

The New Paradigm

*What churches need to know
about the new communication puzzle*

A Quick Bite Publication
Scott Vaughan Communications, LLC



The New Paradigm

Economists hint that we are in the early recovery period of the recent global economic recession. While that news is hopeful, recovery isn't the reality for many people. Many people are feeling the very real effects of the recession and those effects are coming in the form of relational, financial and even physical pain. Governments and culture will make alterations as a result of the recession, and those alterations will continue to change how we live.



I attend a progressively traditional Southern Baptist church. Within my church, I teach a very large Sunday morning Bible Study (Sunday School) class. This position of class leadership allows me to minister to many people who have been affected by the recession directly and indirectly. A direct effect might be the loss of a job. An indirect effect might be the depression felt as friends lose jobs and are forced to move away.

This recession has forced many of us - most of us - to check and recheck our priorities. The recession has forced us to slow down and to see the reality of life, and to check our priorities around faith, family and . . . everything else. The recession has caused us to check our relationships. It's caused us to open our eyes to ministry - not just in our community but literally "next door."

I believe there is opportunity for a sweet spirit within our churches, too. I believe many churches are getting very, very excited about ministry - connecting with families as families come through this period of reprioritizing life. I believe that many churches are "waking up" out of a lethargic state created by life before the recession and then a bit of panic during the early days of the actual recession. More and more churches are calling me, for example, for communication help and there is an excitement within the telephone call.

Yes, many churches are facing budget shortfalls because of the recession. If people are affected financially there can be an expected trickle-down because of that. But churches are also checking ministry priority, asking "What ministries are critical to reach this community for Jesus and what ministries are no longer as effective?" So, there's a very real evaluation going on within churches in the same way there is an evaluation going on within families.

And, it's healthy.

Out of this priority check, many churches are giving examination to the role of communication within the church, and between the church and its community. Many churches now understand that communication is necessary for every facet of ministry and life within the church. *Toward a goal of helping people discover Jesus as Savior and then grow in a spiritual relationship with Him, how will we communicate the ministries, fellowship and "sanctuary" offered by our church?* And, while the desire for heightened communication is growing, there's this reality: How will we fund communication and who will manage it for us?

In 1994, I was in a church worship service following the immediate resignation of the pastor. There was a bit of panic spreading through the church as in "What do we do now?" To calm the people, the church had brought a gifted, wise speaker to that one worship service. I remember his reminder (paraphrased): "This church was created by the Holy Spirit working in the lives of people, and it still belongs to the Holy Spirit. It never

belonged to your pastor and it doesn't belong to you. Lead your church to honor God and love others, and God will always be faithful to *His* church."

So, yes, *on paper* the church may not have enough budget or volunteerism for communication ministry, but if the church desires to build relationships toward Kingdom growth then God will absolutely provide the resources necessary to communicate with people. I believe every church budget withers and pales when placed along Kingdom vision that begins with The Cross. *God is greater than the church's need.*

I know, for a fact, that God is a God of communication.

I know, for a fact, that God is a God of relationships.

I know, for a fact, that relationships thrive or die depending on communication.

A church focused on relationships is a church investing in communication ministry, and God is going to provide ways for focused churches to engage communication easily and with just enough budget dollars.

I believe that a **New Paradigm** is taking root in church communication. I believe it is God's way of helping His churches better connect with people as people - and churches - check priorities related to the recession. This **New Paradigm** includes changes that churches will need to consider and embrace. I've listed these considerations in this paper. Some churches will have to make shifts in organization structure. Some churches will need to create new "core competencies" related to technology for staff; current staff will need to get technology training. Some churches will need to reassign budget. Some churches will need to create plans with phases over 2-3 years. I'm not suggesting that all of this needs to happen in every church or that all of this needs to happen this year. I am suggesting that this is the way church communication is moving, and Kingdom-focused churches will be those that open their minds and mouths for discussion.



One: *In the New Paradigm, we will embrace branding - consistent and scalable logos and identifiers - that speak to ministry strengths and reflect our church's relationship with Jesus. The brand will celebrate our God's unique Great Commission vision for His church.*

Mention your church name to a group of people. What is their reaction? That reaction reflects the strength of your brand - your identity - within that group of people. Most churches, I've found, have a very weak brand identity. A weak identity typically leads to a lot of misperceptions, leading to a weak image of your church. And, so, churches need to be proactive in defining who they are and communicating that definition to audiences. You control your identity; others control their image of

that identity.

If you are a missional church you need to be aggressive in creating a strong identity among people. If you are a church focused on helping people become followers of Jesus it's time to be known for that in your community.

In the New Paradigm, however, church offices or elder boards no longer have sole control of identity creation. Members and guests can now use e-mail, social networking, and text-messaging to communicate on behalf of the church and without permission of

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the church office. A worship service participant can now send a text message, in the middle of a service, that “it’s boring” and all of his networks outside the service can see that opinion. The identity or brand of the church is now weakened. Before smart telephones (those with web browser functionality) and social media, worshippers could affect the church identity, but it required a lot of effort and could involve some expense. Those days are gone.

In the New Paradigm, churches will need to have educational systems for leaders and members, helping them understand brands and church identity, and why it’s important to protect it. But, before that education process begins, churches will need to have an identity worthy of protecting and then get serious about the brand. Churches must have systems and documentation that support the branding boundaries. Getting serious about the church’s identity and others’ image of it will reflect just how seriously we take the bride of Christ.

This all sounds very corporate and business-like. For many churches, operating more like the civic clubs, there will be a whiplash. Is the church a business? No. The church is the bride of Christ. But, the overwhelming majority of Christians and non-Christians don’t understand that. They see the church as a community organization that does good work and helps people live better lives. They compare the church to other key organizations in their lives – organizations like discount stores and fast-food restaurants. They compare how the church greets guests to how the discount store treats its guests. It’s not to say the church must conform to the world, but it must present itself as a professional organization with a strong fiscal small business infrastructure. Then, when the organization talks about its mission and vision – people will listen because the organization has credibility and professionalism.

The church must have a serious attitude about its mission and then communicate that through a serious, professional identity. That identity will cause a positive image among the people the church is called to reach in the name of Jesus.

***Two:** In the New Paradigm, we will focus on more and efficient database management for communication not just for recording attendance and giving. Database management and research will drive our efficient communication decisions.*

For years, many churches have kept simple databases for the purpose of recording attendance or participation and giving. We’ve also used this database for mailing lists so we know where to mail the church newsletter.

In the New Paradigm, we will need to go deeper in our understanding of people. We will need to compare the effects of participation with the effects on giving, and create communication messages for different groups of people. We will not be able to have a “one message fits all” when it comes to promotion of giving or participation. The individually who gives financially, but rarely attends will need to hear a communication message different from the individual who attends regularly, but does not contribute financially. Can you do that right now? Are you?



We must also study how days of week and times of day, and seasons of the year, affect participation and giving. We must be able to forecast, for example, that as children leave the nest those parents reduce frequency of participation, but may or may not maintain giving levels.

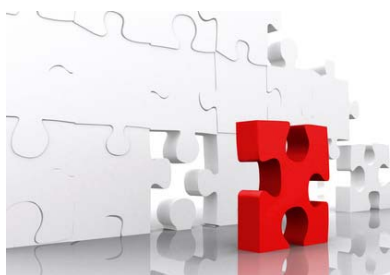
We must study transportation patterns and how that affects the participation of members and guests. Should we have a midweek activity at our church property or move the activity closer to the neighborhoods we serve? What do the statistics tell us?

As we watch trends in participation and giving, including volunteerism, we will create hypotheses that affect the future of our church. We will then be forced to conduct research projects within the church family to discover if our thoughts merit additional research or thinking.

That research drives how we communicate, and saves time and energy in our communication. We will need to experiment with our delivery and methodology. For example, if I send an e-mail reminder on Thursday does that generate more or less participation than if I send an e-mail reminder on Saturday evening? What affect does a Friday morning message through Facebook have on Sunday participation? What people groups, in our church and community, are moved to action by which methods of communication? Only research, watching trends and asking questions, will give us the answers. We can't guess.

In communication, there is a reaction to every action that we take. We must watch the movement and attitudes of people - inside and outside the church - and let research drive the stewardship of our communication time and resources.

Who in the world can manage all of this for our church? In the New Paradigm, the church will need to find a member or team or hire a full-time staff member to take on this assignment. It may require complete reconfiguration of staff. It may require sending staff back to school. I am convinced, however, that we can't talk about stewardship of time and dollars without practicing stewardship, and database research drives practical stewardship. My guess is that a church focusing on this kind of research will save enough budget dollars, ultimately, to pay for or supplement a staff position.



Three: *In the New Paradigm, we will transition to multiple websites, with fewer pages, targeted to specific audiences with simple, well-written information. The primary website will be targeted to guests or those searching for a church. The website will feature video and a contact form that launches a “dance” with people.*

Since 2003, churches have been scrambling to have a church website. Now, many - if not most - churches have websites. In fact, I'm going to suggest that churches interested in growth most likely have church websites. Unfortunately, most churches have bloated websites that feature dozens - if not hundreds - of pages attempting to deliver the entirety of church culture to site guests.

I see church websites that force site guests on a scavenger hunt to locate critical information. I see church websites that involve three layers of scrolling on pages. I see church websites with navigation added with no purpose. I see church websites with copy

that is horribly written and never-changing. I see church websites with clip art rather than photographs.

There are so many websites - new ones every day - that the casual consumer does not and will not take time to explore a bloated, unintentional church website. People are coming to your website for quick information about your worship experiences. They will not take hours to explore all that you offer through every possible ministry that you offer.

The New Paradigm involves not one website but several. The church's primary site becomes a site targeted to first-time guests who are looking to visit you during the week or on Sunday morning. They are looking for a 6-8 page website that is simply written and beautiful in layout. They want a contact form through which they can request more information, including a weekday site visit or tour. They will want to watch video of your pastor preaching - not just hear an audio file of a sermon. They will want to see photographs of how your people dress at church, but they will be turned off by words like "casual," believing it's an oxymoron to worship.

Alongside this "guest site" the church will need to add additional, simple websites for ministries that extend the church brand into the community: Children, youth, women's ministry, preschool ministry, recreation ministry, and special events. If your church uses a ministry to strengthen its community identity - you will need a website for that ministry.

No longer is the website strategy about one mega-site using a mass communication approach with people. In the New Paradigm, churches will have multiple sites focusing on specific audiences with specific "call to action" messages for those audiences.

For members, add the best possible calendar page to your primary website. Your members are largely interested in checking a calendar.

When I talk about website strategy, I like to talk about creating a "dance" with people. I like to create an action/reaction dance that ultimately moves a person to connect with individuals within the church. The sooner and more efficiently we move people from websites and impersonal communication to more personal communication the more opportunity we have for relational connection.

Consider the dance: The church offers a website, making it possible and easy for a site guest to contact the church and request more information. The site guest makes that request. The church follows-up on the request, and now plants the idea to connect more relationally. The guest follows-up on that request, and a relational connection is made. It's a dance moving the site guest from impersonal to personal. It's in the personal connections that we help people stick with churches.



Four: *In the New Paradigm, we will renew our focus on front-line ministries, especially office reception, greeter ministry, usher ministry, and how we connect with people through Sunday School, home groups, ministry events, and through Welcome Centers. We will heighten a focus on relational ministry.*

The rise of so much non-verbal communication methodology keeps people from connecting face-to-face. We communicate at "e-mail length." We can maintain

relationships with people and never actually speak to them. This impersonal communication puts the church in a unique position to be more personal and emphasize the face-to-face relational connections.

To that end, the New Paradigm will force and push churches to invest and better manage front-line ministries. Wise churches will no longer use answering machines in the church office during normal business hours, replacing answering machines with a live and pleasant voice. Churches will begin to staff front-end ministry with more diligence around professionalism and kindness, looking for people who are not easily overwhelmed or allow issues at home to affect relationships at work.

Churches will invest in creation of greeter ministries, and provide new training for greeters and ushers. Churches will rethink Welcome Centers, and how these are staffed in concert with greeter and usher ministries. Churches will train the leaders of small groups regarding connections with guests and members.

Churches will begin to create strategies for making people feel welcome throughout the church property, inside and outside of the buildings. As contacts are made, database information is collected, and used for research and communication at the guest's comfort level. Not all guests will want or desire follow-up at the same tempo, which gets back to the need to understand people through database management and research.

As culture pushes us to impersonal communication methodology, the church will need to fill the vacuum with very personal and every engaging face-to-face strategies. Simply having a greeter ministry will not be the norm. Having a well-trained, well-staffed, strategic greeter ministry and system for connecting with guests will be the prescription within the New Paradigm.

***Five:** In the New Paradigm, we will reduce or eliminate print of collateral products like brochures, flyers, and newsletters distributed with less than monthly frequency. We will strengthen the regular, printed mailed newsletter, using it for information, outreach and community-building, and distributing it weekly, twice-monthly or monthly. We will use our worship bulletin as supplemental to the newsletter, and not as an extension or in place of it. We will eliminate paper-driven packets for guests or new members.*

In most churches, the communication budget should be \$100-per-year for every household the church desires to keep or attract. After this calculation, the budget should be increased until it is 3-5 percent of the total church receipts. That kind of budget investment is indicative of a church interested in building the Kingdom and helping people discover Jesus.

Interestingly, most churches will report spending about 50 percent of the church's communication budget on print methodology at a time when research no longer supports many of the items that we print. In case you wonder, there is not a best way to communicate - the church must embrace many different ways, knowing it will connect with everyone through a variety of methods.

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No other area of the New Paradigm will cause so much heartburn as the affect on print. Since the earliest days of organizational non-verbal communication, churches have relied on print as the primary carrier of information. That began to shift with the growing use of websites and e-mail about 2003, and now the promotion pressure once assigned to print has faded. Unfortunately, we have staffed many church offices around maintenance of print methodology.

Churches can now cease to print all of the ministry brochures, flyers, and many posters because that information is more economically positioned on websites or delivered through other less expensive means like e-mail.

Likewise, bulky new member kits and packets can now be organized for easier access on a website. At minimum, those print documents can be put on a CD for easier use in homes.

Churches *should maintain* a printed, mailed newsletter simply because mailed delivery is a more guaranteed delivery form than e-mail and print is more trusted than a website download. Also, the organizational newsletter remains the No. 1 recognized method for communication from leadership to constituency. Ask people how an organization is supposed to communicate and most people will and still give “the newsletter” as a primary answer. And, delivery of that newsletter remains best through the mail service. Frequency of the newsletter should be weekly or monthly, however many churches are saving budget dollars with 10 issues per year, doubling up during summer months or around the holidays.

In the other area of print, churches are saving budget dollars through reduced and simplified worship bulletins, moving away from folders of paper to simple cards with a renewed focus on worship. Churches that force promotion pressure on a weekly worship bulletin and churches with dysfunctional communication ministry.

Six: In the New Paradigm, we will use e-mail strategically, purposefully, and creatively to call people to action; or to communicate personally from leaders to individuals or groups. E-mail will be purposeful and penetrate the entire church.

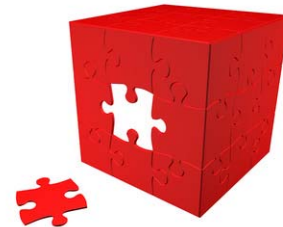
E-Mail has become the new “mail” but without the delivery reliability of its slower cousin. There are so many reasons an e-mail will not be delivered or opened in a timely manner that serious questions rise about shifting all print delivery to e-mail delivery.

Still, in the past seven years, the number of households connected through e-mail has grown substantially, and churches are relying on e-mail for information delivery. E-mail has so saturated our communication mix that we can no longer draw conclusions regarding its use around age or gender or economic boundaries. Anyone and everyone is a potential e-mail user. Do not over-think age or economic issues - do the research and find out. Many senior adults are now using e-mail.

The question becomes this one: How is the best way to use this very inexpensive form of communication? My recommendation is to use it as supplemental to the printed newsletter. If the church has a monthly, printed newsletter, my suggestion is to use e-mail as a weekly supplement. E-mail can also be used to communicate with targeted

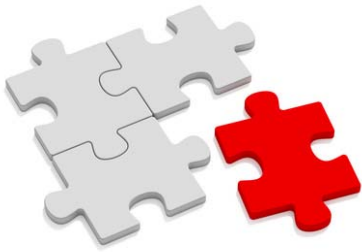
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leadership or small group memberships, when creation of regular mail might not be worth the effort. However, e-mail should never be used to distribute budget information, statistics, or bad news, simply because e-mail is easily forwarded to wider distribution groups. If you circulate e-mail expect the entire world to see it.

In the New Paradigm, e-mail is an effective and creative way to communicate with people. The availability and use of it by large segments of our culture will require churches to use it. However, pushing all of our communication through e-mail to save budget will not be a wise decision. Let relationship-building drive communication decisions - don't let the budget drive communication decisions.



***Seven:** In the New Paradigm, We will integrate leader blogs, social media, and text-messaging into our communication mix, looking for ways to “salt” our communication ministry to better penetrate and saturate our audiences.*

In recent years, churches have discovered on-line journals (blogs) for leaders to use in communicating with broad audiences; social media for developing relationships in and beyond the church family; and, text-messaging to communicate in real-time with people using very simple messages. These methods represent emerging communication methodology, extending beyond demographic and into the mainstream of culture.

Look for people, in the very near future, to each carry smart telephones (web browser access), essentially having a computer in their pockets and purses. This will allow everyone to connect online to and through the church with a variety of networks.

In the New Paradigm, churches will begin using these new communication methods to “salt” communication ministry. Just as we use moderation in salting our food, we will use these new forms of communication to moderately “salt” our communication ministry. Sending too much text messaging, for example, will cause our constituents to read none of it. Too much communication through social media actually distracts people from our church, and begins to become an aggravation. And, people will turn away from reading too many leader opinions on blog sites. Within their local contexts, churches will moderate how and when they use these new forms of communication.

But, the real issue is that churches must explore the use of these new communication methods. Not using these new methods will push people to see the church as irrelevant to everyday life. The message of Jesus will always be relevant, but churches will have to work to remain relationally relevant to the communities they are called to serve. Remember, those outside the church don't see or understand the church they way we do on the inside.

What I fear is that churches will opt-out of participating in this emerging communication, falling to the excuses of ignorance and apathy. The reality is that there will be no excuse for a lack of participation - not for those churches interested in relational connections that help people discover Jesus as Savior. The ability to engage these forms of communication will be low-cost.

Eight: *In the New Paradigm, we will embrace the use of video, allowing people to “see” the church - not just hear about the church.*

You Tube, created in 2005, is, according to its website, “the world’s most popular online video community, allowing millions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos.” It’s become very easy for individuals and organizations to produce video, edit video through inexpensive computer-driven software, and then post video for the entire world to see.

In the New Paradigm, people will begin approaching church websites looking for a video of the pastor preaching the weekly sermon. People will want to see video that promotes local church ministry. People will want to see music video that highlights mission trips. There is even capability for short-term missionaries to take and upload video while they are on mission trips. We no longer need wait on missionaries to return and provide reports.

And, it’s all relatively inexpensive. And, it will be expected of churches desiring to show relevance into today’s world.

Nine: *In the New Paradigm, we will create climates that extend our ministry brand into our communities, and empower our people to better talk about the church, its role in their lives, and better reflect Jesus as personal Savior.*

This New Paradigm will provide climates through which churches - of all sizes, histories and cultures - can extend their brand into the community. And, I am predicting that churches embracing the New Paradigm will see members who are more excited and more empowered to talk about their faith, their church and their ministries. Strategic communication on the part of the church will provide courage to the membership.

The member who is proud of her church website will point her friends to it. The member who appreciates her church’s Facebook presence will communicate about her church through Facebook. The member who receives an e-mail about a special community event will forward that e-mail to friends and family. The member who sees his church engaging the culture will have his friends ask about the church, and that will open the door for him to invite her friends to activities and ministries. The member will ultimately be faced with questions about faith, and knowing there is a professional organization behind her will now have the courage to talk about faith and invite people to engage the local church.

As part of the New Paradigm, heightened church communication will lead to more word-of-mouth among rank-and-file members and that will yield benefits beyond imagination. When people begin talking about their church as a sanctuary from the pain of life, church becomes more than property.



Ten: *In the New Paradigm, we will be pushed to hire better management staff, moving away from volunteers who are preoccupied or unqualified. We will surround management staff with teams of qualified rank-and-file members who have communication and customer-focused skill sets, but also understand the Great Commission work of the church.*



The New Paradigm will require communication systems - the integration of our methodology. These systems will require management that includes staff with different skill sets from those tied to the pre-2003 print paradigm. New staff members will have core competencies for computers and software, including but not limited to word processing, spreadsheets, databases, page design, and photo management. Staff members will face core competencies around spelling and grammar, and the ability to write well. In addition, these new staff members will have a sense of customer relations and will bring a professional kindness to the office. They will be self-confident and self-motivated, and see work as project-driven rather than clock-driven. They will be good communicators, and they will be growing followers of Jesus.

In paying these new communication managers, the New Paradigm will force churches to see communication as true ministry. The managers of this ministry will be aligned more with executive-level staff than secretarial staff, and salaries will reflect that. In most organizations, the communication manager will be seen as executive staff - a Chief Communication Officer whose value rivals that of the Chief Financial Officer.

It's my opinion that most pastors don't understand communication strategy and its impact on the church and future. Hiring professional communication staff to fill a personal weakness will not be easy for the insecure pastor. Insecure pastors, especially those terrified of communication's power, will put their churches at risk for successful Kingdom ministry.

Eleven: *In the New Paradigm, we will put an emphasis on strategic writing, writing messages that communicate simply and that are focused on specific audiences.*



Last, and most importantly, the New Paradigm will expose a church's failure to write well. The success of all communication begins and ends with the ability to form sentences and use vocabulary that speaks simply and efficiently to all people. Effective writing moves people to action.

Historically, churches have invested in personnel, and then assigned communication as an afterthought to personnel or volunteers. Very little attention has been given to whether those charged with communication can actually write well.

The New Paradigm, and all of its communication methodology, will force church leaders to write well and purposeful, and to write consistently between all methods. The

message on the website will be consistent with the message in the newsletter. The message will be simple without the use of slang or the over-use of pronouns.

Churches that write well will communicate efficiently, and efficient communication results in better response.

Last. In The New Paradigm, we will embrace a strategic formula, moving the right message to the right person by the right method and at the right time.



In today's church culture we almost hear too much of the word "strategy." I like this definition of strategy: *A strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal. Strategy deals with the how part rather than the what (en.wikipedia.org).* In addition to answering the how, I believe strategy also answers the *why* we do things the way we do them.

Still, communication in the New Paradigm will require a thoughtful, strategic approach, thinking about why we say it, why we use that delivery method, why we communicated at that time, and why we chose that particular audience. The more we can apply strategy to our communication the better we will protect budget dollars and staff or volunteer time.

Churches that embrace a strategic formula for communication, understanding the mix of timing, message, audience and methodology will succeed in the long run in identity improvement and communication of The Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who fail to embrace a strategic formula for communication will continue to be less than relevant to people and lose the opportunity to build relationships through which the love of Jesus can be communicated. <^><

Scott Vaughan was a 20-year newspaper writer, editor and publisher before entering vocational ministry as a church communication strategist. As a member of the media, he won awards in both the Georgia and South Carolina press associations, and served on the South Carolina Press Association's Executive Board. For nine years, he was marketing director for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, serving churches of all sizes, in all cultures, and of all ages. In 2003, he created his own ministry, enabling him to serve a larger ecumenical community that reaches across the United States, and six of seven continents. He is a professional public speaker, and has the gift for creating original presentations customized for audiences. He is a local church leader, serving as a deacon and small group teacher/leader. He is active in his community, specifically supporting children and young people through youth sports. He and Vicki have been married 24 years and have four sons, ages 21-13.



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