



# **ENORMOUS EXPECTATIONS, EXPLOSIVE ENGAGEMENTS:**

***Communications Priorities for Faith-Based Organizations  
in a Post-COVID World***

June 16, 2021

## Where Do You Want to Go from Here?

We won't bore you rehashing the details of the COVID-19 pandemic – you experienced it first-hand. But as we start to emerge from lockdowns and masks and daily infection rates, the big question becomes this: where do we go from here?

InChrist Communications and Grey Matter Research posed this question to over 100 different ministry leaders, marketers, and communicators.

Well, actually, we posed a *variety* of questions to them about organizational goals and priorities as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. And we'd like to share with you what they said.

One of our questions was what the pandemic taught them. The theme of this report was encapsulated in a comment made by a woman working in outreach to children. Her most important lesson was simply this:

“Pivot quickly, innovating around barriers. Move forward; don't stand in place.”

That struck us as outstanding advice; this report is all about how ministries desire to move forward.

## Methodology

InChrist Communications and Grey Matter Research & Consulting conducted an online quantitative survey with over 100 ministry and business leaders who regularly work for, or with, non-profit and mission-based organizations. The research was conducted May 4 – 14, 2021 and provides insights about the biggest challenges, learnings, and aspirations to emerge from the COVID–19 pandemic. We also conducted some in-depth qualitative interviews with non-profit ministry and agency leaders to provide further insight into the major themes that the research revealed. Some of their comments are included in this document.

Organizations represented by the research included many different ministry sectors; the most common were these:

- Overseas missions/evangelism
- Overseas poverty relief
- Christian education
- Domestic relief and development
- Church denominations
- Christian media
- Agencies and consultants working with ministries

This was followed by a small number of in-depth interviews with various leaders, to dig deeper and clarify some of the study findings.

## The Big Themes

In our research, we found a number of big themes that could be seen running through the individual findings. Briefly, these include the following:

### Theme 1: Striving for Connection

We heard this loud and clear in a variety of ways: leaders want to do more to foster connection with their target audience.

- We asked them about their priorities for messaging as we emerge from the pandemic. The priority most often mentioned in the top three was “Engaging our audience as participants in our cause, rather than as recipients of our information.”
- We asked them about various potential elements of their brand personality they want to emphasize. What clearly came out on top was a desire for their brand to engage: personable, relatable, emotionally engaging, and sense of community.
- When we asked them about the most important lessons they learned during the pandemic, six key themes clearly emerged; one of these was about the importance of relationships and community.

Maybe because COVID-19 interfered with so many relationships – social distancing, shuttered churches, work-from-home, online school – connection, engagement, and community are critical going forward for many ministry leaders.

## Theme 2: Heart over Head

This second theme also came out in many ways.

- We asked leaders whether their organization's communications about the need they're addressing should target more of an emotional response or a rational response from potential donors. The vast majority put more weight on targeting an emotional response.
- The same thing happened (although to a slightly lesser extent) when we asked about communicating to donors about the impact their organization is making.
- When we asked about communication strategies they want to use, leaders were *seven times more likely* to call for more emotional or inspirational ways of communicating than they were to plan on more rational or objective ways of communicating.

In short, leaders want to hit the target right in the heart, not right in the head.

## Theme 3: Live and Virtual Channel Strategies

We asked leaders what channels they want their organization to use more; the clear preferences were events and video. (The next two were social media and small group or peer-to-peer interaction, which further bolsters what we said about Theme #1.) And when we talked to them about overall strategies rather than specific channels, the top strategy was still simply to do more with video. Note that this wasn't *broadcast* video. Half said they need to do more with videos on their own website, while just 9% wanted to do more through television.

Both of these channels (video and events) were heavily impacted by the pandemic. Live events were canceled, postponed, or switched to online. We learned the value of live events when we couldn't hold them; we learned the value of online events when they actually worked. We watched as people turned to video: Netflix subscriptions surged and Disney+ far exceeded launch expectations. The average American viewer had 60% more streaming services by October 2020 than they did

just two years before (up to an average of 4.8 per household, according to Hub Entertainment Research).

## Theme 4: Confused Role of Brand

For a long time, branding has been huge in the corporate world. But there are still companies that don't fully grasp what a brand really is and can be; they want to "rebrand" and think that means a new logo and maybe a slogan. Our two companies have repeatedly seen ministries struggle with the concepts of brand, brand voice, brand personality, and brand differentiation. And the findings from this study support both elements of branding: how important leaders believe it is, but how much they struggle with what branding *really* is.

On one hand, wanting to communicate what makes their brand unique from others doing similar work is one of the top two priorities leaders have for post-pandemic messaging. Building a greater emotional connection with their audience is also a top-four priority, and while this doesn't specifically use the word "branding," a huge part of what makes brands strong is their ability to connect emotionally with constituents.

On the other hand, the perception is that the pandemic has had less impact on their organization's focus on brand identity than on mission, daily business, or communication – really, than anything else we measured. And when left to discuss their brand identity or personality, many leaders struggle mightily to talk about *brand* rather than mission, strategy, or things that don't differentiate their ministry (like "We want to be God-centered"). And very few want their brand to be surprising in any way (unique, delighting people, or unexpected), even though this is an element for which much of corporate America strives.

In short, it appears that many leaders want their brand to be unique, but don't really know what that means or how to go about getting there...wherever "there" might be.

## Theme 5: Same Goal, Different Tactics

The folks from whom we received input included a number of people working in agencies or as consultants (these were asked to respond in terms of what they want

for their clients, not their own companies). We saw some pretty large gaps between ministries and agencies in terms of where they want things to go.

As an example, 32% of the folks in ministries say one of their priorities is to focus on “What makes our brand unique from others that may be doing similar work,” while 70% from agencies want this to be a priority for their clients. Conversely, 41% of those from ministries want to prioritize “Details of exactly *how* we’re accomplishing our ministry goals,” while only one out of ten from agencies agree with this. Agencies have different views on what their clients’ brand personalities should be, how emotion-based communications from clients should be, and what communication channels should be prioritized. This may represent ministries failing to listen to the expertise of agencies, or agencies failing to understand client priorities. Or maybe both. Either way, we saw a consistent disconnect between agencies and clients, which doesn’t benefit either party.

So follow along with us as we show you the priorities ministry leaders have for post-COVID communication.

## *What's the most important work-related or ministry-related lesson you have learned during the pandemic?*



What ministry leaders, marketers, and communicators learned during the pandemic can be boiled down largely to the seven major areas shown above. But more than numbers, what strikes us as particularly meaningful are some of the specific things people said. Undoubtedly some of these lessons were hard-learned, but what value that learning has provided...

### **Creativity/Flexibility:**

- “Never underestimate the value of a crisis to bring about new ideas and courage from some of the least expected places and never underestimate the value of encouragement as an ignitor to that process.” (Family services)
- “There’s so much value in being innovative and being willing to take risks and jump on trends (or create your own!) as they emerge.” (Agency)
- “Ignore the conventional wisdom.” (Domestic missions/evangelism)
- “It is possible to find creative ways to accomplish mission even when the rules for engagement have completely changed.” (Domestic relief/development)
- “Pivot quickly, innovating around barriers. Move forward; don’t stand in place.” (Reaching children/youth/students)

## Relationships/Communication:

- “Community and relationship can go deep even virtually, but also requires intentionality, and intentional occasional face-to-face roots.” (Overseas missions/evangelism)
- “Relationships are still #1. It just takes a bit more creativity when cultivating relationships remotely.” (Reaching children/youth/students)
- “To communicate more clearly and more often. Especially to those who work under me who need to feel that sense of connection, care and community.” (Domestic relief/development)
- “Although you don’t need in-person human interaction to now get a message across, everyone is longing for a personal connection.” (Social/political policy or advocacy)

## Positivity/Opportunity:

- “Secular parents are desperate for their children to attend in-person school. They will gladly pay tuition to have their students taught by qualified teachers rather than babysat on Zoom. What an opportunity to reach non-churched families! Praise God! Not just a silver- but a gold-lining to this pandemic.” (Education)
- “That the challenges also provide opportunities; for example, it fast-forwarded our digital presence and global reach.”
- “People are expecting big changes on the other side of the pandemic. We’ve been hearing ‘there’s a new normal’ and ‘things will be different’ for a solid year – pounded into us every night. So, people are not just READY for changes, they’re EXPECTING change. This means that if you’re a leader, we have about a six-month window to make major changes in your organization, your team, your strategy, etc. After that, people will hate change once again...” (Christian media)
- “People were more inclined to pay attention because they had nothing else to do. They slowed down and embraced our messaging.” (Agency)

## The Role of Technology:

- “Remote and digital work is far more productive than previously believed.” (Denomination)



- “Ministry and relationships can work beautifully using digital tools.” (Domestic missions/evangelism)
- “We’ve all seen the power of connecting online through Zoom meetings and other means. It has taken our old ways of connecting and opened possibilities for drawing in people who wouldn’t be able to travel to on-site meetings – plus saving us a lot of money.” (Christian media)

## Trust Your Donors:

- “If your non-profit fills a need, your donors will stand in the gap in hard times.” (Family services)
- “Donors are generous and want to help even in what could be the midst of their own personal crisis.” (Overseas missions/evangelism)
- “Through thick or thin, donors want a meaningful role in the solution.” (Agency)
- “Keep walking in faith, communicating honestly, and don’t presume that others who support your mission will stop helping just because of interruptions beyond your control.” (Overseas relief/development)
- “Donors who actively support ministries are really ‘all-in’ and believe in the missions they choose to support. Because of that, it only harms the nonprofit to not ask. While many were financially impacted by the pandemic, not everyone was, so it was important to continue to ask for donations. Those who couldn’t give didn’t. But those who could did, and even gave more noting that others may have had to pull back. Bottom line, always ask and allow people to be blessed through action of giving to God’s work.” (Agency)

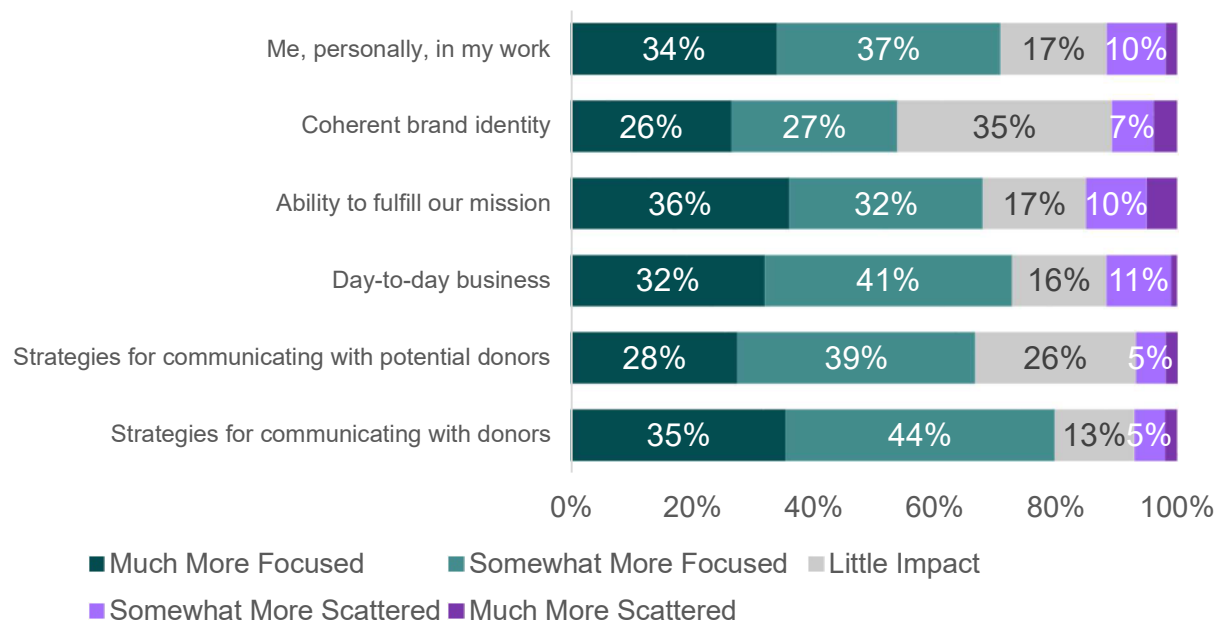
## Persistence:

- “Even in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, things can be done and accomplished if you remain focused and on mission.” (Overseas missions/evangelism)
- “Stay on our stated ‘calling’ or mission statement. Do not alter our work for fundraising purposes.” (Christian media)
- “The gospel doesn’t stop. Even in lockdowns, people were still coming to Christ, missionaries continued to work, and donors continued to give.” (Overseas missions/evangelism)
- “That we can and should just keep going.” (Overseas missions/evangelism)

## Preparation:

- “Crisis preparedness begins long before the actual crisis.” (Agency)
- “Rich communication with donors and our publics are essential to building awareness and commitment after the crisis has subsided.” (Overseas missions/evangelism)
- “Be sure your structure, systems, and strategy are flexible and able to adapt quickly to unforeseen circumstances that may arise.” (Overseas missions/evangelism)

*From your perspective, would you say the effects of the pandemic have made your organization more focused or more scattered in each of the following areas?*



At first glance, the chart above appears quite positive. Most people we interviewed report that the pandemic has made their organization more focused in a variety of areas, including an average of 31% who say it has made the organization much more focused. Most others report little impact. On average, just 11% say their organization has become more scattered in each of these various areas.

Keep in mind that we heard from people more than a year after the start of the pandemic. We suspect the answers might have been quite different in, say, April

or May 2020. Also, keep in mind that these are simply the perceptions of leaders and communicators – it's always possible there's an element of wishful thinking in here.

So, the pandemic has, in some ways, had a positive effect on ministries (and remember how positive many of the comments are regarding what people learned during the crisis).

Sixty-one percent did say they or their organization has become much more focused in at least one of these areas, and 29% claim they've become much more or somewhat more focused in *every one* of these areas. But not every impact is positive. Three out of ten people admit that they or their organization have become more scattered in at least one of these six areas.

Note also that where the impact is least likely to be positive is in maintaining a coherent brand identity. Crises can be opportunities for brands to shine, but nearly half report no sharpened focus on brand identity. This potentially represents a missed opportunity for brand development.

***Regardless of what your organization is actually prioritizing, what messaging would you, personally, like to see your organization emphasize over the next year or so as we begin to emerge from the pandemic?***



We asked folks for their top three messaging priorities; the chart above shows which ones people list in the top three. Interestingly, one of the top two priorities is what makes their brand unique, even though nearly half feel the pandemic has not impacted their organizational focus on maintaining a coherent brand identity.

Note some of the things seen here and how they reflect those Big Themes we discussed in the summary. The most common priority is engaging the audience as participants in the cause rather than as recipients of information; building greater

emotional connection with the audience is also in the top four. Both speak directly to that theme of Engagement.

It's worth noting that although 34% want their organization or clients to prioritize providing details of exactly how they're accomplishing their ministry work, only 14% put a high priority on the negative side of things – transparency about obstacles and defeats as well as triumphs. Apparently, positive information is mostly (or exclusively) what leaders want to communicate.

These priorities are also an area in which we see major gaps between what ministry leaders want to prioritize and what agencies want their clients to prioritize. Ministry staff are more likely than agencies to want their organization to prioritize the following:

- Details of exactly *how* we're accomplishing our ministry goals (41% to 10%)
- How we've stayed resilient in the face of the pandemic and the issues it's created (33% to 20%)
- How we're building bridges/creating community among donors, volunteers, and staff (26% to not a single agency representative)

Conversely, agencies are much more likely to want their clients to prioritize these messages:

- What makes our brand unique from others that may be doing similar work (70% to 32%)
- Building greater emotional connection between our audience and our work/organization (50% to 29%)

While we're not about to judge who is "right," it's interesting that the three messages ministry leaders emphasize more than agencies are all on the operational side, meaning details about *how* the work is done. The two areas agencies emphasize far more than their clients are both very "big picture" – brand identity and emotional connection. Is it possible that some people working within

*"We're actually switching out our entire back-end digital strategy around community building. We have a large project going on to shift gears and get away from being a one-way communicating org and much more into a communication stream approach, where people are going back and forth with comments and material, and really putting them in charge of what's even on our website."*

Ted Esler  
President  
Missio Nexus

ministries are taking what they typically focus on daily and projecting that onto what they believe are donor priorities? When you work as a lumberjack it can become easy to see mostly tree trunks.

One other thing to note is that almost no one expresses the priority of using their platform to address challenging social issues. This is a major theme in corporate America today, but it's not one that's commonly shared in the ministry world.

Our research did not explore *why* leaders are not prioritizing this. Some people may try to position this as an abrogation of responsibility to society at large, but nothing in the research suggests this is the reason. It may be that ministries realize supporters are not necessarily of one mind on social issues and wish to avoid being divisive. Many social issues are highly controversial and/or have (rightly or wrongly) have been associated with either the Left or Right sides of the political spectrum. It may also be a case of ministries preferring to stay on point and on message regarding their own calling.

We point out the lack of priority leaders put on this topic not in celebration nor in judgment – we simply report where the ministry world stands in comparison to corporate America.

*What makes your organization's brand different from others that may be doing similar work? In other words, what would your audience perceive or feel about your organization that is different from others that do similar work?*

We asked people to answer this in their own words. As might be expected with the wide variety of types of organizations – from teaching/discipleship to media to education to disaster relief to denominations – we see a wide variety of answers.

But what quickly becomes clear is that relatively few people are actually talking about their *brand*. Instead, there are frequent comments about goals, strategy, outcomes, and even the basics of what the organization actually does. But many of these are also undifferentiated – they could apply to quite a variety of organizations.

Some paraphrased examples of what supposedly makes their brand different:

- “We genuinely care for all of our constituents.”
- “The capacity of our national leaders is extraordinary.”
- “We help our community with their struggles with substance abuse and mental health. We help our community as a whole.”
- “It’s our stewardship of the resources we’re given.”
- “We work with a team that is more agile and able to adapt when things change.”
- “We clearly state what we offer and how we make lives better.”
- “We consistently connect people with resources, whether we’re recognized for it or not.”
- “We are doing just what we say we do.”
- “Excellence in ministry.”
- “We’re Christ-centered.”

*“(For our client), we did some exercises around brand differentiation – so really taking a look at who are those in your space, what messages are they saying, and what do you do as an organization that is truly unique, that pulls you out ahead in a specific area?”*

Hillary Hovinga  
Director of Strategic Insights +  
Client Experience  
HAVEN a creative hub

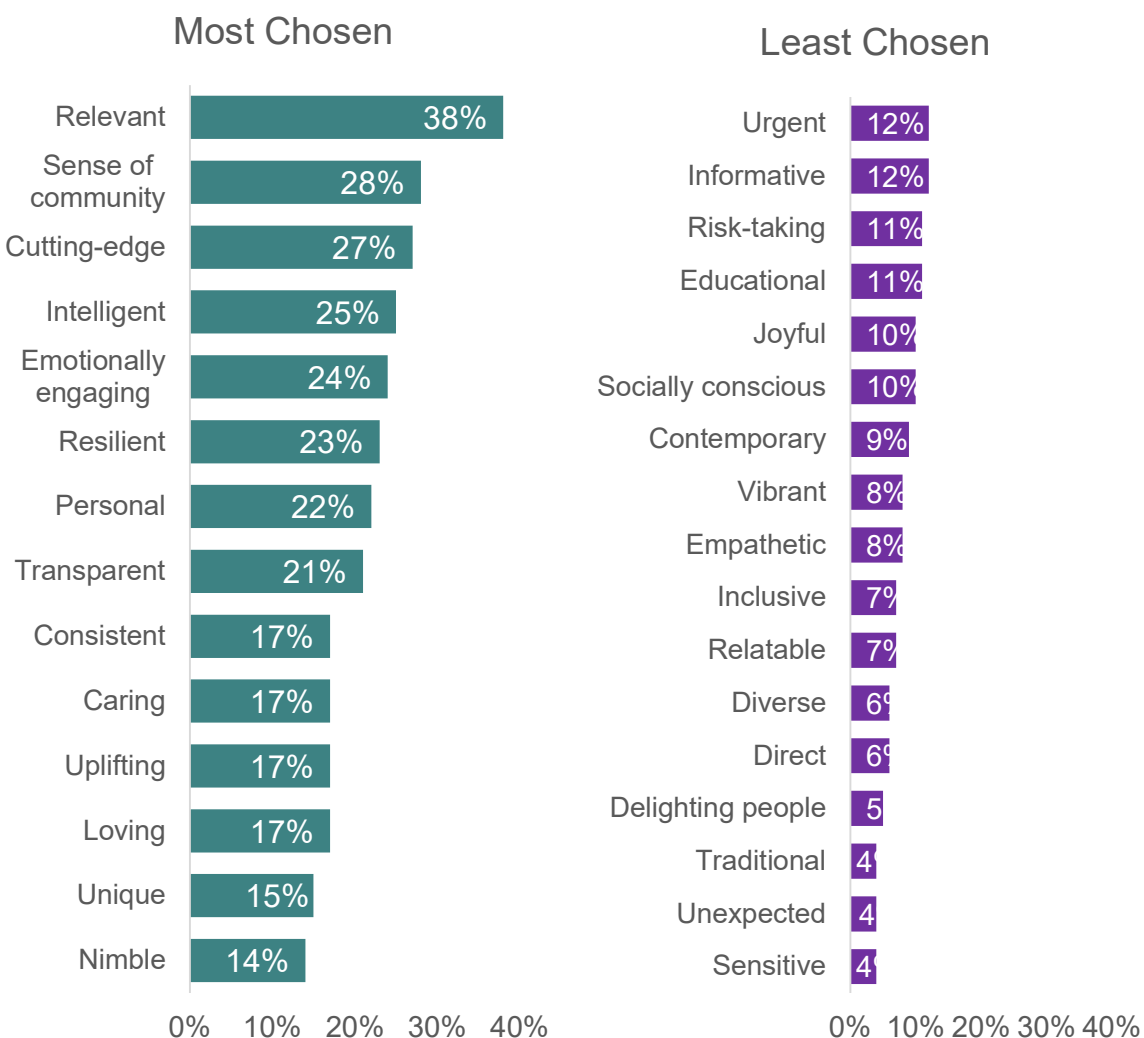
A brand can be effective when it’s positively differentiated. It doesn’t particularly help a vehicle manufacturer to be known for making a safe car or having a great warranty if six other manufacturers are known for the very same things. Just within the category of overseas missions and evangelism, consider some of what supposedly makes individual brands unique:

- “We equip, train, and support people around the world to reach others for Christ.”
- “We train local, indigenous leaders to share the gospel with their own people and train others to do the same.”
- “We serve the local, indigenous church.”
- “We focus on the unreached.”
- “It’s our ability to penetrate areas where missionaries do not have access.”
- “We share the gospel forthrightly in ‘closed countries.’”
- “We are openly Christian, despite working in a country that is hostile to Christianity.”

Just by those descriptions, would you have any chance of identifying any of these organizations from others working in missions? Yet this is what many leaders, marketers, and communicators are saying makes their brand *different*.

It appears that in the ministry world, there is still much work to do in helping organizations understand exactly what a brand is, how it can benefit the organization, and how to develop a clear, meaningful, differentiated brand identity.

***What would you, personally, like to see emphasized about your organization's brand personality as we begin to emerge from the pandemic?***





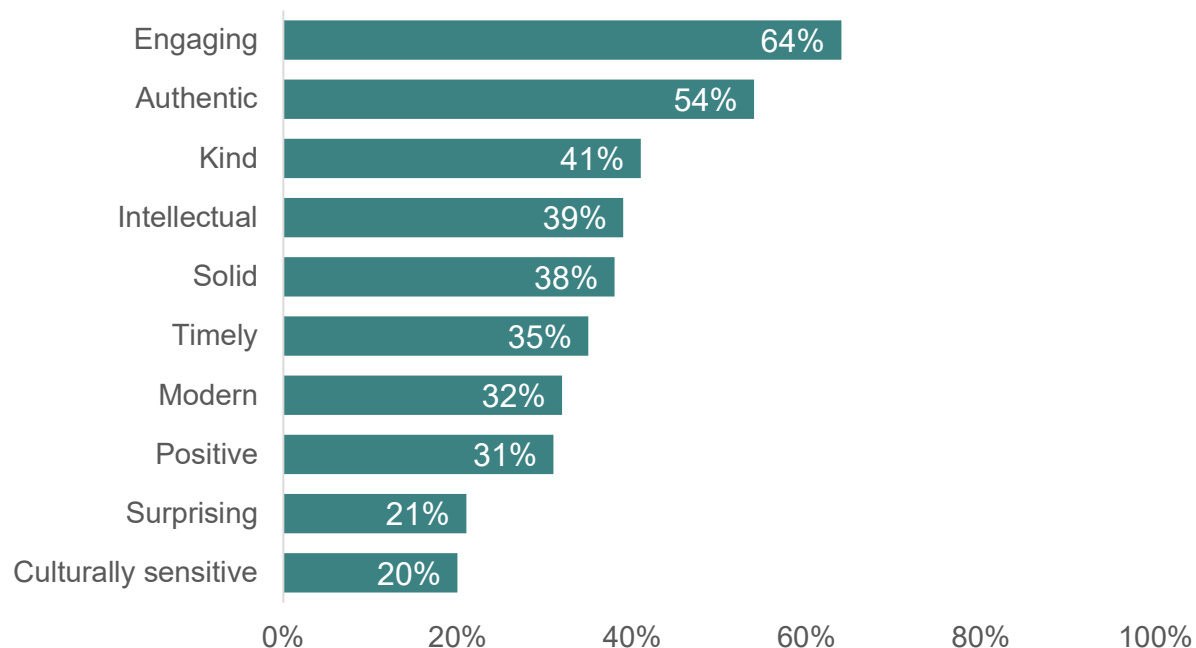
For this question, we provided everyone with 31 different terms, plus the ability to offer up their own.

There are again some significant differences in perspective between people from ministries and those serving in agencies. Ministry staff are far more convinced of the importance of their brand being perceived as caring, loving, nimble, uplifting, and with a sense of community. Agency staff are much more interested in brands being personal, intelligent, emotionally engaging, and delighting people.

Notice that ministry staff focus more on love (caring, loving, uplifting) while agencies emphasize engagement (delight, personal, engaging). We'll see still more of this in a moment.

When people do offer up their own words, it again becomes clear that some really struggle with the idea of brand identity and differentiation. "Brand personality" includes suggestions such as faithful, prayerful, effective, God-honoring, trustworthy, and biblically sound. Again, should any of those things differentiate one ministry brand from another? One toothpaste can differentiate its own brand by emphasizing fewer cavities, or fresher breath in romantic situations, or kids loving the taste, so they brush longer. Can a ministry effectively differentiate its brand as more God-honoring or prayerful than other ministries, particularly if those are things Christians could reasonably expect from *any* ministry?

These 31 terms have some commonalities; it is simple to group them into small categories of similar terms. This sheds some additional light on desired brand personalities.



The two groupings that are most desirable are Engaging (personal, relatable, emotionally engaging, sense of community) and Authentic (relevant, direct, transparent). The first once again points to the strong desire leaders have for their

organizations to be more engaged with their constituents and foster a stronger relational sense of community.

*"We see as our responsibility to provide pathways for people to be able to enter into the conversation with themselves, then with a small community and then a larger community of people, in terms of identifying what is next in their lives."*

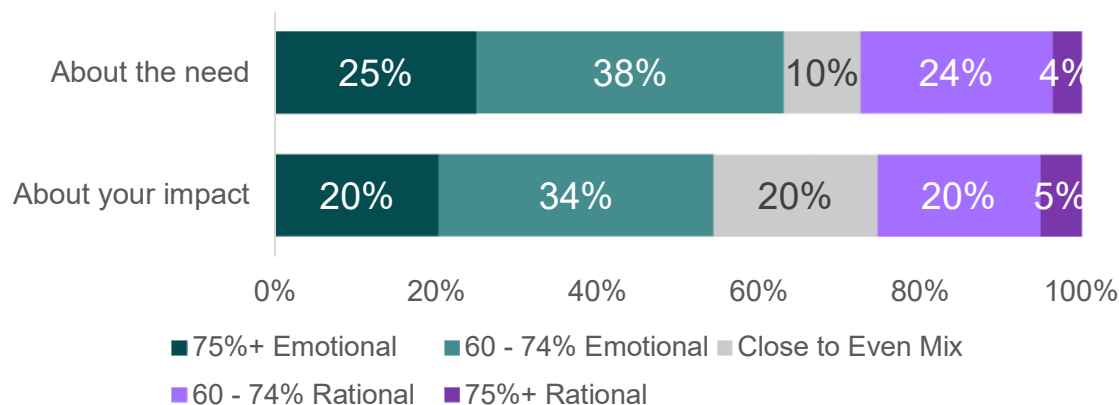
Bruce Bruinsma  
Founder & CEO  
Retirement Reformation

Clearly at the bottom are Surprising (unique, unexpected, delighting people) and Culturally Sensitive (diverse, inclusive, socially conscious). The latter continues a discovery we presented earlier – the ministry world largely is not interested in following the corporate trend of public involvement in socially conscious issues.

*In fundraising, many organizations struggle over how much communication should target an emotional response from donors (e.g. stories about individuals or communities) and how much should target a rational response (e.g. numbers or information about the scope or importance of the need). In general, when your*

*organization communicates about the need you're addressing, how much do you think should be targeted at the emotional and how much at the rational?*

*And when your organization communicates about the impact you're making, how much do you think should be targeted at the emotional and how much at the rational?*



Whether communicating about the need or the impact, the consensus is that the communication should come down on the side of emotional over rational.

When communicating about the need, the average respondent would balance their communication 59% toward the emotional and 41% toward the rational, but in total, seven out of ten people prefer to lean at least a little bit more toward the emotional than the rational (29% lean more toward the rational, with just 2% wanting an exactly equal balance of the two). In fact, only 10% want anything close to an equal balance, saying they would avoid going even 60/40 in one direction or the other. Plus, note that a healthy minority (25%) would go *heavily* toward emotional communication (meaning at least three-quarters emotional over rational).

*"If you can help (donors) understand the ways in which their investment in your ministry is expanding God's kingdom, that's an important component. And the best way you can do that is through the dramatic stories of life change that are taking place as a result of their investment."*

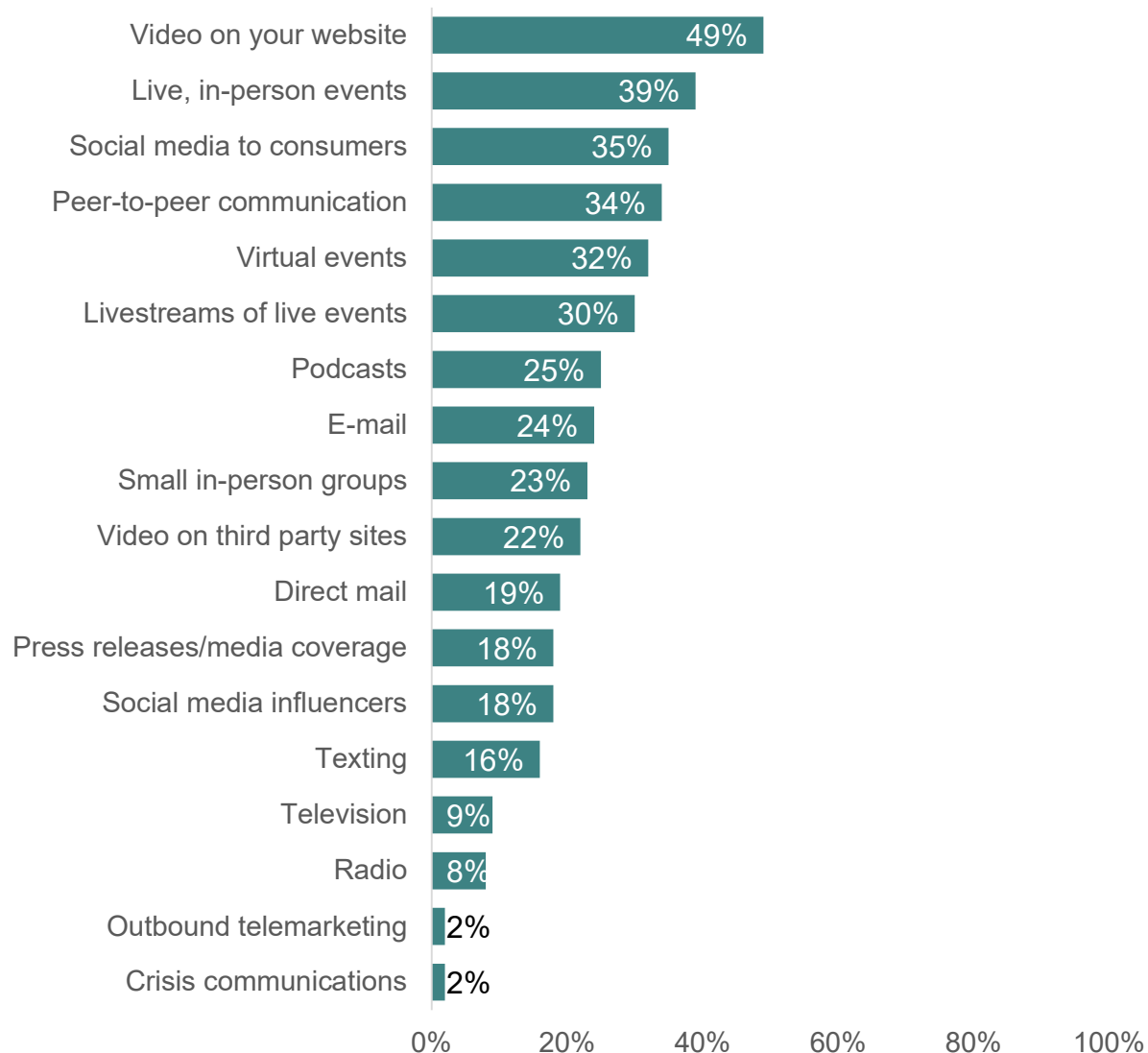
Michael Johnson  
President  
Slavic Gospel Association

Things are a bit more balanced when communicating about the impact the organization is making, but still weighted toward the emotional. Two out of ten

prefer a mix of the two (no more than 59/41 in either direction), while 54% prefer at least 60/40 in favor of emotions, and one out of four want to go more heavily in the direction of rational or informational communication. The average desired mix is still 57% emotional and 43% rational, with 60% leaning at least slightly more toward emotional, 6% exactly even, and 34% recommending a more rational approach.

Once again, there is some difference of opinion between ministries and agencies. Ministries want to take a more balanced approach: regarding the need, 56% lean toward the emotional with 34% rational (with 10% being close to evenly divided). Agencies recommend for their typical client 72% emotional and 17% rational. When communicating about their impact, ministries are at 51% emotional and 28% rational, while agencies are at 62% emotional, 19% rational.

*Which of the following methods (if any) would you, personally, like to see your organization increase (or begin to use), particularly as we begin to emerge from the pandemic?*



The graph above shows what proportion of leaders want to increase the use (or start the use) of each channel. The graph below aggregates similar types of channels (any sort of event, any sort of broadcasting, etc.). There are a few things of which to take note.

One is how ambitious these leaders are. The average person wants to increase the use of 4.1 different channels, even though we limited them to no more than five

choices in order to help narrow down their most important priorities. Of course, each of these will require resources (time, money, expertise, etc.). We did not ask people what they want to decrease or stop using, but it's logical to assume that increasing the use of all these channels will require either new resources or the reallocation of existing resources. It's easy to want to do more, but where will the necessary resources come from? Or what will need to be sacrificed in order to increase the use of some of these channels?

Events are one of the channels most impacted by the pandemic. Live events were canceled or postponed; digital events were used for the first time by many organizations. It may be that the inability to hold live events has made that a particularly appealing option, whereas the sudden increase in digital events has opened leaders' eyes to their possibilities. No matter the reasons, this suggests event planning experts may have tremendous opportunities going forward.

Although video is one of the things people most want to increase, it's interesting that video on their own websites is far more popular than video on third-party websites. Using your own website gives you more control and may require fewer resources, but for that to be an effective outreach it also requires driving more people to your website. One is left to wonder whether there is a concomitant strategy for doing that, in order to optimize the impact of using more video on their website.

For quite some time, ministries have been hearing from various pundits that traditional fundraising is dying. Direct mail is passé; as e-mail has become thought of as a "traditional" form of communication we're even hearing how texting, social media, and other methods will relegate e-mail to the same dustbin as direct mail.

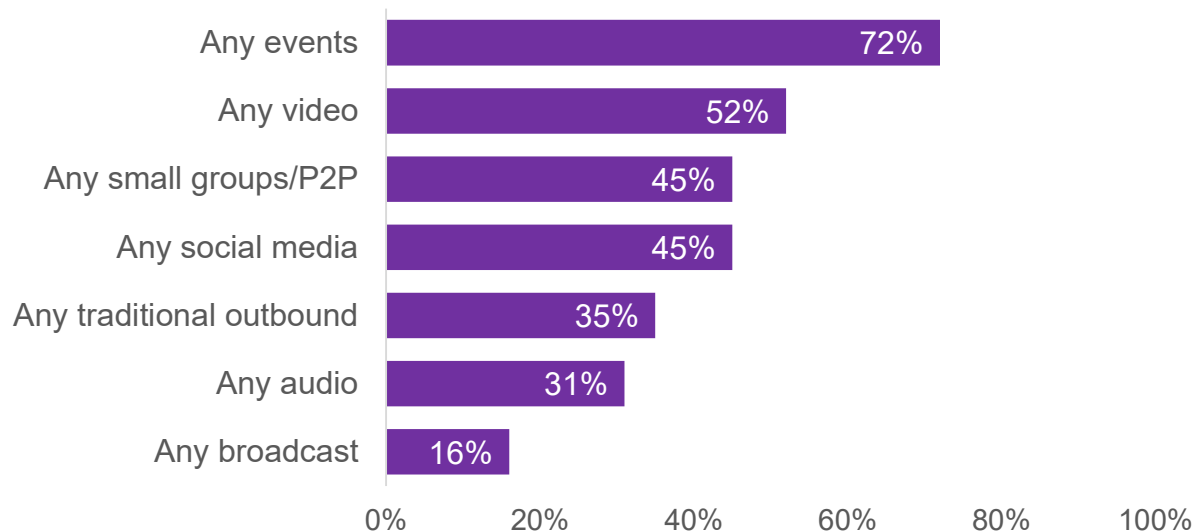
Don't buy it...at least not yet.

We've been hearing this for years – even decades – and yet somehow we're *still* hearing it will all occur in the very near future. It's interesting that 35% of leaders want to *increase* at least one of these channels, even though e-mail and direct mail are both already commonly used by ministries. Yes, newer forms of communication and fundraising have impacted the traditional forms, and the time will likely come that some of these traditional forms are no longer widely viable. But it appears that time is not yet here, and it may not be for some time.

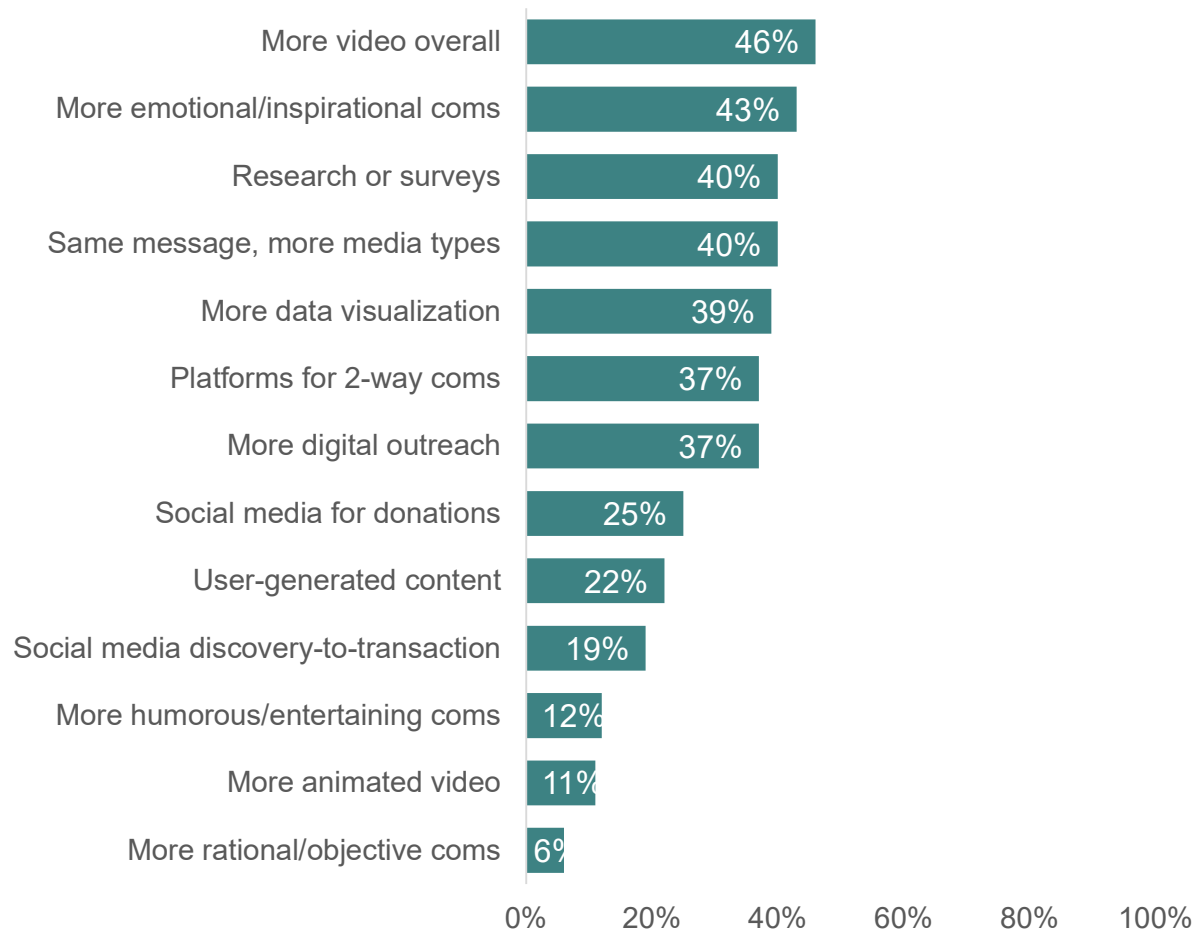
What has changed is a reliance on traditional mass media. In the past, the broadcast world was often seen as a goal, either through developing a regular program or using broadcast media for direct response fundraising. Yet radio and TV individually are two of the channels leaders are *least* interested in increasing or starting to use; collectively, broadcasting ranks far below any other category. Social media, podcasting, streaming video, and even texting have far outpaced broadcast communications as aspirational channels for ministry leaders.

Agencies and ministries again show some priority differences. Ministry staff are far more anxious to use live in-person events in some form, as well as small in-person groups and video on their own websites. Agencies are nearly twice as likely as ministry staff to want to increase traditional forms of communication (direct mail, e-mail, telemarketing) – could this be influenced by the fact that this is the lifeblood of what many agencies offer?

One final note: don't assume that because certain channels such as radio or telemarketing are not being targeted for increases this must mean they are being phased out or de-emphasized. It's entirely possible that leaders plan to continue using these methods; they just don't desire any increased use.



*And as we begin to emerge from the pandemic, which of the following strategies (if any) would you, personally, like to see your organization increase (or begin to use) as a way of communicating your message?*





We also learned that, just like leaders have lofty goals for increasing their use of specific channels, they have quite a few aspirations for broader overall strategies. The average leader wants his or her ministry (or clients) to increase the use of 3.8 different types of strategy out of our list of 13 options. Again, as all of these will require resources, the question arises whether this means a belief that their resources will increase, or those resources will be shifted away from some current strategies.

The findings actually show relatively little differentiation among the top seven priorities, each garnering votes from 37 – 46% of all leaders. But the top two are, again, confirmation of two larger themes seen throughout this study: the desire to use more video, and the focus on the emotional or inspirational over other styles. While 43% want to increase their organization's reliance on emotional or inspirational communication, just 12% say the same thing about humorous or entertaining communication, and only 6% (the lowest for any option) about more rational or objective communication.

The fact that one of these top seven priorities is platforms that facilitate two-way conversations between their organization and individuals in their target market also again points toward one of the Big Themes of this research: the search for greater engagement with the audience.

It's also worth noting that while the average individual would like his/her organization's messaging to increase the use of 4.1 different channels, 60% don't list one of their priorities as promoting the same message through a broader variety of methods or media. This suggests some reshuffling of channels, rather than simply adding more.

It also appears that ministries may be struggling over the role of social media. While 45% prioritize this as a channel they want to increase, only 25% are prioritizing its use as a channel for direct donations, and just 19% want to use it as a single platform to go from discovery to donation or purchase. Many are not looking at social media as a transactional source, but apparently as more of an engagement builder or

*"We're taking all of our big videos and dropping them down to five-minute training videos, so we keep breaking it smaller and smaller and smaller to make it easier and easier and easier. Where I have shown these five-minute videos, it was electric."*

Brian Kluth  
National Spokesperson  
NAE Financial Health & Bless  
Your Pastor

possibly as something to help develop brand awareness. There may be some missed opportunities in these priorities.

Finally, it's a positive step to see such a desire for more research and surveys to understand their audience, as well as more data visualization. Fully understanding who you're trying to reach and making information as easily consumable as possible are both critical in today's information-driven world.

## About InChrist Communications

<https://inchristcommunications.com/>

InChrist Communications (ICC) is a national, full-spectrum communications agency primarily serving faith-based organizations, churches, businesses, and individuals.

Founded in 2002, ICC derives its name from 2 Corinthians 5:17: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* (NKJV)

Core services include public relations, strategic planning, integrated communications, branding, marketing, advertising, media relations/publicity, social media, digital media, crisis communications, donor communications, stakeholder management, web/SEO, creative services, and special events.

ICC is a “lean, flat company” that prides itself on keen stewardship of resources.

It excels in strategic planning, creative concepts and solutions, tactical execution, adherence to timelines and budgets, demonstrable results, and customer-focused service.

ICC has strong, personal relationships with both Christian and mainstream media outlets and journalists.

[pholt@inchristcommunications.com](mailto:pholt@inchristcommunications.com)

704-759-6192



## InChrist Communications Clients

Ananias Foundation  
Bibles For The World  
Biblica  
Brightpeak Financial  
Care Net  
Denton Bible Church  
Denver Seminary  
ECFA  
ELIC  
Ethnos 360  
Far East Broadcasting Company  
Frontier Ventures  
Gideons International  
Gospel For Asia  
International Day for the Unreached  
Alliance  
JAARS  
JESUS Film Project  
Jesus People USA  
Ministry Brands

Mission Aviation Fellowship  
National Association of Evangelicals  
Open Doors  
Operation Mobilization  
Outreach Inc.  
Pioneer Bible Translators  
International  
Ronald Blue Trust  
SAT-7 USA  
SIL  
SIM USA  
Slavic Gospel Association  
Tech Soup  
TMS Global  
Trail Life USA  
Trans World Radio  
Wycliffe Bible Translators  
Wycliffe Associates  
Voice of the Martyrs

## About Grey Matter Research & Consulting

<https://greymatterresearch.com>

Grey Matter Research helps organizations make wiser decisions by helping you truly understand your target audience (donors, customers, potential donors, etc.). We do this through qualitative and quantitative market research and consumer insights. Our work helps you reduce risk, increase the opportunity for success, and avoid waste of resources (time, money, and energy).

While we do not work exclusively with Christian organizations, we specialize in the ministry community, and have extensive experience serving parachurch ministries, denominations, agencies, and other ministry-related organizations.

Our work has been featured in the global media: *USA Today*, NPR, *Christianity Today*, MSNBC, *Los Angeles Times*, CBN, K-LOVE Radio, and media in Russia, New Zealand, China, Hungary, and many other countries. Our work is part of the curriculum at Michigan State University, La Salle University, and University of Trieste (Italy).

We also have many free resources and studies that are of interest to the Christian community (check the Articles & Studies tab on our website).

1-602-684-6294

[ron@greymatterresearch.com](mailto:ron@greymatterresearch.com)



**GREY MATTER**  
RESEARCH & CONSULTING

## Grey Matter Research & Consulting Clients

### Ministry Community

Compassion International  
National Christian Foundation  
Assemblies of God  
Moody Global Ministries  
Joyce Meyer Ministries  
LifeWay Christian Resources  
World Concern  
Catholic Relief Services  
United Methodist Publishing House  
Kids Alive  
Encompass World Partners  
Missouri Baptist Association  
Young Life  
Crown Financial Ministries  
LIFE Outreach International  
Prison Fellowship  
Inspiration Ministries  
The Christian and Missionary Alliance  
Bethesda Lutheran Communities  
World Vision  
National Association of Evangelicals  
David C. Cook  
Focus on the Family

### Others We've Served

Chevrolet  
American Red Cross  
Coca-Cola Company  
Duke University  
Ford Motor Company  
Goodwill Industries  
Los Angeles Kings (NHL)  
CVS/Caremark  
Make-A-Wish Foundation  
Mazda Motors  
Covenant House  
University of Nevada Las Vegas  
MINI Cooper  
Hancock Bank  
BMW  
Cancer Treatment Centers of America  
Operation Smile  
Pulte Homes  
Children's Mercy Hospital  
Los Angeles Galaxy (MLS)  
Paralyzed Veterans of America  
Alzheimer's Association  
Electronic Retailing Association