

A close-up, top-down photograph of several hands of different skin tones and ages stacked together. Some hands are wearing watches. The hands are resting on a dark wooden surface. The background is slightly blurred.

Christian Marketing Is About People

Introduction: From Transactions to Transformation

In both secular and Christian marketing, a familiar phrase often emerges: "People buy experiences — not tickets." While this statement is true, Christian marketing goes even deeper. Experiences themselves do not exist in a vacuum. **Experiences are created, shaped, and remembered because of people.**

Christian marketing, especially within Christian colleges and athletic programs, is therefore not primarily about promoting products, events, or even outcomes. It is about people connecting with people, forming meaningful relationships, and encountering purpose-filled experiences that reflect the heart of Christ.

Jesus Himself never marketed a product, sold a ticket, or promoted an event in the modern sense. Yet no figure in history has drawn crowds, loyalty, or lasting transformation like Him. Why? Because **His focus was always people.**

Jesus Saw Individuals Before Crowds

Although Jesus often ministered to large crowds, Scripture repeatedly shows that His primary focus was the individual.

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When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 9:36 (ESV)

Jesus did not view people as numbers, demographics, or targets. He saw hearts, burdens, fears, and hopes. His compassion drove His communication. In modern terms, Jesus understood audience insight better than any marketer. **He recognized who people were, what they needed, and why they were searching.**

Jesus Built Experiences Through Relationships

Jesus frequently created experiences that were deeply personal and relational:

- **The Woman at the Well (John 4:1–26):** Jesus crossed cultural, social, and moral barriers to engage one woman in a life-changing conversation.
- **Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10):** Jesus invited Himself into Zacchaeus' home, transforming a despised tax collector through presence and relationship.
- **The Disciples (Mark 3:13–14):** Jesus called individuals not to attend an event, but to "be with Him."
- He appointed twelve... that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.

Mark 3:14 (NIV)

The experience was not the sermon alone — the experience was Jesus Himself, walking with people, eating with them, listening to them, and knowing them.



Experiences Flow From People, Not Programs

In sports marketing, especially within Christian colleges, success is often measured by attendance, viewership, or revenue. While these metrics matter, they are outcomes — not causes. People don't remember the ticket price. They remember how they were treated.

- They remember the volunteer who greeted them with joy.
- They remember the student-athlete who signed an autograph and prayed with a child.
- They remember the coach who spoke with integrity and humility.
- They remember whether the environment felt welcoming, authentic, and Christ-centered.

These experiences are not manufactured by marketing materials alone. They are delivered through people who embody the mission. Every greeter, usher, broadcaster, and athlete becomes a steward of the brand's witness. The tone of voice at the gate, the smile at concessions, the care in the broadcast booth—each interaction tells the audience what you truly value. **When the people embody the mission, the programs gain power; when the programs outpace people, the message feels hollow.**



Christian College Marketing: A People-to-People Calling Marketing as Ministry

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.1 Corinthians 10:31

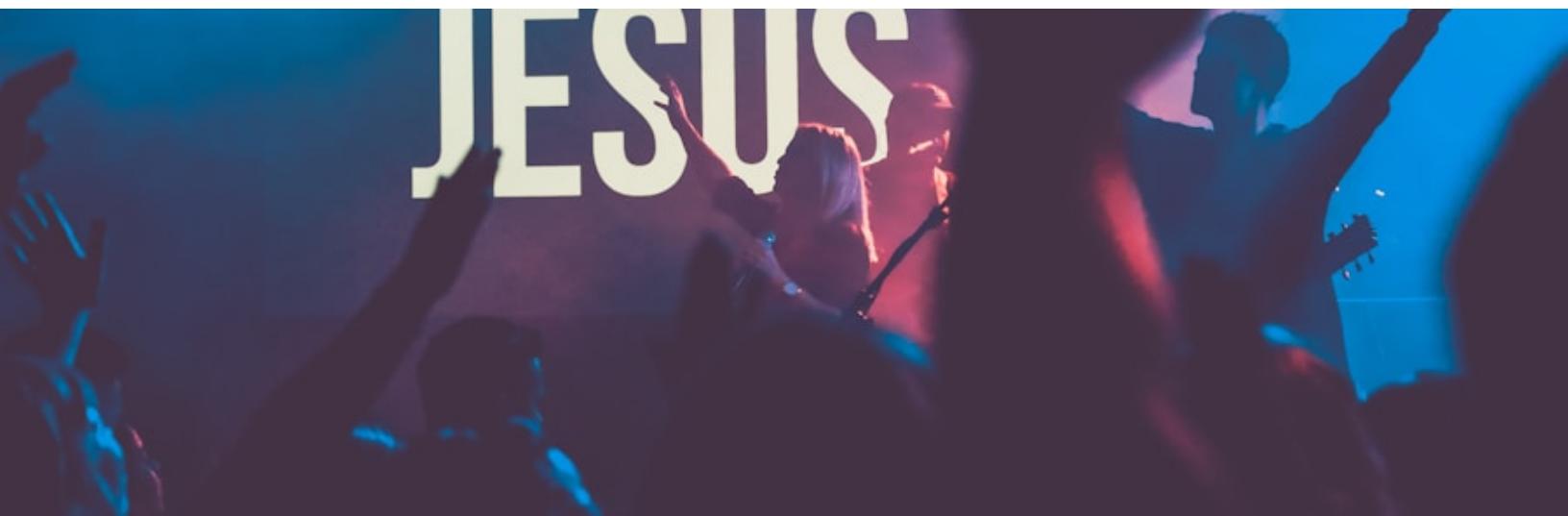
For Christian colleges, marketing is not merely promotion — it is ministry. Every communication touchpoint is an opportunity to reflect Christ. This includes athletic events, campus visits, streaming broadcasts, social media engagement, and fan experiences. Each interaction should point beyond the event and toward relationship, belonging, and purpose. **When a college treats its messaging as ministry, excellence becomes an act of worship and hospitality becomes the strategy.** The brand then speaks in one voice: consistent, gracious, and mission-aligned.



Jesus' Model Applied to Christian Sports Marketing

Jesus' approach offers a clear framework for Christian college athletics. Each principle reorients tactics around people and mission, ensuring that strategies serve souls, not just statistics.

- **Presence Before Promotion:** Jesus showed up where people were. Christian colleges must be present in their communities, churches, and families — not just online. Community nights, youth clinics, and chaplain partnerships cultivate trust that no billboard can buy.
- **Compassion Before Conversion:** Jesus met needs before delivering messages. Marketing should serve, listen, and care before asking for attendance or support. Offer prayer stations at games, highlight benevolence initiatives, and respond to fan feedback with humility.
- **Relationship Before Results:** Jesus invested deeply in a few to impact many. Building authentic relationships creates lasting loyalty far beyond a single season. Equip athletes to mentor local youth; invite alumni into discipleship roles with current teams.
- **Mission Before Metrics:** Jesus measured success by faithfulness, not numbers. Christian colleges should evaluate marketing success by alignment with mission as much as by performance. Track testimonies alongside ticket scans; celebrate character awards as loudly as championships.



From Fans to Community

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

Athletic Events Become - Places for fellowship, Platforms for testimony, Environments of encouragement, Opportunities for discipleship

To nurture this community, design rhythms that invite participation: pregame prayer moments, halftime baptisms in partnership with local churches where appropriate, alumni blessings over seniors, and postgame service projects. Broadcast crews can highlight these rhythms not as spectacles, but as sincere expressions of faith and togetherness. Sponsors, too, can be invited to celebrate community impact rather than merely tout products, creating a unified narrative across in-venue and streaming experiences.



Conclusion: Marketing the Way Jesus Connected

Christian marketing is not about selling tickets, filling seats, or boosting impressions. It is about connecting people to people — and ultimately, pointing people to Christ. Jesus' life demonstrates that when people feel seen, known, and loved, they respond — not because they were marketed to, but because they were valued. For Christian colleges, the goal is not merely attendance, but transformation. When marketing reflects Jesus' heart for people, experiences naturally follow, communities grow, and God is glorified. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.

John 13:35 (NIV)

This concluding vision challenges leaders to audit every message and moment: Does our tone sound like Jesus? Do our calls-to-action invite relationship or pressure transactions? Do our stories elevate character as much as competition? If the answers trend toward Christlike love, you are building more than a brand—you're cultivating a household of faith around athletics. Keep the main thing the main thing: people, loved by God, served by people.



Commercials That Serve the Mission: Advertising That Adds — Not Distracts

In a people-first, Christ-centered streaming environment, commercials are not interruptions — they are extensions of the experience. Just as Jesus never spoke in ways that distracted from His message, advertising within Christian athletic streams should reinforce trust, mission, and relationship, not dilute them.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.

Colossians 4:6

Redefine the Purpose of Commercials

In Christian sports streaming, commercials should not exist merely to generate revenue, but to serve the viewer and reflect shared values. People-first principle: Commercials should feel like recommendations from a trusted community, not sales pitches.

- Partner with mission-aligned sponsors (Christian businesses, ministries, service organizations).
- Avoid ads that conflict with Christian values, tone, or audience expectations.
- Frame advertising as participation in a shared mission, not transactional exposure.
- Design spot creative that features testimonies, scholarships, and community impact.
- Use presenters from the campus community—coaches, chaplains, athletes—to lend relational credibility.

Operationally, build an “ad liturgy”: open with a mission bumper, rotate sponsor stories that highlight service, and close with a hospitality message. Measure success through viewer sentiment and engagement, not only completion rates. When ads behave like ministry touchpoints, viewers experience care instead of fatigue—and sponsors earn trust that outlasts any single season.



Final Encouragement: Streaming as Digital Hospitality

Streaming is modern-day hospitality. It is the digital doorway into your campus, your mission, and your people. When Christian colleges stream with intention, warmth, and relational purpose, viewers don't just watch — they belong. Hospitality reframes production: lower-third graphics become invitations, commentary becomes pastoral care, and chat moderation becomes shepherding.

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 Peter 4

Translate hospitality into practices: greet viewers by name, offer prayer during breaks, and celebrate milestones like baptisms or academic achievements on-air. In the stands, create “welcome teams” trained to notice newcomers and connect them to community groups. Online, follow up with first-time stream registrants through personal notes rather than automated blasts. People first. Always. That is Christian marketing.

There are many ways to grow your athletic audience and strengthen revenue through strategic Christian marketing. If you would like to explore these opportunities further, I welcome the conversation. My contact information is listed below.

About ACR Strategies

ACR Strategies was founded by Don Koehler to help Christian athletic programs, sports ministries, and faith-driven organizations grow viewership, sponsorship revenue, and brand impact through research-driven media strategy and Biblical marketing principles.

Don brings decades of leadership experience across major media and sports organizations including **Nielsen Media Research, Time Warner Cable, WTBS (Turner Broadcasting), and The JOY FM**, along with extensive collaboration with national cable networks such as **ESPN and Turner Sports**. His work has focused on helping networks and sports properties discover and define their sports identity through innovative audience research, ratings analysis, and performance-based sponsorship modeling.

As a former Director of Advertising Sales and Media Research leader, Don has built and managed high-performing ad sales teams and developed sports television sponsorship packages that connect brands with targeted audiences at scale. His career includes extensive experience calling on regional and national advertising agencies in major media markets giving him deep insight into how agencies evaluate sports inventory, sponsorship value, and audience engagement.

In addition to corporate leadership, Don has served in volunteer sports and ministry environments, supporting athletic programs, mentoring leaders, and helping community-based sports initiatives strengthen their outreach and operational impact. .

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