

Life and faith in rural Britain...

COUNTRYWAY



What you see is what you get

CPO was founded over sixty years ago by three tobacco advertisers who came to faith and wanted to use their gifts to help the church do better in conveying its message to the wider world. For some the idea that good design, carefully chosen words or a campaign with a strong visual identity might have anything to do with mission is hard to compute. But Jesus told his followers to ‘go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them... and teaching them to obey everything [he] commanded’ (Matthew 28:16-20). Our world is noisy and competition for a hearing is fierce. We do the gospel a disservice if we don’t deliver it in a clear and engaging way.

Not only that, but God is the source of all that is beautiful and good. As Psalm 19 reminds us, the whole earth declares his glory. When our churches communicate using eye-catching, excellent design, we reflect God’s character and his image in us. Design comes into everything from what you display on your church noticeboard and flyers inviting people to church events, to service sheets and posters in the porch. All these add up to ‘a visual identity.’

As CPO serves, equips and resources churches across the UK, we’ve identified some ways in which a visual identity can be developed.

1. Get to know your church

Our visual identity needs to be congruent with who we actually are as a church community or we will lose the trust of outsiders very quickly. For most of us, pictures of festival-sized crowds would be misleading. We need to build our visual identity around current reality.

Why not ask your congregation to answer a few simple questions about your church? For example:

- What three words best describe our church?
- What do we have to offer our community?
- What do we care about most?

You could ask them to fill out a short survey, or create space over coffee after a service for conversations. Use what you learn to help you understand your church better and shape your visual identity.

2. Photograph church life

Images of your own church are the best way to be authentic so make sure the images you use reflect the size, age and ethnicity of your congregation as closely as possible. Photos you use don’t have to be amazing

but in a visual and digital age people appreciate being able to see what happens at church, what to expect and even what to wear!

If you are using images of people, please ensure that you are complying with GDPR and check that people don't mind being photographed. Before using pictures of children, make sure you have written consent from their parents.

3. Gain a better understanding of your area

Find out about your community. Tools like datashine.org.uk and theology-centre.org.uk/my-context can give you an insight into your area's socio-economic profile, as well as the age spread, religious affiliations and education levels. It is important that your visual identity is contextually appropriate. If your church is in a farming community, use images of crops and livestock. If you are in an area of outstanding natural beauty, use photographs of the scenery that people will recognise.

3. Be consistent

You don't need to have a big budget to have a strong visual identity, and a computer programme like Microsoft Word is all you need to produce high quality, consistent materials. Once you are clear about who you are, come up with some basic 'brand guidelines' and be disciplined in applying them. Choose a main font and a font for headings, a main colour and a couple of supporting colours. Use them everywhere: on any external signage, on notice sheets, your website, the flyer you put up in the local pub and so on.

You could also use the designs CPO creates that can be customised with your details and used in a wide range of formats to help with the issue of consistency. This Christmas, you could use one of our ranges as an invitation, a poster, a banner and a social media image; visit cpo.org.uk to find out more.

4. Resist the pull towards 'people like us'

In his book *Deep and Wide*, Andy Stanley talks about the importance of resisting an invisible gravitational 'pull towards becoming a church for church people'. As you gain a better understanding of your local community, focus on those who don't yet belong to the church.

Picture your outreach events or services from the view of someone who has never been before. What are the potentially confusing social nuances that are hard for unchurched people to follow? No church sets out to make newcomers feel uncomfortable, but it can easily happen if we only listen to those already inside the church.

5. Be visible

How visible is your church within your community? If your building is used by lots of community groups it won't take long for people to notice your new visual identity and your signs and poster about events, services and activities!

If, on the other hand, your building is off the beaten track, or at one end of the village, you may need to be a bit more creative. If you have a local shop, doctor's surgery, or pub, how about asking if you can put up a flyer advertising your seniors' lunch or Harvest festival service? Could you have a stand at the village fete or local agricultural show?

Most people visiting a church for the first time will look it up online first. Even if it is very basic, a website is a huge asset and will help to reinforce your welcome of newcomers. CPO can help get you online. Get in touch and we can talk you through next steps.

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cpo.org.uk