

The Power of One Word: Can You Describe Your Church in One Word?

“The most powerful concept in marketing is owning a word in a person’s mind.”

A church will be in better position to grow if it can find a way to own a word in the minds of people within the community. I’m not talking about a complicated word or a word that must be invented. I’m talking about a word we’ve all heard before; a word taken right out of the dictionary.

When people hear the name of your church in the street, this one word is what they will immediately think. It’s what they associate with you.

Here are some examples:

- *If you hear the word “computer”, you think IBM*
- *If you hear the word “phone”, you think iPhone or Apple*
- *If you hear the word “copier”, you think Xerox*
- *If you hear the word “chocolate”, you think Hershey’s*
- *If you hear the word “cola”, you think Coke*

The most effective words are simple and benefit-oriented. You can’t use another church’s word (at least not in the same community). You can’t steal and borrow. This one word is all about you. This is the word you want burnt inside the minds of people in your community. You can’t abandon your word in search of a word owned by others. You have to own this word.

Here’s the real kicker: If you don’t find your one word that describes your church, the people in your church and community are going to create that word for you.

The key to finding your word (and marketing in general really) is narrowing your focus. There’s no way that your church stands for everything. You can’t stand for every injustice, every ministry and every opportunity. If you’re chasing *everything*, you don’t really stand for *anything*. So it’s huge to find this one word you want people to use to describe you.

Three steps to finding and activating your church’s “one word”:

#1 Identify. It’s crucial that it starts internally. You don’t want external factors determining your one word. Your one word is sitting inside the hearts and minds of the leaders within your church and members. Collectively and internally, you have to spend time reflecting on what is the one word you feel comfortable attaching to your church.

Here’s an exercise: Get a huge white board and a room full of 5-7 hand-selected leaders who understand your culture and history. Ask each person to get up and write three separate words

on the whiteboard they think accurately describe the church and what the external community perceives of the church. After everyone has written their three words, each person will go up and select which one word they think most accurately describes the church. See which word receives the most votes, and if there's cohesion amongst the team about the one word.

#2 Test. Now you want to test your one word externally. Go into your community and find out if your word accurately communicates your church in the minds of people who are not involved with your church. You want to find people who know the name of your church, but are not members of your congregation.

Here's an exercise: Send several of your staff members out on a busy Saturday to the mall or a heavily trafficked area like a park. Simply walk up to people and ask, "Have you ever heard of X church? If they say yes, then ask them politely: "What one word would you use to describe this church?" Collect this data and come back and look at it as a team. You want to test externally, but you also want to test internally with people outside your team (congregation members) on a Sunday morning. Pull people aside asking them the same question, gathering the same data.

#3 Communicate. Once you find and commit to your one word, make sure that you consistently communicate it. Any time you communicate internally or externally, this one word should be used in your communication in some way, form or fashion. On top of using this word in the right context and the right communication channels, you can use images, video and design as ways to supports your one word.

Now that you've identified your one word, you've tested it with the public and your church audience, and you're consistently communicating this message, it's important to protect your one word – especially if it's positive (if it's negative than you have to go back to the drawing board). Say, for example, your one word is "radical". You want to make sure every action your ministry takes and every communication reflects "radical". It all starts internally. This one word is a word that defines your culture, so you are ultimately protecting your culture.