

# Starting Good Rumors

by

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Looking for a doctor? Need a home loan? Buying a new car? Selecting a college?

Where do you go for advice? Do you look in the paper? Watch T.V? Or, "Let your fingers do the walking?"

If you are like most people, you ask a family member, associate or friend.

Advertisers call this "Word of Mouth." It is the most effective way of advertising any product -- even a church!

## **Biblical Examples**

Word of mouth advertising is referred to in Scripture as a story, a report, a tidings, a reputation and a rumor. Rumors are characterized as either good-speaking or evil-speaking (2 Cor. 6:8). Believers are encouraged to think and spread good rumors (Phil. 4:8).

The ministry of Jesus was predominantly communicated by word of mouth. After raising a dead man, Luke records that "...this report (rumor, story) concerning Him went out all over Judea, and in all the surrounding district." (Luke 7:17)

A classic example of word of mouth advertising is found in 1 Thessalonians 1:8. Writing about the church in Thessalonica, Paul says, "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth ..."

People were telling how the Thessalonians had turned from idols to serve a living and true God. They were spreading the story by word of mouth. It was so effective that Paul confesses "...we have no need to say anything."

## **How Rumors Spread**

Studies in the field of "Diffusion of Innovation" (how new products spread) have found that people do not choose a product purely on factual information. The overwhelming

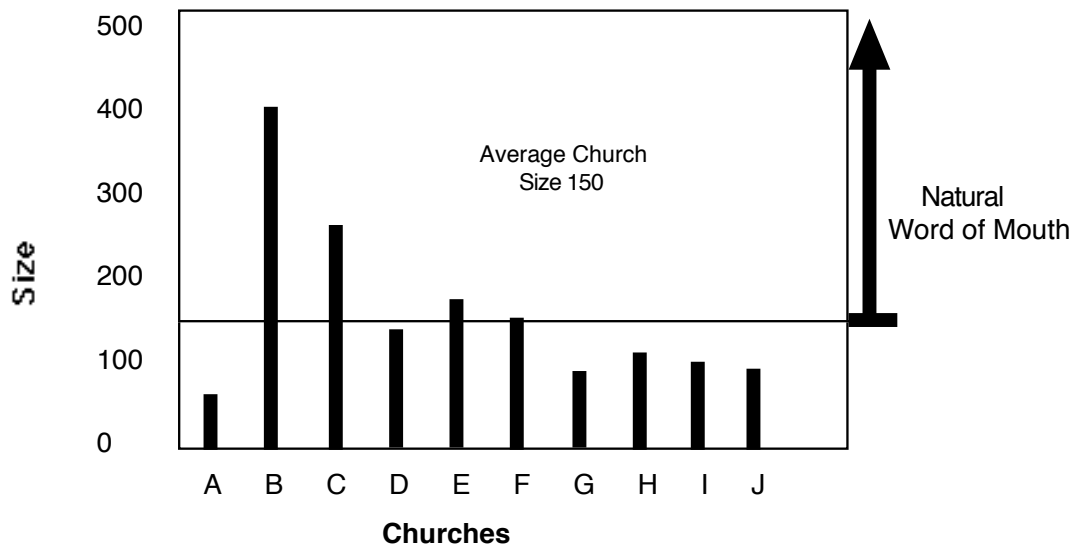
majority of people depend on subjective evaluations conveyed to them from other individuals like themselves who have previously adopted a product.

It appears that potential adopters rely on the modeling of near-peers who have already adopted a product. New products literally take off after interpersonal networks are activated to spread subjective, positive evaluations.

In the same way, churches grow as previous adopters (members and attenders) model their happiness by spreading good rumors (positive evaluations) to their near-peers who are potential adopters (friends, family and associates.)

### Determining Word of Mouth Effectiveness

Some churches have natural word of mouth exposure due to their size. In general, a church with a worship attendance above that of the average church in its ministry area will have strong word of mouth visibility. Note the following graph as an example.



There are 10 churches in the ministry area depicted above. The average worship attendance of all churches is 150. In order for a church to have natural word of mouth exposure it will need to have a worship attendance above 150.

It is easy to see that church "B," "C," "E," and "F" are above this 150 line and have a natural visibility via word of mouth. The remaining churches will need to work at developing word of mouth advertising since they have too few people for such visibility to develop naturally.

## **Energizing Good Rumors**

How may a church tie into the network of previous adopters (church members and attendees) to reach potential adopters? As a church leader, you do not need to passively sit by. You can be thoughtful, organized and systematic about word of mouth advertising.

Good rumors will develop as present members and attendees sense personal satisfaction with the ministry of your church.

The following are some ways your church may begin to develop word of mouth advertising.

**1. Upgrade Facilities:** If facilities, grounds and equipment are below what people would have in their homes, they may come themselves, but will not feel good enough about their church to spread good rumors and bring new people. Facilities must be slightly better than people expect.

**2. Enhance Services:** Services need to be a notch above expectations and consistently good. For example, if the worship service is excellent about one Sunday per month and mediocre the remaining Sundays, it will be difficult to develop good rumors. Members will only spread good rumors when they believe that the worship service will be consistently good each Sunday.

**3. Utilize Newsletters:** A newsletter is a solid way to build a cadre of loyal followers. It is time consuming and expensive, but is certainly worth the effort. One key is regularity. Many churches put out a newsletter sporadically. If anything, this works against the development of good rumors. Make good use of pictures. Keep it crisp, clean, clear and upbeat.

**4. Host Open Houses:** Make it a practice to host regular open house meetings where members may share their desires, hopes and concerns. At the same meetings church leaders may communicate their church's vision and direction.

**5. Interview People:** Interview people from the platform on Sunday mornings. Select new people, those with a fresh testimony and those who have been served effectively by your church. Host an end of the year event where many people who have been touched by your church may share their stories.

**6. Court Opinion Leaders:** One pastor visited the mayor of his city. After the proper introductions were made the mayor asked how he could help the pastor. The pastor confided that he simply wanted to know how the mayor was doing. Before leaving, he prayed for the mayor! The mayor was shocked and pleased. Needless to say, this opinion leader has good things to say about this pastor and his church.

**7. Build Good Experiences:** Complete projects that are started. Work on small goals that are sure to succeed and publicize it when they are met. Take slides and pictures of church events. Show them at meetings throughout the year. Develop a video about your church.

**8. Communicate Victories:** Print answers to prayer. Share how your church is progressing toward its yearly goals. Tell how ministries are reaching people. Publicly read thank you cards and letters from people who have been helped by your church. Communicate everything 5 different ways.

**9. Develop a Sense of Expectancy:** Preach messages that point to hope in the Lord. Describe how God has met church needs over the years and project His certain help into the future. Tell how God has answered your prayers.

**10. Give Out Business Cards:** Provide business cards for every member of the church as a tool for developing good rumors. Give each person in your church 52 cards. Encourage them to hand out one each week with an invitation to attend your worship services.

Does your church have natural word of mouth visibility in its ministry area? If not, then you will need to develop a strategy to help increase your word of mouth image.