

**MARKETING THE CHURCH:
WHAT THEY NEVER TAUGHT
YOU ABOUT CHURCH GROWTH.**

George Barna, (Colorado Springs, CO.:

NavPress, 1988, 172 pgs.

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How do you react to the title, Marketing the Church? When I first read an article entitled this, I had serious problems with the title because I felt churches didn't need to take the business model more into its ministry than it already had. But as I read the book, it began to make sense. What we already are involved in through our churches or BSU's is marketing. We study to make the product fit the audience, we attempt to continue to be relevant to the needs of the persons with whom we minister.

Barna is a professional at helping churches market their product. In his book, he attempts to overcome the many excuses he has heard against marketing the church. He even goes so far as to say that Jesus was a master marketing expert, in his approach of meeting people where they are. The apostle Paul also is mentioned as a marketing expert. He feels the Bible is one of the greatest marketing texts available. I'll bet it hasn't been called that too often!

Barna's book rests on basically four premises:

1. The church is a business. It is involved in the business of ministry.
2. Marketing is essential for a business to operate successfully.
3. The Christian church in America, with a few exceptions, does not have a marketing perspective regarding its growth and development.
4. Many evangelical Christians are sufficiently concerned

about the condition of our nation and the state of the Church to seriously consider alternative approaches to building up the Church through the local church body. (pp. 26-27)

Barna says that the church is competing whether it likes it or not, and needs to make the most of that. "The local church competes with other organizations for the time, attention, money, loyalty — in short, the heart—of people. The real competition is not with other churches — it is with organizations, opportunities, and philosophies that provide people with an alternative to the Christian life." (p. 28) Who of us, even in BSU work, has not felt this competition with many other things, and many of these very good things. Students decide to do many things and often may leave off the best, just as do their parents.

Barna goes on to give some very practical steps for churches (or BSU's) to take, to market their product. He explains how marketing might be used, how to go about doing it within the context of the local church, and gives many resources to consult in this task. One of the most practical chapters deals with "Tactics," and in this one he discusses things such as advertising through newspapers, home visitation, personal invitation, and telemarketing. He places these into the categories of traditional tactics, tactics that work, and high risk tactics. He tells why each category may or may not work. His discussion of newspaper ads was of interest, especially since I found I've done much in this area that really was wasted. There is some good information here!

One problem with the book is that he doesn't center enough attention on the role of the Holy Spirit, though he does say that all these marketing techniques can't make the Church work, without the Lord's help. He discusses the dangers of using these techniques and coming to glorify them instead of the Lord who inspired them.

This is a well written book that might be helpful in provoking thought to see the campus with new eyes. It might help those of us who have been in campus ministry for some time, to dream new dreams, and to go back to studying our

campus from time to time. It might help us to put some of our "programs" on the shelf for other more relevant and exciting ministries, especially if we take Barna at his word and utilize the expertise of students to help us market the BSU.

This is certainly not a book full of proof texts, but it is a very relevant and practical book, worthy of your attention if you wish to see your BSU grow and become more in tune with the needs of persons on your campus.

Pick the book up and see if it is usable in your setting. If not, at least you have some new things to discuss with your fellow campus ministers at meetings.