



Church & Worship

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Having Faith in CD/DVD Marketing

Progressive worship centers are now providing CDs and DVDs to members of the congregation.

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For decades, houses of worship have provided taped sermons to spread the Word to homebound parishioners and others unable to attend services in person. As cassette tape players are rapidly becoming outdated, this market is at a transition point. Between homes and offices, CD-player and DVD-player penetration rates have risen to almost 95 percent and 55 percent, respectively, and today's new cars feature only CD players. That's why progressive worship centers are now providing CDs and DVDs to members of the congregation and even sending them to prospective parishioners to expand the ministry. What's involved in providing this new service, and how cost-effective is it?

A Better Value

CDs and DVDs have a much higher perceived value than cassette tapes. Accordingly, parishioners see houses of worship that distribute them as more progressive. Discs also allow more room for imprinting artwork and descriptive material than the small labels on cassettes.

"CDs are much more professional than cassette tapes," says Pastor Steve Zehr of Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Lakeville, Minn. "Our church members have been thrilled to get the CDs because the quality of the audio is so much better and it's more convenient for them because most of them prefer to listen to the service in their cars. The discs are also much more attractive," he adds. "We imprint them with a beautiful photo, our logo, mailing and web addresses, phone number, the title of the sermon, the list of songs and the date." Trinity EFC purchased inexpensive CD players for a few older people who did not have them yet.

Progressive worship centers that have acquired CD/DVD duplication technology distribute discs for a wide range of applications

Regular services – Tapes in the past, and now CDs and DVDs, are means of allowing homebound parishioners to hear the sermon and the music and participate in the service.

"Every week we use our Rimage CD and DVD duplicator to make copies of the worship service for people who cannot leave home," says Zehr. "We also get requests for

copies from people who have attended the service and want to hear it again."

A CD may also be quickly reproduced if lost by a parishioner; replacement is as easy as reprinting a file. Grace to You, a Christian media ministry headquartered in Valencia, Calif. with several million radio listeners around the world, has recorded every one of Pastor John MacArthur's sermons for over 35 years, a total of about 2500 sermons. "Several years ago, we began to digitize all our recordings," says Jay Morrissette, mastering engineer for the church. "Soon all sermons will reside on the hard drive in folders identified by sermon number. The folders contain three-minute file segments, which our Rimage duplicator uses to create discs. We've written our own software to interact with the duplicator and link it to our database. The operator simply enters the sermon number and specifies the number of discs to be produced, and everything else is automatic. The software locates the appropriate folder, finds the file segments, produces the audio, obtains title information from the database and prints the title on the disc."

Grace to You is currently linking the entire system directly to its web site. "When people order a specific sermon on line, they will in effect be producing the CD by doing so," says Morrissette. "When an order is placed, the system automatically goes through the production process. All our employees have to do is take the disc out of the machine and mail it."

Special events – Recordings of special holiday functions, choir performances and pageants are a particularly popular application. Copies of these events are treasured by people who are unable to leave home or are traveling during holidays.

Radio ministry – Grace to You also uses its CD duplicator to facilitate distribution of its pre-recorded radio broadcasts.

"The technician creates the broadcast at a digital workstation and submits the file and title information directly to the duplicator, which then burns the CD," says Morrissette. "A couple of hours later, a high-quality broadcast is ready for mailing to distributors and sta-

tions around the world.”

Missionaries – “We make copies for our overseas missionaries around the world because they get spiritually fed by the sermons and American praise and worship music,” says Zehr.

Choir and band practice – Trinity EFC also makes use of CDs for band and choir practice.

“I distribute copies of the music and the songs before rehearsals,” Zehr explains. “Members of the worship band and choir can listen ahead of time and get a feel for the sound and what instruments are dominant. It helps with our rehearsals a great deal. After the discs are used for that week, they are thrown away to avoid any copyright problems. Duplicating CDs in house also saves us a tremendous amount of money,” he adds. “I used to make a demo CD for the choir once a year which cost about \$500. Now it’s nothing even close to that and we have better control over the quality.”

Marketing – Some houses of worship are now sending CDs and even DVDs to prospective members, such as people who are new to the community. It’s a great way to provide an audio or video tour of the worship center, including a sample service and interviews with clergy and parishioners. CDs are a much better way to engage a prospective member than sending brochures and marketing materials no one has time to read. On average, the marketing message is remembered 50 to 60 percent more than from printed materials. Further, a disc personalized with the recipient’s name and address and mailed in a clear sleeve, saves money and carries a high-perceived value.

Response rates using CDs and DVDs are three to four times higher than those of direct mail. And, CD/DVD marketing is more cost-effective than other marketing initiatives. Given sufficient quantity, it costs 10 to 40 percent less to produce a CD or DVD than a direct mail piece.

Improved Productivity

Not only do attractively designed CDs have a high impact and high perceived value, they are also much more cost-effective to produce than audiocassettes.

Many houses of worship already have sophisticated audio-visual equipment and digital audio and video recording technology. Some have sophisticated editing capabilities as well. Adding CD/DVD duplication technology is only a small incremental step to become more technologically current in an increasingly digital landscape.

Digital duplication systems are networked with a worship center’s computers, printer and file server and can be operated from any network computer. Producing copies of beautifully imprinted CDs and DVDs is as quick and easy as sending a report to a central network printer and requesting ten copies, collated and stapled. Some worship centers, for example, take a digital audio of the first morning service and then have a staff member duplicate any number of CDs while the second service is in progress. By the close of the second service, the CDs are ready for delivery.

How much effort is involved? Older CD/DVD duplica-

tion technology requires volunteers to spend hours loading individual discs into the drive. However, the new robotic technology used by Trinity EFC, for example, is plug and play. One system takes care of duplication, printing and personalization automatically, leaving staff and volunteers free to perform other, more important tasks. In fact, Zehr takes care of the duplication process himself.

“I just get it started and it runs while I work on other tasks. It doesn’t hold me up at all,” he says. “When we were using cassettes, a volunteer would duplicate them, but she couldn’t come in all the time, so people had to wait up to two weeks for their copies. Now it’s a matter of a few days.”

“If we used a traditional tower duplicator, the CDs would be unlabeled and we’d have to store master discs,” says Morrisette. “It would require a great deal of human intervention. We decided it wouldn’t be the best use of our staff’s time or our company’s money. Machines are relatively inexpensive and can work nonstop around the clock if needed. Each of our two Rimage Producer™ duplicators has a 300-disc capacity, so during the day they can copy 600 CDs, and then at night they can produce another 600 without staff intervention. The discs come out already labeled, so no one has to touch them which could leave fingerprints.”

The duplication equipment quickly pays for itself as it costs much less to duplicate a CD than a cassette. In addition, worship centers may charge a nominal fee for the discs.

“We ask for a suggested \$2 donation per CD to help recover costs,” says Zehr. Some organizations charge a little more to help with fundraising efforts. Grace to You charges approximately \$6 per disc including shipping.

Make It Memorable

While the use of taped sermons is limited to traditional uses, the applications of CD and DVD marketing are practically limitless. In addition to servicing homebound members of the congregation, marketing to prospective parishioners and enhancing fundraising through the sale of special holiday audio and video presentations, houses of worship around the country have found other creative uses for digital technology. Some, for example, record charitable events and distribute videos to reinforce their mission to help those in need. Others take a video camera along on special outings and provide DVDs as keepsakes for participants. What better forum for utilizing these, high-perceived value yet low-cost, discs than a place where people go in active pursuit of a memorable message? As the technology is proven and highly cost-effective, no leap of faith is required.

About the Author:

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