

Introduction

The Purpose Driven Life is a sensation that defies comparison. It became the best selling book in America soon after its release, selling 25 million copies within one year. (Saroyan, 2006)

In the year of its release, 2002, *The Purpose Driven Life* became *the best-selling hardcover book in American history*, according to Publishers Weekly. That statement carries an impact. It outsold fiction and all other non-fiction, it outsold the Bible, the book on which its messages are based.

In 1995 Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins penned *The Left Behind Series*, which has sold well over 62 million copies since its release. *The Prayer of Jabez*, since its release in 2000 has sold 9.3 million copies. (Veith, 2005) What made these books so well liked in such differing markets? What was the driving force behind the thought in the heads of the buyers: "I have to have this book?"

Certain Christian works are wildly popular among Christians and non-Christians alike. The popularity of some can be attributed to the subject matter of the books, while some pose the question: what marketing and public relations tactics were used to bring about the success of these works?

In the world of public relations and marketing, there are specific markets and audiences to target. It is a monumental accomplishment if a public relations or marketing executive can manage to successfully implement a campaign or strategy to encompass multiple audiences, especially audiences that vary widely in their patterns and taste. One particular audience that has remained definably separate throughout the history of public relations is the religious Christian market. Although the Christian and secular markets do not appear to blend borders, it is important to note the success of the products that enable the combination of the two separate markets, and to examine why. This research paper will unveil works that made it big in both markets, and review the tactics used to gain such popularity among secular and Christian audiences alike. *The Purpose Driven Life* is the most prominent example of the topic and discussion of this research paper.

Since the main goal of public relations and marketing tactics surrounding any new product is to reach the greatest amount of people possible, this combination of secular and Christian markets is significant to the respective professions. In adapting familiar tactics, or even adopting new approaches, the significance of combining the sacred and secular is clearly seen by the ability to

bring two large markets together for the purpose of maximizing exposure of the product.

There are several questions worth looking into that arise out of this mixture of markets. The Christian market asks the question: are the authors of Christian material sacrificing their message in order to expand their exposure into the secular market? The secular market asks the question: has the Christian market become too lucrative to be ignored by some secular authors? In addition to these questions, there is the general question: how much of the popularity of books such as *The Purpose Driven Life* is attributed to its content, and how much to the marketing and public relations surrounding the products?

Literature Review

The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren was published in 2002, and within a year became the best-selling hardcover book in American history. The research behind what made this book so successful must begin farther back than the book's origins.

There has always been a divide between things religious and secular. In considering the raw definitions of the words, they are in complete contrast to one another. The New Oxford American Dictionary denotes as "attitudes,

activities or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis." Religious is defined as "believing in or worshipping a superhuman controlling power or powers, esp. a personal God or gods." Culture is defined as "the attitudes and behavior characteristic of a particular social group" (2005). By this definition, both *religious* and *secular* will fit into the term *culture*, which further classifies them as separate groups.

Traditionally, religion has been set apart from the secular marketplace. Going as far back as the account in Mark 11:15-19 where Jesus (arguably the largest icon of contemporary religion today) throws the moneychangers out of the temple for abusing it for business purposes, we see a contention between things religious and things secular, between ministry and money.

Even today, there are many who argue that religion is being misused for monetary gain rather than to win souls and provide genuine hope and comfort to people. In a study that researches how Christian Renewalist ministries use the World Wide Web, Professor Doug Swanson (2008) of Cal Poly State University shows that these ministries are using the Web to ultimately sell a product. "The primary orientation of this message on the Web is informal communication - to create and maintain a positive organizational image and to

engage users through opportunities to donate funds and purchase products." Swanson goes on to reveal through his research that these ministries keep their messages positive by disguising unpleasant topics in encouraging speech, or simply by avoiding uncomfortable issues all together.

Some might argue Warren is joining the group of Christians, which includes the Renewalists, who simply want to sell a product. Tim Challies (2005), author, web designer and blogger puts Warren in this camp, stating, "*Purpose Driven Life* was nothing but a product, and millions of Christians were nothing but consumers who didn't know what they needed until Zondervan told them." An article published on Christnotes.org (2009), a website devoted to Christian research, explains that the message of *The Purpose Driven Life* is meant to help people understand why they are here on earth, the subtitle of the book revealing the question most likely asked by millions, "What on earth am I here for?" *The Purpose Driven Life* promises to help fulfill one's "God-given purpose."

In response to this way of thinking, literature was reviewed surrounding the idea that religious ideology remains prominent in our society for the reason that it appeals to common ground with today's society. How else

could Warren's ideas have made it so far without a majority of people dismissing his book solely as a moneymaker?

In an article published in the *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Martyn Percy (2000) explores religious advertising and how it is used to further the message of the Christian church, building on the idea that "certain religious themes, ideas and images still continue to enjoy prominence in public consciousness" (p 108). Percy also suggests "there are plenty of signs that Christians are increasingly embracing advertisements as an effective means of communicating the particularity of the Gospel in a pluralist age." This proposes that perhaps the Christian community does not view authors such as Rick Warren as money mongers, but as people trying desperately to get a message across in our diverse society.

The Purpose Driven Life's popularity was widespread enough to be identified and discussed in regard to the politics of our country. An article written for *Newsweek* exposes the extent of the popularity of *The Purpose Driven Life* into the political realm. This recent article marks Warren's book as the best encompassing definition of the religion of former President George W. Bush. If the former president identifies religiously with it, it suggests it

very well may be a summation of the faith of many in our country. (Miller, 2008)

To help clarify common ground between the religious and the secular, the Religious Publishing Division of the Association of American Publishers made a poster with these words: "Religious books are also about love, sex, politics, war, peace, ecology, theology, philosophy, drugs, race, dissent, ethics, technology, morality, revolution, rock, God, beauty, psychology, dogma, the underground, the establishment, death and [...] life" (qtd. in Smith, 2002).

In the presentation prepared for the faculty at Liberty University in 2002 quoted above, Gregory A. Smith acknowledges that religious publishing is a split industry. On one hand, its employees and trade magazines refer to and think of it as a ministry, while on the other hand, the major publishers are owned by public corporations whose ultimate goal is to generate profits for stockholders. It is "torn between its ministerial and industrial roles" (Smith, 2002).

John Wilson, editor of Books and Culture journal, identifies religion as widespread throughout both popular and serious culture. He points out examples that pop up in seemingly unexpected places (such as university press catalogs) containing poetry that rely heavily on religious

language, or *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown, a wildly popular fiction novel in which the main focus is religion. In an article published in *The Christian Century*, Marcia Z. Nelson (2004) sums up Wilson's theory behind prominent religious themes in unlikely places such as *The DaVinci Code*.

Dan Brown's multimillion-selling thriller *The DaVinci Code* offers a highly unorthodox view of major Christian beliefs and institutions, and DaVinci fans and debunkers alike would agree that Brown is no theologian. But religion is central to the book. "You're talking about people using the language of Christianity whether or not they accept it," Wilson says. "The extent to which it's penetrated people's imaginations shows it's something happening on a very large scale."

In addition to the idea that religious themes and ideas are prominent in society and provide a common ground for Christian authors to market their products, attention must be given to the public relations and marketing strategies behind these books. *Pyromarketing*, by Greg Stielstra, provides a thorough analysis of the methods by which *The Purpose Driven Life* was presented to the public. Stielstra, the leading marketing director for *The Purpose Driven Life* campaign wrote a book about his strategy, in which he reveals the four simple steps he took to make this book the success that it was (which will be addressed further on in this paper). Although Stielstra's book is

unique to its specific ideas, the overarching theme is not unexplored by marketing professionals.

Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking, by Andy Sernovitz (2006), draws on a concept that is also essential in Stielstra's book. A major marketing and public relations concept behind *The Purpose Driven Life* was word of mouth. Sernovitz observes,

Word of mouth marketing isn't about marketers or marketing. It's about real people and why those real people would want to talk about you and your stuff. [...] Word of mouth marketing [is] joining in the conversation people are having every day with other people. [It's] easy and obvious.

A 2006 New York Times article details the public relations behind *The Purpose Driven Life* as well as Saddleback Church on the whole, supporting the idea that public relations and marketing played a major role in the success of Warren's best-seller. It also examines the public relations behind many other successful Christian films and publications and reveals how the combination of both public relations and the connection of religious ideas with the general public can be explosively successful.

Methodology

The sources used in this paper were researched based on three different public relations theories. The

first is Systems theory, which is a framework by which any group of objects or techniques that work together to construct a result, can be identified and/or described. (Simmons, 2009) This theory was used to examine the techniques used to sell the product in question to both the Christian and secular markets, with specific attention paid to the technique(s) used to work together and produce a positive outcome. The next is Situational theory. This theory consists of identifying groups that when faced with an issue, in order to classify them, identifies if they are aware of the issue and measures the extent of their involvement to resolve the issue. (Grunig, 1992, pp 174-176) The next theory used to frame the research is Diffusion theory, which examines how, why and at what rate new ideas spread through cultures. (Grunig, 1992, pp 141-142) A culture is described as a "society, way of life, lifestyle, customs, traditions, heritage, habits, ways, mores, values" (The New Oxford American Dictionary, 2005). For the purposes of this paper, both the Christian market and the secular market can be identified as separate cultures that can be relevantly examined and analyzed by the Diffusion theory.

The information relevant to the topic of this research paper, as well as related topics, was gathered over the

span of several months. Scholarly articles were obtained through academic search engines (such as Jstor and LexisNexis), and once examined, lit clearer avenues for further research; they provided key ideas and promising narrower topics for more thorough research. However, as a 2009 article published in the Journal of Management and Marketing Research points out,

Although much has been written about the proliferation of marketing efforts with regard to [...] religion, relatively little academic research has been attempted. [...] Many elements of the [...] religion-marketing connection remain largely unexplored. A growing number of scholars have examined the impact of religious values on consumer behavior, [but] there are still gaps to be filled in the body of literature. Much is still to be researched, for example, with regard to how spirituality affects consumer behavior. [...] As more research is conducted, broadening the perspectives on this discipline, there may also be a heightened sensitivity to the connections of marketing and religion that may ultimately contribute to improved theory and teaching.

The analysis of the information retrieved was based on the knowledge that little to none of it would address the exact topic and questions proposed. Each piece of data was examined and compared with the others. The Situational and Diffusion theories were used to provide an axiom on which to interpret the information found as accurately as possible, form research questions and speculate on the potential answers provided to the questions presented.

Research Questions

Based on the research conducted within the framework of the theories explained, three research questions are submitted:

- 1 - How much of the popularity of books such as *The Purpose Driven Life* can be attributed to the public relations and marketing surrounding them, and how much of their popularity can be attributed solely to the content of the books and people's genuine interest in them?
- 2 - Are some Christian authors compromising their message in order to market their material to secular markets in addition to the Christian market?
- 3 - Is the Christian market too large to be ignored by some secular authors? If so, are they adapting their material in an attempt to reach this market?

Results

RQ 1 - How much of the popularity of books such as *The Purpose Driven Life* can be attributed to the public relations and marketing surrounding them, and how much of their popularity can be attributed to the content of the books and people's genuine interest in them?

In response this question, the research conducted shows there is validity to both the content of the book being genuinely liked by the public, as well as the public relations tactics and marketing strategies propelling it to fulfill its potential of success.

Religion as a Marketable Commodity

Several sources propose the idea that religious messages, such as what is put forward by *The Purpose Driven Life*, are popular not only in the Christian market, but in the secular as well. According to these sources, this is due to the fact that these religious messages strike a common chord with the public as a whole.

Religion is prevalent in our society in many forms. "[C]ertain religious themes, ideas and images still continue to enjoy prominence in public consciousness" (Percy, 2000). Drawing from this concept, Percy reveals the similarities between things religious and things secular.

He states, "Products, in their competitive strategies, deploy a theological construction of reality, in which enlightenment, conversion, believing and belonging matter. To be in any market requires a degree of faith and hope and an appeal to the possibility of perfection" (Percy, 2000). The fact that this "construction of reality" shares common ground with the basis of most religious things (faith, hope and appeal to the possibility of perfection) is groundwork for those outside the Christian market to come toward a book such as *The Purpose Driven Life* with these concepts in their subconscious. In addition to these similarities in the marketing and public relations aspects of the product, the actual message of *The Purpose Driven Life* shares these values as well, in essence doubling its appeal to both markets.

Percy (2000) goes on to say,

Insurance advertisements offer peace of mind and security. Corporate companies sell an image that is flecked with ecclesial themes: the assurance of presence, the benefits of belonging and the size of the body are meant to tell a story of social salvation, but they cannot do that without resorting to religious ideology. [...] 'Market' and 'religion' cannot be easily divided, any more than the secular and sacred can be divorced from each other. (p 108)

On the whole, religion is a marketable commodity. According to The Association of American Publishers, religious

publishing grew by 37 percent in 2003 and continues to grow. (Dundas, 2005) Lynn Garrett, religion editor at Publishers Weekly, says, "Religion is very much in the public square. We see that today in television and movies as well as publishing. Post 9/11, a lot of today's issues wrap themselves around religion" (qtd in Nelson, 2004).

Jeremy Lott (2003), in an article addressing the increasing appeal and marketability of religion, indicates that the Christian industry is "expanding its services to a slice of society whose cultural demands grow every year." He admits that modern Christian culture has a growing "crossover appeal," asserting that, "the distinction between the material and the sacred, or the commercial and the spiritual, can be tricky." This shows that the Christian culture and the secular culture share similarities that make it hard to define them exclusively, and make it easier to appeal to the common ideas shared by both.

Gregory A. Smith addresses further evidence that religious subjects intersect with, and are accepted by secular society in a presentation prepared for Liberty University in 2002. "You cannot sort religious books out from history, literature, philosophy in the humanities. Nor will they stand in lonely isolation from anthropological,

sociological or psychological texts." Smith also states that, "[e]very year, thousands of Christian books are written and disseminated to a growing audience." The "growing audience" he points to is identified as the combining of the Christian and secular audiences.

Other Successful Christian Products

Although *The Purpose Driven Life* may be the biggest and most obvious exhibit of a Christian book gaining impressive success within a secular society, there are multiple Christian products that have reached similar success. A story that spotlights animated vegetables with Christian messages made a hit among Christian and secular audiences alike. *Veggie Tales* videos became standard viewing in Christian households across America in the 1990s. In 1998, they began to appear in Wal-Mart and Target stores, "a feat unprecedented for an avowedly Christian media company." *Veggie Tales* became ultra popular among kids and adults alike. (Warren, 2005) *The Left Behind Series* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, action filled adventure books about those left on earth after Christ's return, also reached notable success. Since the first book's release in 1995, the series has sold more than 60 million copies. (Symonds, 2005) Similarly, *The Passion of*

the Christ, a film that vividly tells the story of Christ's death and suffering on the cross, was a giant hit at the box office. It grossed more than \$551 million worldwide within the first nine weeks of its release. (Stielstra, 2005 p. 8)

Language of *The Purpose Driven Life* Identifies with the
Unchurched

Of course Warren, with *The Purpose Driven Life*, hoped to reach as many people in this growing audience as possible. In order to stand on common ground with the most people possible with his book, Warren, though a Southern Baptist, wrote his book in what he deemed intentionally "unchurchy" language. This way it appealed to a broad audience - a range of religious study groups as well as people who may or may not be affiliated with a religion or faith, but who are examining their own lives. (Nelson, 2004)

The message of *The Purpose Driven Life* strives to show that humans were put here for a purpose while proposing to help one find and fulfill their God-given purpose. It puts forth ideas that entice people to buy for the purpose of fixing their problems. Warren says, "Life is a series of problems: Either you are in one now, you're just coming out

of one, or you're getting ready to go into another one."

(Bradshaw) Although part of this book's appeal is its self-help nature, it distinctly does not point to looking to oneself for the answer. Warren suggests, in his "unchurchy" language, that the key is to begin with God, who made us for a purpose. When it is understood one was made for God and by God, he can comprehend the purpose of his life on this earth. Warren proposes that even though life on earth is temporary, if one discovers their purpose, he will have an eternal impact on himself and the lives of those around him. He also stresses the importance of discovering true worship and friendship with God. (Warren, 2002) (*Purpose Driven Life*, 2009)

The main theme of *The Purpose Driven Life* addresses many things that Christians regard as important. In addition to this, it encompasses many themes that appeal to a secular audience because of the common ideas with religion they tend to cling to, or are drawn to. In this way, much of the popularity of this book and other publications like it in the religious sector can no doubt be attributed to people's genuine interest, though this interest does not eliminate the need for public relations and marketing behind religious products.

Some Public Relations Tactics Seen As Extreme

In some cases, the public relations tactics used by the Christian community are viewed as extreme. The Christian Research Network, in reference to *The Purpose Driven Life* and the Rick Warren phenomenon, assesses that the use of public relations to manage the image and success of Rick Warren's ministry is excessive. "The mix match is breathtaking and makes as much sense as a corporate office manager wearing football pads and helmet to work every day" (What IS Rick Warren, 2008).

However, it is revealed through the research conducted that the public relations tactics and marketing strategies used behind religious books and products have spurred them on to become more successful than they could have been solely based on their content. This is prominently seen in the marketing strategy behind *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Pyromarketing

Greg Stielstra, a senior marketing director for the Book Group at Zondervan publishing company, used an approach for the launch of *The Purpose Driven Life* that he dubbed "pyromarketing." To begin, more than 1,200 evangelical pastors were targeted who were willing to lead

their churches through a 40 day period of spiritual self reflection, with the guidance of the book. These pastors were the "dry tinder" Stielstra marks as the first step in his book *Pyromarketing: How to Ignite Customer Evangelists and Keep Them for Life*. Stielstra uses the appropriate analogy of fire to illustrate the process of marketing he proposes. He draws the concept, fittingly, from a familiar religious campfire song.

*It only takes a spark to get a fire going
And soon all those around can warm up in its
glowing;
That's how it is with God's love,
Once you've experienced it,
You spread His love to everyone
You want to pass it on.*

Stielstra explains there are four steps to creating a successful marketing campaign and you build them the same way you build a campfire.

Identifying the pastors who led their churches through this book as a group represent step 1: Gather the driest tinder. *It only takes a spark to get a fire going*. These were presented as the people most likely to respond to his message: those already involved in evangelical churches. The pastors were enticed by the potential promised by the campaign to help their churches grow. The driest tinder is spread throughout the mass market in order to ensure the

fire spreads the most effectively, as shown in figure I.
(Stielstra, 2005, p 6)

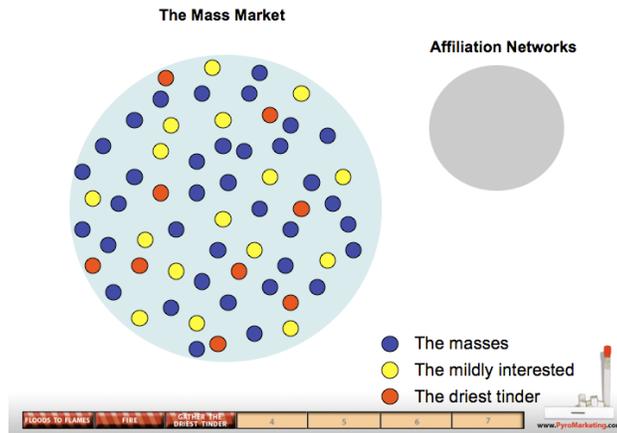


Figure I: "Driest Tinder" equally dispersed throughout the mass Market

Next, the pastors ordered 400,000 copies of *The Purpose Driven Life* at \$7 per book instead of the full retail price of \$20. They then distributed them among the members of their congregations. (Kuzma, 2009) This was step 2: Touch it with the match. *Once you've experienced it.*

Touching it with the match means, to the extent you can, giving people an experience with your product or service. If you want them to laugh, don't tell them you're funny; tell them a joke. There is no faster way to move people to purchase than by letting them actually experience the benefits you claim."
(Stielstra, 2005, p 6)

The people who experience it move it one step beyond the initial public relations to inevitably propel it to the masses, as depicted in the figure II.

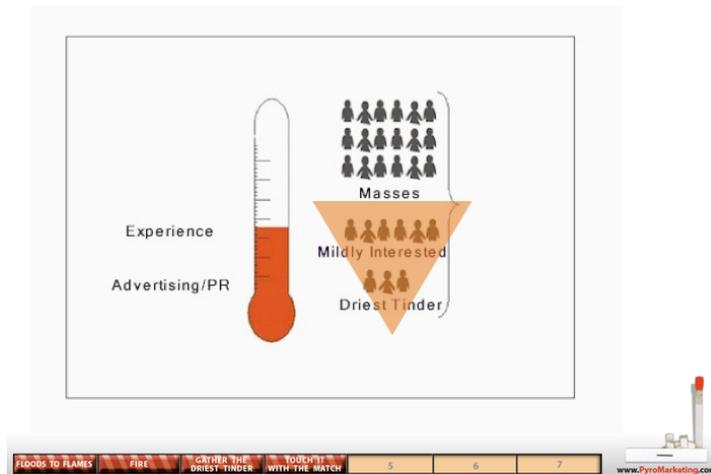


Figure II: Those with experience spread the information to the mass market.

Step 3: Fan the flames. *You spread God's love to everyone. You want to pass it on.* To complete step three, Zondervan promoted the book as evangelism, telling how the book had made a difference in people's lives and caused churches to grow within the initial 1,200 that began the campaign. Outreach Marketing produced advertising products such as door hangers, posters, etc. to help the churches spread the word. Zondervan also supplied retailers with further marketing tools as well as a list of participating churches so they could sell them additional copies of *The Purpose Driven Life*, if needed. The pastors and congregation members who were part of the initial campaign became consumer evangelists, spreading the word about *The*

Purpose Driven Life, largely unbeknownst to them. The flames spread. (Challies, 2005)

Zondervan then gathered information on every church that completed *The Purpose Driven Life* program, and on individuals within those churches as much as possible. This was Stielstra's step 4: Save the coals. *Keep a record of those who care*. As more Purpose Driven products became available, Zondervan could market to their "saved coals" - a group of people who were already known to have shown an interest in this type of product. "The coals are now gathered, prepared to heat up a fire that is dying down, or to begin a whole new one." (Challies, 2005) According to Stielstra, "Pyromarketing" is a strategy that works well with any audience. "Stielstra does not confine his suggestions to churches; his advice is intended for any kind of organization" (Kuzma, 2009). Because this technique can be applied to any situation that requires public relations or marketing, in the case of *The Purpose Driven Life* it levels the playing field of the sacred and the secular, embracing the cohesion of these two markets to maximize the success of the product.

The Effectiveness of Word of Mouth Marketing

The “pyromarketing” strategy may seem revolutionary because it is referred to by a catchy name, but the idea is basic and shared by other public relations and marketing professionals. Andy Sernovitz (2009) is convinced of the power of word of mouth marketing, which “pyromarketing” is in its essential form. “Marketing is easy. Earn the respect and recommendation of your customers. They will do your marketing for you. For free” (p 57). Even Stielstra refers to his technique as word of mouth, noting its necessity to a successful campaign.

Word of mouth isn’t what happens in the absence of marketing; it’s the natural consequence of marketing done right. It is the force behind the incredible success of *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Purpose Driven Life*, or any other runaway movement. It is how ideas, messages, behaviors and trends spread. Harnessing its power is the key to expanding a fire beyond its point of origin. (Stielstra, 2005, p 145)

William C. Symonds, 2005, contends that the Christian community is not shy in its acceptance of public relations and marketing to promote religious ideas through products and services. He suggests that this is boosting their business more than relying on their raw messages ever could. Roger Finke, a professor of sociology at Pennsylvania State University and author of *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, states, “Evangelicals’ eager embrace of corporate-

style growth strategies is giving them a tremendous advantage" (qtd in Symonds, 2005).

Finke is not the only one who recognizes this acceptance as a key to the success of marketing Christian products. Byron Williamson, former president of Word Publishing and current CEO of Worthy Media says, "Brand building and other basics are as important to a book's success in this economy as ever." Worthy Media is a company that acquires Christian media and publishes across multiple platforms. Williamson views this cross-platform technique as essential to creating strong brand recognition and customer loyalty. (Winston, 2009)

Political Affiliation

Once the word spread about *The Purpose Driven Life*, the book's sales took off like wildfire. Its popularity reached even into the political sphere of America, being identified as mirroring the Christianity of former President George W. Bush. (Miller, 2008) The platform may have already been there to help jumpstart the success in this particular vein at this time. "The triumph of evangelical Christianity [was] profoundly reshaping many aspects of American politics and society. Historically, much of the U.S. political and business elite has been

mainline Protestant" (Symonds, 2005). However, the combination of the carefully thought out marketing and public relations strategies appears to have provided prime conditions for the proverbial fire to spread. "No book - indeed, no phenomenon - mirrors the Christianity of the middle Bush years better than '*The Purpose Driven Life*' by Rick Warren" (Miller, 2008). This reach into the political sphere suggests that *The Purpose Driven Life's* message relates to many in our society, causing its success to reach startling heights.

The facts reveal that the cause of the success behind religious products in our society, whether presented to Christian or secular audiences, can be attributed largely to the public relations and marketing strategies. However, evidence also reveals that the genuine interest of consumers plays a vital role. Combining messages that reach common ground and good public relations and marketing is what makes these products so successful across multiple platforms.

RQ 2 - Are some Christian authors compromising their message in order to market their material to secular markets in addition to the Christian market?

Compromise

Reaching common ground, in some cases, may mean the compromising of the Christian message. The exploration of the second research question proposed revealed that yes, some Christian outlets seem to be compromising their message in order to ultimately sell the most product possible. Christian and secular societies have common ground with each other. Because Christians are surrounded by secular culture constantly, they are able to use these commonalities to frame their message when attempting to sell a product, or make something well known. Nelson (2004) says, "While Evangelicals may be theoretically hostile to contemporary culture, many are at home in popular culture." An article in World Magazine (2005) asserts that,

Christians make up a large part of the so-called secular marketplace. Christians, like most people, shop at grocery stores, go to Wal-Mart, and pick up books at megachains like Barnes & Noble or Borders. [...] In this sense, reaching the secular marketplace does not necessarily mean reaching nonbelievers.

Drawing on their comfort and familiarity with popular culture, many Christian novelists are able to encompass a wider audience with their topics. "[Some Christian fiction is] a more subtle engagement with questions and values.

[...][Christian] publishers are urging their best minds to speak to larger audiences, to write accessibly on fundamentals of Christian faith" (Nelson, 2004).

Some Christian publishing houses, such as Skylight Paths, have to adapt to marketing to secular audiences by producing or publishing books on broader, mellower topics. They are striving to draw on topics that appeal across the board, even publishing titles such as *Beading: The Creative Spirit*. Some even seem to be watering down their messages in order to appeal to the maximum amount of consumers possible. (Winston, 2009) Christian publishers have been producing de-gendered Bible translations, tracts that promote faith in self with sentimental encouragement with no regard for the fundamentals of Christianity (sin, grace and salvation), all packaged as Christian messages. (Veith, 2005)

In other cases, however, the essence of the Christian message is not being watered down, at least not to an alarming extent. Alan Arnold, head of Westbow, Thomas Nelson Publishing's crossover fiction line, says, "We've never asked an author to water down or change their message. I feel very strongly that to water down – or bloat a novel with more water – can be equally harmful to the story" (Veith, 2005).

Different Approaches

Those who want to reach both markets, but are unwilling to tame their talk are harder to find. One such man found a solution, which enabled him to market his television show to both audiences, separately. David Michel, who has a master of divinity degree from Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, came up with the character *Jay Jay the Jet Plane* in 2003. Named for his son, his character appeared on PBS's children's programming schedule. In order to accomplish this, Michel prepared separate pitches, packaging his material to be sold to both Christian and secular audiences. "It's very tricky, because both markets are very separate markets," Michel said. "And each market is substantial" (qtd in Salamon, 2003). Tailoring distinctively separate messages for each market is a tactic that is far less used, and does not appear to be as overtly successful as marketing to both at once. *Jay Jay the Jet Plane* was markedly not as big of a hit as *Veggie Tales*. As an Evangelical Christian marketer, Michel did not want his products "tainted by association with a secular culture" (Salamon, 2003).

RQ 3 - Is the Christian market too large to be ignored by some secular authors? If so, are they adapting their material in an attempt to reach this market?

Christian Market A Lucrative Industry

For well-established mainstream publishers the Christian market has become too profitable to brush aside. In 2002, an estimated \$4.2 billion Christian oriented products were sold, and sales have been increasing ever since. (Salamon, 2003) The numbers of Christian titles published has caught the attention of secular publishers and booksellers. "Evangelical publishers have managed to turn out a steady stream of blockbusters over the years, making religion the hottest category in books." (qtd. in Salamon, 2003)

Publishers in the secular vein of society are putting effort into reaching the religious market. "To be sure, as long as the demand for religion books manifests itself in increased sales, publishers will look for new ways to capture the market to which religion books appeal," and they are tailoring their messages to reach it. (Smith, 2002) Nelson (2004) puts it like this, "Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* would have sold fewer copies had it been about

submarines, and probably would have spawned fewer than the dozen-plus books elucidating or refuting it." Not only do religious topics offer a more enticing appeal than subjects such as submarines, but also hold the potential for controversy, which can be voiced in potentially multiple response books.

Instead of simply tailoring their material to reach a Christian audience, some companies see the profitability of buying out independent Christian companies all together. Time Warner, owner of HBO, and home to the openly vulgar television series, "Sopranos," "Sex and the City" and "G-String Divas", has a branch for evangelical books. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation owns Zondervan, the Christian publishing house that put out *The Purpose Driven Life* among thousands of other Christian titles. In addition to this, the well-known public relations firm Ruder Finn publicizes religious titles through a specialized division. (Salamon, 2003)

As long as our society has common ground with religion, the books and other commodities dealing with these topics will be a profitable industry.

Observations

The results corresponding to the first research question proposed may appear a bit obvious at the outset. Of course public relations and marketing play a vital role in the success of a product. However, the research conducted was significant in that it reveals how much secular society intertwines with religion. The success of *The Purpose Driven Life* is inescapable and accurately provides a window into the interests of society that were not as clearly seen before it hit the market.

This research offers enlightening information on how public relations and marketing professionals and companies can move forward successfully in the face of society's embrace of religion, and reveals what the best techniques are for going about it. "Pyromarketing" is a system that upon examination, proved to be hugely successful and is professed to work not only within the Christian sector, but also within any sector in which it is applied. Although some within the religious market might be disheartened to see their message being compromised in order to make a profit, they can take heart that as the market continues to widen for these types of products, heftier religious

subjects being consumed by a secular audience could be on the heels of the increasing popularity of religious topics.

With some Christian and secular publishers moving topics from clear-cut, definable messages to milder and muddier messages to adapt to a secular market, we could potentially see the Christian market change significantly over time.

Spotlighting the similarities between the religious market and the secular market makes the combination for these markets accessible for public relations and marketing professionals. Likewise, highlighting effective public relations and marketing techniques, such as "Pyromarketing," is beneficial to the respective professions for the purpose of pinpointing how to combine religious and secular markets most effectively.

By encompassing the Christian market with their material, secular publishers have taken little to no losses and essentially profited by enlarging their customer base.

Publishing in this relatively new mixed environment may eventually result in better Christian books across the board. This new audience that blends the sacred and the secular, in standing by slogans such as, "intelligent, thought-provoking, authentic" like Salt River (Tyndale Publishing's line of books meant to be marketed to a

secular audience), ultimately calls for better writers.

(Veith, 2005) In turn, this will result in the tightening of competition, and the publishing of only the finest quality work.

Having our novels sell well in the general market is a way for us to be salt and light through the power of story," Mr. Arnold said. "We're supposed to be an influence in the world – not hide or retreat. People who view the general market success of fiction from a Christian worldview as something negative puzzle me. Why wouldn't we want more Christian artists and authors creating more masterpieces that are God-honoring in a sea of entertainment options that mostly are not? Why wouldn't we want our neighbors reading novels infused with a Christian worldview? Our goal with fiction isn't simply to evangelize evangelicals– but to create world-class literature and page-turning commercial fiction that has an impact on the world at large. The great news is we're succeeding beyond our wildest dreams. (qtd. in Veith, 2005)

The result of the combination of the sacred and the secular yields very few negatives and some prominent positives.

With the newfound common ground between these two markets, it seems to be leading to overall success beyond *both* parties' wildest dreams, with great potential for increased success.

References

- Bradshaw, P. An Interview with Rick Warren. Retrieved from
<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/17175.htm>
- Challies, T. (2005, July 25). Purposeful Interference.
Retrieved from
<http://challies.com/archives/articles/purposeful-i.php>
- Challies, T. (2005, May 26) Pyromarketing and The Purpose
Driven Life. Retrieved from
<http://challies.com/archives/articles/pyromarketing-a.php>
- Dundas, Z. (2005, February 02). Confessions of a Dangerous
Mind. *Willamette Week*, 31(13).
- Grunig, J E. (1992). *Excellence in Public Relations and
Communication Management*. IABC Research Foundation.
Laurence Erlbaum Associates, Inc: Hillsdale.
- Kuzma, A, & Kuzma, A, & Kuzma J. (2009, May). How Religion
has Embraced Marketing and the Implications for
Business. *Journal of Management and Marketing
Research*, 2.

Lott, J. (2003, February). Jesus Sells: What the Christian culture industry tells us about secular society.

Reason Magazine.

Miller, L. (2008, December 13). Rick Warren's: The Purpose Driven Life. *Newsweek, December 22, 2008 issue.*

Nelson, M Z. (2004, October 19). Religion Sells. *The Christian Century, 8-10.*

Percy, M. (2000). The Church in the Market Place:

Advertising and Religion in a Secular Age. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 15(1), 97-116.*

Purpose Driven Life (2009). Retrieved from

http://www.christnotes.org/_purpose-driven-life.asp

Salamon, J. (2003, December 27). Marketing Strategy Splits the Sacred and Secular. *The New York Times.*

Saroyan, S. (2006, April 16). Christianity, The Brand.

Retrieved from

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res>

Sernovitz, A. (2009). *Word of mouth marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking.* Revised Ed. New York: Kaplan.

Simmons, D. (n.d.). Systems Theory. [Powerpoint slides].

Retrieved from California State University Bakersfield website:

[http://www.csub.edu/~dsimmons2/systems_theory.ppt.](http://www.csub.edu/~dsimmons2/systems_theory.ppt)

- Smith, G A. (2002) A Survey of Religious Book Publishing with Implications for Collection Development in Christian College Libraries. *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. A. Pierre Guillermin Library: Liberty University.
- Stielstra, G. (2005). *Pyromarketing: The Four-Step Strategy to Ignite Customer Evangelists and Keep Them for Life*. Harper Collins: New York.
- Stielstra, G. (2006, December 14). *Pyromarketing: The Four-Step Strategy to Ignite Customer Evangelists and Keep Them for Life*. [Powerpoint slides.] Retrieved from http://pyromarketing.typepad.com/my_weblog/2006/12/womma_presentat.html
- Swanson, D. (2008). *Show Me, Help Me, Tell Me, Sell Me: Leading Christian Renewalist Ministries' Use of the World Wide Web for Evangelizing, Fundraising, and Merchandising*. Paper presented to the Western Social Sciences Association National Conference, Denver, Co.
- Symonds, W C, & Grow, B, & Cady, J. (2005, May 23). *Earthly Empires: How evangelical churches are borrowing from the business playbook*. *Business Week*. Retrieved from http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_21/b3934001_mz001.htm

The New Oxford American Dictionary. (2005). New York:
Oxford University Press.

Veith, G E, & Vincent, L. (2005, July 02). Out of the
Ghetto. *WORLD Magazine*. 20(26)

Warren, H. (2005). *There's Never Been a Show Like Veggie
Tales: Sacred Messages in a Secular Market*. Alta Mira
Press: Lanham.

Warren, R. (2002). *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids:
Zondervan.

What IS Rick Warren? (2008, December 26) *Christian Research
Network*. Retrieved from
<http://christianresearchnetwork.com/?p=8564>

Winston, K. (2009, July 27). Religion Publishing in These
Times: Working Smarter, Harder. *Publishers Weekly*, 20-
26.