

# **21 Common Blunders in Reaching Beyond the Walls**

*Gain Practical Insight from the Mistakes Often Discovered in  
Ministry Communications*

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**beyond marketing group, inc.**  
**AWESOME INSIGHT**  
Practical Communications Insight for Leaders

## INTRODUCTION

Being a consultant, I see a lot of ways ministries and non-profit agencies communicate. To my surprise some of the biggest organizations with the most informed leadership sometimes make blunders in communicating. After seeing some mistakes that seem to happen too often, I realized it may be helpful to share some of these blunders. By sharing the list, it is my hope that we can learn from others and not duplicate.

**Prepare to communicate.** I can not say this enough. Communicating well requires planning. It also requires people who are willing to learn what it takes to communicate effectively. Sometimes our best intended fliers, brochures or newspaper ads get overlooked or not taken seriously because of the little things we do that make them lose value in reading. If you are on the communications team, your role drives so much of what gets communicated. Identify the steps necessary to keep your communication top notch.

This list of 21 Common Blunders is in no way complete. As I have traveled to cities in Florida, Illinois, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and the list goes on, I realized a couple of things. Across denominations, non-profit groups and even institutions, many of us struggle to get the word out about what we're doing.

Some of the common blunders are small but can impact the ministry or event greatly. Because some of them appear so obvious, you may think I am making them up for you. I hate to tell you but these are real blunders. If you and your leaders look closely, you may even see something that you do or are doing. Size of congregation or group does not matter. I have seen a form of them in one way or another from city to city, congregation to congregation, small to large, and agency to agency. It can happen anywhere; even where you are.

Now what you do with this list is what matters most. I urge you to read it, share it with your team and then take the time to equip your leaders with ways to overcome each of these. This may serve as your checklist to see how you're communicating.

Blessings on your communications!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynette". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'L'.

## **1. No Church Name Found on the Flier**

Having the church, ministry or organization name on the flier seems like a no-brainer right? Not always. Too often small group leaders or creative persons get real excited about shaping the message for the flier or brochure and simply leave off the name.

### **Real Story**

To illustrate this point, a church youth group was planning a kid-friendly gathering at the Halloween season. The church was well decorated; the fliers were prepared for the community. There was only one thing missing.... The name of the church. Unfortunately the fliers were distributed by a well meaning youth advisor who simply did not realize the name of the church was missing. What could have been done differently to ensure this type of mistake did not happen?

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. One of the pre-cautions I would like to share about the name is to not assume anything. Always let the persons who create the flier know what needs to be shared even down to how the organization's name should be written. In addition, get other eyes to review the materials before the items are distributed to the community.

The name and contact information is essential when communicating with outsiders in the community. Prepare fliers, brochures, websites and other materials with every understanding of the essential information to be communicated.

## **2. Pastor or Executive Director Has No Business Cards**

"Never leave home without them." Sound familiar? The pastor and leader of a congregation or non-profit is a walking communication tool for reaching out into the community. You never know when you'll meet a stranger who knows absolutely nothing about your church. It may be in the grocery store, at the mall or on the walk around the high school track, every leader needs to be prepared to invite and reach out. Having a well informed business card makes great sense for ministries.

### **Real Story**

A few weeks ago, a pastor was speaking on a college campus. The presentation was filled with young 20-somethings looking forward to hearing the message. After the very inspiring talk, the students gathered

around the pastor to hear wisdom and get a contact card for follow up. When the pastor was asked for his business card, he looked blankly and stated, "I am sorry I don't have any cards." Wow what a missed opportunity to reach out.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to reach out and invite. That simple thought means keeping a supply of business cards everywhere...in the car, in pockets, pocket books, etc. Business cards are a simple and inexpensive tool to get the word out.

## **3. A Parking Lot Sign Stating "Do Not Parking"**

Have you ever seen a sign that made you looked twice? Just because something is printed on the sign does not make it right. Some signs even signs at churches and non-profit organizations have errors. What do misspelled words and grammar errors on signs say to guests?

### **Real Story**

"Do Not Parking" was really on this sign. I have the photo. This is only one example of a sign intended to say, "Do Not Park" but instead someone kept writing. Sometimes the words on signs are misspelled or the grammar is incorrect. Can you be sure all of your signs are correct? Who is monitoring your signs?

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Take steps to check what is being printed before it gets printed. It is not the responsibility of the printer or sign company to spell check or correct your items. Instead, you or the team responsible must take ownership. Again, preparing in advance can often help in these situations. When we rush sign development or quickly craft messages, we can lead to wrong information. Take the time to plan before you take or send any artwork or copy to the sign company.

## **4. No Directional Signs Outside of the Building**

"Doesn't everybody know where the sanctuary is located?" This was the comment when a trustee from a small neighborhood church was asked why no signs were placed outside. Too often we assume everyone that comes to our facility knows where to go. It may be time for a new mindset that requires us to prepare for guests.

### **Real Story**

A medium sized church located in the suburbs of a metropolitan area was visited one Sunday morning. It was a little past 11 am and all the members had already gone into the building. The church lawn was well manicured and the building looked inviting. There were three doors facing the two parking lots of the church. No signs were anywhere. How will people know where to go?

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate to people who know nothing about your church. Directional signs help people find their way. Can you imagine what it would be like to come to your facility after all the members were inside? How will people know what doors to enter? Signs can be another way to welcome.

## **5. Website Home Page with Simply the Building and History of the Church.**

How many times have you joined a group because you loved their building? Maybe if you are a member of a specific architectural club the type of building really matters. Simply put, very few people care a lot about your building. Outsiders and prospects do care about the people. It's amazing how often a website's focus is the building. The grounds may be well manicured but it is not likely that the building says enough to reach out, invite and appear welcoming.

### **Real Story**

A church created its new website with only two pages. The first page which is the home page had a big photo of the church facility. The other half of that page was a history of the church dating back to the 1800's. The ministry has a rich and well written history; but is that enough to reach out and invite outsiders?

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Think from a guest perspective. What do outsiders need to see to feel welcomed? How can a church website tell the story of the church without filling up the home page with paragraphs of history? How can the home page be used to welcome outsiders? Start by answering these questions then look to your web team to establish plans for a welcoming web site.

## **6. Church Business Cards, Letterhead and Fliers with 2 Different Addresses**

Where is the church or non-profit group located? This question may be on the minds of folks looking at printed materials from the same organization with various addresses. If your church has more than one address or multiple cross-streets, identifying a standard, single address may be necessary. Which address is the right one?

### **Real Story**

A church had printed its business cards and letterhead with the address currently being used for that location. However the fliers picked up an old county address that speaks to the area that was named several years ago. It appears that the group creating the flier was directed by a long-time member who always uses the address that no longer exists for the church. Unfortunately the fliers were printed and distributed with the old address. This move caused people in the community to call and question if the location was the one that is now established.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. When we take the time to prepare, we review information with others so that the correct information is used. Take the time to establish the church or non-profit group's official address. Then communicate that message broadly to other members, team leaders and anyone who may need to communicate.

## **7. Website Address Not On Any Printed Materials.**

How do we expect people to know about the website? Often organizations spend lots of money creating a website with very little thought on letting others know it exist. Is your church website address on the bulletin? Where can someone find your web address?

### **Real Story**

There are so many stories to tell here. Here's one that stands out. A congregation's leadership paid more than \$1,000 to design a website. Each year the site hosting company is paid more than \$250. The web address is not on the bulletin, fliers, brochures or even the pastor's business card. The only people who really can remember the church website address are the two people who worked on the site. The church secretary has to look up the site when asked for the address.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate the church website. Look at all the places you can share this information. Then share it!

### **8. Tiny Font-Size Lettering on the Marquee Outdoor Sign**

Can you read that from across the street? Remember outdoor signs need curb appeal. Be sure the lettering size is readable by people who drive by.

#### **Real Story**

A church sign in an urban major city had letters so small you could only read the sign if standing in front of it. Twice we passed the sign without any idea that we had passed the church. After speaking with a leader at the church, the reason this sign lettering is so small is that the person ordering it did not think about how it was going to be used. She picked the lettering based on all the information desired for the sign. Bad move...the sign is now dysfunctional.

#### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate clearly. Outdoor sign lettering matters. Prepare to communicate based on how the communication tool will be used. For outdoor signs, we have to think billboard. Have you noticed that most effective billboards have very little copy and large lettering? If you want drive by traffic to notice your sign, be sure the lettering is readable.

### **9. A Complete History of the Organization & Every Ministry Listed on the Flier or Brochure**

Too much information! That's what we think about when seeing a flier or brochure that is filled to the brim. Can you imagine how many people take the time to read a completely filled flier or brochure? Today, people read in bites. Too much information can turn even the most interested off. If you want to get the attention of the community, remember less is more impactful.

#### **Real Story**

A church steeped in more than 75 years of history created a tri-fold welcome brochure with two panels of church history. The saga started with the first pastor, his children's names and the various ministries initiated under his watch. Then the paragraphs spoke of the succeeding pastors

giving a full list of accomplishments and a gracious plenty of historical perspective. The reason the welcome brochure looked like this is because the committee designing the brochure had no clues what to include. No one wanted to offend anyone so they included every ministry too. Wow what a site!

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Establish a purpose for every communication tool. Remember to show white space. If everything about the organization is shared in the brochure, why bother to contact for more information? Give people a reason to call to get the details. If you're wondering what to leave out, ask yourself this question: What is the benefit of sharing this?

## **10. Christmas Bulletin Board Displayed in May**

Are your bulletin boards up-to-date? For some congregations, the bulletin board can be the primary communicator inside of the church. Even some non-profit groups use bulletin boards to share the theme, updates on new programs and plans for a specific time period. Keeping information relevant and timely does matter.

### **Real Story**

A church bulletin board had the advent information still in place for Mother's Day. This congregation of approximately 65 members has a lovely bulletin board in the narthex or vestibule of the church. When people enter into the sanctuary, they must pass this board. The celebration of Mother's Day brings lots of visitors but that particular year the visitors were greeted with signs of advent.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Remind the volunteers who are willing to work with the bulletin board the importance of this ministry. First impressions do matter. A prominently placed bulletin board can possibly play a role in your first impression. What does that say about you?

## **11. The Website Displaying Last Year's Dates for Events**

Old dates on websites are a common, common blunder. Imagine seeing last year's dates for the upcoming season. From a visitor's perspective, seeing old dates and events may give a not too good first impression. What does that say about you?

### **Real Story**

“Happy Father’s Day!” Great message right? No, not if you see it in September. A congregation’s website had a very nicely positioned father’s day message on its home page well after the holiday. That alone was bad enough but then in looking at the upcoming events the dates were from last year. It appears this site had not been updated in a very long time.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate timely. Who will keep your website up-to-date? Before going too far in planning the design of the site, make sure you have a plan for updates. Too often sites are created with java script that limits who can really update. Today, more and more ministries and non-profit groups are exploring Content Management Systems (CMS) which allow even untrained, uninformed, regular folks to update. Explore the possibilities for updating and select a web site format that is easily updated.

## **12. Wrong Date Communicated on Flier or Event Announcement**

Is Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>? Sometimes no one asks this question until the fliers are printed or the announcement has been uploaded on the community calendar. Giving the wrong dates can send the wrong message about you. People who are interested in your ministry should not have to look up the dates to verify they are correct.

### **Real Story**

A congregation’s television ministry shared one date and the fliers had a different date for the same event. People ended up calling the church to verify when the event was too take place. Confusing!

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Verify the information before it is published. Check the calendars, street addresses, holiday schedule, and directions before they are finalized.

## **13. Church Website with Former Pastor’s Photo & Name**

Is the current leadership team listed on your website? Sometimes everything gets changed except the website. When leadership changes, be sure every communication tool changes with the times.

### **Real Story**

Pastor resigned from a congregation. His replacement had been hired but the resigned pastor's name; photo and bio remained on the website several months after the new pastor arrived. One of the reasons for the delay was that the site manager left and no one at the church knew how to update the website.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Where possible train more than one person to be capable of updating the site. If the technical know-how is limited, look for resources outside of the church that can help to update information as needed. Create a check list of materials that must be changed when pastoral leadership changes.

## **14. The Office Voice Mail Gives the Phone Number Only**

Do guests in the community know your office hours? Possibly not. People may call anytime. They call looking for directions, hours of worship, office hours, special event dates and the list goes on. If the only thing a caller hears is the phone number, will you miss an opportunity to reach out and invite?

### **Real Story**

The number of office phones that are limited to just re-stating the phone number or the name of the church or non-profit group are too numerous to name. One church called recently simply stated this, "You have reached 336.... Please leave us a message at the sound of the tone." The tone never came on. This message may work fine for one's home but it is not the message to be left for a welcoming places that reaches out to the community.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate by phone. Before you re-record your phone message, call a few places. Call the growing congregations and non-profit groups that seem to actively reach out in the community. Listen to their after hours voice mail message. Then record a message that shares relevant information that callers are likely looking to hear.

#### **14. Welcome Packets with No Welcome Message**

Okay, it sounds like another no brainer but it is not. Too many welcome packets leave out the word, "Welcome." Don't assume anything. Make it plain and say what you mean.

##### **Real Story**

A very traditional church located in the heart of a metropolitan area shares a mini-shopping bag as its welcome packet. In each bag is a bookmark, brochures about mission projects and a small gift. No where on the bag or on the printed materials does it say welcome.

##### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. As you plan welcome packets, take a guest's perspective. Ask someone outside of your church to evaluate your package. Does it really say welcome?

#### **15. Media Appears & Everybody Talks About Everything**

Sometimes the local newspaper or television calls to get a story from you. Are you ready for the media? Will your pastoral leadership know what to say? Who is responsible for speaking to the media at your organization?

##### **Real Story**

A medium sized church was experiencing some conflict within their church. The media appeared on the scene and everybody talked. Information was shared which may be damaging but no one had a handle on how to handle the media.

##### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Create a media plan so that when the media calls or arrives at your church door steps, the ushers, greeters, church office staff knows the plan. Putting your best foot forward with the media impacts how the community views you.

#### **16. Nursery Available But It's A Secret**

One of the best kept secrets in many churches is the availability of the church nursery. Is it a secret? Too often congregations forget to mention the nursery being available on printed materials and other communication tools. For young families, having a nursery can be a significant draw to that particular location. The same thinking applies to other special services such as deaf sign language availability.

### **Real Story**

A church of less than 200 active members keeps a nursery attendant every Sunday. Quite often the attendant joins in regular worship because young babies are in attendance. After many months of keeping the nursery, a young mother shared she did not know they had one. Why? Because the nursery availability was not mentioned on anything.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate special features. Let people know how welcoming you really are. Too often some of the best features of your congregation or group's hospitality go unnoticed because it never got mentioned.

## **17. No Directional Signs inside the Building**

"Can you tell me where the restrooms are?" Do you hear that often? Sometimes the reason people are always asking is simply ...there are no signs. Directional signs and signs on doors clearly mark where to go and what happens in each room. When there are no signs outsiders get lost.

### **Real Story**

The pastor of a church of more than 600 members invited me to meet with him during the week. Once the receptionist buzzed me in the main floor entrance, I got lost. There were no signs directing guests to the church office or the fact that the office was upstairs.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate inside and outside. Think from a guest's perspective. What can you do to make it easier to navigate your building.

## **18. Parking Lot for Guests Unclearly Marked**

Where do guests park at your location? Is it obvious how to get to the parking lot? Too many locations have awkwardly located parking lots with no signs to indicate how to get to them. On Sunday morning or at an event, guests are on their own to find parking spaces or even parking lots.

### **Real Story**

A church located near the downtown section of town has a parking lot that is remotely located a block down from the church. When visiting this church, a guest will reach the building of the church but there is no indication where the parking is located. If arriving early, the parking lot is not obvious and guests will try to find spaces on the street. Sometimes that is an impossible task.

**Action Step**

Sign it! Prepare to communicate with signs. It's that simple.

**19. All Doors Locked Except Main Entrance**

What does a locked door say to you? Let me ask it this way, what does a locked church door say to you? If you come across locked church doors on Sunday morning, does it appear friendly and welcoming? The answers...it depends.

**Real Story**

A congregation of more than 300 members has a lovely campus with two buildings. The sanctuary is obviously located in the first building. All the doors to the first building are locked except the entry door to the sanctuary. There are no signs on any doors.

**Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. People who are visiting for the first time do not always know where to go or how to enter. Coming to a locked door when someone is shaky about their first visit may promote a negative reaction.

**20. Postcards Mailed to Nobody**

Sounds weird right? Suppose you sent out postcards to a mailing list of people who do not exist. That would simply mean you mailed them to nobody. Funds for postage are wasted in these cases. This is not often done but when we use old list or mailing companies that do not regularly validate their list, it can happen to you.

**Real Story**

A non-profit agency paid for a mailing to go out to residents within specific zip codes. Many of the mailings never reached their destination. The listing agency did not have validated list.

**Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Check out any resources being used. Confer with references to ensure the company is reputable and the lists are validated. If you're using your own list, identify ways to certify addresses.

**21. Bulletin Board about Upcoming Event with No Dates**

Details matter. Sometimes we create very decorative bulletin board for the upcoming Easter play or Vacation Bible School and we forget to include the date of the event. When you can let people know early what's coming, they can plan to attend.

## 21 Common Blunders in Reaching Beyond the Walls

### **Real Story**

A Sunday School group at a medium sized church was planning an upcoming Vacation Bible School. The bulletin board was up two months in advance with the theme, colors and appropriate props. But guess what? The dates and times for VBS were no where to be seen.

### **Action Step**

Prepare to communicate. Create checklists for everything. Plan what needs to be said when. Don't leave things to chance. Take the necessary steps to communicate in advance. Early is better because you want the word to spread.



### About the Author

Lynette Hawkins writes, speaks and presents seminars on topics relating to effectively communicating to reach the next generation of believers. She is the lead consultant Awesome Insight, an initiative of Beyond Marketing Group, Inc. She is an active blogger at [blog.awesomeinsight.com](http://blog.awesomeinsight.com). If you would like to contact Lynette, you can reach her at [info@awesomeinsight.com](mailto:info@awesomeinsight.com). Her website is [www.awesomeinsight.com](http://www.awesomeinsight.com)

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