

First Impressions: Improving The Guest Experience

By Matt Polites



Recently, my wife and I put our house on the market. Before we listed it though, we called our realtor for a walk-through. He gave us a laundry list of tasks to do before any potential buyer would be interested in our home. Sure, we had noticed the shower door leaked a little, and we needed to touch up on the paint, but after having lived there for 8 years, we had stopped “seeing” those issues. In the busyness of our daily lives, we had been “blinded with familiarity” to all the house issues.

You may have experienced the same type of “familiarity blindness” when it comes to your church. You may have excellent worship, a friendly congregation, and enriching sermons, but if you can’t get new people through the front doors, you won’t experience any sort of significant church growth.

It’s time to take a “First Impressions Assessment.” Grab a friend – preferably one who doesn’t go to your church (a local pastor can be a great person for this task). Grab a sheet of paper and take a walk around your facility and start writing a list of what needs to be done. After your list is complete, I recommend sorting the tasks into three categories – repairs under \$500, repairs between \$500 and \$1000 and repairs over \$1000.

Next, create an action plan. How many of those under \$500 can be knocked out on a good old-fashioned church work day by some volunteers? Which tasks in the \$500 to \$1000 are you going to work into your budget for this year? Then, create a plan to add fundraising projects or financing options into the budget over the next couple years to tackle those projects over \$1000.

Remember, some of the issues you identify are quick fixes and some will definitely take time to implement. Some issues may involve an entire culture shift if you want to reach new people. Think creatively about the resources God has placed in your care. Your church is full of people looking to use their gifts and talents to further God’s kingdom and it’s your privilege and responsibility to provide a space for those gifts to flourish!

Here are a few questions to ask yourself as you walk around your facility:

Exterior

How difficult is it to find your church?

- Think: Signage and quick access to directions for new attendees.

What is the parking experience like?

- Think: Is the parking lot weed-free with easy-to-see striping?

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What's the condition or "curb-appeal" of the building and property?

- Think: Landscaping. Compare your landscaping to new construction or a retail development in your area. What does their landscaping look like? Do you have dated shrubbery, or trees that are growing too tall?

What's the entrance like?

- Think: Is it easy to find? Is there more than one? Are they clearly marked?

Interior

What is the lobby or foyer like?

- Think: Signage, colors, and cleanliness. Take a look at the carpet and flooring—are there stains or rips/tears/scuffs? What is the first thing your guests see when they enter the building?

What are the bathrooms like?

- Think: Are they clean? Do they smell good? Is there a place for an attendee to set their Bible or bag?

Do you have an information or connect center?

- Think: Is there clear signage for finding it? Is it manned during a service, and if so, are the hosts friendly, helpful and knowledgeable?

What is the sanctuary like?

- Think: Is it easy to find from each entrance? Are seats comfortable and easy to access? Does the style, setting, and mood communicate your culture?

Communications

What do our printed pieces actually communicate (church bulletin, informational pieces, sermon aids, pieces in the pew back, signage, etc.)?

- Think: Do all the pieces go together? If you put everything next to each other, would it all look consistent? Is the style representative of your culture? Is everything spelled correctly and using proper grammar? When developed, did you have a specific audience in mind? Did you use clipart? (If so, throw that piece away immediately!)

Does your church use multimedia elements like lobby or foyer screens, service videos, dramas, or presentation software during the sermon?

- Think: Are the graphics/images consistent with your church's message? Do they run smoothly, especially during service transition times?

What does our website communicate?

- Think: Is it easy to find and navigate through? Does it speak to a specific audience? Is the content updated regularly with quality and current information? How does it look on tablets and mobile devices?

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Service Elements

Who does a new person see when they first come to a service?

- Think: Who will the visitor interact with? (This will include greeters, ushers, kids' check-in volunteers, and information/connect center volunteers.) Are they representative of your culture? Are they friendly and helpful? How do they dress?

What elements are present during a service?

- Think: How long is the welcome/announcements time and is there an emphasis on welcoming new people? Are you just reiterating what's in the bulletin? Is the host engaging and connecting with the audience? Is there a "meet and greet" time; how long is this time? Are people encouraged to meet new people?

What other elements are part of your services?

- Think: Is there communion, baby dedications or baptisms? Are they explained for a new attendee who may be unfamiliar with these practices?

What are the spiritual elements like?

- Think: Is there a move of the Holy Spirit? How is it handled? Is it addressed and explained by the lead pastor? Is there a sense of order? Is there a prayer time? Are spiritual elements explained for a new attendee who may be unfamiliar with these practices?

Does your church have small groups or Sunday School classes during service?

- Think: Are the classes easily located? Are they open and inviting to new guests?

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About the Author:

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