

»» Tailgate in the Church Parking Lot.

1 Hey, we already know it works for stadium crowd. In every church there's a fraternity of fire-making gentlemen who are like coiled springs when it comes to barbeque. Their favorite cologne is smoke. So launch into your pitch by saying, "I know how much you love to grill, so I was wondering if you'd be interested..." If you get that far into your invitation without a "Yes!" I'll be surprised. Arrange with them to grill hotdogs, bratwursts, burgers, and wings *before* church on a Sunday morning. Promote it as a Tailgate Party to the teenagers in your church, and their friends. Play loud music and serve large pieces of pork. Make a run to your local Party City store with a couple of student leaders and grab all the tailgating promo stuff you can find, then start inviting.

Use the Power of SWAG.

2 Watch how the radio stations do it—at every sponsored event they pass out bags of free tinkets and treasures. That's exactly the reason God created the Oriental Trading Company—boxes and boxes of free things to give away to your teenagers. Check out their hyper-low-cost baubles at orientaltrading.com, or stop by its kissin' cousin at ustoyco.com. If your group is small, try the surprise box from archiemcphee.com. Once you have your stockpile of booty, *give stuff away!* No conditions. No trading for email addresses. Just give away your treasures. Promote your prize-fest well in the weeks leading up to your kickoff—make sure kids know that this meeting is the *only* time they can experience your SWAG giveaway.

Plan a Youth Group Birthday Party.

3 Your fall kickoff is a great time to celebrate your ministry's birthday. Ask the best bakers in your church if they'd make birthday cakes for a special youth group party. Send out party invitations, and ask kids to each bring the coolest toy for the youth room they can find for less than 10 bucks (for example, a Nerf gun can be had for \$8.99). Make sure they know the toys and games are for the youth room. Hang streamers. Get balloons. Play party games. Does anybody really know when your group started? Probably not. Now you have an excuse to re-stock your youth room with cool stuff every year.

Get Out of the Church.

4 Go to a movie, or sing Christmas carols at the senior pastor's house (yeah, it's August—so what?), or plan your kickoff at a nearby lake or park. Planning an unforgettable youth group meeting is a lot like starting a business—the key is location, location, location. The biggest reason your teenagers struggle to invite their friends may be the very idea of a "church" event. There's a huge difference between a church event and a church event that's not in the church.

Leverage the Wonders of Modern Technology.

5 The key word here is...*inundate*. To really get your kickoff launched, you need massive quantities of texts, Facebook messages (Facebook.com), tweets on Twitter (Twitter.com), and emails. Recruit one or two computer-savvy retired folks in your church to volunteer for just two weeks, then set them loose to paint the world with your kickoff invitations. Every teenager in your group should receive no fewer than 10 messages a day.

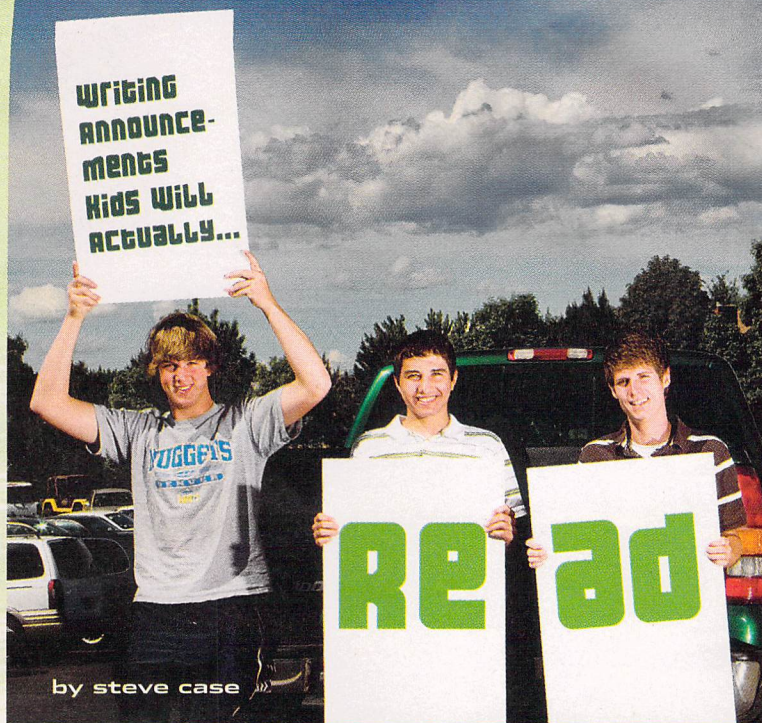
Organize a Breakfast Club Breakfast Club.

6 Send kids invitations to Saturday morning detention at your church. Make the invitations look like actual detention slips. Serve donuts and juice, or go big and ask church members to serve by making pancakes or waffles and sausage or bacon. Print the shooting script from the movie *The Breakfast Club* (dailyscript.com/scripts/breakfast_club.html), select a few scenes and ask kids to act them out during the meal. Then, afterward, show the classic film.

Go Green.

7 Jump on the green bandwagon and plan a "Recycled Party"—the twist is that you use nothing—NOTHING—that's brand new. Kids must wear clothes purchased from a local thrift store and bring decorations left over from previous parties. Serve leftovers. Play only games you've played before. Lead a short, ancient "devotion" from a giant in the faith such as C.H. Spurgeon (spurgeon.org/daily.htm). Make a punch out of all the leftover drinks people have left in your church kitchen—have fun with it. »»





by steve case

Your teenagers carry on entire conversations with words that are limited to a 2x2 screen. You think you're going to get their attention with an eight-word headline in the bulletin? Bag that. Instead...

Avoid Jargon

- 1 Extreme isn't spelled by dropping the E and capitalizing the X. Avoid "cutesy" unless you're trying to be funny.

Avoid Acronyms

- 2 When you use acronyms, you assume your reader already knows what it means. For example, "The S.T.U.M.P Group will meet in the A.R.C. on Wednesday—with our normal A.C.T. agenda."

Avoid Vague Language

- 3 It's easy to take short-and-sweet too far. For example: "Meeting!" Oooh...That's sounds exciting. Let's do that!

The headline should answer: "What's in it for me?"

- 4 For example: "Pizza, Bible study, Wednesday" won't feed the bulldog. It's great information for those who were already planning on showing up for the study, but it's not going to draw anyone in. Instead, do something that intrigues: "The Prostitute in Jesus' Family Tree, Wednesday Night, PIZZA."

Dollar amounts don't belong in the headline.

- 5 If you write "Winter Retreat Costs \$100 Each" anyone who's intimidated by the price is going to skip the article. Save cost information for the text of your announcement.

Don't ask a question.

- 6 If your headline reads "Are You Going On The Winter Retreat?" you leave the door open for some kids to answer "No." ■

»» FOCUS ON Great beginnings.

8

This one's best for smaller groups. Invite kids to bring their favorite DVD (that's appropriate for youth-group viewing).

When they arrive tell them you'll watch the first 10 minutes of every movie. At 09:59:59 hit the eject button and slide the next one in. After the mash-up fun, plan a short kickoff devotion that centers around the themes in the first two chapters of Acts—the "great beginnings" of the church.

Crack-of-dawn Vigil.

9

This is a great idea for smaller groups.

Tell parents ahead of time so they know this is coming. Gather your adult leaders for a pre-dawn invasion—show up at your

kids' homes an hour before sunrise. Give them 30 seconds to find their shoes and grab a jacket. Meet at a park or a tall building. Watch the sunrise, read the creation story in Genesis, then go out for donuts.

Give Kids a "permanent reminder of a temporary feeling." 2

10

A week before your first meeting of the new school year, print your group logo (or the date and time of your first meeting) onto temporary

tattoos. (You can find printing paper for temporary tattoos at beldec.com/tattoo_paper.cfm, or Google "printing temporary tattoos" along with your town or city name.) Send these to all your teenagers. Offer a special prize to everyone who comes in wearing the tattoo. *Double the prize* if they can show you a photo of the tattoo on their arm with a newspaper headline that's more than five days old.

Challenge Your Seniors to Set the Bar.

11

Fall kickoff is usually the time when we welcome new members to the group. First impressions are important. So go back through your

ministry photos and find pictures of your seniors when they were just entering your ministry. Send them each a picture with a "Remember When?" note. Compliment their growth in Christ. Tell them, specifically, how you've seen them mature. Then ask them to remember their crucial responsibility as role models for your new members. Ask them to lead by example. >>>

2 This is the title of a Jimmy Buffet song about tattoos—you can listen to it at Rhapsody.com. Just search for the title after clicking on the "Search by Track" button.

GO MISSIONAL!

12

Ask for donations | from your congregation to fund a special start-of-school-year outreach project. Then get kids in trios and drive half of them to a local Wal-Mart and the other half to a local

Target. Give each group \$20 to spend on school supplies. Donate your haul to a low-income school or homeless shelter. Challenge kids to compete in categories like "Most Creative Use of a Dollar" or "Who Bought the Most for \$20." Tell the store managers what you're doing—maybe they'll offer you an extra discount.

CHRONICLE THEIR CH-CH-CH-CHANGES.

13

Give each teenager a disposable camera with his or her name on it. You keep the cameras in your youth room, and each week you hand kids their camera and ask them to take one picture of "group life." Then, after 24 weeks, get the film developed and put together a visual 24-week narrative of your group.

KICKOFF YOUR KICKOFFS.

14

Fall kickoff meetings are a great time to launch yearlong projects. This is when you start the recycling campaign or a special letters-to-shut-ins project. Use this opportunity to help establish your group's identity. Keep the church updated on your yearlong projects.



The biggest event, the loudest music, the coolest prize...none of this means squat if your kids don't feel welcomed and loved. The youth room, the church itself, should be the one place in their world where they feel at ease with who they are. To fuel that kind of atmosphere:

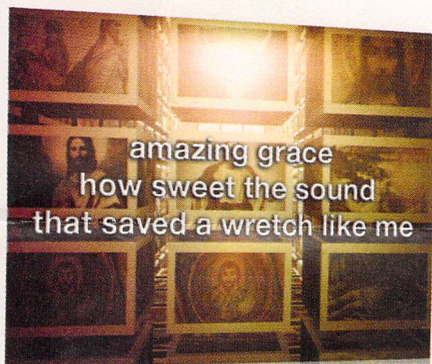
- Touch every teen—shake hands, make eye contact, learn names.
- Listen to their stories.
- Study who drops them off, and whether or not that person is consistently late picking them up (a portal into what's going on in that family).

Your fall kickoff will get them through the door, but it's the atmosphere you create that will keep them coming back. ■

steve is a youth ministry veteran in Florida, a **group** contributing editor, and author of *God Is Here: Connecting With Him in Everyday Life* (Relevant Books).



On-Stage Simplicity.

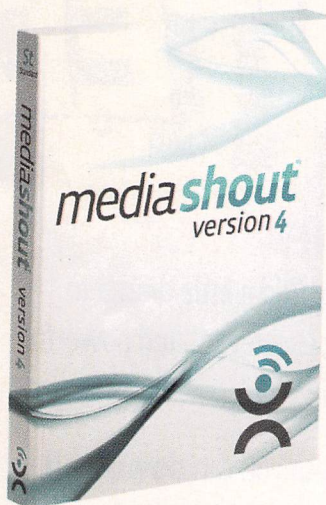


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amazing grace
how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch
like me

verse 1b: i once was lost



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