

What Churches can learn from businesses and missionaries

Have you ever thought about the idea that missions and businesses have more in common than missions and churches? This idea came to me one day while reading an article in a business magazine.

In the article the author was sharing how a long established auto manufacturer was trying to reach a new and younger audience with its message. The message was basically "buy our cars because they are cool". The interesting thing about the car company was the great length the auto manufacturer was willing to go to reach this younger audience.

Doing research, they developed a whole new line of cars and went out on a limb by developing a whole new way of marketing the cars that was in keeping with the younger sub culture. All the new methods and ideas were a gamble for this auto manufacturer. It had one goal in mind, to convince the young audience that what they produced was worth having.

I have seen the same thing on the mission field. Missionaries come into a foreign culture and they go to great lengths to understand the culture. They study the way the people eat, worship, what they do in their family life, where they work and more. Based on their findings, and without compromising the scriptures, they devise culturally relevant strategies to reach the people with their message. They will go to great lengths to understand the culture in which they are living in order to reach that culture. Like the businesses, the missionaries want to convey the idea that what they have to say is worth hearing and what they have to offer is worth having.

Both the missionary and businesses understand one common idea. Unless they find relevant ways to share their message, both may lose the next generation to the competition. The consequences for businesses that fail are not near as serious as for the missionary who fails.

So if businesses and missionaries both understand this, then why is it many churches seem to miss the concept? Please understand I am not talking about compromising scripture or your convictions. I am addressing those issues that can change within any culture. Things such as how we approach small groups, the type of music that is played, or the clothes we wear on Sunday mornings. These are all things that can change from culture to culture and from generation to generation.

Take for instance my friend who works in a large church. Their worship attendance has been declining. Many of the young adults are leaving the church in favor of churches that are more casual in their clothes and more contemporary

in their music. While many of the people have different ideas on why the church is declining none have sought to really find out why. Several of the church leaders both lay and staff have attributed the decline in membership to a matter of marketing or getting a new and better program in place. Some attribute it to the fact that they are not doing some of the things they did 20 years ago. They may be correct or they may be wrong.

The problem is that many of the leaders refuse to examine why the people are leaving. It seems as though they are afraid ask the hard questions to see how they can better reach this young community of people. Unlike the businesses and missionaries this church will not take the time to see what the surrounding culture is all about and what it will take to reach those young people they are losing. Sadly enough this may reflect most churches around our country. Some statistics have 85% of the churches in America in decline.

There is something we can learn from the business and missions' communities. That lesson revolves around the question of "How bad do we really want to penetrate the surrounding culture with our ideas and message"? Are we as passionate in trying to share our message with people as the car company is in trying to sell the cars?

While the answer may be yes in some churches I think the answer in most churches is that they are not interested in changing for the sake of getting their message out to a whole new audience. That scares me. For all the cool cars the auto manufacturers can make and market to us, he cannot give us the one thing that really matters in this world and that is eternal life.