

# **PART I**

MEET THE CHRISTIAN  
CONSUMER

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## CHAPTER ONE

# THE OVERLOOKED 140 MILLION PERSON MARKET

**I**t's Super Bowl Sunday, and crowds begin to gather. Space by space parking lots fill as attendants direct vehicles to open spots farther and farther from the huge edifice. People stream from their cars and head toward the sidewalks—a confluence of humanity emptying into a sea of men and women pressing toward the entrances.

Pulled irresistibly by their common passion, people all across the country follow a similar ritual. Many attend in person; still others listen on the radio or watch on television or the Internet. In total, more than 140 million men, women, and children take part in this weekend spectacle. They are rich and poor, young and old, black, white, Asian, and Hispanic. They form a collection of consumers whose combined spending power totals more than \$5.1 trillion annually!

It was the Holy Grail for marketers, but is not what you think. It was Super Bowl Sunday all right, but this was not the Super Bowl. Kick-off for the big game was still more than eight hours away.

This is the church.

Companies that will spend more than \$3 million for a 30-second spot during the Super Bowl are missing an even greater opportunity. Surprisingly, the Super Bowl isn't the biggest marketing opportunity of the year. It's not even the biggest opportunity on Super Bowl Sunday. A prize far more tantalizing arrives *every* Sunday morning for those who know where to find it and how to access its power. If you haven't spent much time in church—or even if you regularly attend your church of choice—you may not think of *church* as a potential target for your marketing efforts, but several recent success stories have awakened many in the business world to the size and scope of the U.S. Christian community.

Fully nine out of ten Americans say they believe in God or a higher power, according to most polls. Despite growing religious diversity, the vast majority of Americans define themselves as Christians. In an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* survey conducted in September 2008 ([http://www.online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/WSJ\\_NBCPoll\\_092408.pdf](http://www.online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/WSJ_NBCPoll_092408.pdf)), three-fourths of the respondents identified themselves as Protestants or Catholics. And reliable pollsters such as the Gallup Poll, the Institute for Social Research's World Values, and the National Opinion Research Center report that from 40 to 45 percent of Americans regularly attend church. Not exactly a tiny niche when it comes to marketing, as many large companies have discovered.

Fueled by a church-based campaign, *The Purpose Driven Life*, a book explaining God's five purposes for successful living, sold 30 million copies in three years to become the fastest-selling hardcover in U.S. history—faster than any Harry Potter book, faster than a John Grisham novel, faster even than the Bible, the all-time best-selling book in history. The book's author and publisher set aside conventional marketing wisdom to rely on their vast knowledge of the church and the behavior of Christian consumers, demonstrating an important principle we will discuss in this book: To reach this \$5.1 trillion market, you need to understand it. Intimately. And we will show you how to do that.

While *The Purpose Driven Life* is a phenomenal success story, it's not the only one. Mel Gibson's blockbuster movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, grossed over \$551 million in its first nine weeks despite the use of obscure foreign languages, English subtitles, harsh criticism, and a comparatively modest marketing budget. Instead of wasting precious marketing dollars on traditional strategies, Gibson and his producers focused their efforts on church leaders and Christian opinion shapers who then became voluntary consumer evangelists to more than half of the U.S. population that regularly attend church. Just one example: 100,000 pastors were e-mailed, asking them to mention the movie in a Sunday sermon; much smarter—and far less expensive—than running trailers on expensive television ads. But you don't just randomly collect e-mail lists and start plugging your product. You need to understand the difference between a dispensational Baptist and a Missouri Synod Lutheran, or you'll do more harm than good. And we can help you with that, too.

Still need convincing that faith-based marketing is more than a niche? Look at the past two presidential elections. In 2004, many pundits credit the Bush campaign for tapping into the power of the

nation's Bible-belted red states. And both candidates in 2008 poured millions of dollars into trying to reach the nation's evangelicals, a subset of the total Christian market. And whether you think it was genuine or pandering, both candidates took great pains to explain their own Christian beliefs, further indication that they understood the power of the faith-based community.

On any given Sunday, 44 percent of Americans are in church. Can you name a larger group that demonstrates such a singular behavior so consistently? Okay, nearly nine out of ten workers commute to work by car, which is why radio is such a great way to market to consumers. Have you ever targeted your marketing to Hispanics (14 percent of the population), African Americans (11 percent), or retirees (12 percent)? You should, but what if you could reach a demographic larger than those three combined and do it effectively and economically? You can, but you may need to change the way you think about those "religious people."

Christians are not the tiny lunatic fringe so many once thought. Rather, they form a global network of immense size and power comprised of every country, every social or ethnic group, and every economic stratum. Christians now number 2.3 billion or one out of every three people on the planet. That's nearly as large as China and India combined.

Okay, maybe you're not the marketing director for a Hollywood film company or a multinational, global conglomerate; instead, you own a hardware store in a midsize city. Can you grow your business by focusing some of your marketing efforts on people of faith? Absolutely. Forty-four percent of the people living in your community go to church regularly and take their faith seriously. They need to buy garden tools, snow shovels, and paint, just like anyone else. They can choose from among several retailers to buy those products, but if you could learn how to reach them effectively—if you can develop a relationship with them—they will choose you over your competition. But it takes more than putting a religious symbol in a display ad in your local newspaper. Just like any other affinity group, you need to know who they are, what's important to them, and what their needs are. You also need to know how to communicate with them without offending them.

In November 2007, the home improvement chain, Lowe's, sent out a flier that contained an advertisement for "Family Trees," which looked an awful lot like the trees people decorate in their homes during the Christmas season. Lowes received more than 100,000 e-mails

from Christians protesting the removal of the word “Christmas,” and Lowe’s responded with an apology and a return to calling Christmas trees, well, Christmas trees. “It was not our intention to try and be politically correct or to take the significance of Christ out of Christmas,” company spokeswoman Karen Cobb replied. Regardless of their reasons for changing the name of Christmas trees, Lowe’s learned an important lesson: if you want to do business with Christians, you need to know what’s important to them or you could unintentionally offend them. Had they done some research before selecting a new name for Christmas trees, they would have spared themselves a major public relations blunder.

On a more positive note, consider how many local grocery stores have reached out to churches by offering to donate a percentage of their revenue on a particular day. The church promotes this for several weeks ahead of time (free advertising), and on the appointed day the grocery store has a record number of customers show up (more traffic). Increased sales for the store, greater exposure to new customers, and the church gets a nice check to help send their youth group on a mission trip.

The buying power of Christians is evident in the way teenage Christians purchase music. According to Dan Michaels, vice-president of marketing and promotion for INO Records, a Christian label, it’s not unusual for a Christian recording artist to sell into the millions of CDs. One of his own artists, the popular band, Mercy Me, has sold more than four million CDs since they were launched in early 2,000. “Christian parents support their kids’ interest in our music because of the positive message it conveys,” Michaels explained. “You don’t always have that with other genres.”

People of faith are the largest niche in your market. Whether you are selling cars or carpet, they represent a significant portion of your overall market. You can hope that your current marketing strategies will reach them, and they might. But your competition will be doing the same thing, so to grow your business, you need an edge. We hope to give you that edge in this book, but first, a few words of caution.

## COMMERCIALIZING CHRISTIANITY?

We almost hesitate to describe the size of the faith-based market because it could produce unhelpful responses from two groups.

Businesses might mistakenly see only dollar signs, while Christian consumers might only see businesses seeing dollar signs. In other words, everyone might jump to the conclusion that the sole purpose of this book is to help businesses make a lot of money off of Christians. To be absolutely truthful, if you apply the principles we outline in this book, your business *should* benefit financially, but our overarching purpose isn't to help businesses make more money by *exploiting* Christians because that will only produce short-term gains and long-time resentment. Money is basically the best measure for how well a business conducts itself in every area, from producing a product to marketing it, to selling it to treating its employees fairly, and so on. We want to help your business grow, which means you will make more money, and we feel the best way to do that is to understand and respect the faith-based community. So here's what we would say to both groups who may be either overly optimistic or skeptical about mixing business and faith.

First, to businesses: if you're only interested in exploiting Christians, this book will not be much help. We won't provide you with ways to exploit Christians or anyone else. However, if you are interested in creating long-term, loyal customers who will choose your business over your competition, this book is for you. Our goal is to help you better understand the Christian community—their needs, their aspirations, and the reservations some have about you—so that you make more money. If you have a product or a service that will improve the lives of Christians—one that they will truly value—and you carefully follow the principles we outline, you will increase your chances of partnering with Christians in a manner that will result in long-term financial growth.

And to our fellow Christians who may be suspicious about mixing commerce and faith, our goal is to erase the unfair caricatures you've endured and give the business community a more accurate picture of you, your faith, and your traditions. We believe that if businesses know you better, they can serve you better. If you receive better service from a company, you are more likely to do business with it because your needs are being met. So in the end, both you and the business win, and that is our motivation for writing this book—to build a better relationship between business and believers so that both benefit. If a business truly understands Christians then it will be more likely to accommodate them and less likely to do things that offend. If Christians understand businesses better, they will be able to make more intelligent choices about the products and services they buy.

## MARKETING TO CHRISTIANS (OR ANYONE ELSE)

John B. is an independent insurance agent in a midsize city in Illinois. As competition in his area increased, he began looking for better ways to target his modest advertising budget. Sitting in church one Sunday, he looked around and thought there had to be a way to reach people just like him with information about the various types of insurance he sold. Feeling only mildly guilty for daydreaming about his job during church, he nonetheless made a mental note to call the pastor Monday to see what it would cost to place a banner ad on the church's web site. He was surprised—and a little miffed—to learn that the church had a policy forbidding advertising on its web site. But then he had an idea: “Maybe I could teach a free one-day seminar on insurance.” He called the pastor, who loved the idea, and four weeks later John was in a meeting room explaining insurance to 45 couples.

Even though John was active in his church, he didn't fully understand the challenges he would face marketing to his own church. While it is true that the church represents a huge opportunity for successful marketing, ignorance of the church could close that door of opportunity. Many churches are a little leery of mixing business with ministry, even to the point of not allowing any kind of commercial enterprise to access its constituents. There are legitimate reasons for this but before we share them with you, we need to be clear about what we mean when we say marketing.

Many consumers—Christian and otherwise—view marketing as an annoying attempt to trick them into buying something they don't need. Unfortunately, we've met people in the marketing profession who pretty much live down to that description. But as a professional marketer, you know that any attempt to force people to buy something, exploit them, or otherwise get them to do something they don't want to do will ultimately fail. The best example of that occurred when Coca-Cola, normally brilliant marketers, tried to force “New Coke” on their consumers in 1985. After secretly working on a new formula to replace the most popular cola beverage in the world, they rolled out New Coke on April 23 with a massive television and print ad campaign, which was flatly rejected by consumers. Sales of the new beverage plummeted as people began paying up to \$30 a case for the *old* coke and hoarding as much as they could get their hands on, fearing it would never again be available. Less than three months later, on July 11, Coca-Cola pulled the plug on its new product, replacing it on store shelves with the old



formula, which it dubbed “Classic Coke” to further reassure consumers their favorite cola was back. According to Sam Craig, professor of marketing and international business at the Stern School of Business of New York University, Coca-Cola marketers failed to ask the critical question of its consumers: “Do you *want* a new Coke?”

Successful marketing always begins with the consumer—understanding what she needs or values. To the extent that you will become successful in marketing to Christians, you will need to understand them, know what they are passionate about, respect what they believe and why, and discover what they need to improve their lives. Like Coca-Cola, you might think every Christian organization in the country will love your product, but unless you’re willing to make the commitment to fully understand this dynamic consumer group, you run the risk of wasting a lot of your company’s time and resources.

Marketing is identifying people with needs and connecting them to the product or service that can satisfy their needs. The more profoundly you meet their need, the more satisfied they’ll be; the more satisfied they are, the more people they will tell; the more people they tell, the more product you will sell. But it all begins with people, not product. Christians are more likely to support this approach to marketing because it is almost indistinguishable from ministry; it’s essentially the mission of the Christian church—find people in need and meet their needs.

## FAITH-BASED SKEPTICISM

Okay, so we’re on the same page about the definition of marketing, and you’re all set to develop a killer marketing plan to inform this very large audience about your product or service. Don’t be surprised if you initially find it difficult to get your foot in the church door. Even if you have a great product that Christians truly value and need, you may still face resistance in trying to do business with churches and Christian organizations, and there are two primary reasons for this.

First, some churches are wary of mixing ministry with commerce because of an important story in the Bible: “Money Changers in the Temple.” It’s pretty important to many Christians, so you should understand it as well. Here’s what happened 2,000 years ago that still influences the way some Christians view commerce in the church: Jesus went to the temple to pray and got angry when he saw the merchants doing

business there and literally chased them away. This story has special significance because it is the only record in the entire Bible of Jesus, the “Prince of Peace,” becoming angry.

A superficial reading of this story suggests it is wrong to do any kind of business in a religious setting, and as recently as a generation ago, many churches disallowed *any* buying and selling on their premises. Now you could choose to view this separation of church and commerce as strange or even silly, or you can begin to recognize that Christians are highly principled people who respect what they believe to be biblical truth. Which response do you think will lead to a better relationship with faith-based ministries? Good—so let’s continue with your first theology lesson.

Think about it. Jesus drove businessmen out of the church, and you’re trying to get the church to help you sell RVs to its members. Not the best conditions for a great marketing plan, but don’t give up. Most churches that used to prohibit commerce in church now allow it, and here’s why. Trustworthy Bible scholars have discovered that the merchants who set up shop in the synagogue were not reputable businessmen, but crooked clerics who deliberately cheated these religious consumers, especially widows and the poor. It was customary then to charge temple goers a temple tax before they could enter to worship and pray. Further, the temple clergy required that tax to be paid in temple currency rather than conventional money, which meant they had to exchange their money for temple currency. Pretty slick scheme, huh? The money changers, who were actually the religious leaders, knew the temple goers had no other way to change their currency and charged grossly inflated rates for their temple money. The real message of this story was a warning against dishonesty and exploitation in a house of worship, especially that which is directed at the most vulnerable.

So what’s the big deal and why did we lay some theology on you? Even though most churches will welcome your efforts to do business with them, that Bible story still carries some influence, especially on *how* you interact with them, which we will cover in this first section.

On the practical level, Christians may seem a little resistant to business because church leaders view the protection of their parishioners as part of their role as pastor or shepherd, and they worry that businesses are only interested in exploiting their flocks. Here’s where the stereotype of crook comes into play, strengthened by churchgoers’ own isolated experiences with unethical businesses. A few years ago in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a businessman began approaching people who attended church, offering an investment opportunity that would produce

huge returns. Many good church folk who looked at their inadequate retirement accounts felt this would be a good way to prepare for a better retirement and bought shares in his company. What they didn't know was that this man was using their investment dollars to deliver "returns" to other investors he had approached a few weeks earlier—a classic Ponzi scheme causing hundreds of individuals to lose millions of dollars. It only takes a few experiences like this for churches to build an impenetrable wall between them and any outside business. If church leaders initially seem reluctant to work with you, understand that they are only doing their job as shepherds protecting their flocks and will gradually become more receptive if you are open and honest with them.

### CASE STUDY: FAITH NIGHT

The Nashville Sounds minor league baseball team had a hunch they could sell more tickets if they marketed to Christians; they just didn't know how. They had seen the demographics: 3,000 churches within a two-hour drive of Nashville. Their first effort—offer a dollar discount to anyone carrying a church bulletin—fizzled. At best, they sold about 200 extra tickets at these "Faith Nights."

Enter Brent High, former youth pastor and executive director of Third Coast Sports Foundation. The Nashville Sounds hired him in December of 2002 and for the next three months never saw him. That's because he was in his car, crisscrossing middle Tennessee, southern Kentucky, and northern Alabama asking pastors what it would take to get more Christians to the ballpark. They told him: help us reach more people with the gospel, not just put on a show. So Brent went to work, lining up great bands to perform, getting players who were Christians to talk about their faith after the game, and in 2003, sponsored five Faith Nights designed to help churches accomplish what was important to them.

It worked.

In 2002, the average Friday night attendance at Greer Stadium was 4,800. For the five Friday night Faith Nights, attendance nearly doubled, averaging just under 11,000. Attendance at the final Faith Night in August was a standing room only 13,000! Corporate sponsorships for Faith Night that first year produced \$11,000. Three years later that number climbed to \$84,000. And growing.

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Four seasons after his first Faith Night, High and his company were sponsoring 175 events, adding major league baseball (Los Angeles Dodgers, Cincinnati Reds, Colorado Rockies, Atlanta Braves, Minnesota Twins, Texas Rangers, Kansas City Royals, and Washington Nationals), arena football, and hockey, which expanded Faith Nights to 60 different teams.

“Christians are out there in huge numbers,” High explained for anyone interested in marketing to them. “They are organized, they have e-mail lists, and they have buses to transport their members. As long as you are sincere and approach them in the right way and respect their beliefs, you will be successful.”

## INTEGRITY WINS

We’ve covered a good deal of ground here, from the huge opportunity to demographics to theology, but you may have recognized a common theme: you will not get very far with people of faith if you don’t have a relationship with them, and you can’t have a relationship with them if you don’t get to know them. And as you gain a better understanding of Christians, you will discover that they are very much like any other consumer group. They want you to be honest, to conduct your business with integrity, and to respect their values and beliefs. You don’t have to share their beliefs in order to market to them—nor should you try to give the impression you do. Christians will have greater respect for you and be more receptive to your business if you do not try to be something you aren’t.

As we will discover in the next chapter, Christians have been easy targets for ridicule, usually based on unfair stereotypes and caricatures. Those stereotypes have not only been a disservice to Christians, they may have given you a completely inaccurate view of the very people you’d like to reach.

One final note: the Christian community is a richly diverse group of people who share a common belief in God (approximately half are Catholics and half are Protestants). You may have a friend who attends church, and from your relationship with that person, you might think you have a pretty good working knowledge of Christianity. Or you may even be a regular attender of a particular church and are already beginning to develop a strategy for marketing your product to “the church.”

So just to see how well you know this 140 million person market, take the “Faith-Based Marketing Quiz” on page 13–16. Where else can you learn if you’re a saint or the Antichrist?

Remember, our purpose for writing this book is to build a better relationship between business and believers by helping them truly understand each other. It works both ways. While you may not fully understand Christians, they also have misconceptions about you. They may seem like kooks to you, and you may appear to be crooks to them, so now let’s take a look at how we earned these labels and what you can do about them.

### FAITH-BASED MARKETING QUIZ

How well do you understand the faith community? Could you safely connect to this market or would you commit a fatal misstep? Take this quiz and find out:

1. Who preached the Sermon on the Mount?
  - A. Martin Luther King, Jr.
  - B. Jesus
  - C. Billy Graham
  - D. Moses
2. Christians and Muslims worship the same God. *True or False?*
3. If you invited people from a Southern Baptist, Methodist, Missouri Synod Lutheran, and Catholic Church to the same gathering, which church’s members are least likely to attend?
  - A. Southern Baptist
  - B. Methodist
  - C. Missouri Synod Lutheran
  - D. Catholic Church
4. You are selling guitar amplifiers to church worship bands. Which of the following churches won’t even consider buying your product?
  - A. Churches of Christ
  - B. Assemblies of God
  - C. Presbyterian
  - D. Reformed Church in America

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5. You are hosting an event and plan to invite people from the local Jewish Synagogue, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, and Catholic churches. Which of the following days would maximize turnout?
  - A. Thursday night
  - B. Friday night
  - C. Saturday night
  - D. Sunday night
6. Which of the following is *not* among the Ten Commandments?
  - A. Thou shalt not kill.
  - B. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
  - C. Honor your father and mother.
  - D. Do not covet.
7. Evangelical Christians believe that a person who performs good works on earth will go to heaven. True or False?
8. Which of the following groups is *not* recognized as a Christian denomination by most other churches?
  - A. Covenant
  - B. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
  - C. Anglican Communion
  - D. Wesleyan Reform Union
9. What is mammon?
  - A. Bread that fell from Heaven to feed the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt
  - B. Money
  - C. A godly mother serving as spiritual head of the household
  - D. An idol worshipped by the Philistines
10. If you are planning a campaign for De Beers or Maybelline, which of the following groups should you ignore?
  - A. Catholics
  - B. United Pentecostal
  - C. Assemblies of God
  - D. All of the above

Was it tougher than you thought? Look at the answers to see how you did. Give yourself one point for each correct answer and find your score on the chart that follows.

*Answers:* 1-B, 2-False, 3-C, 4-A, 5-A, 6-B, 7-False, 8-B, 9-B, 10-B

Score	Title	Comment
8–10	Saint	Why did you waste your money on this book?
5–7	Pharisee	Don't get cocky—you know just enough to be dangerous.
3–5	Boycott magnet	Start practicing your apology for the press conference.
0–2	Antichrist	Those protestors on CNN are in front of <i>your</i> building!

## REVIEWING THE QUIZ

1. Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. Its text is recorded in the Bible in the book of Matthew. It is considered the greatest recorded collection of Jesus' words and advice.
2. The God of the Bible is "triune," a single deity comprised of three persons: God the father, God the son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. The God of the Koran, by contrast, is not triune. Muslims believe Jesus was merely a prophet, but not God. Neither do Muslims recognize the Holy Spirit. By definition then, Christians and Muslims worship a different God.
3. Don't expect many members of the local Missouri Synod Lutheran Church to attend your event if you also invite other denominations. They are discouraged from attending religious events with people from other denominations.
4. The Church of Christ won't buy any guitar amplifiers. They restrict their worship to singing without any musical accompaniment (a cappella) because this was the style used by the first century church.
5. If you want Jews, Baptists, Catholics, and Seventh Day Adventists to attend your event, hold it on a Thursday night. The Jewish Sabbath runs from Friday to Saturday evening. Seventh Day Adventists worship on Saturday, Baptists on Sunday, and many Catholics attend Saturday evening Mass. Thursday is the only night that won't conflict with someone's worship service or observation of the Sabbath.

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6. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is a very good idea, but it is not among the Ten Commandments. It’s more a suggestion, coming from the New Testament, known to most people as the Golden Rule.
7. According to evangelical Christians, good works will *not* get you to heaven. It’s not like a ledger where if good deeds exceed the bad we enjoy a positive balance that earns admission to eternal paradise. The Bible teaches that everyone has sinned and that Jesus was sent to earth to endure punishment for our sin (the Crucifixion). We only need to accept his free gift of salvation to enjoy eternal life. Right living is simply how we express gratitude toward God for saving us from our sins.
8. Even though “Jesus Christ” is part of their name, many Christians don’t consider Mormons to be a Christian denomination because their beliefs differ fundamentally from core Christian tenets.
9. The Bible teaches that man cannot serve both God and mammon (money). An appeal to greed may work with some segments of the population, but be careful not to use it to appeal to Christians.
10. Don’t bother promoting jewelry or makeup to United Pentecostals because they will not adorn their bodies with either. You might tell them about your new line of combs and brushes though, because Pentecostal women don’t cut their hair.