

# Harley-Davidson and the church

*This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Dec. 11-12, 2010.*

**By Lenny Cacchio**

LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—In the early 1980s Harley-Davidson's Richard Teerlink was slapped with a problem. Harley was losing market share and sales, and the company was on the verge of bankruptcy.

In response Teerlink organized Harley Owners' Groups (HOGs), and he simply listened to what Harley owners were saying. He learned that people were buying Harleys not just because they wanted transportation or a classy bike. Instead, as one writer put it, "they were buying freedom, independence, and escape from stress and routine in their everyday lives."

Teerlink listened to his customers and changed the marketing strategy accordingly. "Harley-Davidson" today is *the* name in motorcycles.

Said Teerlink: "Harley went up when we cared about our customers and employees. Harley went down when we stopped caring about customers and employees."

"Marketing" might seem like a crass way to refer to evangelism, but in fact Christianity is faced with some of the same challenges and decisions that companies such as Harley-Davidson face. Who are we? How do we hold ourselves out in the marketplace of ideas? Who is our competition?

Some churches hold themselves out as the only true bearers and preservers of The Truth. The Truth, in their view, is defined as a set of exclusive doctrines that no other group or individuals hold in total.

Those churches market themselves as an exclusive club of very special believers who know something the rest of us don't.

Evangelism in such an environment can easily become a sort of debating party or a biblical sword fight. It can make for interesting entertainment and can even be a profitable exercise at times, but would a church want to be perceived in the public square as masters of the art of argument? Is there more to attracting disciples than that?

Of all the alternatives available, what would motivate someone to choose Christianity in general or your church in particular? What do you have that no one else in town has? Is there something more to it than the ability to make the best arguments?

Can you give people real hope? Can you give them real change for the better? Can you show them that God has a plan for them and all of us? Can you answer if someone asks you what God's purpose is for mankind? Can you show the real way to peace and give them an understanding of why the world lacks that peace? If people visit your church, will they meet God there?

Are we selling a set of doctrines, or are we addressing real needs and questions?