

3 ways you should start over with your church communications

One of the most loosely defined roles I've seen breakdown over the past decade is "Church Communications Director." The title is used liberally as a synonym for all things graphics, web, marketing, writing, comms, creative, social, video, branding, etc.

Bad communications start with a bad definition.

The list of expectations I've seen put on this one catch-all role are wild:

- design requests from multiple departments with little to no lead time
- ensure high attendance and event registrations
- intercept and manage crisis relations
- craft internal communications to unify staff
- write creative marketing campaigns to win over external audiences
- build and run social media calendars
- surge digital and physical engagement metrics
- increase donors
- fill volunteer teams
- guard brand consistency
- direct and produce short films
- demonstrate a successful ministry metrics
- drive book store sales
- accumulate 5-star satisfaction ratings in all church surveys and app reviews
- inspire people to life transformation
- work 7 day/week full-time schedule on part-time salary

Not only are some of these responsibilities out of any single person's capacity to deliver on ever, many of them shouldn't be regulated to a single department or role. This is not a new problem. But it is a problem that's been accelerated at mach speed post-COVID.

Under Pressure

Churches aren't alone in this. The business sector is experiencing the same problem with Chief Marketing Officers (CMO), the equivalent to the Church Comms Director. Increased pressure to provide more output, in more places, on a shorter timeline with smaller budgets and better results is putting marketing and communications professionals in a confusing and precarious state. And some companies are starting to recognize the problem.

“The role has become too big to succeed at and too easy to fail at.”

- Allen Adamson, managing partner Metaforce

Failure can look like cluttered messages, serious external brand mishaps, internal team dysfunction, or the real cost and headache of replacing key players who walk away with extreme burn out. (This is no joke. Communication leaders are burning out at a disproportionately high rate.)

Leaders are taking notice. The number of high-profile brands reshuffling, redefining or eliminating their marketing roles all together is growing. And, that's a good thing. These changes are designed to integrate a reimagined role back into building unified cultures and growing the business.

How should you start over with your church communications role under this kind of pressure?

■ Define your strategy before you define the work

High volumes of creative content with quick turnarounds is putting the cart before the horse.

Let's make sure we're doing the right work before we try to do more work.

If you don't know where you're going, how can you set an accurate course? I've learned this the hard way, but communication makes marketing work, not the other way around. Just because something looks good to us, and makes us feel good about what we're doing, doesn't mean it's actually contributing to the bottom line.

Marcomm is a very real and necessary interdependency. In other words, marketing requires a corresponding communications strategy to meet your objectives. **Start with a communications strategy designed around the values of your organization, with clearly defined wins, before you figure out what marketing projects you need run.**

Start Here → [Sample Communications Charter](#)

■ Define the right role before you assign the role

In too many cases, the “catch-all Church Communications Director” fails to win because they have all of the responsibility without the authority or all of the authority with none of the responsibility. There are no winners if you fill a position without an awareness of the difference between function, competency, and capacity.

- If you expect a graphic designer to drive organizational strategy appropriate for a senior-level leader, you’ve put them in an oversized role where the title outweighs their capacity.
- If you put a strategic competent leader in role reduced to project execution, you’ve stripped them of access to steer results.

Identify a communications advocate who helps keep the strategy in front of people at all times. They may not be the decision-maker, but they know what questions to ask and how to get things done.

Communication Advocates can make everyone more effective by:

1. **Narrowing the focus** to make a connection
2. **Making content personable** to encourage participation
3. **Pivoting outward** to make content usable and shareable

The Communications Advocate role can sit at any level in the organization at all kinds of capacity. The key is to have one. **Look around your organization and ask, who can be our advocate?**

If you're struggling to determine appropriate expectations for a role, this might help. Many times, the right person can carry a little from each category. But, it's important to clarify what percentage of their job is dedicated to what. Be objective about any areas where they might need support to fill gaps (in mindset and skill set).

DIRECTOR

Leads at a high organizational level; directs strategy and teams

- Chief vision and brand advocate
- Strategic leader, champions organizational culture, values and goals
- Provides clarity for internal and external content
- Simplifies the complex from 30,000 ft. to 3 ft.
- Develops people
- Works **on** the business so others can work **in** it
- Sits on the executive team or has regular collaborative connection with executive team

Alternative: **Executive Champion, CMO, Experience Director, Creative Director**

MANAGER

Leads at a project level; directs timelines, tasks, and people

- Operational advocate - budget, tasks, projects
- 2nd chair leader. Takes initiative. Asks questions. Offers alternatives. Boundary-keeper.
- Team synthesizer - directs and distributes internal and external content
- Systems-thinker who can connect dots and bring it all together with a holistic perspective
- Develops projects with a collaborative connection with the reporting director

Alternative: **Air-Traffic Controller, Brand Advocate, Customer Champion**

COORDINATOR

Organizes work, manages projects

- Anticipates action, knows what people may need before they ask
- Takes initiative, offers suggestions, and closes gaps to get the work done
- Not afraid to ask for help
- Contributes to development of a volunteer culture
- Curates more content than they create; makes existing information easier to find and use

Alternative: **Operations, Admin, Advocate**

SPECIALIST

Produces the thing, makes the craft, brings the unique skill set

- Artist, creative, producer, talent
- Does the technical work no one else can do
- Expert at coding, designing, writing, shooting, editing, etc.
- Proficient at using current tools and technology
- This role can easily be outsourced or contracted

Alternative: **Craftsman/Craftswoman, Freelancer, Contractor**

Empower a working team ecosystem, not an org chart

Once you have your strategy and an advocate, it's easier to thread the "all" through all the parts, so the parts can reflect the "all" in their communications activity.

Corporate communications /noun/

[latin corpus: body]

: the total activity generated by the body in order to achieve its mission and planned objectives.

There's a shared ownership here. Look for opportunities to create interdependent job functions and collaborative communications work between departments. There is power in reconfiguring what already exists. Break down existing silos and redeploy team members to new responsibilities. A fresh approach invigorates personal and corporate performance.

Whether you are rebooting an old department, restructuring across departments, or starting to get your head around organizing your first creative communications team, it all starts with clarifying your strategic organizational goals, defining the right role, and leaning into the unique strengths within the ecosystem of your current team. When you do this, you develop the capacity to run a long-term plan, no matter the short-term view.

1 Start over **2** Define your Communications Charter **3** Identify advocate **4** Empower ownership.

■ Next Steps *The Links*

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Kem is a veteran communications strategist and brand therapist who has spent three decades shaping communication for small business, big business, non-profits, tech, finance, PR, marketing, schools, and churches. Known for her one-of-a-kind approach to making complex things simple and making hard work fun, she's in demand for her ability to produce results for leaders and their organizations.

Fun fact: while Kem spends her time working in all industry sectors, she wrote [Less Chaos. Less Noise.](#) for congregations who need a little help communicating more effectively as they work to bring help to others.

■ KemMeyer.com *The Team*

Kem's handpicked team of professionals are known for being great at what they do. But, what drives them is helping other great people solve problems, put their vision in action, meet meaningful goals, and grow good things. They build systems, design brands, dismantle silos, organize communications, design team-building messaging, and equip leaders with the tools and know-how to bust barriers and amplify results.