



WE DO NOT NEED TO GET SOMEONE IN TO HELP US WITH MARKETING OUR CHURCH AS WE ARE PERFECTLY ABLE TO DO IT OURSELVES

# AUDIT. AS IN AUDITORY. COMMUNICATIONS IN YOUR PARISH



DIocese OF TRURO  
DISCOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM  
GROWING THE CHURCH



We must have a blog.

Our website is rubbish.

We need a  
twitter account.

We look and sound  
too old fashioned.

We're killing off our  
magazine - no one  
reads it.

## SOUND FAMILIAR?

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How do you know your website is rubbish? How do you know that no one reads your parish magazine or pew sheet? Why must you have a blog? Why do you need a twitter account?

Re-designing your magazine or adding some new features to your website can generate a buzz, they can make you feel like you are doing something, even if you don't know why.

But many of these things may be more effective if you have asked yourself: How do they help us? How do they link to what we want to achieve? And more importantly, have asked others what they think.

A communications audit will take care of the all important listening phase. It will give you all the raw material you need to create a communications strategy and then put it to work.

# SO HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Listen first. Then plan. You can do your listening in four ways: surveys, focus groups, executive interviews and vehicle assessment.

## SURVEYS

Surveys allow you to gather quantitative data from your audiences, and to establish their level of agreement and understanding, while also assessing how they feel about the current state of your communications. Here are a few tips:

■ **Ask questions that give you hard data.** This what surveys are all about. Ask people to choose their level of agreement (strongly agree, agree, somewhat disagree, disagree etc) for questions like these:

*I understand how the new strategic plan affects our church  
Our leaders do a good job of explaining decisions to the congregation*

■ **Ask your congregation and parishioners to tank your communication vehicles.** Ask them to choose the channels they use most often to get information, then ask them to rate the usefulness of each vehicle. Is the information relevant to them? Is it timely and trustworthy? How often do they use it?

■ **Keep the surveys short and the questions clean.** No one likes taking a long survey. Promise them your survey will take less than 10 minutes. Compose clear and direct questions, and lose the jargon. One more thing: Don't ask a question if you can't do anything about the answer!

■ **Pick your demographics carefully.** Many surveys get weighed down with a dozen questions that allow us to analyze the survey data along demographic lines. Ask the demographic questions that will actually tell you something. Looking at survey results by age group can be quite revealing, especially if you are considering new technologies or social media channels.

# SO HOW DO WE GET THERE?

## FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are a qualitative measure; they allow you to dig deeper into survey results and ask the 'why?' and 'what if?' questions that can inform your strategy.

■ **Do as many as you need to do.** There's no rule for how many focus groups you should do. The trick is to get a good sample of your different audiences. Again, think of demographics. In your parish you would likely need Readers, LWLs, Messy Church leaders, Messy Church parents, greeters,...

■ **Ideally aim for the magic dozen for each group.** You may need to invite 20 people to get the 12 you need in a group. In most church environments, it is more realistic to aim for 6.

Sample focus group structure		
Intro	Welcome them, re-state why you are doing this, and what you will do.	<b>Two minutes</b>
Set Expectations	What their role is, what you want from them, what your role is.	<b>Five minutes</b>
Warm up questions	Keep them simple. Build confidence.	<b>Five minutes</b>
Interactive exercise	Continue to build confidence, get everyone involved.	
Main questions	Easy questions. Hard questions	<b>15 minutes</b> <b>15 minutes</b>
Wrap up	Thank them for their time. What can they expect? What will happen with their comments?	<b>Five minutes</b>

■ **Get them talking.** Focus group leaders have to draw out the wallflowers and control the chatterboxes. Start the group with an exercise that gets everyone talking on the same level. Perhaps start by asking them to write a few words or a phrase on an index card in response to a simple question, such as 'How would you describe the way our church communicates with its members?' Then ask the participants to read aloud what they've written. That'll get the conversation going, and the answers are usually quite illuminating.

■ **Leader interviews.** Leader interviews allow you to assess how leaders feel about communication, and to gauge whether their views are different from those of the congregation. That gap, and there is always a gap, is one of the best ways to choose the right tactics. Here's how to approach these critical one-on-ones:

What you need to learn from leaders	
Current options	How would you rate communications at the organisation?
Best case scenarios	What would communications look like in a perfect world?
Understand challenges	What are the biggest obstacles to communication?
Understand audience needs	What should audiences know, but don't??
Understand issues	What are the hottest issues facing the church/parish?
Understand personal needs as a leader	What do they expect/ need out of the communications department?

# SO HOW DO WE GET THERE?

■ **Get their views on communications.** The fact is that most leaders don't fully understand what communicators do. Aren't you the one who puts out the newsletter, or posts things on the internet? But do they see communications as a channel to help them meet their business goals? Go find out!

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■ **Test your ideas.** A leader interview is a great way to float your ideas for improving communications. You've got a captive audience. Open a leader's eyes to what communications can do for the parish, and you might just find a sponsor for your recommendations.

■ **Ask them what they are prepared to do.** This is an immensely important question. Leaders pay lip service to the notion that communication is everyone's responsibility, so let's get real. What are they willing to do to make communication more effective?

■ **Vehicle analysis.** After all that listening, you have to take stock of your own efforts. Based on what you've heard, are your communication channels getting the job done?

This is the toughest part because it requires an objective analysis of your own work. To evaluate your vehicles, ask these questions, among others:

**Am I conveying the information people need, in the way they want to receive it?**

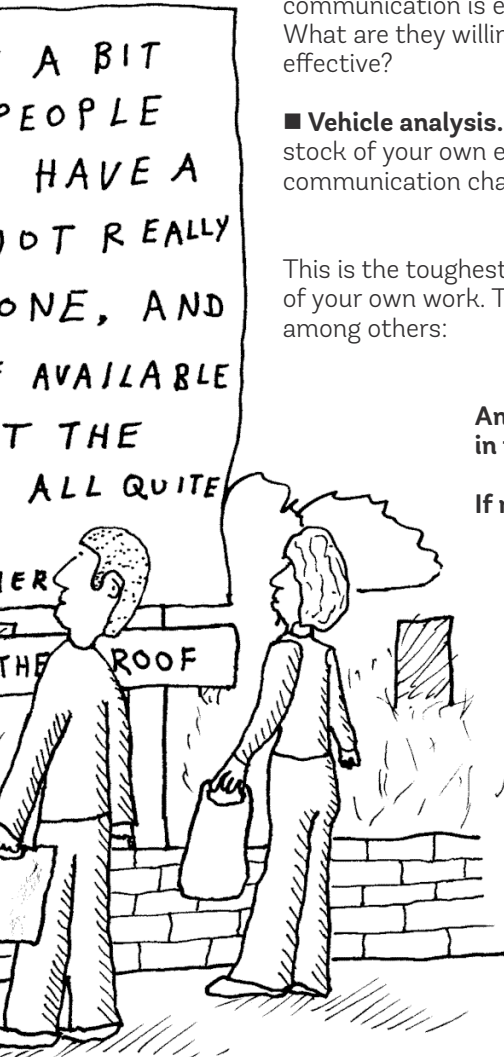
**If not, what needs to change?**

**Am I using each of my channels at its strength? How can I make the best use of print, the internet, face-to-face meetings and my social and multimedia channels?**

**What can I get rid of?**

**What can I do less of?**

**How can I do what's left better?**



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# WRITING YOUR PLAN

What you learn in a communications audit is amazing. Those working in your parishes are quite thoughtful about this stuff, and they like to be asked. After you do the research, you'll be in a much better position to write a good plan for strategic communication.

Based on what you have learned, how can you match your communication to the goals of your parish/ church? What messages are most important to get to your audiences? Through what channels? How will you measure your effectiveness?

Once your plan is in place, you can finally get to the fun stuff: changing the way you tell stories, improving your existing vehicles and possibly even launching new channels.

In practice, this often includes changing your own editorial process and training those who help you to deliver the goods....

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## WITH THANKS

**This booklet is based on an article 'Audit. As in auditory' by Jim Ylisela.**

Jim is an award-winning veteran Chicago journalist and former publisher of Ragan.com. He brings more than 30 years of experience in writing, editing, communications research and consulting.

Jim is a longtime communications trainer and well-known expert in launching corporate newsrooms - both internally and externally - around the concept of brand journalism. He has worked with communicators and news teams around the world.

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