

UU Tampa Bay Area Marketing Campaign Update – One Year Later
Prepared by Valerie Holton, Marketing Outreach Director, UUA
March 15, 2009

In the spring of 2008, eight congregations in the Tampa Bay area – from Tarpon Springs south to Sarasota – were involved in a \$225,700 advertising campaign to promote Unitarian Universalism. This report is a snap shot *summary of first year membership results*. A full campaign report is available on the UUA's website – www.uua.org/marketing/regional. For further information contact: Valerie Holton (vholton@uua.org) or Catherine Lynch, Director of Campaigning, UUA Stewardship & Development (clynch@uua.org).

CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

This campaign was unique from other regional campaigns in that the UUA used a “fast start” approach. The first conversation to determine congregational interest was in August 2007; the campaign started the first week in February 2008. It was hoped that this “fast start” would serve as a new model for regional campaign roll-outs, allowing the UUA to support several regional campaigns each year.

Fund-Raising: Funds were locally raised through the support of the Stewardship & Development staff of the UUA. Nearly 100 donors contributed to the campaign.

Pre-preparation: Congregations worked hard to get ready for guests. Congregations were asked to conduct a “congregational assessment” to determine areas for improvement, participate in a church preparation workshop, and track results. Ninety lay leaders attended the workshop. Several congregations reported that the campaign and workshop were instrumental in changing their church culture.

“The best thing for us was the exercise required to get ready - the best practices workshop, the mystery worshipper, and the other activities that caused us to look at how we do everything. So thank you for what you did to move us along. It is so comfortable doing things the way we always did in the past.” Kathy Stevens, Tarpon Springs President

“The church was being kept cleaner, there was more signage, the lobby was transformed. The congregation was using the lens of a first-time visitor.” Rev. Abhi Janamanchi, UUs of Clearwater

“For ten years we’ve been talking about things we wanted to do to improve the building. The campaign motivated us to do so.” Diana Stevens UUCT President

In addition, each congregation assigned a marketing representative to the Regional Marketing Group. This group, led by volunteer Victor Beaumont, worked collaboratively with the UUA's marketing staff to design the media plan.

In early January, Paula Cole Jones, UUA Just Change Consultant, conducted a workshop titled “UU Hospitality, Inclusion and Transformation in Multicultural Communities.”

Celebrations: A campaign kick-off party on Saturday, February 9th was attended by over 150 local area UUs. UUA President Bill Sinkford was the keynote speaker for the event.

ADVERTISING

The campaign ran from February – April 2008. Media included TV, radio, billboards, print ads, direct mail, newspaper inserts and PR coverage. For a detailed description of the media buy please refer to the full campaign report.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The campaign had the following goals:

1. Generate brand awareness of Unitarian Universalism
2. Create excitement and pride among Unitarian Universalists in the area
3. Build a sense of UU community among the eight participating congregations
4. Increase visitor attendance at local congregations
5. Increase membership

RESULTS (for details refer to Charts in the Addendum)

Church growth is organic – it's not linear. Advertising can bring visitors to the doors and it's an important part of church growth, but not the only solution. There are many dynamics to healthy growing congregations. The membership process includes attracting visitors, transitioning visitors to membership, encouraging members to be engaged in the life of the church, and membership attrition. The UUA has metrics for each stage of this "life cycle" of membership (see Addendum – Membership Ratios).

VISITORS: The congregations measured first time visitors during the campaign; 567 new visitors attended a church over 12 Sundays. For congregations to grow a >1:1 ratio of visitor to members is recommended. If visitor attraction could be sustained at the initial campaign level, the Tampa Bay congregations would have annualized 2,268 visitors, or a ratio of 2.03 to 1.00 (2,268/1,118).

VISITORS TO MEMBERSHIP: Six of the eight congregations welcomed 135 new members February 2008-2009. These figures are conservative; two congregations did not report results. While not all of these new members were a result of the campaign, nor necessarily visitors from the campaign, the visitor to member ratio of 24% (135/567) is above average (liberal churches normally have a conversion ratio of 10-20%). The high visitor to member conversion ratios of Sarasota and UU Church of St. Petersburg are particularly worth noting.

MEMBER ATTRITION: Part of the membership cycle is also attrition. All denominations lose about 10 - 12% of their membership each year, approximately 50% to death. Among the Tampa Bay UU churches the first year attrition rate was 13.5%. It is possible that in Florida the attrition rate is higher as a result of an aging population or the economy (Florida has the highest foreclosure rate in the nation). High attrition rates may also be an indication of church dynamics and/or conflict. Both the Clearwater and Tampa congregations have done a good job of attracting new members and keeping existing members. For congregations with particularly high attrition percentages, exit interviews with members leaving the church would be helpful. "Closing the back door" is important. Churning membership is costly and prevents building a strong church community.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Marketing is particularly difficult – and important - for Unitarian Universalism because of our low brand/name awareness. It is important to educate the public about our values, history and theology. Brand education, while not stated as a campaign goal, is critically important.

Marketing has a long term impact. It is difficult to measure a direct response to church marketing. Studies indicate that people search for a church community when they are "in transition" or "in tension" – when their lives have changed in profound ways. People will visit us when they are in need. It is good that they will know who we are and will find a welcoming home.

The UUA continues to learn with each regional campaign. “Continuous improvement” is important. The following are lessons learned from this campaign:

Fast Launch - We know that fund-raising and church preparation take time. More time might have resulted in wider financial support, increased inter-congregational collaboration and continued work on our hospitality and welcoming practices.

Maintaining momentum – these campaigns need a mechanism to create on-going momentum. Ideas include earmarking dollars for a second flight of advertising, creating an annual event that could be advertised yearly and utilizing more “earned” media.

The campaign did meet many of our goals – specifically generating brand awareness, increasing visitor attendance, creating excitement among Tampa Bay Area UUs and fostering a sense of inter-congregational community.

ADDENDUM – CHARTS

NET MEMBERSHIP, ONE YEAR LATER: The net membership figures for the eight congregations are listed below.

Congregation	FY* 2005	FY* 2006	FY* 2007	FY* 2008	FY* 2009	FY* 2010	# Change 2009 vs 2010	% Change 2009 vs 2010
Manatee UU Fellowship	103	100	113	117	111	104	-7	-6.3%
UUs of Clearwater	275	290	318	338	287	314	27	9.4%
Spirit of Life UUs, Odessa	77	68	60	55	60	54	-6	-10%
UU Church of Sarasota	308	311	326	314	315	288	-27	-8.6%
UU Church of St. Petersburg	97	101	106	119	132	123	-9	-6.8%
UU United Fellowship, St. Petersburg	25	24	24	27	29	28	-1	-3.4%
UU Church of Tampa	129	114	120	107	108	117	9	8.0%
UU Church of Tarpon Springs	68	73	70	76	85	90	5	6.0%
TOTAL	1,082	1,081	1,137	1,153	1,127	1,118	-9	0%

FY figures are from UUA Directory and reflect membership numbers provided in February of prior calendar (e.g. February 2010 numbers were reported in 2/09)

MEMBERSHIP PROCESS: The campaign resulted in a significant number of first time visitors. Below is a chart of First Time visitors (over 12 Sundays - 11weeks - of the campaign from February 9th through April 27th)^{as} well as New Member, Net Members, and Attrition Rates. For further details please see the full campaign report.

Congregation	# Adult First Time Guests	New Members Feb 2009-Feb 2010	% New Member to Guest	Net Members 2009 vs 2010	Member Attrition	% Attrition to Membership
Manatee UU Fellowship	62	7	11%	-7	-14	13%
UUs of Clearwater	216	40	18.5%	27	-13	5%
Spirit of Life UUs, Odessa	20	5*	25%	-6	-11	20%
UU Church of Sarasota (3 weeks data missing)	40	31	77.5%	-27	-58	20%
UU Church of St. Petersburg	106	32	30%	-9	-41	33%
UU United Fellowship, St. Petersburg	27	NA		-1	NA	
UU Church of Tampa (2 weeks data missing)	92	20	22%	9	-11	8%
UU Church of Tarpon Springs (10 weeks data missing)	4	NA		5	NA	
TOTAL	567	135	24%	-9	-148	13.5%

* Spirit of Life welcomed 5 new members, four of whom left within the year for various reasons

ADDENDUM – MEMBERSHIP RATIOS

The UUA currently uses a membership diagnostic tool called “Congregations Count.” This tool was designed by Linda Laskowski, member of the UU Church of Berkeley and currently UUA Board Trustee for the Pacific Central District.

Ms. Laskowski has developed a methodology and metrics to ascertain the steps in the membership process that can lead to increased growth.

Included in “Congregations Count” are some baseline metrics gathered from UU congregations, as well as membership studies from other denominations. Her research indicates:

First time guests: Growing congregations should have a ratio of annual total guests to total members >1:1

Return guests: The average congregation can expect returning guests, as a percentage of first time guests to be 20-40%. The higher the percentage, the better.

New Member: Conversion of guests to members is ~ 14%-20%. Evangelical churches are higher at ~ 25%; liberal Churches are ~10-20%.

Active Members: Involvement in a church is a barometer for membership health and vitality. Congregations should aspire to have -

- 65% of new members involved in activities other than Sunday service. (Evangelical congregations’ statistics indicate that 90% of new and 75% of all members are involved).

Attrition: Congregations lose about 10 -12% of their membership each year (Evangelicals lose less ~ 6-10%). The majority are a result of moving (50%) or death.