After 36 years as a church member and leader, and for the last few years Communication director in a Phoenix church, I was faced for the first time by an interesting, and unfortunate, situation that I must share. It was a true eye-opener.

An elder and good friend from a church in Wisconsin drove to Phoenix to spend a few weeks doing some evangelistic work at our church. On his return, he drove through five states. On Friday and then again on Sabbath, he called asking if I would locate on my computer a church along the way, as he wanted to stop by for Sabbath worship and hopefully some good Seventh-day Adventist hospitality.

To make a long story short, and not wanting to mention any cities to avoid making anyone feel uncomfortable, I called about 18 to 20 churches, both English and Spanish, in Texas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. I located them using Google Maps.

Believe it or not, on a Sabbath morning I was able to speak to a live person at just one church! Another church had a voice message option. I left a message but have not
to this day received a return call. At all other churches, the phone rang with no one to answer and no voice message option. The one church that answered my call saved the day because my friend was able to join them for worship. Would it be safe to say that that church is the only one that is properly reaching out to the world?

Would you agree that a telephone number listing is useless without someone to either answer the phone or an option to leave a message on the answering machine? If there is no way to make contact, the purpose is simply defeated. It is critical to the success of our mission for people to be able to find us in a directory and to reach us through guidance, counsel, a new spiritual home, or simply just to visit. If we are not available to them, we have failed.

The experience enabled me to put in place a set of tools that has helped our church to lead in the area of communication. For just a few dollars and little effort, we improved our system. I’d like to share it with you.

Understanding today’s advances and the proliferation of internet-based communications, we MUST take advantage of that.

**Google Maps** – Google Maps is critical for people to find us online, and this is how you do it: Go to Google Maps and you will see on the top left corner the line: “Put your business in Google Maps.” Create an account completely free and follow the simple instructions. There you have the opportunity to add useful information about your church such as address, phone numbers, Web site, services, times, photos, your logo, etc. By default, when people find you on Google Maps, only your name, address, one phone number, Web site and one image of your choice will show. But, when people click on “More Info” they will see all the additional information you listed about your church. When you complete the Google Maps application, they will mail a letter to the church’s physical address to confirm the address. It will arrive in a few days, and when it does, just follow the simple instructions, enter the code provided, and you are set! In one day, your church will show up beautifully on Google Maps. Having created an account there, you can change the information at any time.

**Phone Listing** – Another critical component of your communications is to be available on the phone. You can have a landline number, but there is a problem of limited functionality. I strongly recommend getting a toll free number as well. We use and recommend Kall8 (www.Kall8.com) but there are plenty of other companies. This one is very inexpensive and provides many very useful tools: You can choose an 800 number (800, 877, 866, etc.), or a local number that acts as a 800# while giving the idea of being just a local number. You can route the number to ring at multiple numbers (including cell phones) such as the church office at days and hours when there is someone there, or at other number(s) (e.g.: the pastor, secretary, communication director, volunteers, etc.) during the rest of the week, or simply go to voice mail during days or hours when
no one is available to take calls (for example in the middle of the night). You have the choice to record calls, secure caller ID, email call information and messages to your inbox, etc. It’s phenomenal, and the cost is just $5/month plus 0.7 cents/minute. We never spend over $10 to $20 because of course we only get a few calls per month, but when we do, people always find us. Do not promote the toll free number in church for member’s regular calls. Members should call the church landline or the pastor. The toll-free number is for outreach, to be used in Google Maps, your Web site, the phone book, etc. Although you should ALWAYS take church calls, you MUST have a live person taking calls on Sabbath and whenever you have other important activities.

**Church Web Site** – Having a good Web site is also an important tool for both your members as well as for outreach. If you don’t know how to create a professional Web site, the North American Division has made it a simple process so that every church in North America can have a working Web site. Go online to http://www.adventistchurchconnect.com. Follow the instructions to set up a free Web site. Our church Web site was awarded the eChurch Award for developing one of the top 12 Seventh-day Adventist Church Web sites in the North American Division. You can see our current church Web site at www.DeerValleySpanish.org to get a feel of how resourceful a Web site can be. When you have a Web site, you need to offer a church email option with your Web site name. e.g.: info@DeerValleySpanish.org.

Although having a Facebook page is an excellent outreach tool, it does not offer real value when it comes to local people trying to make contact.

With these tools in place, you will be blessed with an effective Communication ministry capable of helping people in your local church, in our church as a denomination, and in your community.

*Martin Gondra is the Communication Director at the Phoenix Deer Valley Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church in Phoenix, AZ.*

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**Quick Start Guide for Church Communication Directors**

*Created by the NAD Communication Department*

Whether you are a new or experienced church communication director, this *Quick Start Guide* can help you share your church’s message. Learn about connecting with your church and community as well as the conference communication department. This *Quick Start Guide* also includes information about the church bulletin and newsletter, publicizing your church’s events, church Web sites, blogs and social media, and more.

Available from AdventSource at www.adventsource.org or 800.328.0525. Catalog #250120 $2.95 each. Quantity discounts are available.
Local Church Communicators Apply Here!

SAC offers the training and networking you need

by Kimberly Luste Maran

Where could a local church communicator learn photography tips from the pros, sample new technology, and network with other Adventist communicators? The same place they’d attend a media tour, listen to informative presentations from widely-known communication experts, and have dinner with eager college students—at the annual Society of Adventist Communicators convention.

“It was good to be there and meet with people in the industry, in the field,” says Rich Herard, in regard to attending two conventions, including the most recent in Rochester, New York. Herard, who works in multi-media for the Anne Arundel County Police Department in Maryland, was program director for Miracle Temple Networks of the Miracle Temple Seventh-day Adventist Church in Baltimore, Maryland. “It’s good to be able to share and see what the common trends are, and see what is working or not working. People have the opportunity to brainstorm, and learn how they can do things better.”

“A SAC convention is like a salad bowl of great people with incredible ideas,” says Steve Vistaunet.

Seasoned professionals mix with college students and local church communicators—and everyone gains something new. It’s an exciting, inspiring environment that encourages all of us to sharpen our skills and refresh our focus on the Adventist mission.”

But why specifically should a local church communication leader attend? “It’s an eye opener,” Herard explains. “It shows local communicators what we’re doing right, what we can do better, and what is being done currently [in the field].”

Herard adds, “It empowers you on the local level. Sometimes, on the local level, you feel like you’re in a vacuum. You feel like you’re the only one dealing with this [task], and you wonder how you are going to get this done. Then you find out you’re not the only one, someone has a recipe for this. Someone you didn’t even know who was were right next door and doing the same thing! Great!”

With technology that’s no longer cost-prohibitive, many churches now have the potential to really communicate their stories, their projects, their ministries. But the local leaders, who have Web sites, cameras, and blogs at their finger tips need training. What better place than a SAC convention?

Herard, who has also presented workshops in photography and “backpack journalism,” says, “Local leaders need more training to use the tools they now have access to. A lot of churches, for example, have Web sites. At SAC they can learn how to better manage their sites. You attend a convention and you’re going to bring back something. You’re going to learn a lot.

“The people are warm and friendly, open and sharing—and being in the regular media industry, I know that doesn’t happen—it’s about ratings and getting the story out before the competitor … that is not the case at SAC. [With SAC] we have a warm and beautiful advantage.”

Register today at
http://www.adventistcommunicator.org/article.php?id=49