

CHANGE REVOLUTION



HOW TO BE A BREAK-OUT SUCCESS ON RELIGIOUS TELEVISION

BY PHIL COOKE

OK – I’m actually going to be serious here. No jokes about bad hair, polyester suits, gold furniture, or prayer cloths. In an ocean of competition on a typical religious channel, how do you cut through the clutter and get the audience’s attention? Better yet, how do you get them to respond? I don’t have all the answers, and I’d love for you to respond, but here’s my two cents. And by the way, let’s take it for granted that you have an actual spiritual call to do this, so don’t get mad that my list isn’t more spiritual. I’m making the assumption that if you’re not spiritually mature enough and called to do this, you shouldn’t even be reading this list.

1. The Message Matters

The truth is, 90% of TV preachers are teaching a message few even care about. You’re either answering questions no one is asking, or you’re not scratching where the culture itches. You may not like Joel Osteen, but his message of hope and encouragement touches a chord in millions of people. Likewise, Joyce Meyer’s message of how God works in practical, everyday ways connects with just as many. It’s not about tickling their ears, it’s about connecting – sharing a message that strikes a chord and resonates with people. In their day, Billy Graham had it, Oral Roberts had it, Bishop Fulton Sheen had it, and others had it. The traditional media world is about what they think the audience wants to watch. The new media world is about what the audience wants. Learn something from that. It doesn’t mean you pander, it means you listen.

2. What Makes You Different?

In the world of branding, one of our key questions is “What makes you different?” Once again, 90% of preachers do very little that makes them distinctive, and in a media-driven culture, people need that help. In a world with thousands of choices, it’s the different choices that stand out. Be the nail that sticks out of the porch. Be the blade of grass that stands above the others. Be different. That permeates everything you do – look different, have a different message, present it differently, think differently, create a different program, and more.

Essentially, that's what branding is all about. Why should I watch your program? To justify my attention, you've got to be different from all the others out there. We live in a culture where we don't have much time, and we have lots of choices. Make it simple for me.

3. Give Me A Hook

Why should I respond to you or your message? What's in it that makes me want more? Why should I care? There are lots of preachers out there – and some are preaching good messages, but few give me a reason to watch more. The old radio and TV serials invented the "cliff-hanger" – leaving the audience in suspense demanding to know what happens in the next episode. What are you doing that makes the audience want to come back next week? Creativity, cool graphics, and hip clothes, are all good, but they won't matter if you're not sharing a message that hooks the viewer. Don't forget that this is the key to response. If you don't give them a reason to respond, they won't.

4. Unify Your Branding

The vast majority of TV ministries have no brand at all, much less know how to unify it. Unifying your brand means that every expression of your brand story needs to be expressed throughout everything you do. From postcards, to the website, set design, architecture, social media, look and feel of the TV program, and more, it all needs to tell the visual story of who you are. Today, if I spread out the brochures, books, tapes, websites, and more from a typical TV ministry, it would look like they each came from a different organization. Therefore, they all tell different stories. But when you see anything from Starbucks, Apple, or Nike – it all has a similar visual expression of their brand. Look at everything you do and make sure the brand story of you and/or your ministry is told through it all. It doesn't have to necessarily look the same, but it needs to tell the same story.

5. Raise The Bar

By now, most TV preachers reading this will say, "So what? I do all that already." Maybe, but I doubt it. But even if you are, your standards are probably way too low. You need to realize the level of competition out there. In 1980, just about anybody could succeed on religious TV. Even Ernest had an audience. But today, it's the Olympics on steroids when it comes to finding an audience. It's a tough world out there, so you need to raise the bar in the level of content, differentiation, branding, and the reason they should respond. Make it better. Go deeper.



THE SECRET FOR GETTING A RESPONSE FROM EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Everyone sends out mass emails and newsletters these days, but the problem is, most get zero response. Years ago, Gail Goodman, CEO of Constant Contact, listed five important tips to writing effective subject lines in mass e-mails or newsletters. If you send out announcements, e-mail newsletters, or mass e-mails of any sort, they're worth considering: **Getting the Subject Line Right!**

5 TIPS FOR WRITING GREAT EMAIL NEWSLETTERS.

One of the most important elements of your email communications is the subject line. Next to the "from" address, the subject line will determine whether or not your email gets opened. Writing a great subject line is no small challenge. You only have a few words to make it compelling, urgent, and specific—without sounding overly "salesy" or misleading your readers. Here are some tips that will help you write subject lines that get great results.

1. Keep it Short and Sweet

Do your best to keep your subject lines under 50 characters, including spaces, as most email clients display 50 characters or less. A recent study done by email monitoring company Return Path showed that, "subject lines with 49 or fewer characters had open rates 12.5% higher than for those with 50 or more," and that, "click-through rates for subject lines with 49 or fewer characters were 75% higher than for those with 50 or more." Want to have better open and click-through rates? Keep it short and sweet!

2. Be Specific

A vague subject line is a waste of real estate. A great example of this that I see often is monthly newsletters with subject lines like, "The Green Thumb Newsletter: June 2007." This tells the receiver nothing about what they will find when they open the email and gives them very little reason to do so. A better approach for a newsletter like this is, "The Green Thumb: 3 Tips for Summer Gardening."

3. Write it Last

Many email marketing services (including Constant Contact) prompt you to write your subject line first, as you are building your email. I encourage you to come back to it when you are done with your email content. It's important to determine all the elements of your email first and then look for the most compelling topic to highlight in the subject line. When you are done with the body of your email, read it over and pick the "nugget" that will entice your readers to learn more by opening.

4. Take Some Time

Don't just dash off your subject lines. Considering how important they are, take some time to think about them and write several (3-4) before choosing which one to use. Once you have a few subject lines you like, run them by a friend or colleague and see which they think is most compelling.

5. Test It!

When you have two strong—yet different—subject lines, test them. Split your list in half and use a different subject line for each group. After a number of tests like this, you will have a very good idea of what works for those on your list. And as always, the better you know your audience, the more effectively you can communicate with them.