

Executive Summary of Houston UU Advertising Campaign January – April 2005

Presented to the Houston Council, Ministers and Houston Network

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Background Data: End of year 2004, there were 1677 members of eight (8) UU Congregations in the Greater Houston area. This represents a 2.3% increase from 2003 (1639 members). 2005 numbers are not currently available.

Campaign Objectives:

- Create brand/name awareness of Unitarian Universalism in the greater Houston area
- Educate market on Unitarian Universalism
- Increase church visitors and convert them to membership

Overview of Campaign: Approximate Budget \$212,000 – 50 Million Impressions

- Two months (January and February) of billboard advertising in three high traffic locations
- 200,000 households received post-cards, each three times, in late January, February and March
- Eight ¼ page print ads in the Sunday Houston Chronicle and three in the Sunday Galveston Daily News
- Three months of advertising (1/2 page four color ads) in OutSmart, a GLBT special interest magazine, and banner ads on OutSmart website
- An 8-page insert, with stories about all the local churches, in the Sunday Chronicle on February 20, 2005. Subscriber list of 750,000 households and a readership of > 1.50 Million
- Banner ads (six weeks) on the Chronicle News homepage
- Six weeks directory listing of the eight congregations in Chronicle Religion section (complimentary)
- 7 week/105 radio announcements on KUHF, the Houston area public radio station

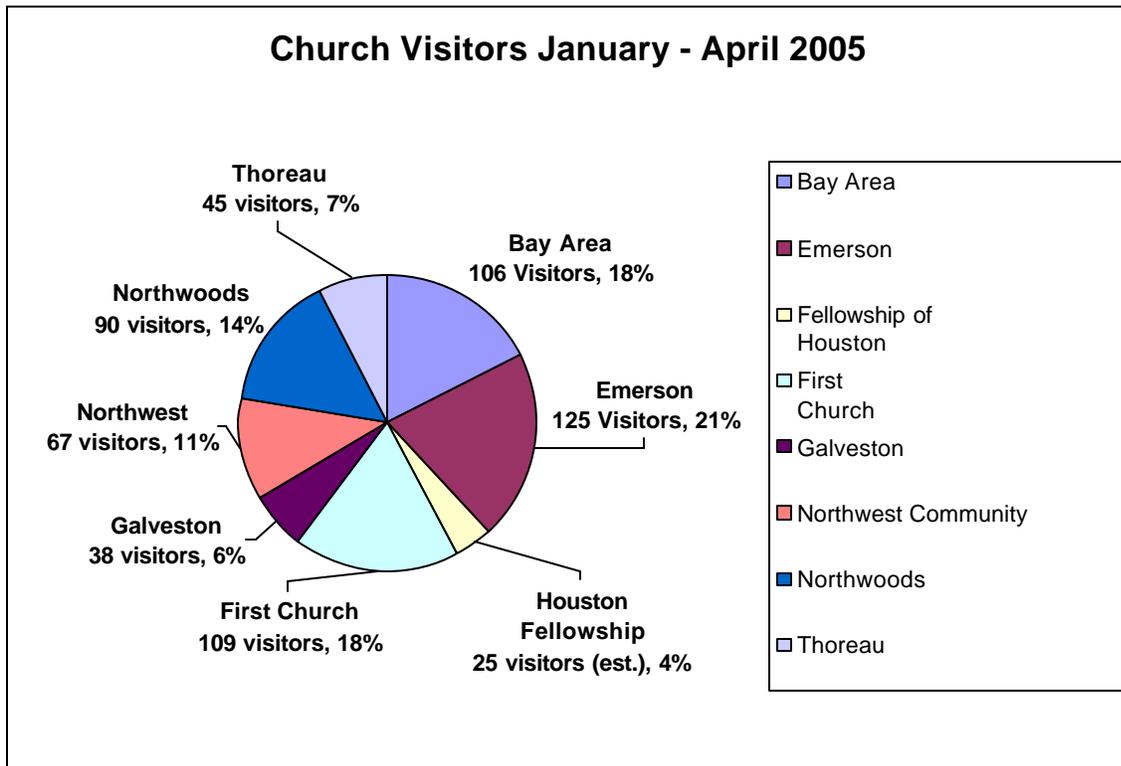
The campaign ran from January 1st through April 15th. The majority of the media buy was in late- January, February and March. Attendance, both members and visitors closely tracked media expenditures, with a sharp increase in attendance the week(s) following the Sunday Chronicle insert and second direct mail drop.

Measurable Results:

Visitors: Over 605 first time visitors attended a Unitarian Universalist congregation in the greater Houston area from January – April 2005. This represents 36% of current membership.

- Northwoods' new visitor attendance increased 296% from a year prior
- Bay Area experienced a 100% increase from a year earlier
- Emerson estimates a 100% increase
- First Church's "Total visitors" count (includes new and returning) was double (100%) last year

Visitor acquisition costs were ~\$350.



New Members: The following is a summary of new members for first quarter 2005

Church	New Members
Bay Area	22
Emerson	47
First UU Church	35
Henry David Thoreau	3
Northwest Community	10
Northwoods	17
UU Fellowship of Galveston County	4
Unitarian Fellowship of Houston	5
Total	143

New member acquisition costs were ~\$1,500¹. While the campaign was donor funded, each congregation can determine the time period for pay-back based on average pledge amounts. The majority will see a payback within two years.

New members represent 8.5 % of total membership. Not all new members can be attributed to the advertising campaign. Some churches (Emerson) felt there was a direct correlation with the campaign; while others (Bay Area) felt that claiming a relational impact of the campaign on membership was premature.

Congregations vary by their net membership growth. For example, Bay Area and Northwest are seeing dramatic growth, 18% and 45% respectively, while the Fellowships are experiencing a slight decline in membership.

Intangible Results:

Public Relations Opportunities

- On February 13th, Reverends Ballester, Marriner and Tittle participated in a Houston area same-sex marriage ceremony. A dozen clergy and 50 couples were in attendance. The event was covered with TV and press interviews.
- The Focus on Family “Love Won Out” Conference was on Feb. 20th. Approximately 150 protesters were on hand, many were from our Bay Area, Galveston and First UU congregations. Matt Tittle was interviewed on radio. In a counter-response to the conference we ran a new ad “Imagine a Religion Where All Are Welcome” in both the Galveston and Chronicle papers in February. Our campaign was well timed!
- The Houston Chronicle ran an article on church marketing June 12th. Our marketing campaign was prominently referenced.

Congregational Transformation

A best practices workshop was conducted in October. Congregations came together to share and learn about receiving visitors and retaining guests and members.

Task forces were assigned to address outreach issues and church preparedness.

Every congregation mentioned that the campaign had a positive impact on church outreach. For example:

- First UU Church trained 55 greeters to be welcoming
- Galveston Fellowship was more purposeful in its programming
- Emerson’s church culture was “transformed”
- Bay Area is seeing a 100% increase in visitors

Matt Tittle, Minister at Bay Area, mentioned that existing church members are more willing to invite friends to their church and more engaged in personal outreach, a profound change in attitude from Unitarian Universalists’ historically introspective faith profile.

In addition, there is a new energy and a belief that future congregational growth is possible and desirable.

1. The Kansas City Campaign new member acquisition costs were \$2100 over the same time period.

Anecdotal Comments

Bay Area had their highest church attendance ever on Easter Sunday, with 226 folks. Rev. Matt Tittle mentioned that the day the insert dropped, (Sunday 2/20) a person called the church at 8:30 AM. Matt took the call, the gentleman came that day and has been coming every Sunday since.

The Unitarian Fellowship of Houston states “we averaged 2-3 times our regular number of visitors through-out the campaign with a peak of 15 one Sunday (*the Fellowship averages <50 folks on Sunday; visitors that day would have represented 30% of attendees*)...I’ve also seen folks come in with the insert in their hands as they walked in the door.”

Northwest Community UU said that “over 50% of the visitors cited the campaign as their reason for coming.”

Henry Groppe, Emerson Church member states, “We welcomed 47 new members – a record number...they stretched all the way across the sanctuary in 1 ¼ lines...the whole church buzzes with new life these days. You have helped us achieve the rarest of all accomplishments, a change in our culture”

Considerations for Future Campaigns:

In reviewing the trending data the following recommendations should be considered in a future campaign:

- **Omit the third direct mail drop.** Consider either two postcard mailings with wider reach (households targeted) or use those funds towards other media.
- **The insert had a very high impact – consider additional ways to maximize usage.** There was a significant spike in attendance the week following the insert. It is difficult to know if the insert alone was responsible (The insert day - 2/20 -was followed by a second direct mail drop the week of Monday 2/21). The insert was a comprehensive educational piece about our faith and was a critical component to the campaign’s success.
- **Reallocate budget.** With the monies saved from the third direct mail drop (approximately \$40,000) a second insert could be used, possibly again in combination with direct mail. The insert costs \$20,000 providing a \$20,000 surplus to be used for radio, regional newsprint or TV.
- **Shorten campaign. Consider second flight.** The attendance spikes in the months of February and March, and subsequent declines in April, strongly correlate with the media buy. Consider a 90-day campaign, omitting April, and reallocating the dollars. Options include a greater concentration of dollars in the three month period or a second flight of advertising in the return-to-church/school August –September season.

Summary Statement

Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States. We were able to achieve great success with a well-targeted and thoughtfully budgeted advertising campaign. Congratulations to the great team that made this possible – the Houston UU Donors, Houston Chronicle, Congregational Ministers, lay-leaders and congregation members, and the Houston Network.