

What Does It Mean to Own a Christian Business?

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<http://faithdrivenbusiness.com/what-does-it-mean-to-own-a-christian-business/>



At one of my previous jobs, a running joke went, “If you see the Jesus fish on your contractor’s business card, turn around and run!”

The idea was that unscrupulous individuals would use the symbol to convince others that they were trustworthy. That is probably sometimes true. But, when is it legitimate to have a business with a prominent Christian theme?

Before you say, “Never!”, consider that you probably already use Christian businesses. There are Christian radio stations, schools, magazines, websites, bookstores, and bands. By contrast, there are also Christian business owners who don’t feel right indicating their faith in a marketing context. Romans 14 advises us not to quarrel over such matters. But it’s fine to explore a topic and consider different views before making up our minds.

When is it ethical for entrepreneurs to call their small businesses “Christian”?

We could nitpick over things like profit vs. non-profit tax status. However, I think the only legitimate distinctions to be made are as follows. Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I using my business or professional activities to point people toward Christ?
- Am I using the Christian label, imagery, or theme because I am producing something that other believers will find beneficial?
- Does it appeal primarily to Christians?
- Do I want to do business only with other Christians?

Personal application is fair game for any business that doesn’t explicitly contradict biblical teaching (such as a strip club). We are instructed to examine our own motives. Anyone considering a Christian business should explore these questions before making a decision.

The ultimate question is, *Do I have a legitimate reason?* Or, am I *only* using the Christian label for a selfish reason, such as trying to drum up more business? Worse yet, am I using it to deceive people into believing I'm an honest person? Someone doing the latter might not be a true believer at all. How are we to know the difference?

How to Distinguish Between Honest Christian Businesses and Fakes

I think the answer is found in 1 John 4:1, which instructs us to test the spirits. For example, when I review other Christian finance sites, I can normally discern the true from the false. The false tend to contradict themselves, and glorify themselves rather than God. In my particular line of work, they tend to appeal strongly to people's sense of desperation, fear, guilt, or greed.

Perhaps most significantly, they often quote the Bible out of context (or not at all). Interpretation has gray areas and no one is perfect. But, someone constantly twisting scripture to fit their own views is displaying signs that they're a false teacher. So, when it comes to businesses that seek to instruct Christians, there is plenty of material through which to discern the spirit behind the business.

But there are businesses without such material. What about the Christian plumber who has the fish symbol in his ads? If you get to meet with him, maybe you can glean some insight. With others, that opportunity might not come. How am I to know if the furniture store with the fish symbol in their ads is legit? I should either investigate them further, or ignore them altogether. I shouldn't pass judgment prematurely, or react with a critical spirit.

Ultimately, I would rather reserve grace, giving fellow believers the benefit of any doubt. I would rather err on the side of supporting other believers, rather than act out of fear that something I supported will turn out to be a ruse. That kind of fear is normally self-centered, having concern only for what people will think of me if I support something that later turns out to be counterfeit. That's probably not the best approach.

But we can still apply wisdom to the matter. So far, we have four ways of categorizing business owners explicit about their Christian faith.

4 Types of Christian Business Owners

1. True believers with traditional business ventures that we can all get on board with.

Think Christian bookstores and radio stations.

2. Christian businesses we don't quite get, but we're convinced they have good intentions nonetheless.

I'm sure Christian investing (like my business Wisdom's Reward) falls into that category for many people. Christian medicine falls into that category for me. I've seen advertisements in which doctors are explicit about their Christian faith. My knee-jerk reaction is, "How do they apply Christian teaching to being a doctor? That seems weird." But they've probably put more study into it than I have.

3. Christian entrepreneurs whose intentions we question, but whose faith we do not.

If there is a serious issue, we are supposed to go directly to them and address the issue with them. We fail them when we don't.

4. The false believer who uses Christian language, imagery, themes, or labels in their business.

They only use the Christian faith to turn more profit through deception.

What about secular businesses that market to Christians? Is that ethical?

There is one last category of business owners we haven't really mentioned... those upfront about the fact that they aren't a Christian-owned business, but that nonetheless market to a specifically Christian audience. An example would be Christian Mingle, a dating service owned by Spark Networks. The company also runs dating websites for other niche audiences, like JDate for Jewish singles.

I don't have a problem with Christian Mingle because they aren't trying to trick anyone. They are providing a service that is beneficial to Christians. This type of business is no different, philosophically, from a secular publishing company that prints Bibles, or from secular makers of Christian art, apparel, or jewelry. If they do a good job, we do business with them.

The only difference is in our familiarity. Because we are unfamiliar with a concept, it's easy to have an emotional reaction that says, "They're taking advantage of Christians..." No, they're not. They're selling a needed service. If they aren't good at it, or if they do something that is offensive to Christians, they won't last very long. If they conduct their business in a way that benefits Christian customers, they'll succeed.

There is nothing wrong with their structure that should make me refuse to do business with them. Still, if I had a choice between Christian Mingle and a similar site that was Christian-owned and managed according to biblical principles, I would choose the latter. For me, those two things are what make them a true Christian business, and most deserving of my support.