

A Closer Look at Promotional Activities

While promotions can advance your ministry’s cause, the penalties for not complying with applicable laws could be a substantial setback. Always be sure to work with a local attorney to ensure that your ministry’s promotion is a winner.

These examples of common promotions provide detail about the potential issues that may arise if promotion planners are not attentive to legal requirements. The chart also presents a risk management approach that can help planners avoid some of the difficulties that often accompany the use of promotions in churches, related ministries, and other organizations.

Promotion	Example	Potential Issues	A Risk Management Approach
Sweepstakes	The leader of one church’s singles group tried to boost the group’s popularity by setting up a sweepstakes. He advertised that every person who commented on the group’s Facebook page would be entered into a drawing for a new MP3 player.	The group’s leader may have been required to register his promotion with the state or create official rules. He may also have violated Facebook’s promotion guidelines when he made commenting on the group’s Facebook page the entry method.	The leader of one church’s singles group set up a sweepstakes. He registered the promotion with his state and wrote a set of official rules, which he emailed to the group members and posted on the group’s blog. In order to enter into the drawing, group members (aged 18 and older) had to email their leader. When the promotion ended, the group’s leader numbered the participants and then used an online random number generator to determine the winner. He posted the winner’s photo on the group’s blog, and delivered her prize—a \$30 gift card.
Contest	A children’s ministry set up a contest to award the child who submitted the best Bible-based fictional short story.	This could present an issue of how to fairly judge which story is “best,” since it could depend merely on the judge’s personal preference. When the judging criteria aren’t clear, the contest can cease to be a test of skill and become a lottery.	One children’s ministry set up a writing contest, which consisted of children writing historically accurate short stories. The head of the children’s ministry also wrote official rules for the contest and handed them to each child’s parent or guardian. When the contest ended, the judges selected the story that was most historically accurate.
Raffle	A church’s orphan care ministry set up a raffle to help a young family pay their adoption fees. Each raffle ticket cost \$25 and bought the ticket owner a chance to win one of 12 new handheld tablets.	In some states all raffles are illegal. In most states, raffles must be registered with the state. Also prizes won may be subject to a value limit.	A church’s orphan care ministry decided to set up a raffle to help pay a family’s adoption fees. The group’s leader checked with an attorney to make sure raffles were legal in her state. She then registered her raffle and wrote official rules. The rules were given to each ticket purchaser. Each ticket cost \$25 and bought the ticketholder a chance to win one of 12 pies, baked by members of the orphan care ministry.
Door Prize	The leader of a senior citizen ministry wanted to offer a door prize at the group’s annual luncheon. Hoping to boost attendance, he set up a door prize. The prize was a vacation package with an extremely high retail value. In order to cover the prize’s cost, the event planners raised the ticket price from \$3.50 to \$20.	This door prize could be considered illegal because of the increase in ticket price. Depending on state laws, raising the ticket price may have turned this door prize into either an illegal lottery or a raffle.	The leader of a senior citizen ministry wanted to offer a door prize at the group’s annual luncheon. He checked with his attorney to see if door prizes needed to be registered and followed his attorney’s advice. Each ticket cost \$3.50. On the day of the picnic one lucky man won the door prize and left with a new jazz CD.