

Polyline

Digital Media Ministry: **It's More Than Just Packaging**



By integrating digital media into its daily ministry, Heartland Community Church in Rockford, Illinois, has created a series of powerful tools for church members, non-members, believers and seekers throughout the Rockford community. By partnering with Polyline as its primary resource for its media packaging, Heartland is able to receive the materials to accomplish these ministries, when it needs them.

When the founders of Heartland Community Church in Rockford, Illinois, set the direction for the church's ministry in 1998, their vision was larger than just a place for believers to come and worship together. They wanted to be a resource for their community, a place where believers and seekers alike could find their "spiritual gifts" and learn concepts that allow them to apply Christ's teaching to their daily lives.

Clearly a "different way to do church," Heartland's core teaching messages have always centered on video teachings and audio recordings. In its early days, Heartland turned to Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL, which then provided the new church with video teachings from its archives.

Even before Heartland formed as a church, Sherri Bankord, one of the church's founders, was purchasing audiocassettes of teaching pastors at Willow Creek Community Church and sharing them with friends. The transformational teaching helped both her seeker friends and Christ followers, who had drifted from the church, hear teaching that immediately impacted their lives.

"Our hearts were just really refreshed from the teachings we were hearing from Willow Creek," said Doug Thiesen, Lead Pastor at Heartland.

When Heartland first opened its doors, volunteers would make the 100-mile round trip each week to Willow Creek to buy boxes of cassettes of the messages being presented there on videotape. The majority of those attending Heartland's weekend services had never heard the kind of teaching being offered. When they experienced the transformational worship and teaching, they would buy the cassettes so they could listen again or pass them on to their friends. People were sending cassettes to family members and friends around the country and around the world.

"For the first eight years, 95 percent of our teachings were on video. We would duplicate audio cassettes from those video messages and get them into people's hands," Thiesen continued. "We had first hand

Helpful Tips from Heartland

- 1) The popularity of a CD/DVD recording of a church service is directly related to how much it resonates with the audience. Typically, those services which people find most applicable to their daily lives are the ones they find most inspirational and transformational. Heartland's Coming up to Breathe, a new series on recovery, sold 300 CDs on its first weekend.
- 2) Preparation is the key:
 - a. Print CD cover art in advance
 - b. Place an ample supply of jewel cases or envelopes in your CD production area the night before services
 - c. Give your volunteers plenty of elbow room so they can do their jobs quickly and with minimal bruising.
- 3) Use the same or similar graphic elements in your promotional materials, newsletter and on your CD. Repeating the same colors and artwork across all media related to a series will help your audience find what they are looking for.
- 4) Burn extra CDs and make them available from your bookstore or Web site. This will help people who missed your services stay connected with your teachings even when they cannot attend.

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experience how lives can be impacted outside the church with cassette tapes."

To a large degree, the tapes were evangelistic and discipleship tools believers were using to reach out to family and friends who were seeking answers. Additionally, when Heartlanders would be out of town for the weekend, they knew they could purchase a cassette or CD for when they returned. That continues today.

Recording Weekly Services for CDs

Weekend messages on CD and/or DVD are made available to help believers and seekers on their spiritual journey to becoming fully devoted followers of Christ. The rich content of each message still impacts people across the U.S. and around the world.

Each weekend more than 6,000 believers and seekers come to Heartland Community Church over four weekend services. Shortly after the first service has ended, worshippers begin queuing up inside Journeys Books and Music, the church's bookstore, to purchase a CD of the day's teaching. Within 15 minutes, the CDs are available.

It may seem amazing that people would line up to purchase a recording of a service they just heard. Thiesen explained that what inspires the worshippers to become customers are the teachings that are offered.

Dubbed "transformational teaching," the sermons provide lessons that have a high impact and a high application for daily life. In short, lessons that are very rich, very relevant and bear repeating.

"Because it is so impactful, just about everyone in the room is thinking 'I have this friend and I would love him or her to hear this,'" Thiesen said. "Many people are buying two or three or four to share with friends and family."

It's the message, says church leadership, more than the format that matters most to their congregants. Although, Thiesen conceded, the CD format makes the message accessible.

"Not many people would have the time, attention or focus to read through a message transcript," he said. "But at the same time, people do have a lot of downtime and by that I mean a lot of windshield time."

"Every time I get in the car, I just pick up where I left off," Thiesen continued. "That's just one of the tools people can use in their day to day walk with Christ."



Did You Know?

Polyline's Earn Money 2 Burn customer reward program gives participants 2% back in EM2B dollars every time they buy discs, disc packaging, ink cartridges and ribbons, or media kits. EM2B\$ can be used to buy new disc publishers, printers, duplicators and warranties - any brand or model we sell!

Creating CDs

The secret to getting CDs of the weekend teachings into people's hands quickly is to do as much work as possible in advance, said Diana Lambert, Heartland's CD specialist. Printing the cover graphics to disc takes the most time, so she prints the artwork on hundreds of discs on Friday.

"It's been trial and error see what works and what doesn't work," Lambert said. "I've done so many now that I've learned that preparation and having stuff ready in advance is key."

Estimating the popularity of a series can be a tricky task in itself. "It really depends a lot on the teacher," said Jason Petersen, production director of Heartland's communication department. "Some people will touch you and inspire you and you'll want to get the CD immediately. Some speakers won't have the same response."

In general, Petersen said, the more a teaching resonates with the audience and the more it can be applied to people's every day lives, the more popular the teaching will be.

The church uses a Microboards PF2 inkjet printer for the CD art. The Microboards PF2 (and its replacement the [PF3](#)) comes with SureThing™ label making software for windows, which Lambert loves using.

"I've been very happy with SureThing," she said. "That was the software my predecessor was using before I took over this position. It's very simple to use."

Lambert uses Taiyo Yuden CD-Rs. In the past, she has used the shiny silver CD-Rs ([TY8052PS-600](#)), enjoying the subtle sheen they give to high-color images. Now, she uses the white inkjet discs ([TY8052PW-600](#)), which are a basic media that allows smooth, strong colors.

Helpful Tips (continued)

5) Utilize your volunteers. Creating an assembly line is an easy way to produce CDs quickly and efficiently.

6) Keep your recording area as close to the duplicating area as possible. You want both of these areas as close to the distribution area as possible. The time spent walking back and forth to collect master CDs or to move finished CDs to the bookstore is time that is better spent burning CDs.

7) Consider adding a special insert to your CD/DVD that contains study questions or activities relating to the content. This will give your audience another way to absorb the content and apply the lessons to their daily lives. (Need an easy way to add written content? Check out Polyline's [booklets for inside DVD case](#) and [booklets for inside CD case](#).)

8) Remember that many of your staff and volunteers are at your church part time. Things happen while they are away from their posts. You need to purchase your media and packaging from a company like Polyline, which has a wide variety of items in stock and ready to ship.

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Creating visually appealing CD art is key in promoting CD sales, Lambert pointed out. The church's graphics department has artwork that is incorporated into a teaching series' literature and Lambert tries to incorporate the same key graphic elements in her CD design.

"If people don't remember the name of the series they are looking for, they'll see the graphic and it will hopefully trigger their memory."

Lambert records the live services via an intranet connection to the tech room in the church's lower level. She is able to watch the services on a television monitor and record directly from the bookstore. This is a new method that has only been in effect the past couple of years. Previously, a CD recorder was positioned backstage and a member of the tech crew would record the services, and someone would have to retrieve the master CD.

"We're always looking for ways to get it done quicker," she said. "Even that five minute walk to pick up the recording from back stage is five minutes I could have spent making CDs."

Once the master CD is finalized, it is placed into a Microboards duplication tower and CD production begins. While the actual duplication time varies depending on the length of that week's lesson, it usually takes between 30 and 50 seconds to burn each CD.

At this point, Lambert depends on a corps of volunteers who set up an assembly line. The volunteers remove the finished CDs from the tower and place a blank CD-R in its place. The finished CD is packaged in a trayless Slimline with a clear frosted bottom ([SLJB52-200](#)) or black bottom ([SLJB52B-200](#)) and distributed to the waiting crowd.

The benefit of using Slimline cases is that they are lighter and take up less room than standard jewel cases, while affording more protection than a paper envelope. The CD art doubles as the CD case's cover art, eliminating the need for an insert.

When the queue from the final Sunday service has received their CDs and gone home for the day, a handful of extra CDs are created and placed on the bookstore shelves.

Individual teachings are packaged in Slimline cases, but an entire series would be packaged together in a two-ring vinyl binder ([DSC12W-48](#)) with Unikeep polypropylene sleeves ([UNKPSL-500](#)). Heartland's graphics department makes its own cover art for the binders using high speed, color printers.

Heartland's series often have intriguing names that tap into pop culture programming and phrases, while still giving a relatively clear idea of the series content. For example *According to Jim* is a five part-series based on the New Testament's book of James and *Desperate Households* is a four-part topical series on marriage and relationships.

In addition to doing as much of the CD production as possible in advance, Lambert also attributes part of her CD success to Polyline. She said as a part-time employee of the church, she needs a supplier she can depend on and that can work around her schedule.

"I am part time and sometimes, when I'm not here, things happen," said Diana Lambert, CD specialist for Heartland. "If I come in on Thursday and learn we only have 200 CDs left, when we need 400 for the weekend, I know I can place an order Thursday morning and it will be here Friday afternoon."

Not all of Polyline's customers can enjoy next-day ground delivery but, with most products in stock, 99% of processed orders that are placed before 2 p.m. are shipped out the same day. That type of dependability is very important when the majority of your staff and volunteers are part time.

"The two years I've been doing this, we've never encountered a problem at all," said Lambert. "We've never even had something on backorder. Dependability is the key."

DVDs of Services and Ministries

Since its inception, video elements have been a large component of Heartland Community Church's ministry. From the pre-recorded teachings provided by Willow Creek to Heartland's "original programming" such as *Mighty Family Smashup*, the church has continually sought out new ways to present its message.

Heartland's set up for recording services to DVD would put many small television production companies to shame. The church's main auditorium contains three large video screens, onto which the Heartland technical staff can project one of five camera shots or computer graphics, which may contain the words to a song or an announcement. These three screens will become the basis for any future recording of the service.

Heartland Community Church has five Sony D50 cameras (three manual and two robotic) which send information directly to a control room located in the lower level of the church. From there, four VTRs and two DVD decks record all the images that appear on these screens to [Sony DVCAM 124](#) tape and two [DVDs](#).

"It's recording what the audience sees so, to some extent, the video is being edited as it is being recorded," said Petersen. "The information that goes to the decks is the finished videos that the audience is watching during the services."

Heartland Community Church does not offer every service on DVD. To some degree, what they do offer on DVD is based on popular demand – members of the congregation tell church leaders which services they found the most moving and transformational.

"A lot of times we have a good feeling about a teacher and know immediately if he's going to be popular," explained Petersen. "Like John Ortberg who teaches here once a year and is a favorite here at Heartland. At his last appearance, we immediately burned 50 DVDs and made them available in the bookstore and sold out immediately."

If Heartland decides to release a teaching or a series on DVD, the recording would then go to the video editors who would remove music, theatrical performances or any other

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elements that may be protected by copyright. The video editors use Final Cut to create menu and computer graphics.

Heartland's video editors must also reformat the video for standard televisions. The video monitors in the auditorium 16 x 9 (wide screen) formats, but most people's televisions are 4 x 3 formats. So the final stage of editing is putting the recording into a 4 x 3 sequence (letterbox) for export. The finished recording is sent to an outside service that duplicates and prints the DVDs.

A particularly exceptional piece of ministry-based programming is Heartland Community Church's *Mighty Family Smashup*. Meeting monthly, Mighty Family Smashup is a half-hour experience targeted toward families with children in kindergarten through 5th grade. The program's goal is to disciple and to equip families to grow spiritually together. It provides the families with a shared experience and then "kicks them out and lets them continue at home." The sessions are designed like a television program, with different segments revolving around a central theme.

The Mighty Family Smashup format is such that it translates easily to DVD and was an instant hit. In addition to the DVD recording of the monthly meetings, the DVD comes with a four-color tri-fold brochure that describes a month's worth of family activities based on the lessons. These activities give families another opportunity to walk along the same spiritual path.

Spreading the Word

To put its CDs and DVDs in the hands of community members, Heartland Community Church started a full-service Christian bookstore, called Journey Books and Music, which is located near the church's main auditorium. The bookstore offers not only in-house productions, but also CDs of popular Christian artists, bibles and bible study books.

"A lot of times a book is recommended during a teaching," explained Petersen. "Instead of saying 'go to Barnes and Nobel and pick it up,' they can get the book right here. Then, the money they would have been spent at the bookstore is reinvested in the church's ministries."

Of course, the bulk of the bookstores sales are generated on the weekend, when Heartland holds its regular services. To say that CDs and DVDs drive people into the bookstore to buy additional resources, however, is only partly true. Sales are not Heartland's driving force -- transformation is.

"For us it's a matter of getting resources into people's hands," said Thiesen, "so that they can continue to grow in their faith. It is amazing to see how God is changing lives with CDs and DVDs."

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