



Vision-driven campaign communications bring success **Set your church's direction toward campaign communications that really motivate giving**

A great vision from God calls forth something that must not only be shared, but enlarged by inviting others to enlist and engage in its pursuit.

A capital campaign should be driven by a great vision.

There is a responsibility before God to see that the vision is clearly, adequately communicated, and that it is done in a relevant manner. The hope is that Almighty God will raise a unified ownership to embrace the road ahead, as well as all the costs of the journey.

As with any other principled approach to accomplishing something great for the Kingdom, communications will only support the means of grace found in faith and prayer, along with a commitment to the Word as your guide. With that said, thoughtfully executed campaign communications — along with other key components — will help make your vision a reality.

Experience confirms that stationery, brochures, newsletters, question-and-answer pamphlets — all play roles in the understanding and engagement with the vision, but care must be given to the development process. In this article, we share three basic principles that churches often overlook during the communication phase of its capital campaign.

I. Consider the receiver's point of view. Effective, receiver-oriented communications complement the capital campaign and increase success. Well-executed communications are a vital complement to your efforts. When coupled with a solid major-donor gift-development strategy, there's no better way to maximize your church's potential for faith

pledges and corresponding giving. We are talking about the kind of communications that resonate with the congregation. These tools must effectively use words and images to memorably and accurately portray your vision and needs with excellence and consistency. They must maximize and sustain continual, top-of-mind awareness in the trusted direction of the leadership under God's guidance.

Thorough communications will support the understanding of the other components in the overall campaign as well. For example, communications can be used to solidify an understanding of why a stewardship firm might have been entrusted with the task of consulting. They can be used to clarify and support the leadership's intentions related to the plans of the architect and builder and their associated costs. A deeper understanding of these issues will certainly help to avoid problems (or confusion) later.

II. Determine the right communication track for your congregation. Not all communication roll-outs propel the vision further in the right direction, thus appropriately and contextually portraying the vision is critical. What do we mean by "appropriately"? Again, it means developing communications, starting with the receiver's point of reference. This is true whether your church is Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist, Pentecostal, Baptist, Lutheran, Episcopal or Independent or any other.

So, how does one determine the audience's perspective? With a few good diagnostic questions to yield good insight, a discerning communications professional can get a feel for the culture(s) of your church and what will be appropriate.

Envisioning the end is enough to put the means in motion.

– Dorothea Brande, author



For example, asking questions about the history of the church is a good start. Questions pertaining to key influences on the leadership and the vision — and how much the church has been exposed to those ideas — are also helpful.

Sometimes, professional stewardship strategists include helpful feasibility studies as part of their consulting package. Of course, these studies assist in many more areas than just communications; the findings can sometimes help to determine how particular points of the overall vision and needs should be addressed, based on their congregational surveys.

As advertising legend David Ogilvy wisely points out: *“It’s said that the head of marketing research at Ford once inserted advertisements in every other copy of the Reader’s Digest. At the end of the year, the people who had not been exposed to the advertising had bought more Fords than those who had. Oops! something was clearly “off track.”*

With a good understanding of the audience’s point of reference, a communications track is now set to help guide the verbal and design direction. Make no mistake: It will make a difference.

John Caples, a marketing copywriter, once wrote: *“I’ve seen one advertisement sell not twice or three times as much, but 19 times as much as another. Both ads occupied the same amount of space in the same publication. Both had photographs and carefully written copy. The difference was that one used the right appeal (the audience’s point of reference was considered), and the other used the wrong appeal.”*

Obviously, a church capital campaign is not exactly “selling a commodity” — but it is certainly within the realm of consumers to have deeper understanding and acceptance (buy-in) of the vision. So, with the right appeal, you can gear all creativity (writing and graphics) accordingly and, thus, better hit the mark with your audience.

At a teachable moment, Ogilvy once said to a copywriter: *“I’m not saying that charming, witty and warm copy won’t motivate. I’m just saying that I’ve seen thousands of charming, witty campaigns that didn’t. Do you want glowing things that can be framed by copywriters, or do you want to see the response rate start moving up?”*

Based on this sentiment, it is wise to enlist an internal communications overseer (not a designer) who can clearly see the big picture. This pivotal team member should seek to guide communications development in a way that’s beyond his or her own limited perspective.

For example, if the majority of the major donors in a congregation are 50 or older, it would not be prudent to have an overly-hip group of post-Generation-X designers develop the communication pieces for a capital campaign from their personal perspectives (without unbiased oversight). Elisabeth Elliot say hello to Britney Spears.

The same, of course, is true in reverse.

III. Communications must be both specifically targeted and easy to follow. By “targeted,” we mean you must focus on one thing, or no more than a few strategic goals. Shooting for everything is to shoot for nothing. With clear, targeted communications, you can appropriately tell your story and vision in a manner that captures the imagination. Doing this in a focused manner must be the driving force behind all good campaign communications.

Like a train, **the focused vision** is the engine that **propels everything**; Design styles, Images, Fonts, and so forth should follow. Never design for design’s sake. Many things are fighting to grab your congregation’s attention, so it’s critical that the communications clearly lay out the steps ahead necessary to get to that larger vision. Let the audience know what you want them to consider and why. Each objective and perceived challenge should be adequately explained. It’s not only wise to do so, but it’s right.

Writer Michael Novak once explained that *“clarity of what works is an ethical imperative.”* Otherwise, you’ll reap exactly what you sow. If communications sow a lack of clear direction on the steps in the vision, you’ll surely reap a corresponding response when asking for needed service commitments and increased giving. Your people will be confused about the goal and, as a result, hesitant to invest.

We hope for better returns than this for you: returns of a deep embrace from the congregation, rooted in a thorough understanding of the envisioned end, and the steps to get there. To lead them to that embrace, thoughtfully developed, receiver-oriented communications are your best tools.

The authors, Stephen Lee and Bo Gray, represent CATALYST FAITHWORKS (www.catalystfaithworks.com), an Atlanta-based company dedicated to providing complete communication solutions to help church leaders maximize capital-campaign pledges. Lee is the founder of CATALYST MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS and he serves to continually refine the products and processes offered to congregations and denominations from church branding to community outreach efforts to capital campaigns. Gray is an account manager, who has more than 25 years of combined experience in marketing/public relations and the local church pastorate.