



interACTIVE
church

manual

What is the interACTIVE church?

Interactive is defined as acting with each other. In more recent times, technology is said to be interactive when it requires user input and the interface responds to that input. The distinctive element of interactivity is that it is two way. It relies on connection and experience. We have developed “the interactive church” as the concept of a church that is externally focused. That is, it is involved and part of its community. The challenge for churches is to create experiences for the external community that people will find worthy. This booklet looks at how churches can build those experiences. How do people experience your church in the community?

The interactive church looks at ways and means of getting noticed, creating connection and building relationships.

Why do we need to be interactive?

The argument from some is that people will seek out the church when they feel the need in their lives and when the Spirit leads them. The truth is that if our church closed its doors, most of the communities that we are in would not notice a change.

Our latest research on the Seventh-day Adventist Church shows that over 70% of people do not know of us at all or know our name but know little else. If people are not aware we exist, why would they want to experience what we offer?

The bottom line is that we need to be part of the community if we expect them to be part of our community.

How to use this manual?

The interactive church manual is a guide to practical ways your church can become externally focused. The 5 point plan is a simple list of ideas for your church to consider. Some of them are fairly easy and straight forward while others require more significant investment in time and resources. It's a matter of going through step by step and determining your strategy.

This guide makes reference to resources available through Adventist Media Network and other suppliers. You can access these resources and links through the website adventistmedia.org.au or on CD. Many of these resources are free to download. Our aim is to equip our churches resources to help them profile and engage themselves in the community. This guide will hopefully be a good starting point. Remember to jot down your ideas as you go.

1

Make sure people know who you are and where you are

There are some basic steps that every church can take to create good visibility and awareness.

Good signage

Your sign must prominently display the church name and logo. This should look professional and clean – not falling off and illegible. It is also important to use the right church logo. The more churches using the correct logo, the more impact we have in portraying ourselves as an extensive worldwide denomination.

In addition, you should consider the following information on your sign:

- Contact number
- Website
- Service times
- Space for special promotion of events

ACTION: To get some help with your signage, contact your conference Communication Director who may put you in touch with some preferred suppliers. Adventist Media Network is also able to assist you in developing new signage for your church. Signage samples are available for you to consider.

Website

Many churches have discovered the benefits of using a website. Here in the South Pacific Division, every Adventist church has a website. Your church's website can be its most important communication and marketing tool. Websites allow visitors to find out more about you than they would normally obtain from a conversation or a flyer. They can find out where you are, how to get to your church and the programs you run.

An extensive training and support program has been developed for churches that join the web network. Did you know the platform we use allows your church to...

- Customise content for your church
- Create an events calendar
- Share your news with other churches or the conference
- Upload sermons and pictures
- Share church business meeting minutes and agendas with committee members only

The more you use your website, the more you'll discover its potential. From a promotional perspective, it is easy to promote your website with the marketing resources we have developed. It's also simple but effective to put the website address on signs, posters, letters, and promotional items like t-shirts, pens, balloons etc.

ACTION: Contact Adventist Media Network's Web Ministry team to find out how to access your local church website or for information regarding training and support. Visit: web.adventist.org.au

General advertising and directory listing

Are you where people will look for you? Churches should consider where they can promote and list their church details. An obvious place to start is the Yellow and White pages.

Before proceeding, churches need to consider the contact details they promote. Churches should have a contact number (even if it is a mobile) and preferably an email address. We recommend having a dedicated church phone number. Of course many of our churches are not open during the week, but you can have the number re-directed or use an answering machine that is checked regularly. Having a dedicated phone number for the church creates a sense of professionalism and more importantly, it doesn't change even when leadership does.

At second best, the church pastor or elder should use their home or mobile number as the contact number for the church. Once you have established the point of contact, this can be listed in the common directories people use. Make sure your church is listed under Seventh-day Adventist Church. It should be free unless the number is listed elsewhere - another reason why churches should consider having a dedicated number.

Church contact details can be listed in a range of places including:

- Other local directories such as Pink Pages
- Tourist information directories
 - Local hotel directories

It is also important to list your church wherever relevant on the internet. This includes, search engines, local tourist sites, Christian websites etc.

You may even want to consider some paid promotion. Develop a flyer and ask to place it in local hotels. Pay for Google ads so that when people "google" your town, your church comes up. Or have a regular advertisement in your local paper

The important step is to establish points of contact such as phone, email and preferably website. Having only an address will limit the ability to list your church in other places.

2

Give your visitors a warm welcome

The corporate world has long understood the importance of looking after their customers. Our churches should follow their example by giving priority to our visitors. Instilling a warm and friendly culture is at the core of becoming externally focused. Churches can create a welcoming environment by being presentable and friendly as well as by making sure visitors leave with a meaningful experience. Remember - first impressions last.

Visitors' welcome pack

Churches should consider developing a visitors' informational or welcome pack. Commonly this would be brochures or flyers which include an outline of various aspects of the church such as: its mission/purpose, an overview of ministries, contact details, feedback form and other relevant information about your church and its programs. The feedback form is especially effective. If you can get visitors to fill it out the same day, you have their contact details and can follow them up.

Some churches go a step further by compiling a welcome "bag" which includes the above information as well as other items which may be of interest to visitors. This is not a complex or extremely expensive process but is very effective. Here are some other things you may consider:

- There are flyers and brochures that you can include in your pack such as "What do Adventists believe?" and "What do you hope for?"
- Pens, magnets and other promotional products can be branded with your logo and details. These work well as giveaways. Determine your budget and what sort of products you would like to consider.
- Discovery letterbox cards are free for churches to distribute.
- Signs of the Times magazines can be purchased cheaply in bulk.
- There are small Adventist books available through ABC

ACTION: A sample welcome pack is available to download via www.adventistmedia.org.au. Churches can also buy the folders or develop their own. Adventist Media can also provide advice and contacts for promotional items and giveaways.

Information stand

It is worth investing in a brochure or information stand in your church foyer. You can display a number of different flyers, brochures, magazines, newsletters and even books. Many of these materials are available at no or very little cost. Possible content includes:

- Signs of the Times magazines
- Discovery course invitation cards
- Video invitation cards
- "What do Adventists believe" flyer
- "What do you hope for" brochure
- Church events calendar
- Newsletters from various entities and departments such as ADRA,
- Sanitarium Nutrition Service, children's ministry, women's ministry etc.

ACTION: Adventist Media Network can supply you with some of these or point you in the right direction for other materials

Church library

Many churches run a library of books and DVDs that church members borrow from. Investigate developing a section for new believers that visitors could browse through or members could be encouraged to borrow from for their friends and family.

ACTION: Adventist Media Network's Book Department is able to assist you with ideas about setting up your church library or with specific contents such as materials for new believers.

Church brochure

Churches focused on reaching the community and wanting to make an impression should consider developing an individual brochure about their church. It can be an engaging way of telling people who you are and what you represent. These can be included not only in your visitors' packs, but handed out at church outreach events, letterbox dropped or even mailed.

Churches with greater resources could explore using other various media to present their church in a professional, friendly and exciting ways such as creating an informational DVD/CD about their church. Imagine featuring little snippets of the church at worship, interviews with members, highlights of past programs and whatever else helps engage your community.

ACTION: If you're ready to consider developing a brochure or DVD, Adventist Media Network can help. They have plenty of samples on hand. Alternatively, if you have welcome packs, brochures or anything else you give visitors, send us a sample so we can share it with others.

3 Create Professionalism

While it is important to be friendly it is just as important to be professional. Being professional is not only about making a good impression but it is also reflected in our day-to-day operations. This includes good practices such as; starting events on time, having agendas and minutes for meetings, having a process for financial reimbursement etc. Here are a few practical considerations for your church.

Business cards, letterhead and merchandising

Most organisations will have their own stationery; from the local sports club to the multinational corporate company. Churches should not be any different. The General Conference has designed a range of stationery including business cards and letterheads which is available for all churches. Alternatively, design your own based on the logo format and colours. It should be clean, professional and consistent across all stationery.

It is important that all pastors have a business card. These should not only be given to visitors but at any networking opportunity. Pastors are representing their church to the community including to media, other community organisations and other contacts. It may also be worth developing business cards for other major leaders in your local church.

Just a point to note, in this Division, all pastors also have an official church email address. The format is [firstnamesurname]@adventist.org. [country e.g. au, nz, fj etc.]. Contact your conference to follow up on this.

Church bulletins and/or newsletters can also be developed on a designed template matching your church stationery.

ACTION: Adventist Media Network is able to assist your church to design and print your church stationery. Some conferences may wish to coordinate a major run for all pastors at once. Check with your local conference first.

Merchandising

Apart from having your own branded stationery, you should consider other ways of increasing awareness of your church. This is especially important if you are involved in community or outreach activities. T-shirts, name badges, pens, balloons etc. are an investment into increasing awareness of your church and creating a perception of professionalism.

ACTION: Adventist Media Network is able to help advise churches and provide contacts for branded merchandise.

Plan your activities

All churches should have some sort of plan or strategy which outlines the over arching mission and purpose, goals, strategies and activities. If a church does not plan for growth, it will rarely happen. Growth needs to be an intentional effort that, together with prayer and commitment, will bring renewed energy and focus.

You should not be intimidated about developing a plan if you haven't got one. Begin with reviewing what you currently do, the resources available and the areas of interest for your church. Remember it is far better to do few things well rather than doing many things poorly. Planning helps your church prioritise its activities.

Formal Meetings

The underlying objective of conferences is to support churches in their ministry efforts. A church that can produce and present a professional strategic plan of how they are impacting their community will benefit from sharing their plans with their conference. Not only is this good from a communication point of view, but it can create major opportunities such as raising funding, promotion, and assistance in a number of other areas.

In addition, churches should engage formal meetings with other bodies such as the local council, network of churches and any other relevant committee or organisation. Councils particularly are an important entity that many churches neglect. Church leadership should consider meeting them at least annually. They should be aware of your church and the services it has and can provide for the community.

Developing relationships with council representatives will give you an opportunity to investigate how your church can contribute to the local community. Discuss needs and future trends. Find out if there is funding for particular relevant projects that your church could consider taking on. Consider inviting them to your events.

You need to tell the community what you are doing if you want the community to know what you are doing.

4 Promote and share your news and events

Promoting your event

There are so many ways of promoting your event that it is sometimes overwhelming to know where to start. Here are some very basic and effective promotional strategies.

The old fashioned, tried and true way to attract participants is with flyers and posters! In designing your flyer remember these points:

- Keep it simple – go back to the key messages and make sure you've included them
- If the message and content is relevant – people will read it. Spend more time getting this right rather than the design.
- The visual appeal is still important – for those less creative - templates are extremely valuable
- Don't forget a call to action – e.g. register your attendance
- Don't forget contact and other details such as venue, date/time, cost etc.

In terms of distribution, think widely.

- Obviously pass them on to members to give to friends
- Letterbox your local area. You could consider paying a distributor. It is not too expensive - around \$70 per 1000 flyers in urban areas.
- Place them up in your grocery store, the library, doctor's office, dry cleaner and any other place that will allow you.
- Community notice boards are great. Find them in your shopping centre, the local McDonalds, hospitals and other commercial outlets.

Other promotional ideas

- Most newspapers have a calendar that lists the date, time, place and cost of any local event. Check with your local paper to find out how far in advance information is needed.
- Think about direct mailing and/ or emailing people on your contact list. This includes past visitors, "Search" video contacts, past event attendees and non-attending church members. If you have not got a list, it is worth creating one. Include a friendly invitation cover letter with your flyer.
- Promote your event on your website. People should be able to email their RSVP.
- Don't forget your internal communication channels such as church bulletin and notice board.

Media Relations

One of the ways the community will develop a positive disposition towards your church is if they read about the good things your church is doing in the community.

The best way to do this is by getting a story about your church and its activities published in your local paper for free. You do not have to pay to advertise your event if your local media is interested in featuring what your church is doing as a news item.

Is your church planning a special Christmas program like feeding the homeless? Maybe it runs a regular Vacation Bible School for children in the community? Or perhaps there is a group of ladies who knit blankets for orphans as a ministry?

This is what you can do:

1. Give the papers and/or radio station a call - ask for the news desk or to talk to a reporter
2. Tell them you've got a story you think they may be interested in
3. They'll ask you what it is, so give them the gist of what the story is
4. They may either ask to interview someone, or they may ask you to send them more information
5. Send some information through to them, with your contact details (if you have problems writing something, feel free to give me a call)
6. If you don't hear from them after a couple of days, give them a call back and ask them if they got your information and inquire if they need further info, photo or want to organise an interview
7. By now, you'll get a pretty good idea whether they're interested in doing the story or not. If they're not, leave it at that. You don't want to annoy them by being too pushy.

Don't forget to put your news stories on your church website where visitors and church members can read. Also, if your church website is on the South Pacific web network, it has the potential to be displayed on all the other church websites.

Send it in to Adventist Media Network as well. Your news story could be featured in a future issue of Record, or Adventist News InFocus online.

If you are the church communications person (or communications secretary), it is important that you become familiar with collecting and disseminating news. A manual has been specially developed for this role. If you are keen to learn more about communications, you can receive a quarterly Communication Info newsletter

ACTION: Contact Adventist Media Network – public relations team to find out how you can develop relationships with your local media, write news articles, or to receive a free manual for the local church communicator. You can ask to be put on the email list for the quarterly communication info newsletter.

5 Connect with your community

It is not enough for churches to simply be open three to four hours a week and expect anyone who wants to connect with them to do so in that timeframe in that one location. The idea of connecting with community helps us to be more in touch with their needs.

Research

A good place for churches to understand the community and the needs of that community is to do some research. Demographic profiles of your community should be available from your local council as well as from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This not only includes basic demographics such as age, income, ethnicity, family structure but can also include religious affiliation, health and other analysis.

Another option for churches is to survey their local community. Ask them what they would like to see more of or less of in the community. Ask them what community service your church could provide. Even use it as an opportunity to get people on your mailing list or signing up for bible study or a search video viewing.

ACTION: Adventist Media network has links where free demographical data may be available. They also have a sample survey churches can use to research their community. It may also worth contacting your conference to see if they have any relevant research available.

Building your network

It is undisputed that most Adventists church members have mostly Adventist friends. A relatively easy way of connecting with the community is to join local committees and clubs. Examples include Chamber of Commerce, various interest clubs, playgroups, planning groups etc.

How about considering using your facilities to host a group. For example, many of our churches are starting to run playgroups during the week. Just getting people to come to the church facilities can create major opportunities. As people become familiar with the premises, they would become aware of your resources and events and activities, hopefully promoted on your notice board and in your information stand (see section 2). This could lead them to attending other programs.

Social networking

This is the new buzz word for internet based sites that engage people to build relationships with others online – but it is far more than email. Social networking has revolutionised the way we connect and share information with one another in today's society. It is people using websites to engage with existing friends and communities and meet new people over the internet. People share opinions, news, photos, videos, life thoughts, journal entries and basically anything they want.

You may have heard of sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Youtube. Churches can consider starting a group. This may be particular useful to create links with people who have left your church. You can also send invitations to events or post small video clips of church happenings.

It is important that churches understand the power of social networking as a means of connecting with others and promoting your event or church.

It is worth investigating how your church can get involved in social networking. Chances are your young people are already using it!

Identifying Community Programs

Any attempt we make to integrate and connect with the community is because we ultimately want to reveal Jesus Christ. In recent decades, our church has resorted on major evangelistic programs and therefore local churches are often doing relatively little in terms of intentional outreach activities. Understandably, the reliance on personnel (which is often in a volunteer capacity) is an underlying issue.

There is a plethora of program options churches could investigate running from running a Revelation seminar to a community based program such as a fitness class. All are outreach as they aim to connect people to the church and to Jesus. The key is to ensure there is always the next step to engage again. For example, if someone attends a creative activities class, they should be given a "welcome registration pack" which has information about the church, they should be invited to the next major

church event, they should receive the church newsletter etc.

In planning, it is important to choose the right mix of programs. As we said earlier, it is far better to do few things well rather than doing many things poorly.

Here is a recommended criterion in choosing programs

- Relatively easy to manage with current resources
- An area of passion for members of the church
- An area of strength for members of the church
- An area of need in the community

With any program you run remember these keys to success:

1. Plan, plan, plan – creating a professional program is imperative. Make sure you write down your key objectives and purpose as well as a plan of activities and responsibilities.
2. Promote your program effectively (see section 4)
3. Make people register for any community event – even if it is free. This allows you to gather people contact details and start building a contact list (this can be used for future events). Make sure you also ask where they found out about the program so you can find out what promotion works.
4. Have a feedback form at the end of every program so you can see where you can improve and find out other opportunities for new programs.
5. Have an evaluation process for your leadership team

ACTION: Brainstorm community project ideas with your leaders and members. Develop a plan of action. Adventist Media Network will be compiling a list of ideas for activities. Don't forget to share your ideas so others can be inspired!

Ministry Resources

Quite a number of outreach programs and resources already exist within our church. It is a matter of getting to know what's available and identifying options for using the resources.

Video Lending

The search series and other video lending are the more well known personal ministry resources. Predominantly marketed through letterbox cards (available free to churches to handout) and TV advertising, people are invited to view a specific DVD (or video). These names and numbers are collected by Adventist Media Network and passed on to the local church to organise a representative to personally deliver the DVD. These DVDs are often in a series and therefore the representative continues to collect and deliver DVDs while building on the relationship.

ACTION Adventist Media Network's Adventist Discovery Centre has extensive training and support resources available to assist churches in their video lending ministry. Conferences occasionally run training seminars for pastors and church leaders.

Discovery courses

The Adventist Discovery Centre has 13 courses covering the areas: Lifestyle, Health, Relationships, Archaeology and Biblical studies. While these are promoted as correspondence and online courses, the material is excellent for church leaders to use as bible study guides or seminar references. Online courses are especially interesting to younger generations who prefer the interactivity the internet provides.

ACTION: Adventist Discovery can assist you in identifying courses that are appropriate for your particular use. Alternatively you can letterbox your community with cards. These cards are available to your church for free.

Displays

Most communities have local fairs or a shopping centre where displays could be set up. Many churches have found an easy way to profile their church is by setting up a display stand. This is a great way to mingle with the community and promote your programs. These opportunities are also useful for finding out about what people know about your church. If you do decide to have a display, make sure you have a reason for people to visit your stand. Don't just have flyers and posters, but give passers-by something to do or take away.

Some suggestions include:

- Kids activities such as face painting, balloon sculpting or crafts
- Vegetarian food tasting or selling
- Free Course registration
- Health check up activities: Your Health Age simulation, blood pressure check,
- Free giveaways: books, bibles, DVDs, promotional items such as pens, flyers, etc

ACTION: Adventist Media Network is able to source promotional items and give aways for you. Your conference Health Department may assist you in organising Your Health Age simulation. Adventist Discovery has a range of expo/display packs for churches to borrow to promote their courses.

Signs of the Times

Our Signs of the Times Magazine is a resource that is especially developed to target the wider community. While it can be available in our churches and through church members, churches could investigate sponsoring a stand at a local retailer, Doctor's surgery or other outlet. Of course permission would need to be obtained beforehand.

It might be worth placing your local church invitation card or promotion of your church events inside these magazines for local residents.

ACTION: Signs of the Times success strategies can be discussed with Adventist Media Network's Signs Office.

Local Radio Station

Many churches are involved with local radio stations. This is an excellent way of connecting with the wider community. It is important to use these opportunities to engage people. You can invite them to learn more about Christianity, lifestyle, and the bible as well as inviting them to your church and your church programs.

ACTION: Adventist Media Network has a developed programming for radio stations (Hope Radio) that can be used freely by any church. They have also a range of advertisements promoting discovery courses and other products and services. The Health Department has a compilation of 30sec tips that can also be used throughout your program.

Other Ministry Resources

There are a number of other resources available to churches to assist them with their ministry efforts. These include:

- Australian Union Conference Resource Centre
- Christian Services for the Blind and Hearing Impaired
- Hope Channel Satellite ministry

A Final Note

Step by step your church can be an integral part of the community which it belongs. But there is a final step to becoming an interactive church. It is submitting our plans to God and praying over them. A church that is externally focused and Christ centred is ready to face the challenge of growing their church for the kingdom.

In the end, it is our desire to share the message of hope that should compel us to do as Jesus did and reach out.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5: 14-16



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