



# Everything Speaks...

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## The Church Visitor's "Customer Experience"

Imagine this...you have just entered a fast food restaurant and step into the restroom. There is water on the floor and the countertops, the toilet paper dispensers are empty, and the trash can is overflowing. Do you start to wonder about the food that you're about to order?

Every detail of an organization's physical environment "speaks" to the customer. Everything that your customer sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches gives an impression about your organization. What is the message that you want your environment to give?

Some churches unknowingly place an invisible sign in front of their building that says:

**Welcome to our Church!**  
**We are a cold, confused club that has no desire to make**  
**the gospel of Jesus Christ relevant to you or our community.**  
**You will probably not enjoy attending worship service with us,**  
**but if you want, we start at 9:00.**

The first time visitor to your church, for all intensive purposes, is a new "customer". He or she will "judge the book by the cover", and thus, the message of the Gospel by the first impressions of your facility. The Walt Disney Company developed the concept of "Everything Speaks" to capture the essence of outstanding customer service. Dennis Snow, former Disney Institute teacher, states that "Everything the customer sees, hears, touches, smells, and tastes creates an impression. Customers may not consciously pick up on the detail, but make no mistake about it: an impression is made. Overflowing trash cans, empty display shelves, peeling paint, and burned out lights all speak to the quality of the overall facility and the expectation of their experience once in the park."

Greg Barron, Chief Executive Officer of GL Barron and President of the NACDB, goes on to say, "As I travel the country, I have had the opportunity to visit hundreds of ministries and their facilities. I often ask myself the question as I drive up and walk into the building "What would the first time visitor think?" Are the lawns manicured or dead? Is there adequate signage to tell me where to go? Are the concrete curbs crumbling? How about the paint? Is it peeling and in need of repair, or ready to present itself saying "somebody attends to the details." Speaking of details, the Everything Speaks philosophy also had a subtler meaning. If a church can't handle the small details, why should the guest believe that the church is capable of excellence in its other various ministries? Do I want to leave my children in the hands of a church that allows bulbs to remain burned out, ceiling tiles to remain stained, or landscape beds that are overrun with weeds?"



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A very simple list of questions can go a long way to making your facility "speak" in a warmer and more visitor-friendly way:

- 1) As you drive up to the facility, look at the front of the church. Is it warm and inviting? Does it accurately say who you are as a body of believers?
- 2) Does the facility look to be well maintained, clean, and orderly?
- 3) As you enter the parking lot, do you know where to go? Is the main entry of the building easy to identify?
- 4) As you enter the building, can you figure out where you should go next? Is there a welcome center with people to greet me and help me?
- 5) As you begin to find your way in the building, is there clear signage to help me on my way?
- 6) As you move through the building, do you feel comfortable and welcome?
- 7) Are the interior spaces well maintained and up to date with who you are and today's culture?
- 8) Do the various areas in the facility meet their intended "atmosphere" purpose?
  - a. The sanctuary exudes "worship"
  - b. The foyer exudes "welcome"
  - c. The nursery exudes "fun and safe"
- 9) Does the facility feel like a place "to connect" with others?

Looking through the lens of those who may be visiting your church for the first time is an important, but overlooked exercise in most churches. In today's world, there are many choices for those who are seeking a place of worship. Their first visit may be your only chance to make that all important first impression. Take the time to walk the entire facility with a fresh set of eyes. Ask yourself what the first time visitor would think of your building. You will probably be shocked and amazed at what you might find.



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The latest, most up to date, most quality facility will not guarantee growth for your church, but a facility that exudes a negative or irrelevant message will most definitely drive potential visitors away. My hope is that this article will help you to look at your facility and what it says from the vantage point of the un-churched or the de-churched person that drives by your facility several times a week. Sometimes the changes needed to reach out to this person are very easy to make, but sometimes they are a little more difficult and costly.

T&W Church Solutions has developed an "Everything Speaks Checklist" that covers, in more detail, the questions listed above and is broken down by areas of the facility. We would be more than happy to forward this to you, at your request. If interested, contact Kurt Williams at [kwilliams@twcorp.net](mailto:kwilliams@twcorp.net) and ask for the "Everything Speaks Checklist".

Kurt Williams, NACDB CCC, LEED AP, is a Design/Build veteran at T&W Church Solutions with over 25 years in the industry, 20 of those years guiding over 100 churches through the various stages of Planning, Designing and Building their new facilities. T&W Church Solutions is a Design/Build firm who partners with ministry-focused architects to serve the churches of Central Indiana as well as the only NACDB (National Association of Church Design Builders) Certified Firm in Central Indiana. Kurt can be reached at [kwilliams@twcorp.net](mailto:kwilliams@twcorp.net).