

Ignite Purpose Church Growth Strategy

1. Where Are We Now? (Looking Back)

What do your mission and vision statements say? Does your church still align with them or have you headed off in another direction? Maybe you need to rewrite your mission statement or recast the vision of the ministry. Is it possible the purpose of your ministry has shifted? These aren't bad things. The Lord does bring all of us through transitions. If you aren't periodically reviewing and revising, it's likely you aren't conscious of a shift you've already been through.

Core values set the culture of an organization. *Do you have a specific set of core values written down somewhere?* Values statements articulate the principles that guide us. These principles never change. They help lead the daily interactions we have in the ministry. They help explain to everyone what we are committed to and how we will conduct ourselves.

What is the internal and external environment surrounding your ministry? Have you assessed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

2. Where Are We Going? (Looking Ahead)

In your spirit and in your mind, what does the future of your church look like? Just about every church and ministry is founded with a vision. *Someone* had a picture of where they thought the Lord was taking them. This is one of the foundational pieces of a strategic plan that must be communicated with your congregation.

3. How Will We Get There?

The answer to this question forms the core of your strategic plan. It is also the most difficult and time consuming because it demands so much careful thought and planning. This is the where the roadmap for the future is laid out in detail. It demands you to think through the implications of your decisions. It's scary yet it can be the most rewarding question to answer because it actually provides substance. Without taking on this question, you will never be able to execute efficiently.

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What to do...

Some church leaders find planning a challenging exercise. In reality, the planning process is simple—conceptually. It can be described as answering seven key questions:

1. *Spiritual Needs Assessment:* What are the greatest spiritual needs of our church and community?
2. *Strengths and Weaknesses:* What are the greatest strengths and weaknesses of our church?
3. *Opportunities and Threats or Barriers:* What are the most significant ministry opportunities for and potential threats (or barriers) to our church, given the answers to the first two questions?
4. *Ministry Options:* What appear to be the most viable options for strengthening the ministry of our church?
5. *Ministry Goals:* What goals is the Holy Spirit leading us to strive for to enhance our church's ministry over the next year? The next two to three years?
6. *Action Steps:* What action steps must we accomplish to achieve these goals?

Getting your team to agree on the answers to these questions (*under the guidance of the Holy Spirit*) may or may not be simple, depending on the circumstances and the relationships of leaders in your church.

What not to do...

1. *Making Planning Too Complex:* There are usually two or three key issues that will be discovered, and, if acted on, will lead to enhanced health and vitality.
2. *Not Reaching Conclusions and Making an Action Plan:* Tie up loose ends along the way, and outline appropriate action steps.
3. *Not Keeping the Action Plan Simple:* The objective is to create a plan that every member can articulate without having to refer to any documentation.
4. *Not Revisiting the Plan:* Your plan should be adjustable along the way, revised and renewed according to the needs and resources available to you. Keep your planning documents alive. Don't shelve them, file them, or formalize them in pretty documents.
5. *Taking Too Long:* Don't complain about the value of doing this. Keep moving forward toward conclusion and celebration.
6. *Trusting Your Instincts apart from Prayer:* As a team, lean fully in God's direction to hear His voice, feel His heart, understand His will, and trust His empowering presence to lead you. Strategic planning in a local church is a process that God through his Holy Spirit must direct. ***Become a people of prayer as you trust Him for his design for your church!***

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How to implement a strategic growth plan...

1. Create a Vision, Mission and Values Statement

It is difficult to know where to focus efforts and resources without being able to articulate what it is you are trying to do. Imagine taking a vacation without first deciding where you are going or how you will get there.

The first, and arguably most important, step of the strategic planning process is to create a mission and value statement. This process allows church leaders to clarify why the church exists (mission) and what the church is trying to achieve (vision).

The mission and vision is what determines strategy and planning.

2. Do (SWOT) Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a great exercise to go through because it identifies the key areas of the church that may need targeted resources as well as opportunities or opposing environmental factors that could affect church growth strategy.

For example, if a children's program is a strength of the church, there may need to be continued or increased resources committed to it to ensure continued development and growth.

On the other hand, if the church is located in a high crime area, there might be an opportunity to develop a youth outreach program to support that unique demographic.

The SWOT analysis process can flush out many great ideas to help target development, growth and improvements.

To begin the SWOT process, think about the following:

- **Strengths:** Characteristics of the church that may give it an advantage over others;
- **Weaknesses:** Characteristics of the church that may be a disadvantage as related to others;
- **Opportunities:** Conditions outside the church that could potentially increase attendance or revenues;
- **Threats:** Conditions outside the church that could create problems for the church.

For example:

- **Strength:** The church is located on a busy street and has high visibility in the community.
- **Weakness:** A small percentage of the church population is young families.
- **Opportunities:** The church is located in an area with a high population of Hispanic families.
- **Threats:** The church is located in a small town with an aging population.

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3. Write Organizational Goals

Once a SWOT and gap analysis is done, it is time to start writing goals. Goals are only as effective as the formalized process of achieving them. When writing a goal, filter it through the following questions:

Specific: *Is the goal specific enough for clarity?*

Measurable: *Is there a way to measure the success of the goal?*

Attainable: *Is the goal truly attainable?*

Realistic: *Is the goal realistically written?*

Timely: *Is there a timeline associated to the goal to ensure a completion date?*

The church budget is also incorporated into strategic planning as each goal needs to have identified resources (people, time, money) devoted to it to be successful.

This process will deliver a document that details organizational goals for the short term (3-6 months) and long-term (1-3 years). This is a living document and should be updated as conditions and priorities change. The most important part is getting it written down and assigning responsibility as soon as possible.

The beauty of having a written plan, is that once all of the time and effort is invested in the plan, it is just a matter of overseeing the plan to completion. This is done through a structured process and should be monitored and reviewed regularly.

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Creating a Communication Plan

Once the strategic plan is in place, a tactical communication plan is necessary to deliver the strategy. Everything your church does is communication, from the condition of the parking lot to the content in your bulletin to the tone of your sermon. Everything you do communicates something about what you really value, regardless of what you say you value.

BRANDING

Phil Cooke defines a brand as *“the story people tell about a person, product, or organization.”*

Your church has a brand in your community whether you realize it or not. The key to understanding your brand is to find out what story people tell when your church gets brought up in conversation. ***That’s your brand.***

- *What story do we want people to associate with our church? How would we like people to feel when they think about us?*
- *What story do people actually tell about us? How do we know this?*
- *Does the appearance of our building, landscaping, and outdoor signage communicate the feelings we want people to experience?*
- *Do we have a logo that communicates the feeling and the story we want people to experience?*
- *Does our website, bulletin, and other printed materials such as brochures, business/invite cards, or postcards uniformly agree with the story we’re telling across the board?*

CHURCH WEBSITE

If you’re not found in a Google search for churches in your area, you don’t exist to people moving into town. A website is essential, even if it’s a free or inexpensively made website. While not every church can afford the fees charged by professional designers, we still ought to invest in our website with both energy and resources that honor the importance of this crucial area of communication.

- *Is our website responsive and mobile-friendly?*
- *Is our most basic information easy to find on our main homepage (location, service times, etc.)?*

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- *Do we use imagery that tells people that we're human, we're alive, and we're welcoming?*
- *Are event listings available and up-to-date?*
- *Can people easily know what we believe? What we value? How we function?*
- *Do we have links to our Facebook page and other social profiles on our website?*
- *Is there a way for people to reach out and get in touch with us without leaving our website?*
- *Can people easily know how to pursue next steps such as baptism, joining a small group, or volunteering in an area of ministry?*
- *Do we have a page dedicated to our staff and key leaders so that potential visitors can know who we are?*

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media simply refers to how information spreads – from person to person, socially. When we use the phrase “*social media*” we’re generally referring to the websites or web-based platforms used for social networking. While a previous generation got to know social media as an optional activity, an up-and-coming generation sees social media the way we see oxygen – it’s just part of the air people are breathing.

- *Do we have a main church Facebook page?*
- *Do the header and profile images represent us well? Are they consistent with the branding on our website and print pieces?*
- *Are we a location that people can check into when they visit on Sunday?*
- *Is our address, phone number, and website address displayed in the ‘about’ area?*
- *Are we posting regularly? At least weekly if not several times per week?*
- *Are we posting a variety of content such as pictures, text, and links?*
- *Are we offering more than just announcements? Are we also telling stories, giving valuable content, and extending the preaching of our church in a positive way?*
- *Do we engage our fans and followers by responding to comments?*
- *Are our key leaders using social media? Are they on Facebook and Twitter? Do they promote the ministry of the church through those platforms?*

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PRINT DESIGN

Many experts claim that *“print is dying”* but most people walking through the doors of a church building on Sunday still expect some kind of bulletin to know what’s going on.

- *Does our bulletin look nice and clean? Does it match the look of our website and other communication mediums?*
- *Have we put guests first, using bulletin space to explain what to expect during their visit?*
- *Have we made it clear what announcements are really the most important?*
- *Do we use valuable space to communicate church-wide what could be communicated via a different means to only a few people?*
- *Have we offered clear “next steps” such as were to go online to get more information, how to sign up for events, and who to talk to about knowing Jesus, baptism, or church membership?*
- *Are we using readable typefaces?*

COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Much work goes into planning special events and ministries. It’s a shame for that work to go to waste when the right people don’t know about the event or service we’re working toward. Systems are imperative if we’re going to communicate effectively.

- *Do we have a process to follow when an event is planned?*
- *Do we have a calendar that can be seen and shared by all leaders to avoid scheduling conflicts?*
- *Do we have a checklist to glance at to be sure we’ve communicated events using every necessary means?*
- *Have we made it clear that only major, church-wide announcements need to be communicated from the stage or pulpit?*
- *Do we have any kind of content calendar or plan for what updates get posted on our website and social profiles and what times they should be posted?*

There is more, but these questions offer a great starting place for the leadership team of any size church. ***Knowing where we are and how we’re doing is half the battle!***