Abstract

This project examines the community relations side of public relations and communication ethics of NewPointe Community Church located in Dover, Ohio. Addressed in this examination are the public relations strategies that have been implemented to make NewPointe successful when other churches in the northeast United States are floundering. This examination uses standard communication theories and models of public relations practice to assess the organization’s communication programs and suggests ways for improvement. Also included is a comparison of the public relations approach of NewPointe and Northway Christian Community Church, and Orchard Hill Community Church.

Research was conducted through direct interaction by way of visits to all three locations, a personal interview with NewPointe’s Director of Family Ministries, David DeAngelo, use of NewPointe, Northway, and Orchard Hill web sites and blogs, and press materials.

The ethics of NewPointe Community Church were evaluated using the Public Relations Society of America Code of Ethics, which emphasizes advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness.

The research performed indicates that the community public relations approach and effort at NewPointe is substantial and very successful. However, much more could be done to improve its website and expand utilization of social media. Also, although media relations is adequate, a more intentional emphasis in this area could reap additional benefits.
NewPointe Community Church Background

NewPointe Community Church located in Dover, Ohio wasn’t always in the “mega-church” category. It was founded in 2006 after existing for many years as a Free Methodist church which was originally located in Sugarcreek, Ohio (NewPointe was formerly known as Sugarcreek Free Methodist Church). Because of tremendous growth resulting from great leadership from its Pastor, Dwight Mason, and resulting from creative and pertinent programming, a larger, more relevant facility became a top priority. Along with growth in attendance comes a requirement to increase staff. Originally having only a few full-time staff, they were not able to address the needs of such a large membership. Currently, with over 35 full-time people, the NewPointe staff is able to reach a much broader and diverse audience.

Since 2006, NewPointe’s membership has exploded from 800 to over 3,500 people who attend one of two large services offered each Sunday morning (DeAngelo). “The auditorium for two Sunday worship services can accommodate at least 1,400 people” (Wright 10).

This ongoing swell in attendance created the need to either increase their facility size, or to develop additional campuses within the region. They decided to develop additional campuses: one in Millersburg and one in Canton, Ohio. Current plans are to continue to plant branch campuses across the Northeast Ohio region, in order to meet the demand for people seeking an in-depth relationship with Jesus Christ. The long-term goal over the next 10 years is to have a total of 9 campuses throughout the region along I-77.

NewPointe’s goal is to help people grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. They take steps to reach that goal by offering aspects of church that many typical church-goers would not normally experience. “When you visit, you will experience amazing music, creative
environments, and engaging messages, but most importantly, you’ll be with relevant people who are a lot like you, who want you to feel at home” (newpointe.org).

Community Relations Programs

NewPointe Community Church was created to be one giant community relations campaign. It technically exists to implement strategies and techniques used to reach out to its community so that they can be eternally impacted.

Planning and using systematical organization principles is key to a successful community relations campaign. Each week, the staff at NewPointe takes time to plan and organize a disciplined approach to meeting its objectives. Hours of creative team meetings and brainstorming sessions lead to the weekly implementation of all this planning and organization. The target audience is always the surrounding community, but it is within the community that discrepancies occur. Within the community are the churched and the non-churched.

NewPointe’s main focus and target is to reach the non-churched, who either never gave God a try or have some sort of problem with “the way church is done” (DeAngelo). NewPointe strives to bring a new perspective to the community on what church really is, according to scripture.

The following are specific campaigns NewPointe implements to help achieve their goal of leading its community into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Community Impact Day

In early August of 2011, NewPointe implemented a campaign to reach the community surrounding each campus in Dover, Millersburg and Canton, OH. According to Dwight Mason, senior pastor at NewPointe, this campaign is another way the church is literally fulfilling
scripture by not just loving with words but most important, loving with action (Mason). The event is called, “Community Impact Day.”

Community Impact Day is an annual community outreach campaign NewPointe executes each year with hopes of serving the surrounding area. Whether it is serving people by way of painting, landscaping, carpentry, hairstyling, visiting nursing homes, or clean-up, NewPointe provides the supplies needed to tackle each job efficiently and successfully (Mason).

The target audience ranges from church members in need of help around the house, to most important, strangers, community facilities, school properties, as well as individual families who are non-churchgoers needing to see with their own eyes God’s love lived out through the church as a whole. Part of NewPointe’s goal is to impact the surrounding community for the cause of Christ in a relevant way (DeAngelo).

“We scatter throughout the communities and become ‘love with skin,’” Mason said. “God will use this campaign to speak to our communities. I truly believe that most people need to see a message more than they need to hear one” (Mason).

Interestingly enough, this campaign occurs on a Sunday morning, replacing the weekly services at each campus. NewPointe promotes the message that “church doors will be closed, and instead, we are going to go out and be the church” (newpointe.org, emphasis added). It is a bold and brave campaign, but NewPointe seems to thrive on such events.

After a day of serving, volunteers gather at the main Dover campus location for a tailgating celebration including a concert, fireworks and games for the whole family. NewPointe’s aim at this gathering is to celebrate what God has done in and through each volunteer, as-well-as in the community (Mason).
Only God Campaign

Another and perhaps the most important campaign the church has ever created is the Only God campaign, with the goal of communicating that “change is necessary to reach people, and we want everyone to be a part of that change” (Mason, Young, Murphy, Conn).

NewPointe’s vision through this campaign is to plant many branch campuses throughout northeast Ohio. NewPointe already has three campuses in Dover, Millersburg and Canton, but the church’s complete, long-term vision is to plant many more locations over the next few years. The Only God campaign emphasizes the importance of following a call God has for NewPointe as a whole. The next step is to then develop new campuses which will have the same live message broadcast to other campuses, creating a way to get the “churched and the non-churched” connected and on-board with the mission NewPointe has of leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

When asked why a multi-site church is the avenue NewPointe is taking, Dwight Mason said, “Lost people matter to God, so they better matter to us” (Mason).

The question then became, “how could one church be in different locations and still be effective?” With the use of the latest recording and projection technology and software, NewPointe can record the message during the week and then deliver that recording to each campus. From there, the message video is broadcast through a high definition projector, showing an actual size image of whoever is speaking. The audience watches and listens to the message, looking at a life-size image of the pastor preaching, as if he were really standing there.
Mason explained that the benefit of being a multi-site church is that it can reach more communities without having to reproduce the entire church. “We feel this is the most efficient and cost effective way to accomplish our mission” (Mason).

Consistency is the key during this campaign. As more and more people jump on board with this multi-site idea, donating more and more resources to make it happen, NewPointe is able to create a consistent, high quality service week in and week out. It no longer matters which campus someone attends because each site produces the exact same service. Each campus gets the same message and has a live band and ministry staff implementing each Sunday gathering. Content remains the same regardless of location.

According to Dwight Mason’s blog, *Pointe Blank*, other reasons a multi-site church is NewPointe’s next step are as follows:

- A multi-site campus means a new congregation in a new location; it reaches new people and communities faster and more effectively.
- Multi-sites take the church to the people, rather than forcing them to drive long distances to a church.
- A multi-site church puts the “local” back in the local church; it gives more people an opportunity to use their gifts and talents.
- A multi-site creates more seats at optimal inviting hours at less cost; it allows more people to come at their preferred time.
- Multi-sites reduce the dependence on a single leader – it is a team effort.

During the Only God campaign, Mason passionately encourages and challenges people to take leaps of faith while taking part in what God is doing through NewPointe. He preaches, “There are two questions that God is going to ask you when you die. First, what did you do with my son Jesus Christ? Second, what did you do to spread the good news of the gospel? One of the ways that you know that you truly know God is that you have a desire to see other people come to know Christ” (Mason). By promoting the need for action in an encouraging
way, people feel involved and called to not only go to church but be the church. This is why the Only God campaign has been and currently is having success.

**Churches in the Northeastern United States**

There is already an overabundance of empty churches in not only northeast Ohio, but all over northeastern America. NewPointe’s model for success comes from churches in the southern U.S. states, otherwise known as the “Bible belt.” Throughout this assessment, I’ve discussed the successful vision, outlook and campaigns NewPointe implements. So, why is this pattern not catching on throughout the northeast? If this vision and these campaigns have proven to be successful time and time again in the south and for NewPointe, why are there still so many empty churches everywhere we go? What specifically is NewPointe doing that is so successful, and yet, why is the overall American church in the northeastern U.S. failing to reach people?

The answer is relevance. When meeting with Dave DeAngelo, Director of Ministry at NewPointe, we discussed that change has to be embraced to see long-term growth. As styles begin to shift in the church environment, alterations to how things are done need to fit these cultural swings. Otherwise, people will simply not come to church, as much of the United States churches are currently experiencing. They feel there is nothing for them, so why get involved?

This comparison to churches in America is not to downplay their existence and say they are completely missing the mark. After all, people do have different tastes and styles they enjoy. I am saying that the upcoming generations in the U.S. cannot relate to the “old school” version of the typical church culture. It is becoming outdated.
Starting with NewPointe’s facilities, it is easy to see that the style is geared toward a younger audience, with its use of modern architecture, colors and sounds. Whether it is the café in the lobby, the big, colorful stage in the main auditorium, or the age-appropriate themed environments for both young and old, NewPointe has opportunities for everyone to come and get involved.

The public relations techniques used at NewPointe are each focused on a theme of relevance to the lives of the people in the general community. Using a “small groups” approach to integrating thousands of people who otherwise would not know each other is one of the ways the church succeeds in communicating its purpose and mission (DeAngelo). They are able to validate and know they are on target with this effective public relations approach through their numerical and financial growth. This approach is not unique to NewPointe; in fact, there are several churches in our local area that have benefited from utilizing the same PR model.

Northway Community Church and Orchard Hill Community Church have realized similar success. Like NewPointe, both of these local Pittsburgh area churches market their approach to church by taking an age old message and putting it into a fresh wrapper. Again, their approach to the vision and mission of their churches has been by building a network of small groups and then expanding through a multi-campus strategy. Each of these examples promotes themselves to the public as an alternative to “traditional” church. They lean heavily on the theme of relevance in their message, their music, their service (to others), and their programs. From my experience with these churches, I’ve notice that they basically make every attempt possible to present themselves as unlike “church” as they possibly can. When you consider how they approach their congregations on any given Sunday morning compared to the
mainstream denominational churches, they take the “we’re no different than you” tact, rather than giving the impression of “we have all the answers”. This is a huge public relations success because visitors don’t feel like they are being talked down to, but instead feel like the playing field is level.

**Improvement Suggestions**

Although NewPointe has done an exemplary job with its PR tactics, there are certain areas where I believe they could improve. First, they have a fairly professional website, but they definitely are not taking full advantage of everything a content rich site could give them. I have been looking at their website for a couple of years now, and some of the main pictures that I saw two years ago are still there! In today’s world of changed and updated information, they must provide a reason for viewers to come back to the site. Also, the content of their site is very concise which is good, but there is no way to drill deeper and get more information if and when you want it. They have a fantastic facility, that is extremely kid friendly, but the website provides no “how to” information. If I were a parent, I would want to know what’s available, and where to find it before I arrive.

Next, along the same lines, they definitely do not take full advantage of social media. Want to find a NewPointe service or a song on You Tube? You probably can’t find what you’re looking for. This is a huge disappointment to someone who wants to share their experience with a friend or family member in a timely manner. In fact, I believe that NewPointe could grow even more dramatically if they provided better on-line resources.

Finally, I believe they could improve their PR tactics by doing a better job of talking about their successes to the local media. They recently had a huge PR success with a coats-for-
kids project called the “Two Coats” campaign. It was splashed all over the local papers and even on the local Fox news channel. They could do a lot more of this: letting people know more about their community involvement programs. There is much to talk about when you consider that they have thousands of members involved in many, many worthwhile community related projects.

Ethics Statement

The Public Relations Society of America provides ethical guidelines to help ensure the quality and reputations of organizations. NewPointe Community Church is in compliance with these guidelines because they go above and beyond the standards of the following characteristics:

Advocacy:

NewPointe Community Church acts responsibly, keeping in mind the desires of the public. They listen to criticism and work to provide every need the congregation and local community has.

Honesty:

NewPointe Community Church recognizes the importance of honesty not just in the workplace, but in everyday life as well. They act in truth and integrity, leaving agendas behind. NewPointe exists to love people, not to manipulate them. The atmosphere of NewPointe is honest, promoting truth and reliability through the lives who need it most: Every single person with which they come into contact.

Expertise:

NewPointe Community Church offers trained leadership as-well-as a certified and licensed pastoral staff. Each church employee is specialized to a specific aspect of the
ministry which creates an environment of true proficiency throughout the entire church staff.

**Independence:**

NewPointe Community Church offers independent counseling from each employee and remains objective and private regardless of the situation. NewPointe feels it is called to encourage and help others deal with life issues. Some issues may be private, and they will remain that way because of the seriousness of personal privacy. NewPointe is accountable for all its actions as an organization. If an issue arises, they will work to fix it until the job is done. This will be done with objectivity.

**Loyalty:**

NewPointe Community Church will never leave someone in the dark. Their heartbeat is to devote their lives to the needs of not just those who walk through the doors, but anyone they come into contact with in everyday life. NewPointe shows the love of Christ no matter the situation, and will work to create a loyal church congregation.

**Fairness:**

NewPointe Community Church treats every person with love and compassion, just as Christ did. Everyone has a story; some tragic, some wonderful. NewPointe’s desire is to meet the needs of every person and to treat them with the love and respect they deserve. Any unfair situations are unacceptable and will be dealt with appropriately. NewPointe asks people to come as they are, so this church family will love them the way they are.
References

DeAngelo, David. Personal Interview by Steven Lowry. 30 Nov 2011.


