

7 Tips for Children's Ministry Publicity That Turns Heads

1. Know who you are.

"Never pretend to be something you're not. Every local church has a distinct personality and character, just as each person does," says Jeff White, image developer at Group Publishing, Inc. "If you're going to publicize yourself to the community, show your church's true identity — its core values, its distinct voice, and its authentic personality."

To better understand your children's ministry's uniquenesses, answer these questions:

- What are three things your children's ministry does well? Of those things, what's the #1 distinguishing characteristic of your ministry? How is that thing reflected in the event you're publicizing?
- If your children's ministry were a person, who would it be — and why? a clown? Mother Teresa? a cookie-baking grandma? Once you know your ministry's personality, how is that reflected in the event you're publicizing?
- If your children's ministry has only one message that it's trying to convey, what is it? How is that reflected in the event you're publicizing?

2. Know your audience.

"Just as you need to know yourself, you need to understand your community," says White. "Publicity is all about getting attention; people will ignore you if you don't know who they are. Target an audience. Who needs to hear your news?"

Create a target list that identifies who you're trying to reach with the event you're publicizing. For example, at Children's Ministry Magazine, we study the demographics and psychographics of you — our reader. Basically, demographics tell us how many of you are male or female, if you're leaders or volunteers, where you live, what your responsibilities are, and more. Psychographics tell us what you care about, such as what makes you excited, passionate, angry, sad, fulfilled, and more. Understanding these things makes us better able to serve you. And we're always adding new discoveries to our lists.

Create a Target List

Do the same with the target audience you're trying to reach. Create a target list by answering these basic questions:

- Who are you trying to reach with your event? (children, parents, families, unchurched people, or all of the above?)
 - Where are these people? Where do they hang out, eat out, shop, go to school, play?
 - When do these people need to hear about your event to fit it into their schedules? When is the best time for them to attend your event?
 - What do these people care about? What do they need from your event? It's important to note here that there are real needs (relationship with Jesus) and felt needs (entertainment). Your target audience is most interested in knowing how you'll meet their felt needs.
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- Why would these people want to come to your event? Understand the difference between features and benefits. A feature is a description of your event, such as a wild and wacky sports camp. Benefits of the sports camp are to learn new skills, meet new friends, or have fun. Benefits are what people are going to get out of the event. To answer the "why" question for your target audience, you must tell them what the benefits of attendance are — not just what you're doing. And to get their attention, your benefits must be the answer to their felt needs.

3. Create a visual campaign.

You know your target audience and you've identified the benefits of your event — now it's time to attach the creative visuals to your campaign. What images, colors, and wording would speak to your audience, based on what you know about them?

You need a standard image for all of your promotional materials for your event. This involves your logo, fonts, colors, photos, and message. One of the biggest mistakes churches make in publicity is not standardizing these things for each promotional piece. Every method, medium, and mode within a campaign must look the same. For example, if you look at your campaign's posters, fliers, postcards, bulletin announcements, ads, banners, and anything else, you must be able to see that all these things fit the same event because they have the same look.

4. Choose your publicity media.

Now that you know what you have to offer and who you're offering it to, choose your media. The best media is aimed specifically at your target audience. If you post an ad in a newspaper, get it out of the religion section if you're targeting unchurched people. Why not advertise in the sports section for reaching more men? Where will your target audience see your posters and/or fliers? coffee shop bulletin boards? grocery stores? kids' schools? McDonald's?

Remember the adage that the medium is the message. If you want to reach people under 30 in a high-tech world, text-message them. Kathleen M. Joyce, in an article in *Promo* magazine, writes that "according to In-Stat/MDR, a research firm in Scottsdale, Arizona, there were 165 million mobile phone subscribers in the U.S. last year, 90% of whom can both send and receive text. These subscribers sent 30.2 billion messages in 2004, compared to 11.9 billion in 2003, the firm says."

5. Schedule your publicity.

Advertising experts say that it takes at least seven "touches" for a message to sink in. So consider what those touches will be for your audience. Then schedule them similarly to this:

- Web page for your church's Web site created and posted eight weeks before the event. (Post your Web site on every promotional piece.)
- Posters in public areas seven weeks before.
- Fliers delivered to homes six weeks before.
- Church members encouraged to invite guests each week before the event.
- Postcards mailed three weeks before.
- Text-messaging two weeks before.
- Phone calls made one week before.

6. Be original.

“Consider the ‘not so obvious’ options, such as service,” says Jeff Storm, senior art director of church resources at Group Publishing, Inc. “Passing out free water at a ‘cause’ walk-a-thon with your church logo displayed can speak louder than yet another mass postcard mailing. Be creative. Get your team together and think of fun and innovative ways to spread the news.”

A dressed-up character holding a sign on the sidewalk outside your church catches attention. Ask to hang a banner publicizing your event at your high school’s sporting events. Sell tickets to your event (if there’s a charge) at local grocery stores. Think of ways to drive traffic to your event’s Web page on your church’s Web site. Perhaps people can download music, enter a contest, or find the answer to a silly question by going to your site.

7. Follow up.

There’s a reason catalog companies ask you to tell them the number on the back of the catalog when you place an order. They’re tracking their promotional efforts to see which ones work well.

The best way to guide your next publicity campaign is to formally or informally ask people where they heard about your current event. If you find that no one even saw the newspaper ad you spent big dollars on, you either need to position the ad in a new place for another test run or pull the ad to spend money elsewhere.

Not only does this publicity campaign follow-up inform your next campaign, but it also teaches you about your target audience. And understanding the people you’re trying to reach helps you fine-tune your delivery systems for the most important message you need to publicize to your community — the gospel.

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