



**SAY
WHAT?!**

**Key Research on
Church Communications
from**

THE UNSTUCKGROUP

POWERED BY

TONYMORGAN *live*

Key Findings from 186 Churches | Metrics for Your Church | Recommendations to Get Unstuck

WE WANT TO GET CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS UNSTUCK!

Have you ever communicated a message that just didn't connect with the other person? You said something very important to you only to receive a confused glare in return. Our natural response in those moments is to keep repeating our message...sometimes we even try saying it louder! But repetition of the same approach rarely leads to improved results.

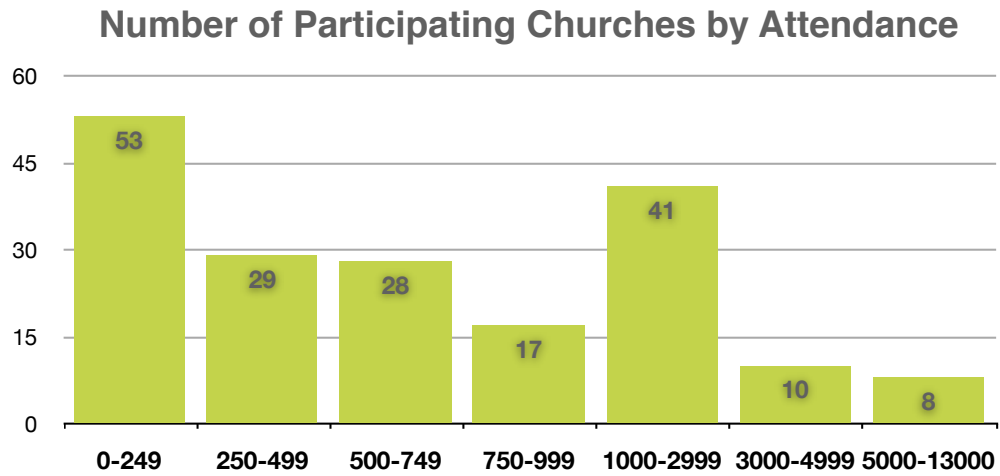
Most churches experience a similar communications barrier. They tell people to invite their friends. But few people actually do. They say, "Small groups are the best way to grow!" But a large number of people never get involved. After repeating the same approaches over and over, many churches have found themselves stuck in the area of communications. Maybe your church is stuck in one way or another.

Here's what we at *The Unstuck Group* believe about your church: We believe that you have the greatest message ever communicated. We believe you hold a story that needs to be told. We truly believe that your community could be radically transformed with a greater understanding of what you have to say. That's why we want to help get church communications unstuck.

We paused to ask 186 churches about the ways in which they communicate. Our goal was to take the pulse of church communications and help leaders like you grow in this area. This report provides a summary of key findings that could enhance the way you communicate in five key areas:

1. Style Guide + Strategy
2. Communications Staffing + Volunteers
3. Weekend Promotions
4. Websites
5. Social Media

The churches we surveyed range in size from less than 100 to over 13,000 in attendance. While some of the churches surveyed preferred not to share all of their data, except where noted, this report only includes findings based on at least 100 churches.



As you read these findings and suggested action steps, our hope is that you find new ways to communicate the message that your community most needs to hear.

STYLE GUIDE + STRATEGY

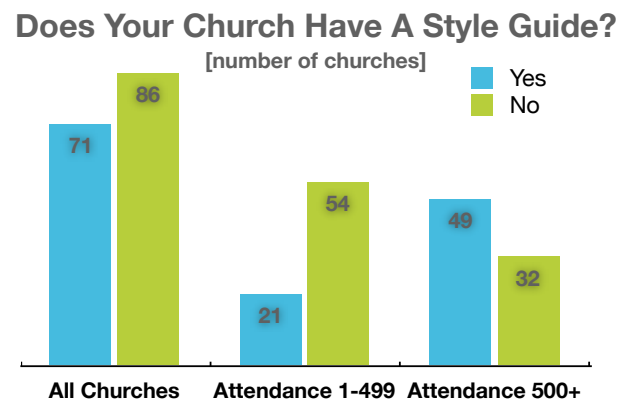
When it comes to communicating, everyone knows that it's not just about *what* you say but *how* you say it. Clarifying your church's approach ensures that the entire team communicates with unity. Defining your strategy also protects your most important messages from getting lost in the conversation. That being said, here's what we discovered about the approaches churches are taking to communicate.

:::KEY FINDINGS

Most churches do not have a style guide to communicate with consistency.

A style guide provides clear guidelines so everyone on staff understands how to correctly share messages from the church. By defining the preferred visual style and graphic guidelines, leaders can ensure that the church's communications present unity, not a variety of personalities.

Only 45% of the churches we surveyed actually have a style guide. If the majority of churches are actually consistent in their communications, it is likely due to a communications staff member working hard to pull everything together. This level of reliance on a person is far from sustainable and certainly not clear. Most churches need to clarify their approach through a style guide that ensures a consistent "look and feel" across all communications over time.



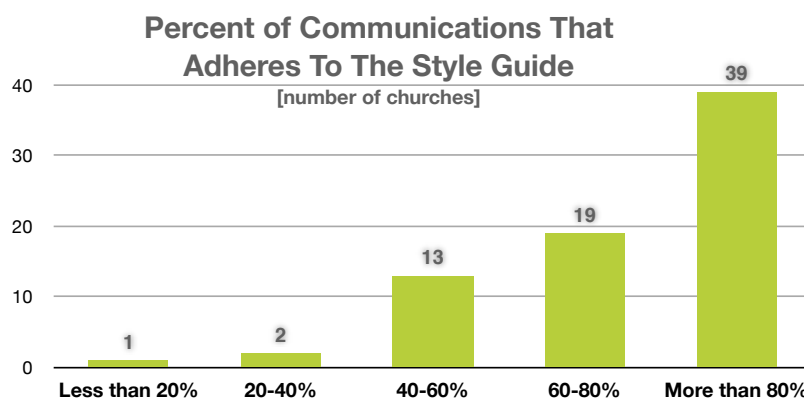
Smaller churches are significantly less likely to have a style guide.

Just 28% of churches with less than 500 people in attendance have a style guide. It stands to reason that churches of this size are more reliant on various volunteers, contracted designers, or department leaders to create communications pieces. Without a style guide, handouts and flyers from different ministries can quickly start to look like they represent separate organizations rather than one church. Developing a style guide

would be very advantageous to a smaller church looking to strengthen its brand and engage communications volunteers.

Nearly half of churches with a style guide do not use it consistently.

It is one thing to have a style guide. It is an entirely different thing to use it. Only 53% of churches that have a style guide use it on at least 80% of their communications efforts (1). A tool is no good if it remains in the toolbox.



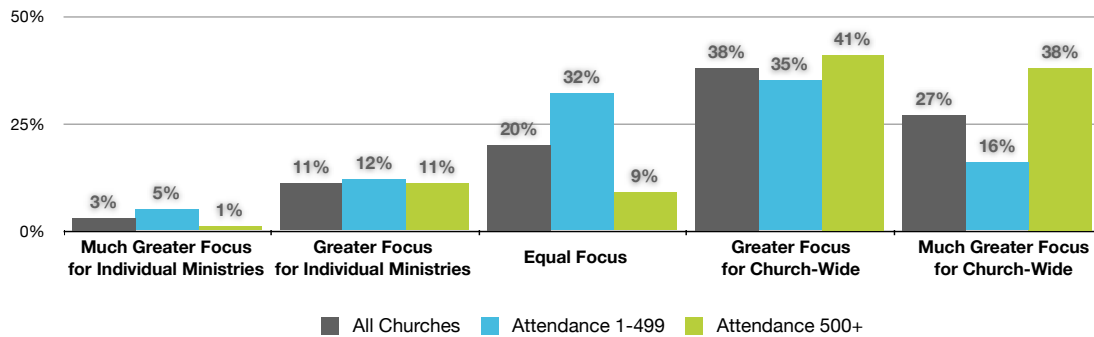
And a style guide offers little benefit until leaders actually use it on a regular basis.

Larger churches keep communications more focused on church-wide programs than individual ministries.

Every church must balance the tension between promoting church-wide programs and individual ministries. For example, senior leaders may want everyone to know about the upcoming outreach event while the women's ministry wants to tell the same people about its Mom's Day Out.

We asked churches how they manage this tension between church-wide programs and individual ministries. 79% of churches with an attendance of 500 or more said they give greater focus to church-wide programs. Just 51% of churches with less than 500 in attendance give church-wide programs that level of priority. In our own experience, we have noticed that larger churches even tend to have fewer individual ministries in existence. It seems that they have discovered value in prioritizing church-wide programs and reducing the number of individual ministries that distract from them.

Do Your Communications Focus More On Individual Ministries Or Church-Wide Programs?



:::COMMUNICATIONS CHECK-UP

Wondering about the strength of your own style guide and strategy? Take a look at this [Communications Scorecard](#) to identify your strengths and weaknesses in comparison to the entire group of churches represented in this report.

:::GET UNSTUCK!

Starting to wonder if you need to further develop your style guide and strategy? Here are a few steps you can begin to take:

- Develop or re-develop your church's style guide. Clarify the following attributes for your church:
 - Proper use of the church logo
 - Specific color palette with color codes
 - Approved fonts
 - Preferred word choices for "church language" (i.e. Sanctuary, Worship Service, etc.)
- Use this downloadable and editable [Church Communications Manual and Style Guide](#) from Granger Community Church as a starting point for building your own. A Communications Manual defines systems and strategy while a Style Guide keeps a brand visually consistent.
- If you have a style guide that is being underused, begin talking with your leadership team about why it is not valued more.
- Give one person the responsibility of reviewing and approving all church-wide graphics and communications, based on your style guide, to ensure a consistent

"look and feel." What gets communicated from your print or web platform should be as consistent and focused as what is communicated from the platform in your main auditorium.

- Create a list of the 3-5 most important steps that you would like to see everyone in your church take (i.e. small groups, volunteering, etc.). Prioritize those church-wide messages above individual ministries.
- Create tiers of communications channels for messages of different priorities. For example, the bulletin and platform may be reserved for the most important messages. Social media and emails to targeted groups may be better ways to share individual ministry announcements.

VOLUNTEERS + STAFF

As with every ministry, it takes a great team to create great communication. Both volunteers and staff are the most valuable components to sharing a clear message in an engaging way. Here is what we uncovered about these two groups.

:::KEY FINDINGS

Smaller churches engage more volunteers per capita in the area of communications.

There is no doubt that volunteers are essential to ministry. In fact, Ephesians 4:12 makes clear the call of church leaders to engage others in service. It seems that as churches get larger, they involve less volunteers per capita in the area of communications. Churches with 1,000 or more people in attendance

involve just 0.4% of adults and students in communications. Churches with less than 500 in attendance involve nearly 4%. That is a level of engagement over 8 times more! It seems clear that smaller churches engage a larger segment of their congregations to serve in communications.

Weekend Attendance	Average Percent of Adults and Students Serving in Communications
1 - 499	3.7%
500 - 999	1.6%
1,000 +	0.4%
All Churches	2.3%

The size of a communications staff scales with church size.

The average church pays the equivalent of one full-time communications staff member for every 1,160 people in weekly attendance. Churches with less than 500 in attendance hire more staff per capita: one for every 983 attendees.

Churches with 1,000 or more in attendance hire the least per capita with one for every 1,412 attendees. It seems that communications staffing becomes more efficient as a church grows larger.

Weekend Attendance	Average Communications Staff to Attendance
1 - 499	1 staff to 983 attendees
500 - 999	1 staff to 1,211 attendees
1,000 +	1 staff to 1,412 attendees
All Churches	1 staff to 1,160 attendees

:::COMMUNICATIONS CHECK-UP

Wondering how well you're utilizing staff and volunteers to communicate? The [Communications Scorecard](#) provides the metrics you need to get a clearer perspective.

:::GET UNSTUCK!

Thinking you might be able to better engage your volunteers and staff? These action items can help you get started:

- Make a list of everything your church is doing to communicate. Ask yourself or your team, "Is this something we could engage a volunteer to do?"
- Build a team of volunteers to manage your social media accounts.
- Challenge your communications staff to carve out at least 2-4 hours a week to invest in and train volunteers.
- As your church grows larger, think twice before hiring an additional communications staff member. A larger team will be needed with growth. But the team may not need to grow at the same rate as your church. Additionally, there may be people in your church with communications experience who would be willing to volunteer their gifts.

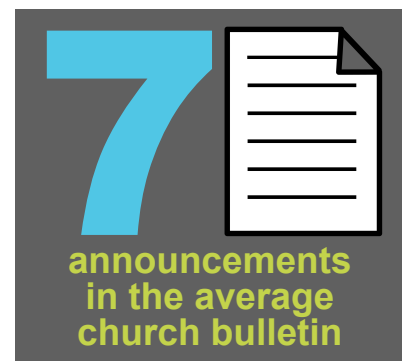
WEEKEND PROMOTIONS

In churches, weekend worship services are the prime time to communicate a message. From bulletins to videos to platform announcements, every component is a great opportunity to encourage people to take next steps. Here are our most valuable findings related to communicating through the weekend service.

:::KEY FINDINGS

Churches rely heavily on the weekend bulletin to make announcements.

The weekend bulletin is often the "catch all" for church communications. It doesn't usually take much to get an announcement included. We found that the average church bulletin includes seven announcements. Personally, we think that is a lot. We doubt the average person would take the time to read that much...or be able to remember it all. If your church is offering seven or more bulletin announcements, consider focusing on fewer messages to make a greater impact.



Very few churches are using a digital bulletin.

Mobile apps and webpages provide an easy opportunity to share written announcements via smartphones. This method could allow attendees to quickly register for programs and add events to their calendars. Despite the availability of this technology, only 7% of churches actually utilize a digital bulletin. There are several benefits these churches experience including reduced paper cost and environmental-friendliness, a key issue for many young adults. The money saved by cutting a paper bulletin could be continually reinvested into digital communications. However, nearly all churches continue to use paper.

Churches make several stage announcements every week.

More valuable to ministries than bulletin real estate is the coveted stage announcement. Whether through a live communicator or video, the average church makes over four stage announcements each week (4.39 on average). We believe that this is too many to be truly effective. We suggest that churches leverage the stage to encourage just one or two steps for people to take. Setting that criteria will force leaders to stay focused on what they believe are truly the most valuable steps for their churches. This also challenges churches to revisit their ministry calendar to avoid competing priorities.



:::COMMUNICATIONS CHECK-UP

How do your own weekend promotions measure up to these metrics? Use the [Communications Scorecard](#) to determine whether or not you are saying too much.

:::GET UNSTUCK!

Ready to get more focused with your weekend promotions? Here are a few steps you can begin to take:

- Meet with your senior leaders to determine the most important steps someone could take in your church to experience spiritual growth. Prioritize the promotions of those steps above everything else.
- Set strict guidelines on the types of promotions that receive stage and bulletin announcements. If you're not saying no to someone on a regular basis, you are probably not focused enough.
- Consider creating a digital bulletin through a mobile webpage or app. A mobile webpage would be readily available to first-time guests while an app would have to be downloaded. Use this digital bulletin to make it easy for people to register for programs and add events to their calendars.

WEBSITES

Everyone knows the value of an online platform in today's society. In fact, 98% of the churches we surveyed have a website. But having a website and using it effectively are two different things. Here are some of the most interesting findings about the ways in which churches are using their websites.

:::KEY FINDINGS

Study resources are one of the least offered components online.

A few years ago, Willow Creek's [Reveal Study](#) suggested that personal study of scripture is one of the greatest catalysts for spiritual growth. Yet today, only 25% of churches provide study resources online. Our society is one that seeks "on-demand" content available at any time from any place. It seems that online study resources would be a valuable tool for discipleship if more churches provided them.

Very few churches offer live streaming of their services.

Live streaming has become an increasingly popular tool among churches. The technology allows individuals who have never attended a church to get a much better understanding of it before attending in person. We were surprised to find that only 15% of churches are actually live streaming services.

Website Components	Percent of Church Websites
Children & Student Information	90%
Beliefs Statement	88%
Social Media Links	80%
Online Giving	75%
Event Calendar	73%
Vision Statement	71%
Podcast	70%
First Visit Information	60%
Event Registration	55%
Small Group Sign-Up	42%
On-Demand Video Sermons	36%
Volunteer Sign-Up	30%
Sortable Categories on Event Calendar	28%
Free Study Resources	25%
Live Stream	15%
Announcement Video	9%
On-Demand Video of Entire Service	6%
Store	4%

More churches communicate their beliefs than their vision online.

The website is often the first place unchurched individuals look before visiting a church. It would seem that the vision of why a church exists and where it is heading in the future would be more compelling to this group than the details of theology. Yet more churches share their beliefs (88%) than their vision (71%) online. In our experience, many church leaders actually misunderstand their beliefs to be vision.

:::COMMUNICATIONS CHECK-UP

If you're curious to see how your website compares to those of other churches around the country, the [Communications Scorecard](#) can help you gain perspective.

:::GET UNSTUCK!

Feeling like it's time to take a fresh look at your website? Here are a few ways that you can get started:

- Begin a conversation about live streaming your services. What evangelism opportunities would it create? What would it cost to get started?
- Ask your leadership team, "How could we help people grow throughout the week with online study resources?" Could you build devotions based on the weekend sermon? Could you utilize other resources such as YouVersion Reading Plans?
- Be sure that your vision is well communicated through your website. If you are not clear on what your vision is, this may be your opportunity to uncover and refine it. The [StratOp Process](#) from *The Unstuck Group* can help your team think through the details for better perspective, planning, and action.

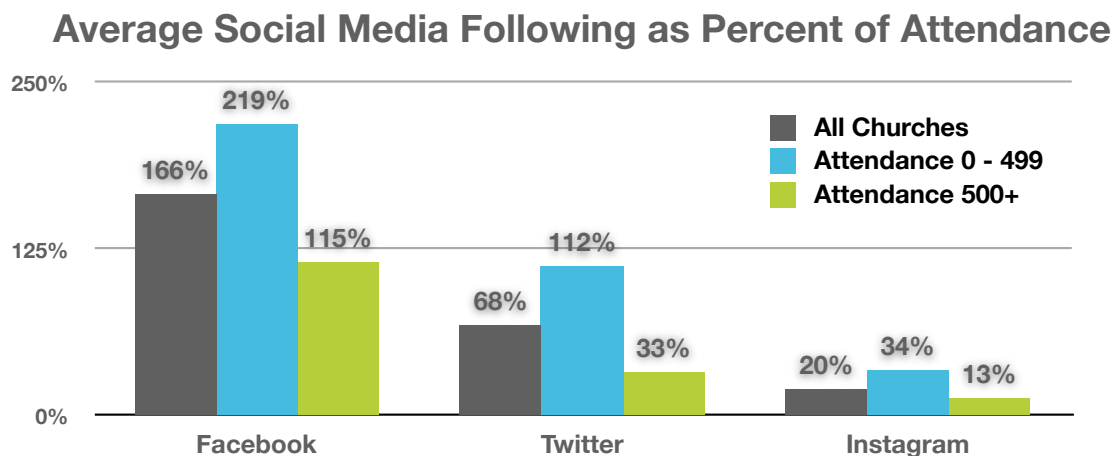
SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media communication is easy to begin but far more challenging to do well. Many churches make post after post with little response or increase in following. So how can you get your social media unstuck? It seems that smaller churches may actually have the most effective approach.

:::KEY FINDINGS

Smaller churches have significantly higher levels of social media engagement on all major platforms.

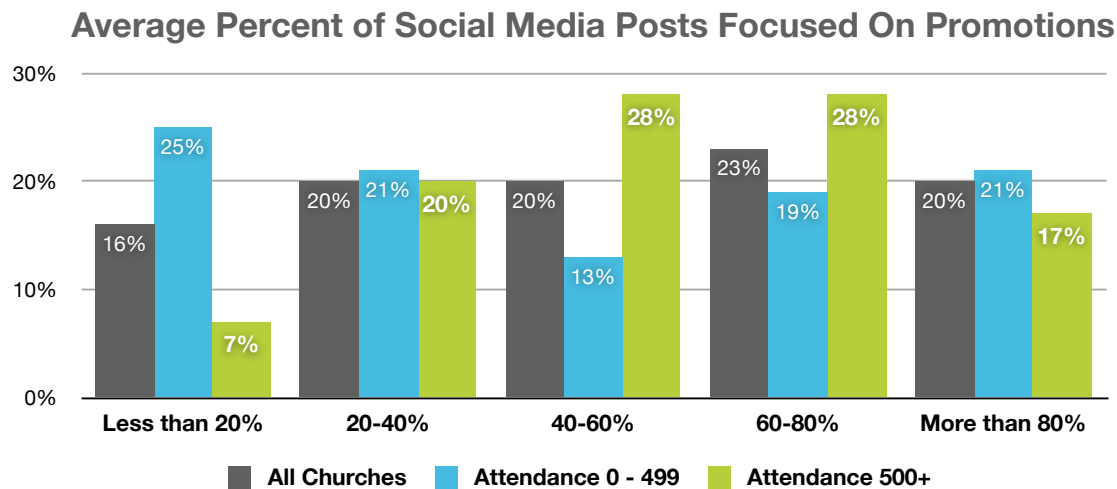
A church's level of social media engagement measures the followers on its social media account as a percentage of its weekend attendance. Churches with less than 500 people in attendance actually engage about twice the percent of their congregation as churches with 500 or more in attendance. This is the case on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (2). So what are smaller churches doing to get significantly stronger levels of engagement?



Smaller churches are less promotional on social media.

We asked churches what percent of their social media posts are focused on programs and events. Only 28% of church with 500 or more in attendance said they keep promotional posts down to 0-40% of their total social media content. At the same time, nearly half (46%) of smaller churches said they limit posts about programs and events

to 0-40%. It seems that by promoting less, smaller churches are actually engaging a greater percent of their congregation!



Churches are most engaging on Facebook.

Despite the growth of Twitter and Instagram, Facebook continues to be the most engaging platform for churches. The average church with Facebook engages a following the size of 166% of its congregation. Churches using Twitter engage 68% of their congregations on average while Instagram-using churches engage just 20%.

:::COMMUNICATIONS CHECK-UP

Wondering just how engaging your church is on social media? The metrics for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on the [Communications Scorecard](#) can provide you with a clearer understanding.

:::GET UNSTUCK!

Ready to get your social media unstuck? These steps can help you become more engaging...

- Review your social media posts from the past two weeks. Calculate the percentage of posts that promoted a program or event. Are you more promotional or conversational on social media? [Kem Meyer](#), Communications Director at

Granger Community Church, has a great list of [“Golden Rules”](#) to help you stay social on social media.

- Develop a true social media strategy. Determine 2-3 focused objectives for your content and craft your posts accordingly. [Phil Bowdle](#), Creative Arts Director at West Ridge Church, provides [3 Words](#) that can help you build the strategy you need.
- Develop a set of social media policies to ensure proper use by your team. [This list of examples](#) from [Justin Wise](#), founder of Think Digital, can help you get started.
- Look up the social media accounts for smaller churches in your community. Do any of them have a high following in comparison to their weekend attendance? If so, connect with the leader and seek to learn from him or her.
- Think about which social media platforms you focus on the most. If Facebook is most engaging for your church, does it receive the greatest amount of your attention? Prioritize your most engaging platform.

MOVING FORWARD

Whether it's on Facebook, a website, or the back of a bulletin, your message is one that could truly change lives. Communicating that message effectively is extremely important. The findings in this report are great to know. But until they are used to make progress, church communications will never get unstuck. What is your team going to do to apply what you've learned?

Do you find yourself a little unsure of where to go from here? If so, a [Communications Strategy Development Process](#) may be what you need to get unstuck. Whatever you do and however you improve, we hope this report helps you communicate better. Because ultimately you are the one with the greatest message to share.

NOTES

(1) Based on responses from 74 churches.

(2) Facebook results based on 107 churches. Twitter results based on 73 churches. Instagram results based on 30 churches.