

**UNseminary**



**RECALL:**

**YOUR CHURCH'S 2021  
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOCUS**



You have no doubt heard all the doomsayers saying that what we've experienced in the last year is beckoning a new age of disengagement in your church.

You've probably heard people say that somewhere around a third of our people have left the church and won't be returning.

It seems like for decades, we've been talking about the fact that we're losing a generation, and this past year has accelerated that loss. I do think that we are facing some tough days ahead. However, **I'm not content to just sit by and let people slip out the back door because of everything that's happened in the last 12 months.**

Your responsibility and mine is to lean in and to do what we can to raise the value of attending our churches, whether that be online or in person.

It's always been our responsibility to ensure that the people who are connected with our ministries find what we're doing to be valuable. It's our responsibility to communicate with them in such a way as to draw them from the crowd and ultimately get them connected to the core.

Of course, we've had significant disruption in the last year, and we need to be laser-focused as we look on how we communicate in this coming year. **Your church has an opportunity to recall people and bring them back again, whether that be to in-person services or to engaging online.**

**I really do believe that the church shines brightest in the darkness.**

There's no doubt that we are in a dark time in many communities across the country. We need your church to shine brightly in order to see the message of Christ connected with people who have been disconnected for a while.

## HAVE YOU NOTICED HOW GOOD YOUR DENTIST IS AT RECALLING YOU?

Is it just me, or have you noticed that dentists have really stepped up their game on recalling people over the last few years?

I'm not a huge dentist fan. **In fact, is anyone really?** Is the thought of having someone else's fingers digging around inside your mouth and scraping whatever has been building up there for the last six months a pleasant idea?

The dentist can teach us a lesson in a recall communications strategy. **They do a good job reaching out through texts, email, and other methods to get you to come back on an annual or semi-annual basis.** The difficulty they're faced with is that people resist going to the dentist, and their livelihoods are largely based on getting people to add that as a regular rhythm two or three times a year. Your church and mine need to learn from people & organizations like your dentist, who go out of their way to recall people.

## THE PROBLEM WITH THE “SNAP BACK” OR “PENT-UP DEMAND” MYTH.

Have you noticed that leaders in lots of industries are looking for a “snap back” to normalcy? Or maybe you've seen how leaders are referring to the fact that there is a “pent-up demand” for their products and services that will cause people to flood back to them in the future.

Both of those myths are magical thinking. **Humans are creatures of habits.** The best predictive behavior of tomorrow is what people did yesterday.

People will not simply “snap back” to your church once vaccines are widespread or the government lifts all restrictions. If you are waiting for “pent up demand” to drive people to engage with your church you will lose people.

**We have always needed to raise the value of engaging with our church in the minds of our people.** It's our responsibility to own that and not wait for some mythical external forces to align to encourage people to connect.

## WHY IS “RECALL” SUCH AN IMPORTANT VALUE FOR YOUR CHURCH IN 2021?

Recall is simply raising the value of reconnecting people who have had some connection in the past with our churches in person or online.

It's reaching out strategically to people who have been connected to your church in the past, and inviting them to reconnect again. **Recall is putting a particular emphasis on connecting with those people who have been on the fringe of our ministry and trying to get them to take one step closer.** It's always been our responsibility to help people take those steps. It's never been as clear or as much of a strategic priority for us as it is today.

## 5 RECALL TACTICS FOR YOUR CHURCH TO LEVERAGE IN 2021:

What we have below is a series of tactics that you could try to help your church recall people who are on the fringe of your community. The big idea is to not look for a silver bullet, but to find a multiplicity of approaches that you can use to consistently reach out to your people in order to recall them to your church in the coming months, whether it be online or in person. Don't try looking for a single tactic that will help bring them back, but rather a bunch of smaller tactics working together.

### ■ MONTHLY POSTCARDS

If you've been following me on unSeminary for a while, you'll know that I love postcards. What is the open rate on a postcard that gets mailed to someone's home? I can tell you that the open rate is a lot higher than email, and exponentially higher than any given social media post. Postcards are inexpensive to produce, and even if people just look at them as they're on the way to the garbage or recycling, the message is still received in their brain. **What if you committed this year to sending one postcard a month for the entire year?** Each month, you could highlight something different at the church that would re-invite people to engage, whether that's a big day, something special going on, or an upcoming series.

### ■ “WHAT TO EXPECT” DOCUMENTS

Across the country, we are seeing a combination of in-person and online services. It's a minority of churches that have returned anywhere close to their normal in-person attendance from before March 2020. One of the sticking points, I believe, is that we're not articulating clearly to our community what they should expect when they come. Church has always been a bit mysterious, hard to understand, and hard to access. On top of that normal opaqueness, you add the new guidelines that most of our churches are facing across the country, and it can make the experience difficult and unapproachable. “What to Expect” documents simply go out of their way to articulate what people can expect when they volunteer, drop their kids off in the kid's ministry area, come to an event and so on. **This year, let's go out of our way to ensure that we're clearly articulating exactly what people can expect when they engage with our community.** Don't leave any detail unexplored, explain it all publicly so that people can feel more comfortable coming.

### ■ SOCIAL PROOF ... FOR EVERYTHING!

More than ever, your church and my church need to share public social proof about people attending. Social proof is when third-party people who attend our church – not staff or volunteers, but normal people – share why it's so important to them that they attend. It's when your people go out of the way to publicly share that they are a part of our community. This year, we need to make a concerted effort to encourage our people to share on social media the fact that they are attending our churches: showing images of their weekend, of your in-person weekend services, of people showing up, checking their kids in, and enjoying the services. Whether they're

wearing a mask or not is an important piece of the puzzle that can allow people to see themselves in those images. Have you ever stopped and wondered why Walt Disney World is running at only 35% capacity these days, but continues to stay open? One of the reasons they're doing that because they need people to show up wearing masks, to share on their social media feeds. The hardcore people will do that now, but the normal folks won't. They need that social proof out there, and for it to spread so that normal people will, over time, return to the theme parks. **How can you encourage social proof this year with your people?**

## ■ **BIG DAYS ARE (STILL) A BIG DEAL**

There are four or five Sundays every year when two things happen in your church: one, your people are more likely to invite their friends, and two, their friends are more likely to attend. Whether it's Easter or Mother's Day, a fall relaunch or Christmas Eve, these days need to have a strategic recall focus this year for your church. Maybe it's calling everyone in your database who has not attended a service and inviting them to come to an Easter service three or four weeks before. Or maybe it's dropping a handwritten note to every mom in your church, and inviting her to come to a Mother's Day service. Or maybe it's sending a special invite-box to every school-aged child to come to the in-person launch of your kid's ministry this fall. For each one of those big days, **we need to build a specific recall communication process to leverage the opportunity to invite people to re-engage with our church**, because people are looking to return to life as normal and those big days are days when people will be reminiscing about what it was like to attend in the past.

## ■ **LEVERAGE THAT DATABASE!**

Most churches have many times more contacts in their database than people who attend their church on a regular basis. In fact, you may have as many as four or five times more people in your database than attend on a regular basis online or in person. How are you leveraging that information? What are you doing to get back out in front of them? The reality is, people have given you their email addresses, mailing addresses, and phone numbers because they wanted to hear from you at some point. **This is not the year to just warehouse all that contact information and not use it to invite people to connect with your church!** This is the year to leverage every one of those contacts. If you normally only email people who have been connected with your church in the last year, then this year, email everyone who you've had contact with in the last five years. Maybe you only ever send physical mailings out to people who have connected in the last two years. What if you change that to everyone who's been involved in the last five years? **The reality of it is, contact information sitting in the database unused is of no value to your ministry.** Why are you paying to just warehouse that information?! Use it! Now is the time for you to think creatively about how you can open up the treasure trove of past contacts that you have, and invite those people to come and be a part of your church.

As we look to 2021, there's no doubt going to be a bumpy road ahead.

We will see vaccines roll through our communities, and see many of our churches come out of the fog of 2020.

As we wrestle with what it's like to have both a robust in-person ministry and our new online expressions, we will be facing new challenges.

This is the year to focus your communication strategy on recall. To focus our efforts in communication around connecting with people that we've had some initial contact with, freshening up those connections and getting them re-engaging, and inviting them to reconnect with our churches. **What can we do to draw those people who are connected to the fringe of our ministry, into the core?**

Are you looking to track with other leaders during the season? [Why not join our Winter Executive Pastor Cohort?](#) It starts on January 13th, and it's an opportunity for you to build relationships with other executive pastors across the country who are looking to make a difference.

Space is extremely limited. We only have a few spots left. [Click here to register now.](#)