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Church Planter Network Resource

Marketing

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*A Strategic Approach to
Church Planting*

Jason Evans of Outreach Marketing

Are America's church plants successful? The answer is yes and no. Overall, the attendance at American churches is in decline. According to the Barna Research Group, in 1999 the median number of adult church attenders was down 12% from 1992.

Yet, we hear stories everyday of new churches that are not only growing, but also thriving! They are experiencing dramatic attendance increases and are seeing many people come to Christ. Why are these new churches experiencing this kind of growth and what can we learn from them?

It is true that the value or impact of a new church cannot be measured by its budget, size of core group or the number of people who are being saved. Each church is called to its own unique work in the Lord. Discipleship, worship, teaching and spiritual formation are a few of many valid, critical and biblical objectives for a local ministry.

However, most church planters feel a strong call to evangelism and outreach. That is why they are planting a new church. At these times, it is often helpful to look from a spiritual, as well as a practical, standpoint at church plants that are experiencing a pattern of growth and see what can be learned from what God is doing in them.

^{NOTE:} At Outreach Marketing, we have been privileged to work with thousands of new churches. In doing so, we have observed distinctive patterns that exist in those that are experiencing consistent growth and outreach effectiveness. We also see that these principles are really a natural progression, mirroring the biblical mandates for outreach. They are anchored in a

^{NOTE:} This paper was prepared by Outreach Marketing and is shared by way of information and is not as an endorsement of the company or products. It is our opinion that the principles identified are sound. It is important for church planters who plan a marketing campaign to deal with these principles. Not all church planters will use a marketing campaign. Not all church fields nor all communities will be impacted the same way by marketing strategies. Several terms and product names are used that are particular to this company. You may contact [Outreach, Inc.](#) or a variety of other vendors for services. H. Gerald Colbert

strong, Christ-centered message, use an intentional plan (the Great Commission), provide a relational touch (as in the early church) and maintain ongoing “life to life” contact with unbelievers. We call this the “[Four Laws of Effective Outreach](#).”

The Four Laws of Effective Outreach are: 1) Create an Identity for Outreach; 2) Attract Visitors; 3) Connect Attenders and 4) Equip Members to Be Inviters. When applied in a consistent manner these create a pattern of health and growth in a church plant.

Law 1: Creating an Identity

Who will your new church reach? The first step in reaching out to the community is establishing a unique identity for the church. Evaluate your new church’s identity using these specific building blocks:

☐ **Spiritual Support:***^{Note} The beginning place for starting a church is in God’s calling. This divine initiative should precede any plans. It is also essential that family, friends, and other outside sources support the pastor and core team. A key advantage is having a church-planting coach or ministry mentor and intercessory prayer team.

☐ **Vision & Mission:*** What has God called you to be (vision) and what has God called you to do (mission)? Having a vision and mission statement is the next step in focusing the ministry of a church. Articulating a clear vision and a detailed mission for the church plant in written form is key to communicating who you are.

☐ **Ministry Plan & Strategy:*** Having a written ministry plan, strategy, and time-line help the church achieve its goals. It should outline the systems, programs and/or projects that the church intends to implement, and when each should be done. Specifically, it should have a systematic process for helping church members grow in Christ.

^{Note} The * items are covered as part of the content in Basic Training.

☐Ministry Focus Group & Community:* Where has God placed you and whom has he called you to reach? Having a defined ministry focus group helps the church design ministries that reach specific people. Studying the psycho & demographics of the area shows if there is a large unchurched population to draw from that is spiritually hungry.

☐Core Group:* Having a core group of spiritually mature, committed, and enthusiastic team members, who have assessed their gifts and aligned themselves with the ministry of the church is essential. This group should make up the basic teams necessary for public service. (Childcare, greeters, ushers, set-up, refreshments, parking, etc.)

☐Location & Date: Having an accessible and visible location is crucial for a new church. It should have plenty of room for parking, worship and childcare, and should be in a place where the social networks of the ministry focus group can easily get together. The date of the opening day should correspond to a key season in the life of the ministry focus group. It should be during a time when they would likely be considering spiritual things.

☐Finances & Resources: Having adequate funding and a workable budget for all ministry needs for the first six months is mandatory. The budget should be detailed, and accurately describe the allocation of resources. The funding should also be from a variety of sources. What has God given you to work with? Be intentional and careful on how you use your people, ministry opportunities and other resources.

☐Image: What image do you want to have in the community? The unique identity includes having a memorable name and [logo](#) that appeals to the ministry focus group. How are you communicating all of these things to those around your church? The church should have a multi-pronged communication plan that includes signage, informational literature, and a Web site with an Internet domain name that is the same as the church name. Once your identity has been

established, you can begin the cyclical process of attracting visitors, connecting attenders and equipping members to be inviters.

Law 2: Attracting Visitors

Let your community know who you are and what you do! Determine a strategy for how you will communicate your new church's message specifically to your intended audience. Many new churches have found that **direct mail** is one of the most cost effective ways to send their message to a specific target audience. A demographic analysis (provided by Outreach Marketing's **OnTarget** services) makes reaching the right audience even easier. There are four main principles of attraction to take into consideration for attracting new visitors:

- **Strategic Timing:** The principle of strategic timing says there are certain times that are more strategic for effective outreach than others. It is more effective to invite people to an event or series of events.
- **Targeted and Receptive Audience:** Whom are you trying to reach and where are they? There are three factors to consider when choosing your target audience: geographic, demographic and spiritual proximity. Knowing how to reach people to attract to your new church takes research. Be prepared to do your research.
- **Compelling Message:** After the timing and audience are decided upon, you must get their attention, capture their interest and prepare their hearts to hear something compelling. What is the over-arching compelling message of the church? God's love for humanity is not only interesting, it is a compelling message. How this message is articulated depends on the first two principles of attraction.

☐Communication Method: Communication carries your message to your target audience. Not every method is right for every message or every audience. The key is to choose only the communication options that reach your target audience and only your audience.

Law 3: Connecting Attenders

Connection is the third, and often overlooked, element in a successful church outreach. You have worked so hard at getting visitors to your church—now get them plugged in and coming back! Connection begins with friendly faces and a welcoming, informative atmosphere throughout the church. Remember, people are not looking just for friendly people – they are looking for friends and meaningful relationships! Make the connection.

☐People: Connect people with people. Programs do not connect people. Many new churches fall into the trap of putting all their resources, planning and energy into doing a great grand opening thinking that the service is why people are coming. In reality, the service is perhaps only one of the many reasons a person is coming and the purpose of the service is to create an opportunity for connection to happen. The service will not do the connecting for you. People feel “accepted” by other people, not the event itself. Every church has tried to figure out a short cut around the need to build a personal relationship, but it does not exist.

☐Atmosphere: Create atmospheres where relationships can happen. Relationships happen best in smaller groups. Create fishing pool events or break waters where relationships can be built. It is much easier to fish in a deep slow pool in the river than in the fast rushing rapids. The same is true in relationship building. It is hard to build a relationship during the 5 minutes between services, but at a one-hour connection event, it can happen.

☐Assimilation: Initiate the assimilation process for the visitor. (They will not do it.) Do not expect visitors to figure out your assimilation process. Only 8% of the population is self-

initiators by nature. As you know, even if you have a process, visitors will not follow it. Just because you have a brochure about your newcomer classes or the small groups you offer, do not think you are done. People need a personal invitation. Identify and fill the gaps in your assimilation process. Every assimilation process will have holes or missing links. The challenge is to look for them and know how to fill them.

☐ Involvement: Provide something to eat or drink with every step. In America when you have a meal with someone, you are saying that you care. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert are the best ways to connect people. Involve everybody in the connection process. Because connection requires relationships, it is very intensive. One person can only have so many relationships. If the lead planter is the only one initiating relationships and taking people out for meals he will soon have a weight problem! Connect seven friends to each newcomer within 6 months.

Relationships, not programs, is what will connect people into the life of your new church. If people feel like they have friends and someone who cares, they will stay.

☐ Communication: Communicate the assimilation process everywhere! Signage, [attractive bulletins](#), resource materials (such as [brochures](#)), a helpful information area and regular connection events (such as a pastor's lunch) are all an important part of facilitating connection. Using multiple communication methods shares the value of inviting friends to churches.

☐ Identification: Use multiple tools and ways to identify your visitors. There is no one great way to get everybody's information. The better the information, the better chance you and your core group will remember your visitors. When you remember a name, you say that you care. Learn the names and faces of the people who visit and start a database so other leaders can learn the names of people.

Law 4: Equipping Members

To make the cycle complete, equip your core group with the training, the tools and the passion to make personal outreach and evangelism a part of who they are. Every day your core group personally “touches” a large part of your community, either through work relationships or through social/family gatherings.

☐ Communication Tools: Provide people with [business cards](#), [postcards](#) and [brochures](#) to use as invitations. An outreach tool such as Outreach Marketing’s four-color, informational, business card-sized [InviteCards](#) can contain a map to your meeting place, service meeting times, your current message series or even list home group locations. Pass these out to your core group members each time you meet to give them a great tool for inviting people to church. In every group, you have those extraverts who have a large social web. Make sure they are equipped. You will be surprised that when equipped with something, how involved they will get.

☐ Teaching Tools: Plan a special message series, events and other activities designed for members to bring their unchurched friends to. When you coordinate a message series with guest appearances, printed communication, as well as special events, you are showing your core group that you are serious about providing a safe, relevant place for them to invite their friends to. For great sermon illustrations, topics, coordinated dramas, etc. go to [SermonCentral.com](#).

☐ Electronic Tools: Design an outreach focused Web site that core group members can share with their friends. The problem with most new church Web sites is that they are designed by a church member for church members. Therefore, the sight talks about upcoming events, prayer requests, church business, and the church budget. Things no visitor is concerned about. If need be, create a separate Web site to be used as your outreach Web site. It might include a statement of belief, types of ministries, pictures of people, and service times.

□ Branding Tools: Constantly build your church's brand identity, to support your members in their outreach efforts. One of the best ways you can support your member's individual evangelism and outreach efforts is through brand awareness. This means being in front of the community at least four times a year.

For more information on “[The Four Laws of Effective Outreach](#),” attend a one-day seminar in an area near you!

For more resources and information go to www.OutreachMarketing.com or call toll free 1-800-991-6011.

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