's visualization of a journey people may take from stranger to promoter is very helpful. Nonetheless, we also agree with Miller who maintains that in practice this journey is not so linear. Miller references a 2013 study by Dixon and Keyes that describes the route customers take through a businesses online media as more of a vortex and less of a journey. In this vortex "both communication from the nonprofit and peer influence from others circle around the individual continuously." Kivi Leroux Miller, *Content Marketing for Nonprofits* (Jossey-Bass/John Wiley and Sons, Inc., San Francisco, CA, 2013), 94. The Dixon/Keyes study can be found at Julie Dixon and Denise Keyes, *The Permanent Disruption of Social Media*, Stanford Social Innovation Review (2013, winter), http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/the_permanent_disruption_of_social_media.

⁷³ Op.Cit., Pew Research, *Social Media Update*.

⁷⁴ Don Patterson, *What Is the Average Number of Contacts a Person Has in Their Address Book?* (September 26, 2013), <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-average-number-of-contacts-a-person-has-in-their-address-book> (accessed May 12, 2016).

⁷⁵ Facebook users differ greatly when it comes to the number of friends in their networks: 39% of adult Facebook users have between 1 and 100 Facebook friends; 23% have 101-250 friends; 20% have 251-500 friends; 15% have more than 500 friends. Among adult Facebook users, the average (mean) number of friends is 338, and the median (midpoint) number of friends is 200. In other words, half of all Facebook users have more than 200 friends, and half have less than 200. Pew Research, *6 New Facts About Facebook*, (February 3, 2014), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/6-new-facts-about-facebook/> (accessed May 12, 2016).

your brand and creating thousands of peer-to-peer recommendations on your behalf.⁷⁶

A blog post at Experticity.com points to three statistics that highlight the importance of church members posting positive comments about their Savior and congregation. “92% of consumers around the world say they trust earned media, such as word-of-mouth or recommendations from friends and family, above all other forms of advertising. 83% of word-of-mouth recommendations are tied to personal experience with a product/brand. Marketing-induced consumer-to-consumer word of mouth generates more than 2X the sales of paid advertising.”⁷⁷

Nonprofit Technology Network provides an infographic (reproduced below) that visualizes the importance of a church’s members being involved in online outreach.⁷⁸ It differentiates between the Crowd, the Network, and the Community. The Crowd is the huge population that is only tangentially known to the members of a congregation. A church has no direct contact with individuals in the Crowd, but church members may influence the Crowd through regular, sensitively written posts about spiritual matters. A church’s Network is the people that have a close relationship with the church’s members. The words and examples of members have a large impact on the Network’s interest in the church and its message. Finally, a church’s Community is the people it has the closest relationships with: those who worship and attend Bible study frequently, those who come to church events, and those who participate in church programs. Consequently, when a church attempts to reach others online, it will first seek to involve its Community in sharing the Scripture’s message of mercy with people who have a close relationship with its members.

⁷⁶ Marketo, *The Definitive Guide to Social Marketing: A Marketo Handbook* (2012), Definitive-Guide-to-Social-Marketing.pdf (accessed May 15, 2016), 23.

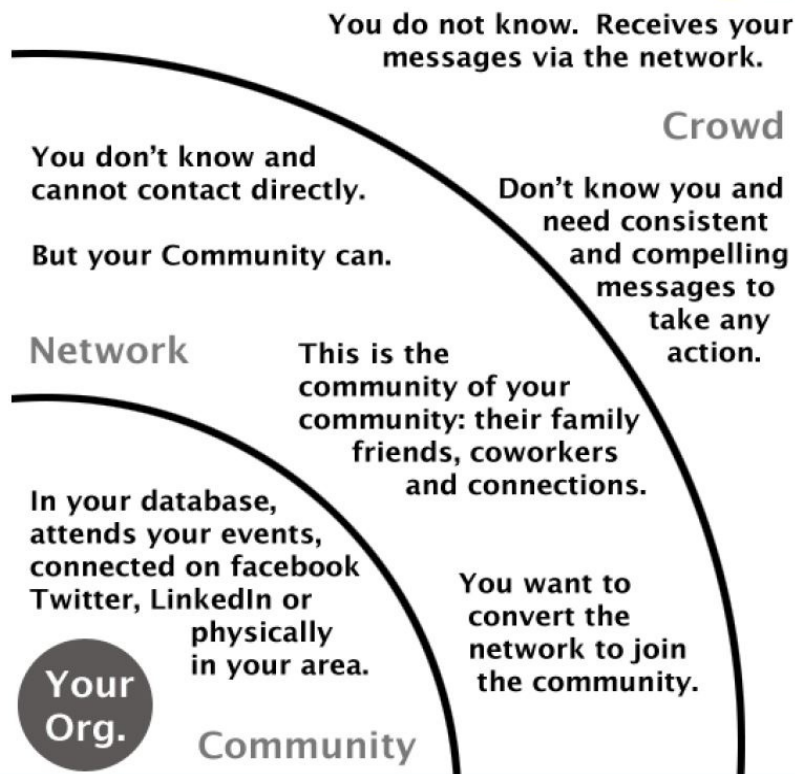
⁷⁷ Experticity, *The New Rules of Brand Influence* (2016), <https://www.experticity.com/business/resources/ebooks-whitepaper/the-new-rules-of-brand-influence/> (accessed July 26, 2016).

Sources for these statistics:

<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2012/global-trust-in-advertising-and-brand-messages.html>;

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/for-brands-experience-driven-word-of-mouth-sparks-the-most-action-2013-05-20>, <http://www.referralcandy.com/referral-marketing-guide/2/how-powerful-is-word-of-mouth-exactly>

⁷⁸ Nonprofit Technology Network, *Getting the Most Impact in the Least Amount of Time* (Society for Nonprofits, PO Box 510354, Livonia, MI 48151, undated), 12.



For those reasons, a congregation will train members to search out opportunities online to introduce Jesus to others.⁷⁹ A lay Christian’s “voice” on their social media channels is a powerful extension of word of mouth advertising. For example, *Social Media Guide for Private Schools*, points out the impact parents can have their school’s recruitment efforts through their social media endorsements of the school.

Word-of-mouth is still having the greatest impact on your school’s enrollment and development. While it is perhaps the strongest and most time-tested of influencers, how word-of-mouth travels these days has changed and is changing with the introduction of that next hot social media channel. For so long, a key driver in: a child’s decision to select a school; a graduate’s decision to join the alumni association; or a parent’s

⁷⁹ Social media provides Christians non-threatening ways to begin a conversation about Christianity. Facebook and Twitter provide a “Check in” tab along with the box for posting a status update. The “Check in” identifies where the poster is and directs friends and followers to more information about the place. When members come to worship or some other activity at their church, they “check in” along with a short post about what they are doing. Their social media friends read the posts and, over time, are likely to search for more information or ask directly about their Christian friend’s attraction to a church. For more information on this concept, visit Reach by Causely at <http://www.causely.com/reach>

decision to attend the Spring Gala fundraiser, word-of-mouth is still powerful. It may take the form of that family legacy: “If it’s a good enough school for grandpa or dad, it’s good enough for you,” or that peer pressure: “I want to attend St. Joe’s because that’s where Sarah and Katie are going.” But word-of-mouth is taking its form in vital social media channels. Managing your school’s social media channels is the best, most strategic way to control word-of-mouth influence on virtually any facet of your school’s communications goals.⁸⁰

An emphasis on God’s grace in Jesus.

We stated above that the gospel is an essential ingredient to a congregation’s ShareGrace approach to online outreach. Grace is the motivation for a congregation’s evangelism efforts. Christians today, like Paul two millennia ago, are compelled by Christ’s love to share that love with others. And what love it is! “This is how God showed his love among us,” John writes. “He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.” Then the Apostles describes how that love transforms our lives. “ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:9-12).

ShareGrace philosophy prompts a congregation to demonstrate that the gospel is energizing its online efforts. People who meet such a church online will realize that this church is not in the business of expanding its size and influence or of raising money for its own purposes, but that this church is head over heels in love with the God who is immeasurably in love with it.

Grace not only motivates us to share the gospel with others, it is also the Spirit-empowered message we long to share. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17). “The word about Christ” must infuse a church’s online materials. No marriage or parenting advice, no counsel on overcoming fears or failures can lack a foundation firmly rooted on cross and tomb.

To be clear, that is not to say that the law’s ability to convict of sin and show our spiritual helplessness doesn’t have a role in a church’s online presence. Both law and gospel

⁸⁰ Campus Suite, *Social Media Guide for Private Schools (undated)*, <https://www.campussuite.com/> (accessed July 23, 2016).

have a separate but equally essential role in evangelism and in a believer's spiritual health.

C.W.F. Walther writes, "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the law is not preached in its full sternness and the gospel not in its full sweetness; when, on the contrary, gospel elements are mingled with the law and law elements with the gospel" (Thesis VI).⁸¹ "The gospel should be proclaimed till the hearers' hearts are melted, till they give up their resistance and confess that the Lord has been too strong for them, and from now on they wish to abide with Jesus. ... The very finest form of confounding law and gospel occurs when the gospel is preached along with the law, but is not the predominating element. We must feed on the bread of life, which is not the law, but the gospel (Thesis XXV).⁸²

Conclusion

With these four characteristics of a ShareGrace philosophy as a basis, we will consider how these characteristics will shape a church's website and use of social media.

⁸¹ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*
<http://lutherantheology.com/uploads/works/walther/LG/lecture-39.html> (accessed July 21, 2016), (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1929).

⁸² Ibid, C.F.W. Walther.

ShareGrace philosophy and websites

Websites will demonstrate ShareGrace's four characteristics

A ShareGrace philosophy will demonstrate that a congregation (1) understands and is committed to its target audience(s), (2) is willing to help, to provide for, and to strengthen its audiences' spiritual life; (3) has a strategy that is designed to lead souls to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ; and (4) seeks to emphasize God's grace in Jesus. These characteristics will apply to a congregation's website.

Websites are the foundation of a church's online presence. The website is the repository of all the information a congregation deems valuable for reaching its audience(s). It is the digital door to the congregation.⁸³ It is the place people will meet a church for the first time and the path through which they will begin to develop a relationship with church members and, God willing, the Savior.

Churches that seek to capitalize on their online presence recognize that their website is the hub of whatever they share online. Posts on social media, e-newsletters, blogs, emails, and other online communication serve the purpose of directing people to the church's website where they will find the most help and information. The website is the portal for guests to leave contact information (usually an email address) so the church can begin a more personal conversation with them.⁸⁴

Echurch's ebook entitled *The Ultimate Church Website Blueprint* emphasizes the importance of a congregation's website: "A church website is your first touchpoint. As early as 2013, a GE Capital Bank study showed that 81 percent of consumers go online before making any large purchase. With the growth of mobile computing, this number has only increased. If people visit websites before they purchase a barbeque or microwave, how much more vigilant

⁸³ "Your church website is your first impression. It needs to represent who you are as a church. Think of it like the upkeep of your building. You wouldn't let your facilities fall apart, so why would you let your website look bad?"

Jerod Clark, *Church Website Statistics* (August 2, 2012), <http://network.crcna.org/church-web/church-website-statistics> (accessed June 12, 2016).

⁸⁴ Notice the growing importance of a church's website in attracting first time visitors: "The percentage of church attenders who said a church's website was important in picking a church to visit: 2009: 34%; 2012: 46%." A survey by Monk Development quoted at Jarod Clark, *4 Church Website Stats You Can't Afford to Ignore* (August 1, 2012), <http://prochurchtools.com/4-church-website-stats-you-cant-afford-to-ignore-wb/> (accessed June 23, 2016).

are they going to be when looking for a new church?”⁸⁵ The article continues, “A church website is a natural expectation [in our culture]. We’re long past the days when having a website meant you were a cutting edge church. People expect you to have a website, and if you don’t, they’ll look elsewhere. A website now rests on the lowest rung of visitor expectations. A church without a website has no idea how many potential visitors it has lost.”⁸⁶

An article entitled *4 Church Website Stats You Can’t Afford To Ignore* provides statistics for the importance of the proper functioning of a church website. “Nearly half (46%) of people say a website’s design is their number one criterion for determining the credibility of an organization.... 94% of people cited poor web design as the reason they mistrusted or rejected a website.... In 2012, 46% of church attenders said that a church’s website was important in picking a church to visit. 33% of people said that the internet was the first place where they learned about their church.”⁸⁷

Website evaluation

A church will regularly evaluate its website to ensure its online front door is open and is graciously inviting people to step inside. The answer to several questions will assist in that evaluation.

- Does the website add value to our visitor’s lives? Justin Trapp of Ministry Pass observes, “Adding value creates a level of trust and trust is a powerful currency. People are more likely to at least visit a church if some sort of trust already exist.”⁸⁸ Related points include:
 - People visit a church’s website to find relief for the pain points in their lives. Churches will have identified those perceived needs and clearly provide solutions on their website.
 - Note: people at different points in their journey toward a relationship with

⁸⁵ eChurch Giving, *The Ultimate Church Website Blueprint: How to Build a Website That Attracts More Visitors*, (Pushpay & eChurchGiving, 2016), <http://info.echurchgiving.com/lp-ebook-the-ultimate-church-website-blueprint.html> (accessed July 15, 2016) 5.

⁸⁶ Op.Cit., eChurch Giving, 6

⁸⁷ Bradley Shearer, *4 Church Website Stats You Can’t Afford To Ignore* (April 23, 2015), <http://prochurchtools.com/4-church-website-stats-you-cant-afford-to-ignore-wb/> (accessed May 13, 2016).

⁸⁸ Justin Trapp, *5 New Rules for Effective Church Websites* (undated), <http://justintrapp.com/5-new-rules-for-effective-church-websites>, (accessed May 13, 2016).

a church and the Savior will need different information. For example, people who have recently moved into a church's parish area may find a list of the stores, services, government offices helpful. Single parents may desire parenting advice or a support group.

- Does the website make it easy for guests to find the information they seek? A partial answer to this question has to do with a website's navigation. Jonathan Carone of The Church Template suggests, "When your navigation isn't laid out in a way that is easy for the unchurched person to understand, you communicate that their experience doesn't matter to you. To fix this, make sure your menu items are easy to understand directions. Ask yourself, 'If I knew nothing about this church, would I be able to find the information I need?'"⁸⁹

Bryan Young, the marketing content manager at Zoro US, adds, "Your visitors come to your website for one reason: information. The design, menus, ads, and fancy features are important, but only if they help your users find what they're looking for.... Ask yourself the questions a person who has never heard of your ministry would want to know."^{90 91}

At the very least a church's website will answer these questions:

- Where are we located?

⁸⁹ Jonathan Carone, *10 Common Mistakes Found On Church Websites* (undated), <http://pastors.com/10-common-mistakes-found-church-websites/> (accessed May 13, 2016).

⁹⁰ Bryan Young, *Is Your Church Website Visitor-Focused?* (December 13, 2010), http://www.iministries.org/BlogEntry.aspx?entry_id=219682, (accessed May 13, 2016).

⁹¹ 76% of consumers say the most important factor in a website's design is "the website makes it easy for me to find what I want." What does this mean for marketers?

- Don't obsess over the visual design of your website
- Do obsess over the usability by your customers and prospects
- Don't worry if you or the CEO think your website design does not look pretty
- Do worry about the conversion rate of your website (Are people finding what they need and completing their tasks?)
- Don't use flash, heavy graphics, or tons of video.
- Do use these things if it helps your customers get what they want from your website.
- Don't reinvent the wheel when it comes to design and layout.
- Do use a basic layout that will be familiar to your customers.
- Don't differentiate with the design/functionality of your website.
- Do differentiate your company by making it really easy for your customers to find what they want on your website.

Mike Volpe, *What Do 76% of Consumers Want From Your Website?* (June 1, 2011), <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/14953/What-Do-76-of-Consumers-Want-From-Your-Website-New-Dat> a.aspx (accessed May 13, 2016).

- When do we meet and for what (worship, Bible study, food pantry, etc.)?
 - What will our guests experience be like when they visit?
 - Where should guests park? A church gets extra points if guests park in designated areas near the door to the church.
 - Who is on staff? The answer to this requires a recent photo, a short bio, a statement of ministry philosophy. Move up in visitor rankings if a short video provides that information.
 - How can people new to the church volunteer? Join a small group?
 - How do people register for events at the church (summer camp, VBS, a parenting program, etc.)? If there is a cost, how is that paid online?
 - Do we provide a calendar of activities with links to fuller descriptions of those activities?
 - Is our contact information easily accessible? When someone emails us, is there someone in place who will respond to them within 24 hours, if not sooner?⁹²
 - Do we have an easy to understand, positive, and gospel centered statement of our core beliefs? Does our site provide a link to our denomination's website?
- Is our site outdated? A site whose design hasn't changed in four or five years speaks volumes about the church that owns it ... and it speaks nothing good. Website design, like clothes styles, constantly change. A church's website need to stay current with the colors, image sizes, and video lengths that people are used to experiencing on the web.
 - Is our website mobile friendly? Can our site be read as easily on a smartphone and tablet as on a desktop? Does our site force mobile users to pinch and scroll to find the information they seek? The smartphone audience is huge and continues to grow. In 2015 nearly two-thirds of Americans owned a smartphone.⁹³

⁹² "I understand not displaying your lead pastor's e-mail address on your website. Having e-mail addresses that lead to actual people are a good thing, though. When the only contact info listed is a phone number and contact form, your website gives off the vibe that you don't want people to contact you. By displaying contact e-mails of your staff, you are telling the potential guest that you want them to reach out to your church." Jonathan Carone 10 *Common Mistakes Found On Church Websites* (undated), <http://pastors.com/10-common-mistakes-found-church-websites> (accessed May13, 2016).

⁹³ Pew Research Center, *U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015* (April 1, 2015), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015> (accessed May 13, 2016).

- Does our website accurately represent our congregation? Do we rely on stock photographs rather than photos of our members and our facilities?⁹⁴ Do guests feel misled by our portrayal of ourselves when they visit our campus?⁹⁵
- Are there prominent links to our social media sites? Most Americans are connected to at least one social media site. A significant percentage are interested in finding a church. Churches must demonstrate they are interested in having those people follow them online.⁹⁶

Website content

The answers to these questions will assist a congregation in evaluating how well its ShareGrace philosophy permeates its website. The answers also lead to an examination of the content a church will publish on its website, social media, and other online communication. A church that is using a ShareGrace approach to its website, not to mention other social media, will seek to develop relationships with the individuals it meets there. It will show that it listens to its followers, learns from them, and shares information with them in much the same way as friends build their relationships in the real world. A church will respond to the questions posted by their virtual friends, as well as reflect on their comments, concerns, and complaints. Of course, the ShareGrace philosophy dictates that the tone of those responses will be positive and those responses will be prompt. “Speak[ing] the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) applies to online relationships as much as to offline relationships.

Building relationships, whether on or offline, requires time and energy. A church’s online communication team must be given sufficient time and training to foster those

⁹⁴ Your goal should be to create an attractive website that features elements people will recognize when they actually visit your church. You also want to use images of your own people to help communicate vital and valuable impressions of your church culture.
Op.Cit., eChurch Giving.

⁹⁵ “Don’t let a poor website kill people’s interest in your church. A current, mobile-friendly, and informative website will be welcoming to visitors and increase interest in your church.”
Emily Kantner, *5 Reasons Your Church Website Might Be Keeping Visitors Away* (undated), <http://churchtechtoday.com/2015/03/16/church-website-visitors> (accessed May 13, 2016).

⁹⁶ “The inclusion of [links to a church’s social media] would mean that your church would need to be active on social media. These links do no good if your social media channels are inactive or defunct... But at the very least, a church should be present where its people are—and that place is on social media.”
Thom Rainer, *Eight things Your Church Website Must Have* (undated), <http://thomrainer.com/2016/01/eight-things-your-church-website-must-have> (accessed May 13, 2016).

relationships. NewsCred assumes such a team when it advises, “Nurture individual relationships through community. Allow the power of community to cultivate your brand’s relationship with consumers.”⁹⁷

Storytelling

“The secret to content marketing is no secret: it’s storytelling,”⁹⁸ proclaims another NewsCred article, a business dedicated to helping other businesses succeed in content marketing. But Christians have known about the power of story for millennia. ShareGrace also harnesses the power of story.

The ShareGrace philosophy strives not to build a relationship between churches and their online followers, but between those followers and Jesus. Relationships between people are built as they share stories that reveal who they are and what they value. Telling the Bible’s stories about our God and what he values is an essential component to building faith relationships. As noted above, gospel based content is the indispensable ingredient for a church’s online communication. But a church will always seek to tailor that content for its audience. That is best done through telling the stories of God’s grace in the lives of people, both in the lives of believers in Bible times and in the lives of believers of today.

Rev. Donald Patterson writes in *Preach the Word*, “God is the greatest story teller of all. His book is one giant metanarrative about Christ and his salvation. It’s communicated through hundreds of smaller stories all chained together from beginning to end. It’s the greatest story ever told.... As evangelical preachers we will want to keep telling God’s metanarrative in some fashion every time we preach. If we aren’t constantly telling the story of Christ and his salvation as the source from which all true spirituality flows, we are just orators, entertainers, philosophers, gurus, and pundits.”⁹⁹

Sysomos affirms that value of storytelling for businesses. Translating its business-centered article into a gospel-centered message provides helpful insights.

The very best marketers [substitute the word “evangelists”] put stories at the heart of

⁹⁷ Op.Cit., NewsCred, *Content Marketing 101: Strategy, Design, Delivery*, 22

⁹⁸ NewsCred, *A 10-step Blueprint to Content Marketing Success* (2014), <http://www.slideshare.net/NewsCred/a-10-step-blueprint-to-content-marketing-success> (Accessed July 23, 2016), 5.

⁹⁹ Donald Patterson, *Storytelling in Our Preaching* (*Preach the Word*, volume 19, number 6, July/August 2016), 1.

their work. Stories of customers, employees, advocates, fans, friends, partners. Social media is a natural extension of storytelling, and a fantastic vehicle for shining a spotlight on the people that make your business tick. Whether it's customer testimonial videos or photos of your latest employee outing, spending time and effort in your social media interactions to celebrate the people behind your brand, or talk about trendsetters and tastemakers in your community matters. Remember: the strongest content doesn't have to be about your brand and products.¹⁰⁰

Storytelling with a purpose

Of course, good content on a church's website is not just storytelling for the sake of storytelling. It's storytelling with a goal: to proclaim and demonstrate God's grace in Jesus. Referencing its approach to website content, Marketo explains, "Educate first, sell second. Create content that is meant to help your customers, not sell to them. When you freely give your audience something so valuable that they'd be willing to pay for it, you build trust – which, ultimately, is your most powerful selling tool."¹⁰¹ To ensure that they are educating first rather than selling Marketo has developed its "411 rule."

Put simply, we try to create four educational, entertaining assets for every one "soft promotion" (such as a third party report) and one "hard promotion" (such as a product demo). We've also found that this approach works well in email marketing, on our blog, and in social marketing. But this approach isn't just about numbers – at its heart, it's about educating first, selling second. We believe that if you focus your marketing on building relationships with your audience and making their lives easier, the rest will follow. Content marketing is one of the most powerful tools to develop and empower your base. So even if you're understandably eager to sell products, keep your content

¹⁰⁰ Expion, *The Smart Marketer's Guide to Social Media Management, 10 Tips You Need to Build and Engage Your Community* (undated); https://www.sysomos.com/sites/default/files/Expion_eBook_03_03_16_v9.pdf (accessed July 15, 2016), 8.

¹⁰¹ This quote continues with an example, "At Marketo we try to create assets that educate our audience about marketing automation as a platform, and how it can help marketers be more effective at their jobs. We aren't just pushing sales messages to our buyers – we're also teaching people marketing best practices, and clarifying the benefits of investing in marketing automation. Even when we're talking about our core competency – marketing automation – we focus on educating our audience with thought leadership, rather than pushing our solution. Marketo, *The Definitive Guide to Engaging Content Marketing* (2014), <https://www.marketo.com/definitive-guides/definitive-guide-to-engaging-content-marketing/> (accessed June 15, 2016),10.

informative, valuable, and relevant. Your audience's trust – an essential element if you plan to sell anything – hangs in the balance.^{102 103 104}

A ShareGrace philosophy concurs. Church websites, as well as their social media sites, are not a vehicle to broadcast a stream of self-promotion. Churches will seek to provide content that will meet the perceived needs of their audiences, that will offer it information those audiences consider valuable, and that will seek to build trust with those audiences. (Recall how emphasizing God's grace through Jesus is essential to such content.) The 411 rule, then, means churches best serve their audiences by promoting their programs, worship services, and events only one out of every six times they post messages.

With ShareGrace as its guide, a church will provide helpful online content that leads souls to a faith relationship with Jesus. Highlighting the gospel is key to achieving that goal, but wrapping the gospel in the appropriate content is also important. Content that is viewed as valuable and shareable impacts people in at least one of four ways. "It *enlightens* the audience, or gives them information or details they need in order to understand your brand or products better. It's *entertaining*, giving readers or viewers something they enjoy or that captivates their attention for a while. It's *educational*, or teaches people something they didn't know before. It doesn't have to be specifically about your products or services, but maybe a topic related to what you offer, like a home improvement store offering "how to" videos for DIYers. It *evokes* an emotion, and helps the community see themselves in the story you're telling, and the problem you're trying to solve.¹⁰⁵

Examples of content that shares relevant stories that are *enlightening*, *entertaining*,

¹⁰² Op.Cit., Marketo, *The Definitive Guide to Engaging Content Marketing*, 10.

¹⁰³ Some content experts advocate for a 60/20/20 approach to the types of content churches and businesses should share online. "60% of the time we should be educating, informing and bringing valuable content and information into people's day to help them learn and become better at what they know and do.... 20% of the time we should be inspiring and engaging people with our experiences, the lessons we learn from them, and engaging in conversations about them.... 20% of the time we should be asking for, consummating, and making sales.... By the way, sales are not only about buying. Sales are also about getting appointments, making presentations, networking, and referrals.

Deborah Shane, *60/20/20 Marketing and Sales Formula* (September 2, 2014), <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140902125537-46429081-60-20-20-marketing-and-sales-formula> (accessed May 16, 2016).

¹⁰⁴ See also Brady Shearer, *The 60/20/20 Rule with Van Baird* (September 1, 2015), <http://prochurchtools.com/076-sm/> (accessed May 16, 2016).

¹⁰⁵ Op.Cit., Expion, 9.

educating, and *evoking* helpful emotions include:

- Lists of helpful information. Examples: lists of businesses in the area that a newcomer could find useful, lists of contact information for area government offices, lists of parents tips.
- Videos: Churches can curate short video from Youtube, Vimeo, or denominational sites that educate, entertain, etc. Churches can also produce their own videos that address their audience's pain points. Video summaries of a pastor's weekend messages could be beneficial.
- Webinars: Webinars usually require a significant investment of time and resources. However, with the ease of broadcasting live events using Periscope, Facebook, and other hosting platforms, churches can provide their communities, if not the world, entree to the presentations and workshops they host.
- Polls: Regularly sampling one's online audience for its opinion on any topic is easily and cheaply done (e.g., qzzr.com). Not every quiz needs to address moral or theological issues. In fact the 411 rule would insist that most quizzes will entertain and educate.
- PDF downloads: PDFs provide an audience with access to larger digital documents than websites can usually accommodate. A white paper, an authoritative report on a complex issue (e.g., a document providing a Christian view of gay marriage or abortion), may be offered as a PDF. A how-to document that has many photos will work better as a PDF than as a webpage.¹⁰⁶
- Reviews: Reviews of local activities and events could be helpful for newcomers to an area. Churches will want their reviews to be positive, diplomatically mentioning any negatives.
- Interviews: Audiences can find audio, written, or videotaped interviews helpful features on church websites. Certainly interviews with the congregation's pastor and other key leaders will be important. Also useful would be interviews with longtime members, as

¹⁰⁶ Often businesses "gate" access to their PDFs behind a sign up form as a way to harvest an individual's contact information. Gating content in this way may not be the best approach for a church or for a business. Confer: Kathryn Aragon, *Is Gated Content a Necessary Evil? [Case Studies + Optimization Tips]* (August 8, 2014), <http://unbounce.com/content-marketing/gated-content/> (accessed May 16, 2016). Pamella Neely *Gated vs. Ungated Content*; (November 22, 2013), <http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/109724-content-downloads-vs-lead-generation>, (accessed May 16, 2016). Mark Sherbin, *When Does Gating Make Sense for Content Marketing?* (September 10, 2013), <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2013/09/gating-make-sense-content-marketing/> (accessed May 16, 2016).

well as people well-known in the area. These interviews may seek to entertain and educate on subjects that are not directly related to the church.

- Podcasts: Today anyone with digital audio or video recording devices has the capability to post a podcast. Podcasts are expected to be episodic (to occur at regular intervals). They can deal with any topic and can be formatted in any number of ways (confer the weekly WELSTech podcast, <http://welstech.wels.net/>)¹⁰⁷
- Blog: Blog is an elision of web and log. It describes an online, public journal entry.¹⁰⁸ Research has shown that businesses that blog regularly drive more traffic to their websites than those that don't.¹⁰⁹ The blogs must be well-written and address topics that interest audience members. For examples of blogs written by a WELS members, confer Mike Westendorf's blog at http://www.mikewestendorf.com/accessible_worship/ and Mark Cares "Weblog" at <https://markcares.net/>.
- Tutorials: Nothing says "I'm here to help" better than a well constructed tutorial. A video of a pastor's class on how to interpret the Bible could be a frequently visited tutorial. The same may be said of an educator's tutorial on modifying a child's negative behavior or a counselor's advice on improving a marriage. Tutorials work best when they make several clear points in less than three minutes (confer the most popular

¹⁰⁷ "A podcast is a digital media file that is downloaded directly from a streaming Internet source. They are distributed on the Internet using syndication feeds, or free use websites, and are hosted or authored by a podcaster. The media files are downloaded onto a computer, whether it is a home PC or a Mac, and then can be directly downloaded onto a digital media device like an iPod or other MP3 player. Many people simplify the podcast definition simply by calling it an online, prerecorded radio program over the Internet." Brick Marketing, *What Is a Podcast?* (undated), <http://www.brickmarketing.com/what-is-a-podcast.htm> (accessed July 24, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ CoSchedule has curated advice about blogging's best practices at *How To Be A Successful Blogger In 12 Steps From Popular Bloggers*, by James Johnson, (February 10, 2016), <http://coschedule.com/blog/how-to-be-a-successful-blogger/> (accessed May 16, 2016). Also see, *Say What?! Your Church Still Isn't Blogging? – 3 Instant Takeaways*. This article maintains that blogging is an alternative to preaching, that blogs requires catchy headlines, and that a blog is a place to turn every question pastors get into a blog post. Brady Shearer, *Say What?! Your Church Still Isn't Blogging?* (July 29, 2014), <http://prochurchtools.com/020-wb> (accessed May 16, 2016).

¹⁰⁹ Confer: Corey Wainwright, *Why Blog? The Benefits of Blogging for Business and Marketing*, (September 30, 2015), <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/the-benefits-of-business-blogging-htm> (accessed May 16, 2016).

YouTube tutorials).¹¹⁰

- Case studies: A case study is an depth report on a person, group, or situation that has been studied over time. Churches may publish or curate case studies on any topics that are of interest to their target audience. Examples include comparisons of public and Lutheran educational outcomes or examinations of the cultural values of millennials.
- Research is similar to a case study, but it encompasses a wider range of topics and tends to approach those topics from a qualitative rather than an quantitative analysis. A church could publish a research document on its parish area based on information from the U.S. Census Bureau or its own ethnographic survey. Even better, it could ask for comments on its research.
- Infographics: “An infographic (information graphic) is a representation of information in a graphic format designed to make the data easily understandable at a glance. People use infographics to quickly communicate a message, to simplify the presentation of large amounts of data, to see data patterns and relationships, and to monitor changes in variables over time.”¹¹¹ Churches could use infographics to highlight the growth of their ministries, to make a case for a new or expanding ministry, to simplify the conclusions of a research paper. 316NOW offers an example of an infographic about its online Bible institute at <https://tinyurl.com/hoa6edf>.

Clearly written, relevant content

Much more could be said about website content, but that is a topic for another thesis. However, Network for Good captures key elements of that topic in an article entitled, *How to Polish Your Online Writing*. The ShareGrace philosophy recognizes clear and understandable writing best serves a church’s audience. This article offers guidelines when it asks: “Are you...

- Writing for a specific audience? Your copy should reflect your cause as well as the interests and concerns of your supporters. ...
- Checking all copy for clarity, grammar, and spelling? Proofreading is worth the

¹¹⁰ Confer Melissa Bowles-Terry, Merinda Kaye Hensley, Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, *Best Practices for Online Video Tutorials in Academic Libraries: A Study of Student Preferences and Understanding* (December 2010). https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/18671/VideoTutorials_BowlesTerryHensleyHinchliffe.pdf (accessed May 16, 2016).

¹¹¹ Whatis.com, *Definition: Infographics (undated)*, <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/infographics> (accessed May 17, 2016).

investment! ...

- Focusing on a single, clear call to action? Make it specific, feasible, and your first priority! ...
- Using eye-friendly font styles and colors? Dark text on a light background is best. ...
- Streamlining your copy? Remove redundant phrases and unnecessary explanations to make your point clearer.
- Being consistent? ...Create a persona by using a consistent tone and writing style in all of your outreach. ...
- Making your text easy to read? Help readers skim by breaking up long blocks of text with bulleted lists and bold headings. ...
- Making your missives visually appealing? Use white space to help reduce visual clutter and make your copy more readable.¹¹²

“Relevant” is a word that frequently surfaces in a discussion of writing clarity. A ShareGrace approach acknowledges that there is no message more relevant than sin and grace. However, churches must learn how best to make a case for the gospel’s relevancy to its online audience. Christian-speak and church jargon must be avoided. Biblical concepts must be translated into words and images the intended audience can grasp. The questions for the author of a church’s posts are not, “Do you understand this,” but “Will your readers understand this and find it helpful?”

Kivi Miller offers six solutions to communicating effectively.

Relevancy can be hard to pinpoint because it varies from person to person and circumstance to circumstance.... There are six primary elements of message or communications relevancy that are especially important in nonprofit marketing. Any message... is much more likely to be [perceived as] relevant when it’s rewarding, it’s realistic, it’s real time, it’s responsive, it’s revealing, it’s refreshing.... If you can be at least two of the six, your odds of feeling relevant are significantly improved.¹¹³

¹¹² Network for Good, *How to Polish Your Online Writing* (undated), <http://learn.networkforgood.com/online-writing-checklist-for-nonprofits.html> (accessed May 17, 2016).

¹¹³ Kivi Leroux Miller, *Content Marketing for Nonprofits* (Jossey-Bass/John Wiley and Sons, Inc., San Francisco, CA, 2013), 236.

Visual appeal

Beyond writing well for an online audience, visual content is also a critical ingredient to serving one's online audience. This applies equally to websites and other online posts. Hubspot has shared an article named, *19 Fascinating Statistics That Make the Case for Using Visual Content in Your Marketing*. First among those statistics is: "90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual, and visuals are processed 60,000X faster in the brain than text (Sources: 3M Corporation and Zabisco). 40% of people will respond better to visual information than plain text (Source: Zabisco)."¹¹⁴ MarketingTech Blog adds, "Publishers who use infographics as their marketing weapon can increase their traffic by 12%. Photos are liked twice as much as text updates on Facebook. 94% more total views on average are attracted by content containing compelling images than content without images. 67% of consumers consider clear, detailed images to be very important and carry even more weight than the product information, full description, and customer ratings. 60% of consumers are more likely to consider or contact a business whose images appear in local search results. 37% increase in engagement is experienced when Facebook posts include photographs."¹¹⁵

Consequently, Rebekah Radice, the founder of RadiantLA, a digital marketing agency, and the Chief Marketing Officer at Post Planner, advises, "Use images that are a banquet for the eyes. Bold, beautiful, eye-catching and simple to scan. The goal here is to create an image that will immediately intrigue, delight, and connect with your audience."¹¹⁶

JeffBullas.com has published a helpful article on visual content written by Anna Guerrero. It is entitled, *10 Types of Visual Social Media Posts That Get Shared Like Crazy*. Guerrero promises that with the right graphics its possible to double social engagement and see content shared with many others. She points out, however, that simply adding photos or other graphics will not increase an audience's engagement. "Smart content marketers create visual content that reach people's emotions – content with real psychological impact." Guerrero

¹¹⁴ Amanda Sibley, *19 Fascinating Statistics That Make the Case for Using Visual Content in Your Marketing* (August 6, 2012) <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/33423/19-Reasons-You-Should-Include-Visual-Content-in-Your-Marketing-Data.aspx> (accessed May 17, 2016).

¹¹⁵ Douglas Karr, *Why Use Visual Content in Social Media?* (September 11, 2013) <https://www.marketingtechblog.com/visual-content-social-media/> (accessed May 17, 2016).

¹¹⁶ Rebekah Radice, *11 Little Facebook Tips That Bring Big Engagement Results* (August 10, 2015), <http://rebekahradice.com/facebook-tips-that-bring-big-engagement-results/> (accessed May 17, 2016).

suggests the use of these ten types of graphics:

- High quality stock photography: Churches will be wary of using stock photographs because an audience can perceive them as falsely representing a congregation. However, the right stock photograph can convey an accurate depiction of a church in a high quality fashion.
- Screenshots: Pictures of content on a computer screen can tell a compelling story. For example, a screenshot of a missionary in Thailand speaking to worshipers over Skype.
- Infographics: We've mentioned the value of infographics above.
- Personal photographs: Think of phone photos, the kind that millions of people post every day on social media. They lack professional polish, but they can depict real emotions.
- Behind the scenes shots of your workplace: Photos of a church cleaning day, of the secretary hard at work, of a Sunday school teachers' meeting will touch a church's audience and speak volumes about the atmosphere in a church.
- Quote graphics: Attractive graphics that contain Scripture passages and quotes from notable Christian leaders are easy to create. Quotescover.com and Canva.com are two sites that make any designer look good. Of course, the internet is full of quote graphics that are free to use. For example, 316NOW.org offers three free Scripture graphics every week.
- Original designs: Every successful business strives to brand itself through consistent and immediately recognizable font styles, colors, and image personality. The goal: you want your brand to be instantly recognizable. Think of Apple's apple logo or the Nike swoosh. Churches, too, will use the graphic styles of their keys fonts, colors, and photo types to help their audience immediately recognize their materials.
- Action shots: Churches can use photos of members working together, of children caring for each other, and of the congregation at worship to demonstrate what happens on its campus and beyond. Action shots also portray activity and offer an invitation for others to participate.
- Images with a striking color palette: Colors reflect, even create a mood. Churches will use the way its audience will interpret the colors in a graphic to reinforce the message it seeks to convey.

Echurch's ebook *The Ultimate Church Website Blueprint* adds, "Feature your target demographic. One important factor for churches to consider is what target demographic they

want to focus on.... Once you've figured out what your key demographic is, feature images of congregants on the homepage that fit this demographic. Whether you're looking to attract professionals, young families, members of the military, or any other under-represented group in your community, you'll want to feature images of people they can identify with on the homepage."¹¹⁷

Conclusion

For a fine example of a thoughtfully done church website see New Spring Church's site at <https://newspring.cc/>. Notice how audience focused this site is. It provides content for each of its audiences, information on the experience of visiting one of its sites, and highlights of its programs all in an easy to navigate website.¹¹⁸

Well designed website that answers the questions of visitors while proclaiming the gospel with solid content and appealing graphics aligns with a ShareGrace philosophy. It also demonstrates that the congregation that publishes that website (1) understands and is committed to its target audience(s), (2) is willingness to help, to provide for, and to strengthen its audiences' spiritual life; (3) has a strategy that is designed to lead souls to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ; and (4) seeks to emphasize God's grace in Jesus.

¹¹⁷ Op.Cit., eChurchGiving, 10

¹¹⁸ For a commentary on this website see this *How New Spring Church Uses Technology to Connect Members to their 5 Core Values* by Beka Johnson (undated), <https://echurchgiving.com/newspring-church-uses-technology-connect-members-5-core-values/> (accessed July 23, 2016).

ShareGrace philosophy and social media

The principles of a ShareGrace philosophy must also guide a church's use of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Here, too, churches will demonstrate they (1) understand and are committed to their target audience(s), (2) are willing to help, to provide for, and to strengthen their audiences' spiritual life; (3) have a strategy that is designed to lead souls to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ; and (4) seek to emphasize God's grace in Jesus.

In our discussion of church websites that practice a ShareGrace philosophy, we noted design characteristics that also apply to social media. These included storytelling; posts that enlighten, educate, entertain, and evoke emotion; clear writing; and visual appeal.

Contemporary society expects that churches and other nonprofits will have an active presence on social media.¹¹⁹ More important than that, social media provides avenues to reach our culture with God's good news of free forgiveness in Jesus. "Social media is no longer a fad. It is established in our culture. And churches should do everything they can to engage the public in this forum. As of January 2014, 74% of all adults who have some sort of presence online use social media—your church needs to be accessible there."¹²⁰ Ed Stetzer, the Senior Fellow of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, advises, "With some strategic thought, churches can reach those who are regularly using social media."¹²¹

Churches need a presence on social media

Jayson Bradley at echurchgiving.com suggests there are five reasons churches need to

¹¹⁹ At the present time the most used social media sites in the United States are Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, and Instagram. Confer the Comparison of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram infographic in the Appendices for further information. Statista, *Leading Social Media Websites in the United States in May 2016, Based on Share of Visits* (undated), <http://www.statista.com/statistics/265773/market-share-of-the-most-popular-social-media-websites-in-the-us/> (accessed July 23, 2016).

¹²⁰ *Why Your Church Should Be On Social Media Right Now* quotes from Pew Research's research on Facebook to establish this point. 71% of all online adults use Facebook. 58% of the entire adult population use Facebook. 66% of all online men use Facebook versus 77% of all online women. 87% of all online 18-29 year olds use Facebook. 73% of all online 30-49 year olds use Facebook. 63% of all online 50-64 year olds use Facebook. 56% of all online 65+ year olds use Facebook. Ed Stetzer, *Why Your Church Should Be On Social Media Right Now* (February 10, 2015), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/february/why-your-church-should-be-on-social-media.html> (accessed May 18, 2016).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, Ed Stetzer.

have a presence on social media. They are:

1. Social media might be the first place people find your church. Over 46% of church planters say that social media is their most effective method of outreach.... So it isn't like social media is competing with your website for the most visible digital channel; it's competing with every method churches are using to draw attention to themselves.
2. You can build a relationship with your congregation's friends.... Through the likes and shares of your updates from people who already attend your church, your content is pushed into the feed of their friends and family. When you explain to your congregation that their interaction with your Facebook page is a form of outreach, you can build a strategy around sharing your culture with people who might be open to learning more.
3. Facebook's groups and events rival some church social networks. ...One thing that's fantastic about Facebook is the fact that most of your people are already there every day. Using Facebook groups for ministries or studies is an incredibly easy (and free) way to keep everyone together and on the same page.... This gives people another level of exposure and interaction with your church.
4. You're meeting people where they are. Community is in transition.... Instead of fighting this transition, the church should be embracing its inherent positives and opportunities. We should be taking advantage of every tool at our disposal to reach people where they are, and there may be no greater tool available than social media.
5. Your social media accounts represent your church vitality.... When people come to one of your social media platforms and you haven't updated it in months, it shapes their impression of your church. If you're going to have a social-media presence it's important for you to regularly update it.¹²²

In an article entitled *Why Your church should invest in social media*, Ministry Best Practices forwards three qualitative reasons active participation on social media can improve the quality of a church's ministry and help move the church's ShareGrace objectives forward: communication, connecting, and call to action. The article goes on to explain each quality.

Communication ...Social Media [is] another effective tool to add to the church's communication mosaic. But social media has some unique benefits all it's own in

¹²² Jayson Bradley, *Five Reasons Your Church Needs Social Media* (undated), <https://echurchgiving.com/5-reasons-why-your-church-needs-social-media/> (accessed May 17, 2016).

effectively communicating: it's easy and effortless, it doesn't take much money or manpower to implement or use it; it's ubiquitous, since it is so available and pervasive it isn't hard for people to miss the message; it's variety, social media takes many different forms, words, audio and image; it's viral, the beauty of social media is that your message can expand well beyond it's intended audience—therefore exposing and introducing new people to your cause and community.¹²³

Connecting ...Unlike communication which most often pushes information in a “one-way” direction, connecting must create a conversation. You must ask, Will social media create conversation within the community? Are people able to talk to you the minister/ministry team leader? Can they talk to one another? ...Can others contribute in helpful and meaningful ways to the conversation? Are they even able to shape the conversation? ...Does your social media allow the benefits from the collective hive of experience, skills and knowledge from your community?

Call to Action Social media...can't be passive. [Posts must include] calls to action.... Are you asking someone to go and serve others in some way? ... Are you asking someone to give either of their time or financially to the cause? ... Are you calling people to act in concerted and persevering prayer? ... Are you asking people to spread the message of the cause to their friends and networks?¹²⁴

Social media is first of all social

The key to making the best use of social media in a manner than aligns with ShareGrace philosophy is to remember that social media is first of all social. It is about people connecting with people, people forming relationships with each other. Unlike the one-to-many design of traditional media (where communication is one way, such as a broadcaster sharing a message

¹²³ The article *Five Mistakes Pastors Make On Social Media* adds to this point when it identifies not being on social media as one of those mistakes. “A pastor who is not on social media could be compared to a pastor not using the telephone, computers, or microphones when they preach. Social media gives each pastor the equivalent of their own TV station, radio station, and printing press. This is one area of our culture pastors cannot afford to sit-out. The potential reach of social media is far more than the average pastor will personally minister to personally in their lifetimes.”

Ed Stetzer, *Five Mistakes Pastors Make On Social Media* (November 20, 2015), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/november/five-mistakes-pastors-make-on-social-media.html> (accessed May 18, 2016).

¹²⁴ Ministry Best Practices, *Why Your Church Should Invest in Social Media* (2009), <http://www.ministrybestpractices.com/2009/02/why-should-your-church-invest-in-social.html> (accessed May 18, 2016).

with a large audience), the design of social media requires back and forth communication between all parties. A church that uses social media properly will invite opportunities to be a responder, not just a broadcaster.¹²⁵

In a handbook on online communication, Sysomos (Sysomos.com, “a world leader in social intelligence”) maintains, “Social media is only one mechanism in our overall communications efforts, but it’s a really powerful one due to it’s customer-driven, real-time nature. Unlike the marketing vehicles we’ve used for generations, social media flips our marketing models on their heads and gives us unprecedented, direct access to the customers we’re trying to reach. Meet your customers where they are, and harness the power of this new era of expectations, one where technology and communications collide to give us better insights, clearer actions, and more agile businesses than ever before.”¹²⁶

The social aspect of social media is transforming the way businesses market their products. In *Why the Future of Marketing Is a Two-way Customer Conversation*, David Kirkpatrick, an editor at Marketing Dive, writes, “From a strategic standpoint, Dholakia [CMO at Marketo] explained the customer experience must be at the core of the entire marketing program. He said social media, for example, is a channel that many marketers view as a way to push messages at people rather than engage in two-way conversations, which should be the approach they take.”¹²⁷

Social media is a two-way street.¹²⁸ ShareGrace emphasizes that a church will employ

¹²⁵ Consider this observation of Andrew Caravella, vice president of marketing at Sprout Social. He is quoted in an article by David Kirkpatrick, “Sprout Social’s Q2 2016 Index ... report revealed that 75% of people are more likely to post something positive about a brand if that brand attempts to connect with them in a meaningful way on social... If you prioritize customer care, you’ll be surprised by how many people will become vocal brand advocates.”

David Kirkpatrick, *Study: Marketers Aren’t Engaging Customers on Social Media* (May 18, 2016) <https://www.marketingdive.com/news/study-marketers-arent-engaging-customers-on-social-media/419402/> (accessed May 18, 2016).

¹²⁶ Op.Cit., Expion, 13.

¹²⁷ David Kirkpatrick, *Why the Future of Marketing Is a Two-way Customer Conversation* (April 11, 2016), <https://www.marketingdive.com/news/why-the-future-of-marketing-is-a-two-way-customer-conversation/417177/> (accessed May 15, 2016).

¹²⁸ Kate Rose writes in *A Reminder: Social Media is About Being “Social,”* “Stop looking at social media as a ‘tool.’ It’s not. It’s a channel to allow other people to find and interact with you....” *A reminder: social media is about being “social”*

Kate Rose, *A Reminder: Social Media is About Being “Social”* (May 18, 2016), <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/marketing/reminder-social-media-about-being-social> (accessed May 18, 2016).

social media to broadcast its message, but it will also listen intently to the messages that return to it.¹²⁹ When churches that are making use of social media are contacted by online followers, they will always respond as quickly as possible and with undeniable concern and sincerity.

Churches will also demonstrate they understand the “social” in social media by providing their audience with more than content. Churches offer to assist their audiences; they willingly share resources so the perceived needs of others are met. “Peer-to-peer sharing is the best way to get your message heard.... Always add value. At the end of the day, if you are not providing some sort of value to your prospects..., you are not doing your job and social media will never work for you.”¹³⁰

The importance of social media’s content

When we described a ShareGrace website above we noted the importance of well-written, relevant content that addresses the needs of a congregation’s target audience. We also noted that quality graphic content is essential to reaching a church’s audience. Those same design principles apply to social media posts. The containers for holding this content that we have described (infographics, lists, white papers, etc.) have a prominent place in social media. However, since social media posts must be succinct, these posts will provide followers with a two or three sentence description of the longer articles and supply a link to the website where the article actually resides. Alternately, a social media post may only be a graphic with an article’s title superimposed that is linked to the full article on the church’s website. This is an especially good solution for a social media sites like Twitter because it has a 140 character limit.

Conclusion

A ShareGrace approach to social media finds rich application as a church engages with the multitude of people who use that media. A church’s social media presence will demonstrate

¹²⁹ In an article entitled, *Social Listening is Key to Donor Retention*, Jeanette Russell of attentive.ly suggests that content marketing is not just about making good content available; it is about listening to them. “Social listening gives organizations unprecedented insight into their donors’ lives and an opportunity for richer engagement through personalization. Far beyond surveys, focus groups or feedback forms, nonprofits have the ability to analyze, in real time, what their donors think, feel, and care about — and can react with predetermined triggers or send personalized marketing messages.”

Jeanette Russell, *Social Listening is Key to Donor Retention* (May 26, 2015), <https://attentive.ly/blog/social-listening-is-key-to-donor-retention/> (May 15, 2016).

¹³⁰ *The Definitive Guide to social marketing: a Marketo handbook*; 2012, Marketo, Inc., Page 6. *Definitive-Guide-to-Social-Marketing.pdf* – Accessed 05/15/16

that it understands and is committed to its target audience(s). It will show a ready willingness to help, to provide for, and to strengthen its audiences' spiritual life. It will exhibit a well-thought-out strategy that is designed to lead souls to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. And most of all, it will seek to emphasize God's grace in Jesus.

Summary, Suggestions for Future Study, Concluding Remarks

The ShareGrace philosophy is a Scripture based concept that undergirds a strategic online evangelism approach that is motivated by God’s grace in Jesus and focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent gospel content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to welcome that audience into a faith relationship with Jesus.

This approach is informed by the research and experience of for profit businesses, but it avoids the negative implication that the Church is engaged in selling a product. ShareGrace emphasizes the privilege and responsibility of giving away God’s undeserved love to God’s world. ShareGrace recognizes what marketing experts have learned about communicating in the age of the internet: to gain an audience for a product an organization must build trust. It does that by giving away help that people perceive to be relevant. Churches are privileged to give away the most relevant and helpful treasure of all times: God’s love, forgiveness, and an eternal place in his home.

Four characteristics of a ShareGrace philosophy will mark a church’s online communication.

1. An understanding of and commitment to its target audience(s).
2. A grace-prompted willingness to help, to provide for, and to strengthen its audiences’ spiritual life.
3. A strategy that is designed to lead souls to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.
4. An emphasis on God’s grace in Jesus.

ShareGrace seeks to guide churches in the early years of the 21st Century to take fullest advantage of our internet age as they boldly use cyberspace “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Jesus, Mark 16:15).

Future study

This thesis has focused on how a ShareGrace philosophy will shape a church’s online evangelism efforts. It raises many issues that call for further study. Those issues include:

- A documented content marketing strategy that will detail the specific steps churches will implement as they represent the Savior online.
- A strategy that will enable churches to evaluate their online efforts. This strategy will include metrics that measure those efforts as well as what those measurements mean,

- including the measurement of a church return on investment (ROI).
- Specific application of ShareGrace principles to each social media platform and the audiences they attract.
 - Advice on assembling and leading the team that manages a congregation’s online presence, including establishing a publication calendar, a listing of responsibilities and relationships, and training programs.
 - Research on how a congregation develops and exploits its online brand.
 - Best practices for
 - planning, designing, and optimizing a congregation’s website.
 - email marketing.
 - blogging
 - content creation and curation.
 - Strategies and anticipated outcomes for purchasing advertising on social media.
 - A plan of action for reaching millennials with the gospel through online media.
 - A program to train Christians to share their faith online.

Concluding Remarks

Five hundred years ago the Lutheran Reformation embraced Gutenberg’s new printing technology and the clear message of the gospel spread throughout Europe and then the world.

Today’s children of the Reformation do well to follow that example as the internet, an invention that is countless times more powerful than the printing press, surges onward in its conquest of our planet. A ShareGrace philosophy of online communication will allow churches to harness the potential of the internet for service to the gospel, our God, and the people of his world.

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Jesus, Mark 16:15).

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“What Is a Podcast?” Brick Marketing. Undated. <http://www.brickmarketing.com/what-is-a-podcast.htm>; Internet, accessed July 24, 2016.

Appendices

- Inbound Marketing Rising
- Inbound Marketer vs Outbound Marketer Info
- Persona Description
- Comparison of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- Prospect's Journey

Inbound Marketing Rising



As consumers continue to flock to the Internet, **the Internet marketing industry continues to evolve**. In a two-way medium like the Internet, the traditional models of **marketing are losing their efficacy, and new types of marketing are gaining steam** by providing value for consumers increasingly put off by intrusive marketing tactics.

THE INBOUND MARKETER
VS.
THE OUTBOUND MARKETER

"NEW MARKETING" is
"any marketing tactic that relies on earning people's interest instead of buying it."





Communication is interactive and two-way.



Customers come to you:
• Via search engines, referrals, social media



Marketers provide value.



Marketer seeks to entertain and/or educate.

"OLD MARKETING" is
"any marketing that pushes products or services on customers."





Communication is one-way.



Customers are sought out:
• Via print, TV, radio, banner advertising, cold calls



Marketer provides little to no added value.



Marketer rarely seeks to entertain or educate.

Infographic design by:



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- Twitter: [@voltierdigital](https://twitter.com/voltierdigital)

Source: *Inbound Marketing Rising*, Marketing TechBlog, July 5, 2012; <https://www.marketingtechblog.com/inbound-marketing-rising/> (accessed (July 21, 2016)).

Inbound Marketer vs Outbound Marketer Info



Source: *Inbound Marketer vs Outbound Marketer Info*, Social Media Today (August 20, 2014), <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/inbound-marketer-vs-outbound-marketer-infographic> (accessed July 21, 2016).

Persona Description

After completing a quantitative and qualitative study of the demographics in its parish area, a church will summarize the types of individuals it is best positioned to relate to with a persona description.

Persona Description

Sarai

Age: 35
Marital status: Married to Scott, 11 years
Children: Daughter, 12; Son, 5
Home: Single family purchased 3 years ago
Education: Bachelor's degree in journalism
Employment: Full time senior administrative assistant
Income: \$55,000
Spiritual background: None; Baptist as child



Motivation:

- Raise children in loving home
- Successful marriage

Pain points:

- Children's education
- Children's preparation for adulthood
- Job future uncertainties

Looking for:

- Peace in face of uncertainty
- Parenting advice

Questions:

- Is there a God who can help provide hope?
- How can I be a better parent?
- How can I create a secure home life?

Scott

Age: 35
Marital status: Married to Sarai, 11 years
Children: Daughter, 12; Son, 5
Home: Single family purchased 3 years ago
Education: Bachelor's degree in business
Employment: Full time finance officer at local hospital
Income: \$65,000
Spiritual background: None



Motivation:

- Succeed in career
- Respect of peers
- Financial security of family

Pain points:

- Wife's insecurities
- A lack of time to get everything done

Looking for:

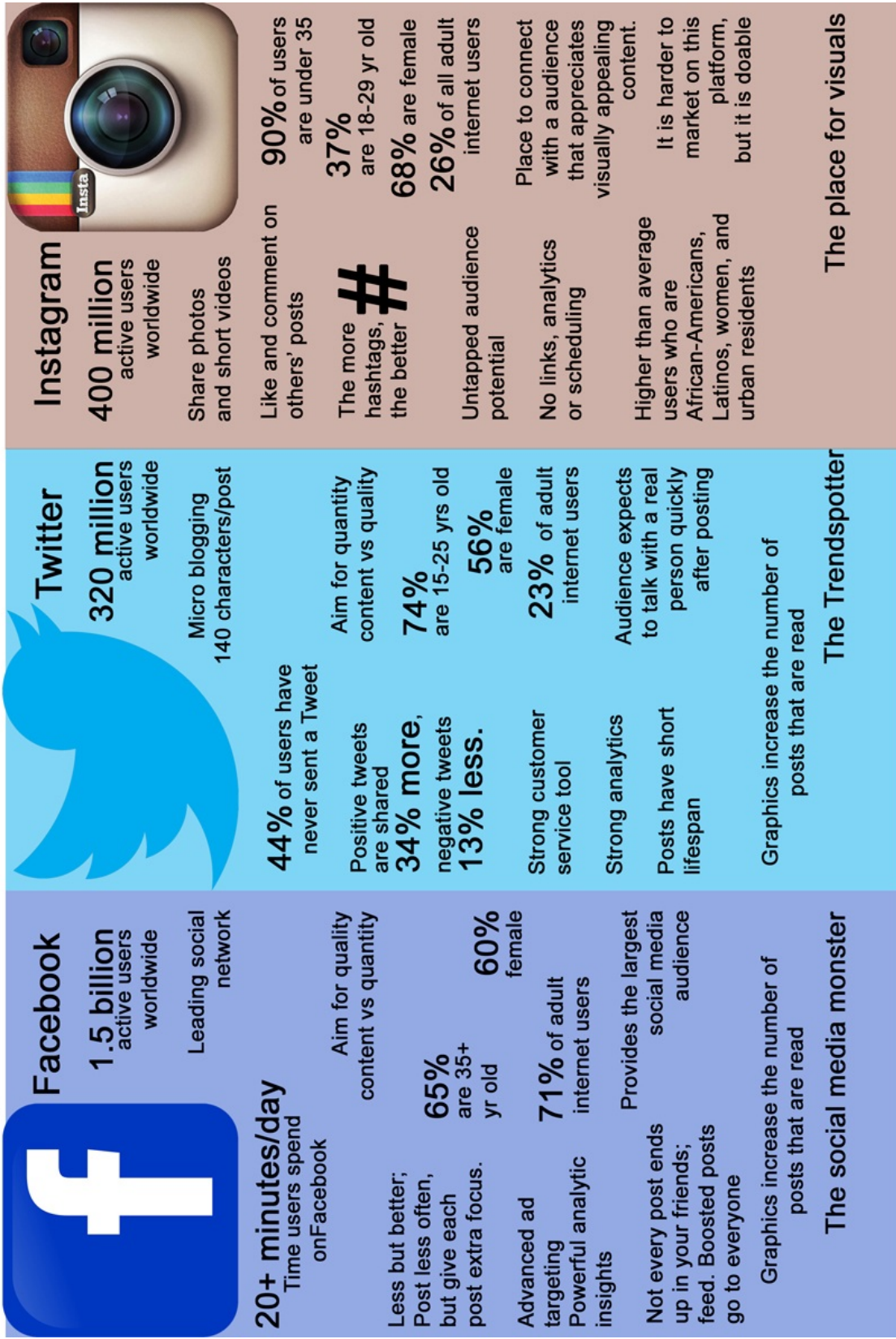
- Ways to overcome pressures of responsibilities

Questions:

- How do I balance all the expectations I and others put on me?

Based on a form by *the whole brain group*

Comparison of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram



Sources: Constant Contact; Flowtown, Leverage New Age Media; Likeable Media; Pew Research Center; Powerup Social; Topnonprofits

Prospect's Journey

After a church has identified the types of individuals the Spirit has best equipped it to reach with the gospel, it will determine the resources it has available or needs to develop in order to ease the pain points of those people. The information that follows demonstrates the kind of information a church might provide for a certain set of individuals through its online media, as well as through traditional media and its physical site.

Assumptions about our prospects and their pain points: The individuals we are attempting to reach are concerned about their child's education, spiritual/moral formation, and improving their relationship with their spouse.

Strategy: A church's website provides the following materials to help a prospect overcome their pain points.

	Parenting/ marriage helps	Information on LES/SS	Family activities	Information on Christian education	Maintain presence
Strangers: Recognize the problem					
Traditional					
Posters in stores		✓	✓		
Brochure	✓	✓		✓ Short, series	
On Site					
Banner on building		✓	✓		
Online					
Blog	✓ short	✓ short	✓		
Website	✓ Article	✓ Article	✓ Notice		
Facebook	✓ Article	✓ Article	✓ Notice		✓ Weekly graphic
Email	✓ Newsletter	✓ Newsletter	✓ Newsletter, notice		
Visitors: Search for a solution					
Traditional					
White paper				✓ Long, series	

On Site					
Class	✓				
Online					
Blog	✓ long	✓	✓	✓	
Website	✓ Long articles	✓ Long articles	✓ Interviews, photos, video, infographics	✓ Interviews, photos, video, infographics	
Facebook	✓ Long articles	✓ Long articles	✓ Interviews, photos, video, infographics	✓ Interviews, photos, video, infographics	
Email				✓ Interviews, photos, video, infographics	
Leads: Select a solution – GATED					
Traditional					
Mail	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓ Personal invitation to events	
White paper				✓ Additional	
On Site					
Class	Parenting, Love & Logic, Marriage	Registration	Events: soccer camp, music camp	BIC. Worship Open house	
Online – Include call to action					
Blog	✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to registration	✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to events	
Website	✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to registration	✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to events	

Facebook	✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to registration	✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to events	
Email	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓ Invitation to registration	✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to events	
Members: Delight in grace					
Traditional					
Newsletter				✓ Invitation to events	
Worship folder				✓ Invitation to events	
Mail	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓ Personal invitation to events	
On Site					
Bible studies	Parenting, Love & Logic, Marriage		Events	BIC, worship	
Online					
Blog			✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to events	
Website			✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to events	
Facebook			✓ Invitation to events	✓ Invitation to events	
Email	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓	✓ Personal invitation to events	✓ Personal invitation to events	

Resources

The links that follow provide additional information about online communication, many with direct application to a church's online communication.

Share-Grace Philosophy of Inbound Marketing

- 4 Ways Inbound Sales Outperforms Legacy Sales Every Day <http://www.thewholebraingroup.com/4-ways-inbound-sales-outperforms-legacy-sales-every-day>
- Beginner's guide to inbound marketing <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/145335/file-465397506-html/ebooks://blog.thewholebraingroup.com/4-ways-inbound-sales-outperforms-legacy-sales-every-day>
- Data From 10,000 Articles Prove That Content Marketing Really Does Work <https://insights.newscred.com/data-from-10000-articles-prove-that-content-marketing-really-does-work/>
- Here's why your content marketing strategy is totally failing <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2016/02/content-marketing-strategy-failing/>
- Inbound Marketing & the Next Phase of Marketing on the Web <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/4416/Inbound-Marketing-the-Next-Phase-of-Marketing-on-the-Web.aspx>
- Key content marketing terms <http://www.slideshare.net/Briancrotty/hubspot-the-ultimate-inbound-marketing-glossary>
- PR Professional's Guide to Content Marketing <http://www.5wpr.com/new/content-marketing-public-relations/>
- The 10 Commandments of Content Marketing <http://www.jeffbullas.com/2013/11/06/the-10-commandments-of-content-marketing/>
- The First Law of Content Marketing <https://hitenism.com/the-first-law-of-content-marketing/>
- What is inbound marketing? <http://blog.thewholebraingroup.com/inboundmarketing-5-steps-increase-traffic-convert-leads-customer>
- What exactly is content marketing? <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/getting-started/>
- What Is Content Marketing? <http://www.copyblogger.com/content-marketing-codex/>
- Why Your Sales Team Should Invest More Time on Content Marketing [Infographic] <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/marketing/why-your-sales-team-should-invest-more-time-contentmarketing-infographic>

Content

- 3-Part Social Media Strategy That Actually Works <http://rebekahradice.com/social-media-strategy-that-actually-works/>
- 5 engaging visual content formats that aren't infographics <http://marketingland.com/5-engaging-visual-content-formats-arent-infographics-170686>
- 5 Proven Ways For Driving Traffic to Your Website With Visual Content <http://insights.newscred.com/5-proven-ways-for-driving-traffic-to-your-website-with-visual-content/Strategy>
- 5 Storytelling Mistakes That Content Marketers Must Avoid <http://www.practicaledge.com/articles/91128-5-Storytelling-Mistakes-That-Content-Marketers-Must-Avoid>
- 9 Digital Marketing Tactics You Can Leverage

- <http://www.contentcurationmarketing.com/9-digital-marketing-tactics-you-can-leverage-2/>
- 9 Ways to Dominate Social Media Marketing in 2016
<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-business/9-ways-dominate-social-media-marketing-2016>
 - 10 Ways To Create Contagious Content for Your Social Media Marketing
<http://www.jeffbullas.com/2014/10/21/10-ways-to-create-contagious-content-for-your-social-media-marketing/#tKmh1WXE3IL2a2GT.99>
 - 10 Content Marketing Goals Worth Pursuing
<http://www.copyblogger.com/content-marketing-goals/>
 - 11 Data-Driven Tips to Create Perfect Posts on Social Media
<https://www.postplanner.com/blog/11-data-driven-tips-perfect-posts-on-social-media/>
 - 17 Content Marketing Tips for Any Size Budget
<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/05/content-marketing-tips/>
 - 25 Questions To Help You Define Your Social Media Marketing Strategy
<https://blog.bufferapp.com/social-media-strategy-questions>
 - Align All Your Messaging With This Simple (& Fun) Tool
<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2016/01/align-messaging-tool/>
 - Building Love Through Content Marketing
<http://www.contentcurationmarketing.com/building-love-through-content-marketing/>
 - Content Curation is Now Crucial to Content Marketing
<http://www.contentcurationmarketing.com/content-curation-is-now-crucial-to-content-marketing>
 - Content Marketing Philosophy + Mistakes
<http://www.quicksprout.com/2016/01/27/a-recipe-for-failure-6-mistakes-marketers-make-when-they-copy-tactics/>
 - Content Marketing Strategy Workshop
<http://www.slideshare.net/michaelbrenner/content-marketing-strategy-workshop>
 - Crafting your content marketing strategy
<http://blog.newscred.com/article/advice-from-5-cmos-on-crafting-your-content-marketing-strategy/45a1ec1fa1a91131c698cdbc7213ed93>
 - Creating Valuable Content: An Essential Checklist
<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/04/valuable-content-checklist/>
 - Eight Elements To Consider Before Launching Your Content Marketing Strategy
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2016/02/25/eight-elements-to-consider-before-launching-your-content-marketing-strategy/#339a23061006>
 - How To Break Through The Noise With The 3 Vs Of Content Marketing
<http://is.gd/8cQOo9>
 - How to Build Social Media Into Your Sales Funnel
<https://blog.bufferapp.com/social-media-sales-funnel>
 - How to Create an Effective Content Marketing Strategy for 2016
<https://marketinginsidergroup.com/content-marketing/how-to-create-effective-content-marketing-strategy-2016/>
 - How to Create Content 10x Better Than Your Competitors [Infographic]
<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/marketing/how-create-content-10x-better-your-competitors-infographic>
 - How to Create Content to Attract Your Target Market
<http://www.amyporterfield.com/2015/04/56-how-to-create-content-to-attract-your-target->

market/

- How to Create Your Social Media Strategy
- How to deliver content and resources that your target audience will find valuable
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/95279348341662525/>
- Now That's What I Call Social Media Strategy!
<http://www.mrss.com/lab/now-thats-what-i-call-social-media-strategy-vol-1/>
- Steps to Instantly Improve Your Social Media Strategy
<http://rebekahradice.com/improve-social-media-strategy/>
<http://rebekahradice.com/create-your-social-media-strategy/>
- The 8 Hottest Content Marketing Trends for 2016 [Infographic]
<https://marketinginsidergroup.com/content-marketing/8-hottest-content-marketing-trends-2016/>
- The 60/20/20 Rule with Van Baird (PCP076) <http://prochurchtools.com/076-sm/>
- The Content Marketing Road Map – How to Build Your Own Content Marketing Plan
<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/05/content-marketing-road-map/>
- The Ultimate Content Marketing Strategy [Infographic]
<http://www.curata.com/blog/the-ultimate-content-marketing-strategy-infographic/>
- Two content marketing rules – Be there, Be useful
<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/articles/why-consumer-intent-more-powerful-than-demographics.html>
- What Types of Content Should You Create? [Infographic]
<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/marketing/what-types-content-should-you-create-infographic>
- You don't need to be on every channel
<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/marketing/marketers-you-don't-need-be-every-digital-channel>
- Why You Need A Social Media Marketing Strategy & How To Start One
<http://www.twelveskip.com/marketing/social-media/1414/start-social-media-marketing-strategy>

Analysis

- 3 Ways to Test and Measure the Effectiveness of Your Social Marketing Efforts
<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-networks/3-ways-test-and-measure-effectiveness-your-social-marketing-efforts>
- Church Marketing Through Storytelling with Kelvin Co
<http://prochurchtools.com/081-ct/>
- How to Measure Social Media Success in Your Church with Josh Burns
<http://prochurchtools.com/045-sm/>
- How to Use Google Analytics to Improve Your Social Media Strategy
<http://www.business2community.com/social-media/use-google-analytics-improve-social-media-strategy-01517913>

Suites to help analysis online effectiveness

- Buffer <http://buffer.com/>
- BuzzStream to find influencers <http://Buzzstream.com>
- Google analytics <https://www.google.com/analytics/>
- Hootsuite <https://hootsuite.com/> (See also <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/marketing/hootsuite-updates-its-analytics-and->

- offers-additional-reporting)
- Kissmetrics <https://www.kissmetrics.com/>

Church and Social Media

- 3 Social Media Mistakes Churches Make
<http://churchtechtoday.com/2016/01/08/3-social-media-mistakes-churches-make/>
- 3 Ways Social Media Benefits Church Leaders
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/february/3-ways-social-media-benefits-church-leaders.html>
- 4 Ways to Strengthen Your Relationship with Customers Using Social Media
<http://blog.hootsuite.com/ways-to-strengthen-your-relationship-with-customers-using-social-media/>
- 4 Tactics for Making Your Church Social Media Posts Less Spammy
<http://www.unseminary.com/4-tactics-for-making-your-church-social-media-posts-less-spammy/>
- 5 Easy Ways to Create Visual Social Media Content for Your Church
<http://www.unseminary.com/5-easy-ways-to-create-visual-social-media-content-for-your-church/>
- 5 Online Communication Styles for Nonprofits
<http://www.nptechforgood.com/2014/11/30/5-online-communication-styles-for-nonprofits/>
- 5 Principles for Dealing with Haters & Trolls on Your Church's Social Media Channels
<http://www.unseminary.com/5-principles-for-dealing-with-haters-trolls-on-your-churchs-social-mediachannels/>
- 7 Ridiculously Common Mistakes Churches Make On Social Media
<http://pastors.com/7-ridiculously-common-mistakes-churches-make-social-media/>
- 8 Social Media Posts Your Church Should Try
<http://thecreativepastor.com/8-social-media-posts-your-church-should-try>
- 10 Signs Your Small Nonprofit Excels at Social Media
<http://www.nptechforgood.com/2016/04/02/10-signs-your-small-nonprofit-excels-at-social-media/>
- 16 Ways to Use Social Media to Promote Your Event
<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/use-social-media-to-promote-your-event/>
- 21 Social Media Tips For Your Church by Steve Fogg
<http://www.stevefogg.com/2015/11/12/social-media-tips-church/>
- 30 Quick Tips for Social Media for Churches and Nonprofits
<http://pastors.com/30-quick-tips-social-media-churches-nonprofits/>
- Before Your Church Starts Using Social Media
<http://pastors.com/before-your-church-starts-using-social-media/>
- Best Practices in Leveraging Social Media for Your Next Church Event
<http://www.unseminary.com/best-practices-in-leveraging-social-media-for-next-church-event>
- Five Mistakes Pastors Make On Social Media
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/november/five-mistakes-pastors-make-on-social-media.html>
- How-To Create a Social Media Policy for Your Church
<http://churchm.ag/social-media-policy/>
- How To Find Your Social Media Voice <http://pastors.com/find-social-media-voice/>

- How to Grow Your Sunday Attendance Using Social Media
<http://pastors.com/how-to-grow-your-sunday-attendance-using-social-media/>
- How to Use Social Media Effectively in the Church
<http://www.churchleaders.com/worship/worship-articles/154143-how-to-use-social-media-effectively-in-the-church.html>
- Nonprofits trying to leverage email and social media marketing have to check out this guide <http://t.co/4Hat6E1YZP>
- Six Most Common Mistakes Churches Make on Social Media
<http://thomrainer.com/2016/03/six-most-common-mistakes-churches-make-on-social-media/>
- Top 5 Churches That Use Social Media Best
<http://www.christianpost.com/news/top-5-churches-that-use-social-media-best-97492/>
- Using Social Media as a Christ Follower: One Principle and Three Questions
<http://pastors.com/using-social-media-christ-follower-one-principle-three-questions/>
- Using Social Media in Your Church: How can churches leverage social media for kingdom work?
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/february/using-social-media-in-your-church.html>
- What Should I Post on Social Media? <http://prochurchtools.com/post-social-media/>
- Why Your Church Should Be On Social Media Right Now
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/february/why-your-church-should-be-on-social-media.html>
- Why Your Church Should Invest in Social Media
<http://www.ministrybestpractices.com/2009/02/why-should-your-church-invest-in-social.html>

Church Websites

- 5 New Rules for Effective Church Websites
<http://justintrapp.com/5-new-rules-for-effective-church-websites/>
- 5 Reasons Your Church Website Might Be Keeping Visitors Away
<http://churchtechtoday.com/2015/03/16/church-website-visitors/>
- Church Website Usage Stats [Infographic]
<http://churchtechtoday.com/2012/02/20/church-website-usage-stats-infographic/>
- Is Your Church Website Visitor-Focused?
http://www.iministries.org/BlogEntry.aspx?entry_id=219682
- Optimize Your Church Website for How People Think
http://www.iministries.org/10267/blogentry/entry_id/281036/Optimize-Your-Church-Website-for-How-People-Think
- What Do 76% of Visitors Want From Your Church Website? (Find what I want)
http://www.iministries.org/10267/blogentry/entry_id/254729/What-Do-76-of-Visitors-Want-From-Your-Church-Website
- What Your Church Website Says About Your Church
<http://churchtechtoday.com/2011/09/02/church-communication-strategy-101/>

Personas

- 5 Common Mistakes Marketers Make When Building Personas
<http://hub.uberflip.com/h/i/215151378-5-common-mistakes-marketers-make-when-building-personas>

- A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Reader Personas
<https://www.quicksprout.com/2016/04/06/a-step-by-step-guide-to-creating-reader-personas/>
- How To Create A Buyer Persona That Wins More Sales
<http://blog.thewholebraingroup.com/how-to-create-buyer-persona-wins-more-sales>
- How to Create Easy, Yet Actionable, Content Marketing Personas
<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/04/content-marketing-personas/>
- More than personas
<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/08/personas-audience-wants/>
- Personas Are Great (Except When They Suck)
<http://marketinginsidergroup.com/content-marketing/personas-are-great-except-when-the-y-suck/>

Social Media

- 9 Tips for Making Instagram Your Professional Secret Weapon
<https://kimgarst.com/9-tips-for-making-instagram-your-professional-secret-weapon>
- 10 Instagram Marketing Hacks <https://kimgarst.com/10-instagram-marketing-hacks>
- 10 Twitter Secrets You Should Know [Infographic]
<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-networks/10-twitter-secrets-you-should-know-infographic>
- 11 Effective Ways to Use Social Media to Promote Your Content
<http://www.curata.com/blog/11-effective-ways-to-use-social-media-to-promote-your-content/>
- 50+ Ideas on What to Post on Social Media
<http://afreshstartonabudget.com/31-days-of-blog-growth-day-11/>
- How to Brand Your Social Media
<http://www.chloesocial.com/2015/04/how-to-brand-your-social-media/>
- Social media calendar template
<http://andrewmacarthy.com/andrew-macarthy-social-media/social-media-calender-template-excel-2014-editorial-planner-for-social-media>
- Social media demographics
<http://bestthenews.com/article/social-media-cheat-sheet-users-and-brands-mon-02152016-0000.html>
- Starting Up on Social: Facebook
<http://contentsolutions-128158815.us-east-1.elb.amazonaws.com/blog/starting-up-on-social-facebook/>
- Starting Up on Social: Twitter
<http://contentsolutions-128158815.us-east-1.elb.amazonaws.com/blog/starting-up-on-social-twitter/>
- Twitter secret information
<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-networks/10-twitter-secrets-you-should-know-infographic>