

Resourcing the Local Church

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A primary responsibility assigned to the North American Division is to provide resource materials for the local church. This involves a wide range of information, "how-to" books, manuals, study guides, evangelistic and outreach tools, audio-visuals, training packages, and curriculum materials for Sabbath School, Pathfinder Clubs, VBS, etc. It is consistently rated in survey research as one of the most important services that the denomination provides to the local church.

Past Problems

A great deal of dissatisfaction has been expressed about the church resources system of the denomination in past years. Several key issues that have been identified:

Top-down planning: The local church does not like to be pushed into a mold, told precisely what to do with its activities by "someone up there in an ivory tower." Pastors and lay leaders prefer to find materials that meet their needs and fit local plans and contextual considerations such as congregational size, cultural background, urban or rural setting, etc.

Difficulty in finding the right materials: The local leader does not want to call many places and be handed from person to person, or discover that something just like they needed last year really does exist but they didn't know about it. They would prefer to have a "one-stop" customer service that guides them quickly through the menu of options, describing in a way that is easy for them to understand the benefits and "fit factors" (which local context does it best fit?).

Choices: The local church does not like a "one size fits all" approach which leaves people with only one choice for a given event or ministry. Local leaders prefer to be able to select from a menu of alternative materials and models. As one pastor said in a recent survey, "I am tired of being told that this is *the* program that will finish the work. We need to be allowed to make choices."

Difficulty in purchasing materials: At times when a local pastor and lay leaders has actually found something they want, they will discover that it is quite difficult to get a copy. Eight years ago it was not uncommon to be told, "You cannot purchase that here; you have to go ..." through an office that does not have inventory and must order it, or is even resistant to the financial risk and paperwork involved in processing the order. Common tools such as use of credit cards and overnight shipment were not available until recently.

No support services with materials: The local leaders are unhappy when they purchase a handbook, kit or series of lessons and there is no one to answer their questions about how to use the materials and no training to introduce them to the design and purpose of the tools. They expect, in today's world, for "software" to come with an 800 number for questions, an orientation video, etc.

Untested, impractical concepts: The local church feels that it has been "ripped off" when the resource materials and tools that it purchases prove to be impractical, never actually tested in the reality of local church and community life. There has been a number of

occasions on which a good "idea man" in some department has written materials based on his creative concepts, and then when local churches tried to implement the ideas many problems surfaced. In some instances this is a result of a lack of attention to contextual fit, but in other instances the materials had never been used in a local church prior to publication. This can be a particular problem when a program that is successful in one local church is re-written to conform to departmental goals and policies before it is published for the denomination, and the revised version is never field tested.

Unresponsiveness to expressed needs: In the past the turn-around time for development of new materials that were requested by local churches was very lengthy. With the rapid nature of change in our world today, it is essential that information and tools needed to support some new opportunity for outreach be delivered quickly.

Too much promotion: Ironically at the same time that pastors and lay leaders complain that they cannot find materials they need or do not get enough information about what is available, they have also expressed the concern that they received too many mailings and too much material. This is probably due to the fact that the materials they were being sent did not seem to meet their needs, were inappropriate to their specific situation, or were of general poor quality and therefore not read.

There are also some management problems that have surfaced repeatedly. **Unproductive inventory** is one of the most common concerns. When the GC, the NAD and other entities moved from Takoma Park to the new complex in Silver Spring in 1989, the old Central Departmental Services (CDS) had more than \$800,000 of inventory, much of it out of date, that had to be moved to the new location or dumped and the loss taken by some cost center. In many cases this happened because an individual on the staff produced something they wanted to promote and then found so little interest in the field that the inventory did not sell.

Re-inventing the wheel is another common occurrence. Costly proliferation of materials can result from the fact that various levels and departments within the structure compete with each other for the attention, buy-in and funds of local church leaders. Independent ministries will at times jump into a particularly popular kind of program with new materials simply because they believe there is money to be made.

No funding for marketing costs. It has been a common practice for a department to allocate funds to develop a product, publish a quantity of it and then have no funding to get the word out as to its availability. The traditional departmental system planned on a trickle-down of information through the various levels of the department, but as local conferences and union conferences have down-sized their staffs it has been more and more difficult to get information copied and passed on at each level. If money is to be invested in creating materials, it is foolish to not let local leaders who may want the materials know of their existence.

What is Being Done About the Problems?

From 1988 through 1992 a number of surveys of pastors and local church lay leaders have been conducted by the NAD in which questions were asked about the kinds of resource materials needed, what kind of delivery system and support system should be provided with the materials, etc. Each year the NAD Materials Development & Marketing Committee

(M&M) met to review the research findings and make recommendations to the departments, publishing houses, and other producers. The M&M committee included pastors and lay persons as well as representatives from all the unions and selected local conferences with successful, creative programs.

Out of these meetings has emerged a new system for resourcing the local church that began implementation with a massive Needs Assessment conducted in 1993 by the nine unions in collaboration with the NAD and their local conferences. It has been voted by the NAD executive committee for this Needs

Assessment to be conducted every two years as a permanent basis for planning and decision-making regarding resource materials and services. Specific market research is also conducted on an on-going basis as part of the development process for each new product that is developed in response to the identified areas of need.

Focus group research allows the departments to involve pastors and lay leaders in the key questions of how the materials should be developed and designed.

Telephone surveys provide a valid random sample to test how widely there is agreement with suggestions gleaned in the focus groups.

Twice-yearly large surveys taken in a significant sample of local churches with more than 2,000 members responding discover the realities and dynamics at the local level and inform product development.

Test projects are necessary to give materials a trial run in the real-life setting of one or more local churches. These cannot simply be the basis for promotional hype, but must be carefully designed tests that yield hard data about the effectiveness and user-friendliness of the materials. This can be very costly and result in throwing away expensive materials when they prove not to work, but it is essential to "de-bug" what goes out to the local church.

Constant feedback must be built into every product so that the producers learn from the users and modify subsequent editions, updating new versions as new realities surface at the local level.

Results of 1993 Needs Assessment

When the results of the needs identified by local church leaders in each of the nine unions were collated at the NAD M&M Committee meeting in January, 1994, the following priorities were established for the production of resource materials and services in 1994 and 1995:

1. Lay training and mobilization
 2. Teen and young adult involvement
 3. Finding and recruiting volunteers
 4. Lack of outreach
 5. Insufficient funding for local church ministries
 6. Materials in languages other than English
 7. Ministry to families
 8. Boredom and lack of enthusiasm in Sabbath worship
 9. Support for small group ministries
 10. An experience of spiritual renewal among members
 11. The needs of aging members and intergenerational tensions
 12. Conflict management
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Diversity and Micro-Markets

One of the major findings of the research is that the NAD Adventist population is very diverse in its interests, cultural backgrounds, etc. That creates lots of micro-markets, instead of one large market. Church resources cannot be designed in terms of 800,000 Adventists in North America--they are really of interest only to 45,000 local church leaders. And those 45,000 leaders must be understood in terms of a number of micro-markets.

These can be further segmented according to church size. For example there are about 600 churches with 275 or more members, about 3,000 with less than 100 members, and about 1,000 with 100 to 274 members. Each of these market segments have quite different needs and interests. And these are further segmented according to ethnicity and location. For example, a recent study that I did of large churches revealed that there are 150 big-city black churches, 140 white suburban churches, 60 institutional churches which include the group represented by the College Pastors that gather with us each January, and so on. Each of these has unique needs and represents a micro-market.

This means that with any given product a circulation of 2,000 is a very high level of penetration, given the specific, specialized niche that it serves. Yet, the publishing houses have repeatedly pointed out that they need to sell a minimum of 4,000 to 5,000 copies of a product to break even. It is possible to be profitable at sales of 2,000 or even 1,000 or less, but not with the burden of overhead and large-scale technology in traditional production facilities.

On top of all this, when local church leaders were asked in our surveys where they would turn to find out about needed resource materials, only 13% said they would check with their conference office and only 29% said they would contact their Adventist Book Center. Nearly half (48%) said they would ask their pastor, local church office or another lay leader. Those natural networks are the key to building an effective communication system.

A primary complaint of pastors and lay leaders is that they do not know what is available; they don't know what is going on; they do not know what the denomination's goals are for the specialized area in which they are interested. This results in feelings of frustration and non-supportive attitudes toward the denomination. This can only be overcome with highly specialized, highly targeted communication.

Micro-markets for Church Resources

- 3,100 pastors
- 10,000 elders
- 4,000 SS superintendents
- 12,000 children's leaders
- 12,000 adult SS class leaders/teachers
- 3,000 Community service directors
- 800 Pathfinder Club directors
- 500 family life coordinators
- 3,500 personal ministries leaders
- 300 prison ministry directors
- 2,000 stewardship leaders
- 1,500 youth ministry leaders
- 400 singles ministries leaders
- 1,200 reclaiming ministries
- 8,000 small group leaders
- 300 inner city coordinators
- 1,300 Health-Temperance leaders
- 700 Women's ministries directors
- 1,300 Communication coordinators

Marketing in the age of diversity means:

- *More options for good producers and more choice for consumers.
 - *Less perception of differentiation among similar products, so it is more difficult to make your product clearly "stand out."
 - *Intensified competition, with promotional efforts sounding more and more alike, approaching "white noise" in the marketplace. Consumers can't hear your promotion anymore.
 - *Newly minted meanings for words and phrases as marketers try to "invent" differentiation.
 - *Disposable information as consumers try to cope with an information deluge.
 - *Customization by users as flexible manufacturing makes niche production every bit as economic as mass production.
 - *Changing leverage criteria as economies of scale give way to economies of knowledge--knowledge of the customers and of trends that allows the rapid development of new products and services.
 - *Changing company structure as large corporations continue to downsize to compete with smaller niche players that nibble at their markets.
 - *Smaller wins--fewer chances for gigantic wins in mass markets, but more opportunities for healthy profits in smaller markets. -- Harvard Business Review, Sept.-Oct. 1988, page 89.
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The *Monday Fax* experiment is an example of this kind of communication. In addition to the 9 unions, all 58 local conferences, and about 25 other organizations, seven of the largest local churches in the denomination also receive it directly to their Fax machines. And a number of conferences are regularly copying it and sending it to all their pastors. This has been the single most successful communication service that NAD has provided to date. It gets rave reviews constantly, and perhaps a more important indicator of its usefulness is the high number of complaints from people who do not get a particular issue because of some glitch. **We need 'Monday Fax' solutions to our communication problems with the other micro-markets.**

The denomination needs to solve this communication problem

because these 45,000 people and their multi-focused interests represent the core infrastructure of our constituency. If significant numbers of these leaders feel that the denomination does not care about them and their program, or are simply operating in a vacuum without good communication with denominational leadership, they as thought leaders pass on negative, "no leadership" messages to many other church members. Attempts at broad stroke communication on the part of denominational leadership can be sabotaged by these negative, "left out" feelings. We must communicate with these micro-markets because they are "thought leaders," as well as because we want to sell our products.

Key Solution: Resource Centers

Additional findings from the research with local church leaders has revealed that it is a mistake to sell materials by themselves. To just sell a man or woman in a local church a study guide for a small group is to leave them with a tool in their hands, but no support

services. The clear message from research is that our local leaders want these support services:

Training in how to use the tool. Pastors and local leaders want to gain the skills to use new tools that become available. Our recent study of the opinions and attitudes of pastors about the new Adventist Communication Network (ACN) which provides live, satellite events to local churches surfaced the fact that pastors spontaneously asked for training in how to use interactive video and satellite resources; the practices of the use of these materials in local church activities.

An 800-number "help desk." Local leaders want to be able to dial one number and go straight to the person with the best expertise on the materials in hand. Every other manufacturer and industry in North America today provides this service; a place to ask questions and get additional information.

Regular reports on others who are using the tool. Local leaders want a newsletter two or three times a year with networking opportunities and the encouragement that other leaders in other local churches are also using this new tool and finding success. This is a medium to trade "war stories."

Consultant services. Some churches will want to have a skilled person help them install a new program or ministry, helping them adapt and craft the tool to fit into their local situation. Consultant services can range from simple telephone coaching to on-site visits to long-range partnerships between local church committees and an "outside" helper.

Tools to sell the new concept. As more and more new technology has come into the local church, pastors repeatedly ask for materials that help to explain the new tools to their church boards and congregations. When a local leader purchases a kit for a divorce recovery support group, for example, he or she needs more than the discussion guides; they also need a list of reasons why their church should sponsor such a group and documentation from the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy show the missional purpose of this new group.

A research base. When local leaders purchase resource materials they are actually buying expertise and information. They have a right to know that the foundation from which that expertise and information comes is based on high-quality, practical research. A resource center is no such an enterprise to sell materials as it is a "hub" or clearinghouse for the best and the brightest the Adventist Church has to offer on a particular subject.

Over the past five years the NAD has encourage the development of about 30 entities that have achieved or are working toward standards that will make them true resource centers. Each addresses a narrow area of specialized ministry such as evangelistic seminar or youth ministry. Each includes or is developing the elements listed above. Each serves as a direct source for information, materials and services for a particular micro-market among church leaders.

The New NAD Strategy for Resourcing the Local Church

Last year the NAD executive committee put in place a new strategic plan and a new structure for resources for the local church. It is the NAD Church Resources Consortium. It is a network of small enterprises, some of them denominationally-owned or based in denominational institutions and some of them ASI members. Each is now or will become a fully-accredited resource center. Overall coordination is placed in the M&M executive

committee or NAD Church Resources board, with an Assistant to the President of the NAD serving as executive secretary of the board.

Decentralization saves costs and allows for a maximum of market-driven elements in the system. Very little denominational investment is at risk. The most efficient new technologies for production of materials are being fully utilized. Last-minute, small-inventory production methods tie up very few assets in inventory risks. Several key elements are vital to this system:

1. The Plusline 800 number. Local church leaders across North American can dial 800-SDA-PLUS from 8 to 5 local time and talk to a person who will help them find answers to their questions, find the materials they need, and guide them to the right resource center. This is not a sales organization; in fact, orders are not taken on this number. This is a division-wide help desk. It has been tested in the Pacific Union for the last year, and successfully dealt with more than 3,000 calls. Half of these were requests for help with resource materials with another 25% asking for information, and another 15% seeking an address or phone number from somewhere in the denominational system. A database of more than 4,500 listings has been developed from a number of sources and the research required to answer inquiries.

2. The NAD Distribution Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. This facility manages production, inventory and fulfillment services for a number of resource centers. Only a limited amount of production is done in-house, and there is very little investment in hardware. Student labor from Union College is used both provide flexibility in labor needs and keep labor costs low. An 800 number is available for direct purchases using the four major credit cards, and a strong program direct marketing targets product information to the specific users of each product. This involves direct mail, telemarketing and database marketing approaches. A professional staff handles customer relations and marketing.

3. The Church Resource Center at the Pacific Union. The only union to invest in a resource development staff, this unit is linked directly to the NAD and provides major services in research and development, project management and related activities, as well as serve the needs of its own field. This team has developed particular expertise in focus group research. It also operates the Plusline service for the entire division. Nearly half of the resource materials being made available by the NAD come from the work of the CRC. Without this unit the overall resourcing of churches in North America would be hurt.

What Does the Local Leader Get?

What does the local church leader get from this system? The hallmark of the system is its ability to deliver top-quality products and services. Specific standards in relating to each local church leader is to provide:

1. A quality product that is Christ-centered, practical, up-to-date, user friendly in design, tested and able to empower church members in ministry.
2. Legendary customer service.
3. Ease of access and immediacy.
4. Information as well as product.
5. Support in the form of a help desk number, a regular users newsletter with updates, and a schedule of associated training events.
6. A listening ear and the willingness to try improvements in any product.
7. Prayer partners who are with you in your ministry.

4. FaxPlus fax back information service. Fact sheets on some 70 major topics are available through an 800 number that a person who has access to a fax machine can dial, enter the correct ID numbers and their fax number, and get immediate return service by fax. The ID number to obtain an index to the rest of the ID numbers is announced in the answering audio tape to facilitate access. This provides a flexible information source for those who do not have access to online computer services, but do have the more pervasive fax technology.

5. SDA On-Line forum on Compuserve. A computer information service where notices can be posted, people with similar interests contacted, questions asked and documents downloaded from a library of resource materials. Graphics and complex documents can be transferred in this way; ultimately this can serve as a comprehensive source of resource materials and information.

6. Product teams. The primary means for collaborative work to design, test, develop and market resource materials is a number of product teams that are created as needs are identified. Each team will include local and union conference departmental personnel, creative personnel from one or more of the resource centers, innovators from the grass roots who are pioneering the area of ministry to be supported with the resource material, and NAD staff to coordinate the team. The product teams are assigned one particular priority and then develop a specific project work program and budget. This is approved by the M&M executive committee and the appropriate resource center board, funds are allocated and the team is given authorization to move ahead.

7. Church Resources Consortium fund. The NAD allocates up to \$100,000 each year and the union conferences match this amount to provide seed money for project development. The project budgets involve money from this fund and matching funds from one or more resource centers collaborating in the project. Each product developed from the fund must also pay a 10% royalty back into the fund in order to make it self-sustaining in the long run.

8. Church Resources management team. A small team that includes a team leader from NAD administration, two people from the NAD departmental staff, two from the Pacific Church Resources Center and two from the NAD Distribution Center provide overall management of the complex array of projects. This team meets monthly to review progress on each project, solve problems, and develop marketing strategy. The Distribution Center provides a marketing consultant and a full-time advertizing coordinator to staff the marketing functions and make maximum use of collaboration with the networks represented in each product team.

9. Church officer periodicals. Three periodicals serve as the official NAD journals for local church officers and provide regular delivery of information direct to local church leaders; *Celebration Magazine* for leaders of adult activities in personal ministries, family life, community service, evangelism, stewardship and the Sabbath School; *Cornerstone Youth Resource Magazine* for leaders of teen and young adult activities; and *Kid's Stuff* for leaders of children's ministries, including Pathfinder Clubs, Adventurer Clubs, VBS and the Sabbath School. This is the primary conduit through which new materials are announced.

10. Curriculum review office. A final piece yet to be put in place is an evaluation office that will constantly review feedback from users, evaluate and revise existing materials as they come to time for reprinting. Funding has been voted for this and it should be

implemented next year. This is the evaluation function that completes the circle of a fully market-driven, user-friendly resource system. A set of curriculum standards is being developed to evaluate all materials in terms of the spiritual goals the church has for them, the mission of the church as presented in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, as well as the practical issues raised by users. This will protect against market forces moving materials outside the acceptable parameters of doctrine or into areas that are counterproductive to the mission of the church.