

The Biggest Mistake Church Leaders Can Make

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Since writing my book “[Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media](#),” I’ve had the opportunity to meet a number of experts in the field who have significant things to say to church leaders about the power of a great brand. One of those experts is [Denise Lee Yohn](#), author of the book “[What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles That Separate the Best from the Rest](#).” I asked Denise if she could share *one message* with pastors and ministry leaders today, what would it be? Here’s her answer. It’s counter-intuitive for many, but from my experience, worth considering:

Church leaders tend to make the same mistake as business leaders do. When it comes to deciding who their organization is for, they try to appeal to everybody. It’s the same mistake ministry leaders make when it comes to recruiting volunteers. And many non-profits make it in their fundraising.

Some pastors think they can and should be a church for all people. They want to reach as many people as they can (all for God’s glory, of course.) They don’t want to be exclusionary or unwelcoming — or even appear to be. They don’t want to miss out on helping people who come to them with needs or lose people who have been in their church for years. So they spread their resources across so many different ministries and programs that none have what they need to thrive. They make their worship services so generic that they end up being unmemorable. They try to include everyone in everything but end up with congregations that are connected only superficially. They preach so many different messages that no one is clear about what the church believes is really important.

Eventually they experience the same fate as businesses that chase customers — they fail to attract people, don’t

make much of an impact, and sometimes end up wondering if they really have a reason for being.

You don't have to take this path. You can make a wise and disciplined choice to stand for something clearly; to be for some people and not necessarily for others; to adopt a mission, values, personality, and scope of influence for your church that reflects a real point of view and specific calling. You can do what great brands do.

When you decide to be clear about your uniqueness and attract people with shared values instead of chasing everyone, you:

– **achieve greater resonance and impact** — like Red Bull, the energy drink brand that has become a legendary brand by adopting a somewhat alienating brand personality that appeals to rebellious students but turns off their teachers

– **are better able to serve the core people of your community** — like Sweetgreen, a fast-growing fast casual restaurant chain that decided it would no longer accept cash payments in order to speed up its service for those more profitable customers who pay with credit or mobile app

– **operate with greater integrity** — like CVS, the much-admired drugstore company that decided it was willing to lose \$2 billion in revenue by removing tobacco from its shelves in order to achieve its mission of helping people on their path to better health

Great brands don't chase customers; great churches don't chase people.

Blending a fresh perspective, twenty-five years of experience working with world-class brands including Sony and Frito-Lay, and a talent for inspiring audiences, [Denise Lee Yohn](#) is a leading authority on building and positioning exceptional brands. Denise is the author of the bestselling book, [What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles That Separate the Best from the Rest](#). Follow her on Twitter: [@deniseleeyohn](#).