



COURAGEOUS
STORYTELLERS

MEMBER RESOURCES FOR CHURCH COMMUNICATORS

THE NON-LEAD MAGNET

By Matt Ehresman

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If you pay any attention to online marketing gurus (there's a lot of them these days), you're probably familiar with the idea of a lead magnet. We've talked about them [quite](#) a [bit](#) recently on Courageous Storytellers. They're popular right now for good reason; if they're made and executed effectively, they generally work well.

Before we get any further, let's define terms so we're all on the same page. The basic idea behind lead magnets or "content marketing" is a business or organization provides some sort of valuable content (the "magnet") to their audience for free in exchange for their email address or other contact information (the "lead"). Once they have that, the organization generally adds them to an email marketing campaign where they receive a series of messages that ends in some sort of ask or sales pitch. For churches, maybe the eventual "ask" is to invite them to a special Sunday service, sign up for a giving campaign, or start volunteering with a new ministry.

This idea is effective because we've learned an important lesson: **Effective marketing comes down to trust.** If a customer trusts you, they're likely to purchase from you. The more they trust you, the more likely they are to come back and think of you next time they have a specific need you can fill.

If you're able to prove to your audience that you are an expert and are worth hiring through a piece of free content, it's totally worth it to give a piece of your knowledge away for free in the short term in order to gain their business in the long run.

All of that is great, but I believe we're in the early stages of a new chapter of content marketing.

THE PROBLEM

Since this formula has worked well in recent years, seemingly everyone is jumping on this bandwagon. I don't know about you, but I find myself subscribed to all sorts of email newsletters I have no interest in actually being on because the company suckered me into some sort of free font download or video teaching series I requested five years ago.

I got the freebie, and then I upheld my end of the deal by receiving their onslaught of marketing emails.

As more and more people find themselves in that situation, I think we'll begin to see a shift. What started out as a trusting relationship where I invited the business or organization to be my guide (to use the [Storybrand](#) language) has turned into a one-sided relationship where I quickly tire of seemingly endless sales pitches.

Which leads to an interesting discussion: What exactly does "trust" look like? Are companies really trustworthy if their gifts of free content come with strings attached and implied business benefits? It doesn't feel like they necessarily have my best interests in mind... Is that OK?

And if that is the approach, what does that mean for churches? Of all the organizations out there vying for attention, surely the churches should be known for being trustworthy, right? So what does that mean for the future of content marketing?

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

I'm currently trying something new at my church. We're in the early stages, so I should tell you up front that I have no data to back up this strategy. With that disclaimer out of the way, here's what we've started doing:

We're giving stuff away for free.

No email list. No drip campaign. No ask. No sales pitch. No invitation.

Just helpful content.

Our church is in a season where we're intentionally focusing our marketing efforts on young families. We brainstormed a number of ideas for content we could offer that would appeal to that audience. To that end, we've been working on a free ebook download that has helpful information for parents about the dangers of screen time.

- How much is too much?
- What are the actual dangers of "blue light"?
- What kinds of limits should parents set?

From my friends who are young parents, that is a "pain point" or "felt need" that I hear about regularly, so we did some research, got some quotes from local experts, and published an ebook with really helpful ideas.

Later we plan to offer a PDF that has a list of 10 places parents can take their kids for free activities over the summer.

We spoke to a local counselor who attends our church, and he agreed to help write another ebook with tips on how to parent children with different personality types.

By the end of the summer, we hope to release three of these downloads to our community for free. We plan to do a Facebook ad campaign targeting people nearby who haven't liked our Facebook page, and simply give them the content for free.

LONG RUN

To be fair, we do have our church name, service times, and a short write-up about us on the last page of these PDFs, but it is intentionally very brief and casual. If they choose to join us on a Sunday, that's great! But our goals are actually more long-term.

More than attracting new guests, our actual goal is to be seen as a trustworthy friend in our community. When a young parent needs help meeting some kind of practical need, I hope we eventually come to mind even if their need isn't inherently "spiritual."

WORTH IT

I admit: This is a time-consuming project. Doing this well will require valuable information and some sort of design work, as well as the administrative logistics of putting the content on your

website and executing the ad campaign.

But I'm learning this is a great way to take advantages of volunteers at your church. No matter what church you attend or what size the congregation is, you have an expert in something sitting across the aisle from you on Sundays. Maybe you have a veterinarian with tips on potty-training puppies, or teachers who have ideas of how to keep learning over the summer, or mechanics who know how to determine if a flat tire needs to be repaired or replaced.

Our church intentionally chose topics that were desirable to our target market of young parents. Your church may have a different target audience, and it would be wise for you to narrow down that target as you brainstorm content types for you to give away.

Whatever audience you choose, the fact remains: you can find someone in your church who is knowledgeable enough about something that your community would find valuable. Take advantage of that. Create helpful content, carve out some time to make it look nice, and put it out in the world.

Remember: The goal here is long-term trust, not immediate follow-up. Make sure your community knows you exist, you care, and you're committed to helping them without expecting anything in return. Instead of becoming a recurring nuisance in their email inbox, hopefully you'll be known and remembered as someone who truly cares—no strings attached—and that is what trust should look like.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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