

## **Ch. 8 Advertising**

### **OUTLINE OF STEPS COVERED IN CHAPTER EIGHT:**

#### **1. Evaluate Your Goals and Readiness**

- Invite Before Advertising
- Review Your Public Relations Practices
- Weigh the Costs

#### **2. Strengthen Public Relations and Hospitality Programs**

#### **3. Consider Cost-Effective Alternatives**

#### **4. Research Available Materials**

#### **5. Partner with Other Congregations**

- Get Advice from UUA and District Staff
- Consider Forming a Multi-Congregation Marketing Team

## **1. Evaluate Your Goals and Readiness**

- **Invite Before Advertising**

If your goal is congregational growth (and it always is when people decide they need to advertise), then ask yourselves some tough questions first:

- Are you truly ready to grow?
- Are you willing to add a weekly service?
- Do you have the space, staff, and programming to support growth?
- Do you currently retain a healthy number of newcomers?
- Do your members regularly invite friends to services?

If you can't answer "yes" to all of these questions, then you probably should not attempt a paid advertising campaign. In the meantime, the UUA's Department of Congregational Services ([www.uua.org/cde](http://www.uua.org/cde)) and your District Office can help you consider ways to prepare for growth.

- **Review Your Public Relations Practices**

Successful advertising needs to be supported by the benefits of a successful public relations effort. If you have not yet seen desired results from your public relations work, then advertising probably will not be effective. Keep working on your public and media relations goals for the time being.

- **Weigh the Costs**

In order to be effective, advertising has to be planned for maximum "impressions." That means that any effort must be sustained and repeated across a variety of media for a significant period of time if it is going to succeed. This translates

into months or years of media purchases in quantities large enough to have an impact. We're talking lots of money here! Most congregations need years of preparation and major additional contributions before their budgets can handle this extra demand.

## **2. Strengthen Hospitality Programs**

One of the most important lessons from the Kansas City congregations' test marketing campaign in 2003 was that ads can bring in visitors but only "radically hospitable" churches can keep them. It is a waste of money, energy, and hope to place ads without having an effective program to retain and integrate newcomers. The UUA's "Uncommon Denomination" website has a resource called "Welcoming and Hospitality" that can help your congregation better welcome visitors. The insights in this material are valuable for all congregations, whether or not they are in a position to purchase advertising. You can find it online at [www.uua.org/uncommon](http://www.uua.org/uncommon).

## **3. Consider Cost-Effective Alternatives**

Many communities have media that provide free or very low-cost opportunities to place your messages. Local cable news studios and college radio stations sometimes offer free broadcasting time and equipment provided that you supply to volunteer labor and on-air content. Thanks to a resourceful member, one congregation on Long Island managed to secure a free hour-long program spot each week on their town's cable access channel. Now they just have to find material for all that air time! Other possibilities in your community might include

- Public Service Ads
- Underwriting
- Community Calendars in newspapers and circulars
- Free advertising in Real Estate publications
- Notices in "town online" or other electronic city websites and community bulletin boards

#### **4. Research Available Materials**

Designing advertising material from scratch is very expensive. Find out what's already out there and what works for similar organizations. Appoint a research team to explore costs, options and materials from other congregations.

Over the past few years, several groups of UU congregations have undertaken marketing campaigns to promote their clusters and to bring awareness of UUism to their regions. Each campaign developed unique messaging and materials, some of which are available in template form for shared use. To find out more about the campaigns, please visit their websites:

“Uncommon Denomination” campaign from Kansas City area congregations (2002)  
<http://www.uua.org/programs/congservices/uncommon/>

“I Believe” campaign from the San Diego Cluster (2005): [www.uusandiego.org/](http://www.uusandiego.org/)

“Imagine a Religion” campaign from Houston area Congregations (2005):  
<http://www.uua.org/news/2005/houston/index.html>

#### **5. Partner with Other Congregations**

- **Get Advice from UUA and District Staff**

If your congregation is determined to invest in a serious advertising campaign, please consult with UUA headquarters and your district staff first. These professionals can help you navigate the options and advise you about the risks and opportunities.

- **Consider Forming a Multi-Congregation Marketing Team**

A good option may be to partner with other nearby congregations. The major campaigns described above would not have been possible as solo efforts. By partnering

you can share the cost and extend the duration and penetration of your campaign. You can also multiply the creativity and energy of your volunteers. Over the long term, one of the most significant benefits of a shared marketing effort is increased visibility and name-recognition for Unitarian Universalism in your region. Your district executive can help coordinate a multi-congregation exploratory conversation around this possibility.