

The 2010 Church Consulting Future Trends Report

Introduction: *Demand is rising*

The **2010 Church Consulting Future Trends Report** is a comprehensive analysis of the challenges, opportunities and trends facing church consulting. Based on two separate surveys of hundreds of ministry leaders and consultants, this resource is meant for pastors, consultants, denominational executives, leadership coaches, lay leaders and ministry students.

According to many researchers, 4,000 new churches are planted each year, but more than 7,000 churches die in the same time period. Gary McIntosh, founder of the McIntosh Church Growth Network, reports 1,300 pastors are fired every month, and another 1,200 leave their churches due to stress, burnout and related issues. Of course, many factors lead to church decline and pastor burnout. And many are preventable.

We are encouraged to see how God is using a growing number of church consultants and coaches to help turn around churches. As you'll see in our research, more ministry leaders are willing to work with strategic outsiders.

But the bottom line in our report is this: The demand for qualified, experienced consultants far outpaces the supply.

How many church consultants are there?

Our estimate of the size of the church consulting market is influenced by how we define what a consultant is. In this report, we have leaned toward inclusivity - if a person consults with at least two churches a year and has received leadership training or has extensive experience as a pastor, he or she is considered a consultant. We further define a consultant as "a strategic outsider tasked with diagnosing and making recommendations for church clients."

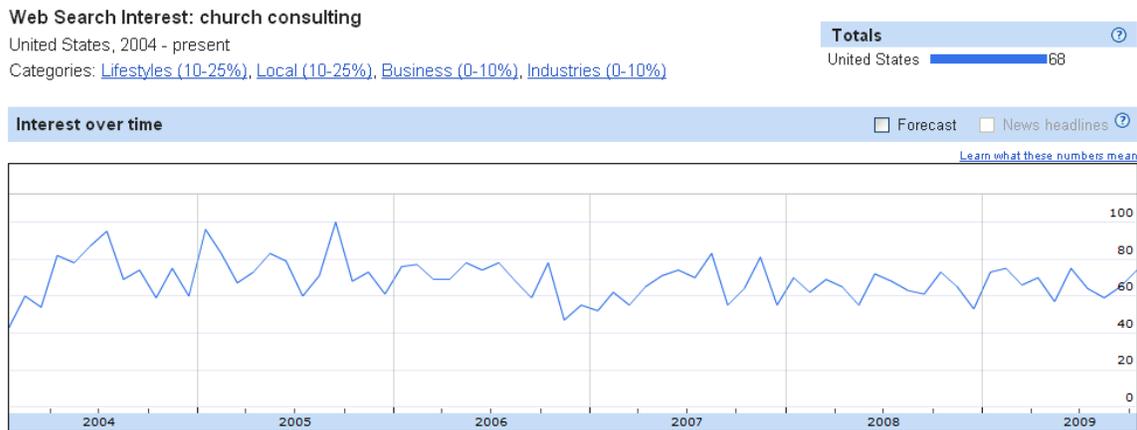
One factor that makes the church consulting segment difficult to quantify is that many people think they're consultants, but in reality have not been trained or have little experience. The Society must be careful not to send out ill-equipped consultants, just as Bible colleges and seminaries need to be careful about sending ill-equipped pastors.

Based on our best estimates, there are 3,000 to 7,000 active ministry consultants and coaches in North America (including part time, full time and denominational).

How did we reach this conclusion? For starters, the Southern Baptist Convention has around 600 directors of missions serving in this role, with an additional number of congregational strategists specializing in church turnarounds. Our LinkedIn discussion group has nearly 800 members, with about 20 percent of them serving as full-time consultants. The Society itself has 277 members. We are discovering new vocational church consultants almost every day through ChurchCentral.com and various social-networking tools such as Twitter and LinkedIn.

The interest in church consulting continues to grow, as more than 2,500 people have downloaded the Society's Guide to Church Consultant Training in the past two years. Currently, 10 to 20 people download this free guide every week. Many of them find the Society's site through Google.

The following chart shows a Google Insights report on the popularity of the keywords "church" and "consulting" used together in Google searches:



In the past three years, the searches for "church consulting" have stabilized, but they have not increased since 2004. The graph below analyzes the keywords "pastor" and "coach" together, a combination that has risen from zero since 2006 and continues to increase. (Note the Y axis does not reflect a total number of searches but rather a scaled number, with 100 representing the highest search volume in the entire time period.)



The main takeaway from these graphs is that church consulting has been searched for much longer than pastor coaching; however, interest in coaching seems to be on the rise. This is not enough data to indicate a definite surge in coaching and a decline in consulting, but, as you will see in the data to follow, the two approaches are becoming inseparable.

New models

We have talked to many denominational leaders over the years about their different structures and strategies for serving the churches under their care. New models of consulting, coaching and resourcing are emerging.

For example, Thriving Churches International, led by John Jackson, is creating a network of churches and supporting them with consultants, training and other resources. John and his team have a grand vision to serve thousands of churches in the coming years.

Our research methodology

This **Future Trends** report is a follow-up to a dissertation study published in 2006 by Warner Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church of Emerson, Ga. We learned much from Smith's work and were inspired to do a broader study on the perceptions and trends as seen by both pastors and consultants.

In this project, we conducted two e-mail surveys, one of church leaders and one of church consultants. Because we sent our survey to the approximately 7,000 subscribers of ChurchCentral.com's e-mail newsletter as well as members and constituents of the Society for Church Consulting, the majority of our respondents were at least familiar with the concept of church consulting. Many either had worked with consultants or were consultants themselves.

While using our own lists introduces some bias, the larger number of respondents (320 consultants and 515 pastors) helps mitigate a potentially higher margin of error.

Survey #1: Pastors' opinions of church consultants

Despite the relative newness of the church consulting industry, 51 percent of these respondents said they had worked with an outside consultant.

Granted, because respondents were among recipients of a newsletter significantly focused on church consulting, they would be expected to be more open-minded to consulting than church leaders generally. Despite that consideration, we believe the results show the concept of using outside church advisers is gaining ground.

Where respondents had not worked with a church consultant (49 percent), reasons included:

- Consulting had not yet achieved widespread acceptance
- Cost
- No consultant in the general area

In addition, many respondents either did not perceive the congregation needed consultation, or were unable to convince other leaders that their churches would benefit from it.

Motivations to seek a consultant: Among available answers, the top six included:

- Need for a new church vision - 49%
- Irresolvable conflict within the congregation - 25%
- Decline in attendance - 24%
- Decline in overall perceived spiritual health/growth of members - 23%
- Want help launching new ministries - 22%
- Constructing new space - 22%

Satisfaction: Almost two-thirds of church leaders were satisfied or very satisfied with the results of their consultants' work, and just 10 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Among those **pleased** with consultation results, common statements said the consultants:

- Listened well
- Imaged professionally
- Inspired
- Were willing to state difficult truths
- Paid attention to details
- Exhibited compassion and discernment

Among those **displeased** with results, subjective responses included perceived faults with the consultant (such as applying a “cookie-cutter” approach, showing poor presentation skills or not adequately understanding the congregation) and disappointment that the congregation had yet to adequately move forward with the consultant’s advice.

A separate question identified the top **bad habits** of consultants as:

- Poor implementation
- Being proud and opinionated
- Exhibiting impatience
- Thinking short-term
- Repurposing old consultation reports

Costs: As evidenced in the data, there is no generally accepted fee structure in church consulting. However, many consultants charge \$50-150 per hour (plus expenses) depending on the church’s ability to pay and the complexity of the project.

Costs are no doubt critical when it comes to considering outside consultation, according to the survey responses. The top barrier to working with a consultant was financial limitations (35 percent), with the second-most cited one being concern that the consultation would not be “worth the expense” (20 percent, tied with “unfamiliarity with what consultants do”).

Effectiveness: When asked about their perception of the effectiveness of most church consultants, 53 percent of respondents rated it potentially positive or very positive. “Unsure,” however, was checked by 42 percent. The relative size of that response may reflect the difference between the number of respondents who had used a consultant and those who had not.

Answers to two final questions speak well to the reputation of church consultation generally. Leaders responded by 86 percent that they would be open to working with a consultant in the future, and a remarkable 58 percent said they would consider being church consultants themselves.

Survey #2: The church consultants speak

Our survey elicited responses from 320 consultants. The following issues were the most interesting and/or surprising.

Time devoted: We were surprised that 16 percent said consulting was a full-time endeavor for them. The largest percentage said they consulted only occasionally. Almost a quarter of the respondents, however, said they consulted rarely or never.

Respondents who consult less than full time were asked what other professional endeavors occupied their time. The largest percentage checked pastor (senior, executive or associate), at 40 percent, followed by denominational employee (21 percent) and other (18 percent).

Results reflected the relative inexperience of most church consultants. Fifty-three percent of respondents said they had been active less than five years, with 13 percent consulting less than a year. A considerable majority — 78 percent — had performed fewer than 50 consultations, but 11 percent had performed between 51 and 100. One percent had performed more than a thousand consultations.

Areas of specialty: While 64 percent of respondents indicated no particular specialty, among those who did, the areas were purpose, mission and vision; strategic planning; and leadership training.

Coaching vs. consulting: We also asked respondents to evaluate the difference between “coaching” and “consulting.” Answers indicate many do both. Coaching was suggested to be more “pure” and therefore superior to consulting, but the opinion was not widely evidenced. Many said both have their place, ultimately to be adopted as a style based on the church’s need and the practitioner’s personal preferences.

Here are a few sample responses:

- “I do a little of both with churches, i.e., consult the church and coach the leaders.”
- “In my opinion, coaching is just a new buzzword for mentoring without accountability.”
- “I like the term consulting better because it speaks to more a team concept and doesn’t have the egocentric overtones of coaching.”

Finding church clients: At least some difficulty finding new church clients was expressed by 53 percent of respondents, indicating a need for better marketing by the individual consultant or the Society. Thirty-six percent said they had no difficulty finding clients (mainly because these consultants work for denominations, with no need to search for new clients).

Asked why pastors and lay leaders may hesitate to call outside help, 58 percent of consultants said they believed financial limitations were responsible, followed by unfamiliarity with what consultants do. Only 17 percent indicated a perception that churches might view consultants negatively.

The future: Trends indicated that many consultants are doing more consulting now than they were three years ago (47 percent, the No. 1 answer), and they expect to be consulting more in the next three years (66 percent, the No. 1 answer). The second-most popular answer for both questions was “about the same” amount.

Overwhelmingly, respondents believed the market is growing - both demand and supply are on the increase. This is impacted by the continued decline in churches, a greater desire these churches have to bring in outside help, more team and specialized consulting and better available training.

Some negative trends include an increasing number of inexperienced and ineffective consultants, market saturation of consultants and weak church finances (the most common answer).

Finally, an open-ended question asked how the Society for Church Consulting might help respondents perform better. A list of their responses appears later in this report.

Commentaries

In addition to surveying our two broad groups, we asked some established consultants and thought leaders to share their views regarding the future of church consulting.

Contributing experts include:

- Bill Easum
- Will Mancini
- Tim Gentry
- Paul Borden
- Jeff Johnson
- Chuck Lawless
- Warner Smith
- Alan Chandler
- John Jackson
- Randy McWhorter
- Dillard Wilbanks
- Barry Winders
- Gordon Macy

Excerpts from some of these commentaries are below:

Chuck Lawless

“More churches will need outside expertise. Let’s face it: most churches are unhealthy. More than 3,700 churches in the United States close their doors each year, and thousands more probably should. Leadership is lacking, and laity are unequipped. Few churches are really making a kingdom difference in the darkness of society. That trend is not likely to change significantly in the next five years. In fact, it may get worse as another undisciplined generation takes its leadership position.”

Will Mancini

“There has never been a more viable time for the role of the consultant, and the need is dire for more of us. In 1995, Lyle Schaller wrote that there would be a five-fold increase for the need of consultants in the next 25 years. This has been true in my experience and is the motivator behind my interest and role in the Society of Church Consulting.”

“Churches are navigating all kinds of change and complexity today and, as a result, they are in desperate need of qualified consultants. It remains true that profound knowledge comes from the outside. If you are teetering on the edge of a new ministry calling, or are just getting started, I don’t think there could be a better time to jump in!”

Paul Borden

“The use of effective pastors as consultants and congregational coaches is really working.”

“The [church] problems are common across all 40 or more denominations (including charismatic congregations) I have worked with; they just get fleshed out differently in different groups.”

“The bottom-line urgency for producing any change must be the Great Commission.”

John Jackson

“The five essential skills for future church consultants are:

- Faithful and consistent teaching leadership
- Creation of systems and environments to help people connect with God and each other
- Ability to equip and release men and women for meaningful ministry in alignment with their gifts
- Understanding of leadership principles and cultural analysis for contextual ministry
- Multiple partnership models to extend and enhance local ministry.”

Mission of the Society for Church Consulting

Our mission is to revitalize and advance churches through a network of high-quality consultants. We accomplish this in two ways:

1. Training, certifying and edifying a global community of consultants
2. Connecting these consultants with churches in need

We envision a force of thousands of well-trained, certified consultants working with churches around the world.

Our certified consultants meet high standards of proficiency and professionalism. Our prayer is that they find joy and fulfillment in rebuilding God’s church.

The Society was formed to meet several needs, the most important of which is that the church is in decline, and we have a passion to do what we can to turn it around. Many churches need help to reach the lost and edify the saved, and we believe our consultants can help restore many churches to their biblical purposes.

Visit the Society’s home page:

www.churchconsultation.org