

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Junk in the Mail

Frustrated with all of the junk mail she received, a few years ago freelance writer, Leanne Kenney, set up a box in her garage and started collecting.

For 365 days she kept every piece of junk mail that came to her mailbox. Slowly one box became two, then three, four, and five.

After one year's time, Kenney sat down and sorted through the junk mail. She received 1,613 pieces, or an average of 5.34 items each delivery day. Altogether it weighed 115 pounds.

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—Gary L. McIntosh

According to her report, published in *The San Diego-Union Tribune*, Kenney received “52 *Pennysavers*, 50 Mailbox Values (coupons), 80 Christmas catalogs, 200 computer catalogs, 39 department store catalogs and 18 office supply catalogs.”

She also found “51 subscription offers for magazines, books, CDs, movies, newspapers, baseball patches, baseball tickets and 24-karat gold football cards.” In addition she discovered “22 bank advertisements, 14 sweepstakes entries and 28 pool service mailers.”

Of course, she received lots of credit card offers. Visa and MasterCard sent her 14 pre-approved credit card offers—each! Other banks and credit companies pre-approved her for a total of 40 credit cards. Altogether, Kenney was sent 101 credit card offers and 98 debt-consolidation solicitations.

Seven singles clubs wanted her to join, even though she's married, but only three churches sent invitations to worship services.

During the year of her experiment, additional offers were hand delivered to her

home. She received “276 hand bills, calendars and scratch pads from 20 real estate agents.” She found bags of rocks tossed on her driveway with fliers in them from landscape architects.

Kenney's personal experiment did not include another source of junk mail—e-mail spam. Known as unsolicited bulk e-mail, junk mail, or unsolicited commercial e-mail, is the practice of sending unwanted e-mail messages, frequently with commercial content, in large quantities to an indiscriminate set of recipients. It is estimated that the average person receives around 40 unsolicited e-mails per day, with Bill Gates receiving the most, about 4 million per day.

So, what does all of this unwanted mail mean for church leaders? What impact does it have on our people?

**For information on scheduling
Dr. Gary L. McIntosh**

call toll free . . .
1-877-506-3086

e-mail . . .
cgnet@earthlink.net

write . . .
PO Box 892589
Temecula, CA 92589

Communicate everything five different ways.

Worshippers struggle with short-term memory dysfunction.

Insights for Ministry

The age we live in has created an overload of information that overwhelms many people in our congregations. People's minds are saturated with so much information that it is difficult for them to take in much more. Our people hear so much advertising noise, what has been called "informational cacophony," that they do not hear what we say.

Worshippers are plagued with short-term memory dysfunction. People hear and read information but forget it within a short period of time. This is often labeled "overload amnesia." When our brain becomes overloaded, it shuts down to protect us from taking in even more data. This action shows up when we forget the names of those we know and our own phone numbers. In short our people often hear more than they understand, forget what they already know, and resist learning more.

To get a hearing from your people, consider the following ideas.

First, communicate every important message five different ways.

Use e-mail blasts, personal letters, posters, phone calls, banners, public announcements, visual slides, brochures, television ads, post cards, etc. Remember: people have not heard your message until you have told them five different ways.

Second, keep things simple.

Make sermons clearer, shorten announcements to include only what applies to the entire congregation, and make signs obvious. Remember: simple is more.

Third, tie communication to images.

Use pictures to illustrate what you are trying to communicate. Employ good use of stories and humor. Remember: half of our learning comes through stories and visual images.

Fourth, apply everything.

Focus on known information rather than always trying to give new information. Show people how to do projects rather than just telling them what to do. Concentrate on basic practices instead of fringe issues. Show how the Bible relates to real-life issues. Remember: the key to learning is redundancy, redundancy, redundancy.

Fifth, clarify your purpose.

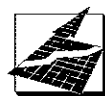
Tie communication to your church's purpose. Present ideas in concrete terms rather than philosophical ones. Use real-life testimonies and stories to communicate a clear message.

What challenges do you encounter in communicating with your congregation?

What have you found to be the most effective means of getting a message through to your people?

What ideas from this article are the most helpful to you?

What will you begin to do differently in the next month?



Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D. is President of the Church Growth Network. For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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