



# What Does Media Coverage Offer Your Church?

by Steve Freeman

Many church communication managers may feel they have plenty to do without adding something as unpredictable as media relations—but media coverage is surprisingly quite “doable” and definitely has advantages for the local church.

In this three-part series, we will consider these points:

1. Why pursue news coverage?
2. What mechanics are involved? and
3. What is the tipping point to convince media pros to give your church coverage?

Why should media coverage be a part of every church's communication activity? That is because it is another tool with which to impact your community.

Currently, your church may have some type of marketing effort targeting the general public, maybe including direct mail and advertising. And perhaps the church manages certain aspects of community involvement that brings good will and public awareness about your church. Let's face it: even good signage provides a certain level of outreach and awareness to the world surrounding your church.

Media coverage is but another tool that is similar and yet unique. Here is how:

- It provides higher credibility than advertising and even marketing, both of which are “controlled” messages biased in favor of the message sender (your church).
- It reaches the masses in your area.
- It says your church is in the mainstream—part of everything that is good in a community.
- It is more informative than solicitous and thus more naturally appealing.
- It recycles news and stories probably already being told at your church.
- It is free publicity (or certainly very inexpensive compared to the other efforts mentioned).

One distinction needs to be made, however. Media coverage may not achieve the primary impact that other outreach efforts can and do. A strategic mass mailing and even sponsoring an informative Web site are proven tools for outreach that may bring certain desired results faster and may generate more visitors. Media coverage, however, does promise secondary benefits.

## **IT IS SOFT EVANGELISM THAT BRINGS AWARENESS AND RECOGNITION OF YOUR CHURCH TO PEOPLE.**

Some say evangelism is less about a “point in time” and more about a person taking a

series of steps or making a series of decisions to pursue a relationship with God. This stands to reason since none of us make decisions without weighing the factors presented to us.

Realistically, the next visitors through your church doors will have made various decisions to get there. What preceded making an appearance and “trying it out?” Early on, they heard something about your church and from there they became more aware and had some intangible interest in seeing what was going on at the church down the block.

This represents the psychological aspects of decision-making. Of course, the Holy Spirit is hugely involved in drawing people to God; so, together with the Spirit, the marketing and communications tools are what churches have used with great impact.

Media coverage is one piece of that puzzle. When a person reads or hears about something involving your church, you are planting seeds that the Holy Spirit begins to till. This seminal exposure leads to an awareness, a recognition, a consideration, an investigation, a trial run, etc.

Certainly media coverage will not automatically “pack the pews,” but churches should not underestimate the impact of this type of soft evangelism either.

## **IT PRESENTS A POSITIVE IMAGE OF YOUR CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY.**

Of course, not all news coverage is positive, but short of your church being caught in a major scandal or gross impropriety, the overall result of media coverage is good publicity. When your church's news or views appears in the press, the church is generally considered a respectable part of the "establishment." While that may not be desired by some churches which are greatly uncomfortable affiliating with "the world," remember that we are called to be salt and light, and not extreme "separatists." Even the Apostle Paul shared space with the other voices of his "establishment" when ascending Mars Hill to preach.

In other words, media coverage compares to getting out the good word about your church in the community just like maintaining attractive "zone-approved" signage, putting an ad in the religion section of the newspaper, or sending invitations to worship at your church's address each Christmas and Easter.

## **IT INFORMS THE COMMUNITY ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN, GROW, CHANGE, OR GET INVOLVED.**

How will they know if you do not tell them? Sound familiar? Every church hosts all kinds of offerings to regular attendees—and to any prospective visitors—that are obviously of value to anyone. Most churches—even the best of the best—do a poor job, however, sharing these activities with the community. Attempting to get media coverage changes that.

In future installments of this series, we will consider what events, classes, and happenings at your church are obvious sparks capable of garnering media coverage of some type. Every church has them—and most every media outlet wants to know about them. Your job is to use that opportunity to expose your church's ongoing events to the public.

## **IT AFFIRMS YOUR CHURCH'S HIGH STANDING IN THE MINDS OF MEMBERS—THAT "FEEL GOOD" PHENOMENON.**

It is one thing when a beloved church leader commends your congregation or parish. It is quite another when an "outside" entity like the media spotlights your church. No amount of coverage in your own church newsletter, no unbelievably cool flash intro on the Web site, and no praise from the denominational office will quite match the so-called "recognition" that your church is doing something good as broadcast by the secular media. Somewhere along the way, member satisfaction is elevated, too—and a happy member is

a growing, motivated, and reproducing member.

## **IT GIVES YOUR CHURCH A PUBLIC FORUM IN WHICH TO "LIVE OUT" ITS MISSION STATEMENT.**

Let's face it. The trend to package a body of believers with an inspired motto has its downside. It seems so formulaic; yet, mission statements serve a valuable purpose, keeping a church's God-sized vision in front of everything. What if—instead of the continual repeating of the phrase in unison each Sunday—an occasional entry about your church into the news airwaves gives real-world illustration of that mission? All of a sudden, your church's



### **Summary**

- Media coverage is surprisingly quite "doable" and definitely has advantages for the local church.
- Media coverage should be a part of every church's communication activity.
- Getting coverage says your church is in the mainstream—part of everything that is good in a community. It provides a number of secondary benefits:
  - It is soft evangelism that brings awareness and recognition of your church to people.
  - It presents a positive image of your church in the community.
  - It informs the community about opportunities to learn, grow, change, or get involved.
- It affirms your church's high standing in the minds of members—that "feel good" phenomenon.
- It gives your church a public forum in which to "live out" its mission statement.
- It creates the potential for "buzz" when members ask their non-churched friends if they "heard the news."
- It helps fulfill the Great Commission of "go" and "tell."

### **Author**

Steve Freeman is a freelance writer. He can be reached at [steve.free@verizon.net](mailto:steve.free@verizon.net).



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mission statement becomes a living and breathing statement of faith, truly for all to hear.

**IT CREATES THE POTENTIAL FOR “BUZZ” WHEN MEMBERS ASK THEIR NON-CHURCHED FRIENDS IF THEY “HEARD THE NEWS.”**

This relates to “soft evangelism, but the difference is the average member becomes

the impetus for outreach. The greatest resource every church has is the members of the body of Christ who go home from worship, live those other six days as laborers in the field while being aware of how God may use them during an occasional harvest time. Media coverage could pave the way for that.

**IT HELPS FULFILL THE GREAT COMMISSION OF “GO” AND “TELL.”**

Down through the centuries, the Christian church has pursued ways to lift up Christ as symbolized by the church on earth. Some churches are more proactive than others here, but all have some level of commitment to being the channel through which God can reveal His love to the world. As the word goes out, why not add media relations to the mix?

**FINALLY...**

Why pursue media relations? These points alone make the argument well, but yet one more reason is because you can. If you do not believe it, return for the second installment to learn—or be reminded—how to accomplish the task of getting media coverage for your church. 