

Today, we're taking another dive into the multi-faceted world of marketing, this time borrowing a couple of terms that are often used in the tech world...the computer world. So, let's start with "node," that's N-O-D-E, node. Dictionary.com says that a *node* is a connection point in a network that's a processing device with an assigned address. So, a node could be a computer terminal that receives digital information as an *end node*. And the source of it all could be called the *originating node*. And a node that handles traffic between other nodes and is embedded within the network could be called a *router node*. Hey, here's the main thing: you've got to have effective nodes to make the whole setup work well!

Now, all these nodes are part of a *network*, and, boy oh boy, does the modern era now have just oodles and oodles of networks! And that's where you come in. 'Course, you use the Internet, a kind of giant "network of networks." And, sure, you use the World Wide Web on the Internet...of course, that's why you start a digital address with [www](http://www).

The truth is, network activity is so deeply embedded in our everyday lives that we simply take networks, their nodes, and our access for granted. Well, except those instances when we can't get a good Wi-Fi connection...then our irritated elitism surfaces very quickly! Yeah, I'm talking about you...and me! That's true, even when most of us don't have a ghost of an idea of how all that node interconnectedness really works. Like a king or queen from centuries ago, we simply expect our every whim to be immediately gratified. Anything short of that, well, it's "*off with their heads!*" Well...figuratively speaking!

So...what's all this got to do with marketing? Well, like the old proverb says about a chain, *a network is only as good as its weakest link!* And marketing in the modern era is very often a node-filled network...or even networks, plural...with all those nodes interconnected for incredible effectiveness.

Yes, the modern-day truth is, in many places like Europe or America, the picture of a village baker waking well before dawn to bake bread and then personally selling loaves in a few hours in the same humble storefront—well, that's very rare. Now, a great marketing chain is often networked—it has many nodes!

Let's take an example. When you buy a new car, the marketing *foundationally* is in the product design and features. So, that's why a company like Ford spends an inordinate amount of time, money, and effort in product design and features that will be well-received by a very large number of consumers. That's the core germ of marketing, and that's what we'll call the *originating node* for marketing cars.

Now, because buying a new car is an expensive purchase, competent salespeople are hired to be the *end node* of the marketing network. These folks extensively know all about the various cars for sale and expertly practice the necessary human relation skills to getting eager but nervous consumers to a "yes" on such a major purchase. We can be sure that a selling skill set is very highly valued by Ford!

But there might be *other* people who are also end nodes in the marketing of the car, perhaps a celebrity endorser or maybe even Dan Neil, the highly-entertaining Pulitzer-prize-winning new-car columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*. As Neil's official bio says, "In awarding Mr. Neil, the Pulitzer board praised his 'one-of-a-kind reviews of automobiles, blending technical expertise with offbeat humor and astute cultural criticism.'" This multiple end-node impact is cool: it could be Dan Neil *and* a celebrity endorser *and* the salesperson who together become the end nodes that move the consumer from *looker* to *buyer*.

But wait a minute, we've missed a key step in the marketing network for cars. Ford has painstakingly developed a large network of prominently-branded car dealers in the U.S. who secure convenient retail locations where potential consumers can get a close-up feel for various models of cars. That's pretty much a *router node* in the marketing network, where the true consumer-contacts—like the salesperson or the service advisor making repairs later—can do their magic in securing, serving, and retaining the customer.

And so it goes! Complex, successful marketing networks in a high-volume consumer society have savvy originating nodes, like manufacturers who do the strong product design...and often efficient router nodes, like delivery networks, distribution centers, and retail locations...and then effective end nodes, like great

salespeople or great user-interfaces at the retail level—you know, that’s where the consumer easily self-navigates using sophisticated search software to find specific products.

Take Amazon, a preference of many happy consumers. Manufacturers and third-party sellers offer strong products there...while Amazon provides a powerful user-interface—from an astute search for just the right product to the “place order now” button—then wrapping it all up with world-class distribution.

But it doesn’t *always* go so happily. Business marketing-process is competitive and can be very difficult. A few years back at Christmas-time, Amazon’s sheer volume of deliveries and fast-delivery promises overtaxed the capability and willingness of its established router-node partners...FedEx, UPS, and the U.S. Postal Service. Amazon’s “fix” to that weakening link had already been in the works—so Amazon finished gearing up its own front-porch delivery-system with its own now-familiar delivery vans. But after that, porch pirates became a real issue for Amazon. Yes, it’s always *something* that tests even the best network.

This example of what Amazon did with its own delivery is classic! While still keeping its options open with the established delivery-alternatives nodes like using USPS as needed, Amazon built its own router node, yeah, one significantly under its own control. And that’s a very interesting parallel to the Internet because the Internet has *physical-path options* built in. When one path is closed, the Internet affords networks more paths to take to the desired end nodes—so the user is not held up by only one path being closed. So, Amazon built its *own* captive physical-path option, one that competitors have trouble replicating!

But here’s the ultimate! You do know how God amazes us all with His Kingdom’s “marketing nodes,” right? Let’s lay the groundwork. In a series of perfectly deft moves, God first gave humanity the independence to choose. Then humanity disobeyed. Then God gave the Law to prove that no one could keep the Law! And the work of the law is written on the hearts of every person by God, even while clear evidence of His power and nature is constantly provided. (Romans 1-2) And now—this is crazy good—in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4), God provided the perfect service offering of His Son—yes, Christ and Him crucified!

So, every person in the entire world can be saved...in fact, God clearly reveals that’s His very desire...and that’s done only by grace and faith, not by being a person supposedly being “better” than others at keeping the Law! Wow, you talk about God being the perfect *Originating Node*—then, now, and forever!

And kinda like Ford car dealerships—but clearly under God’s direction—missionaries set up local churches from which disciples of Christ would be sent...you know, like Antioch, the famous missionary-sending church founded by the Apostle Paul. These locations were clearly *router-nodes* where believers would go to fellowship, to worship, to be discipled, to be sent...in other words, to lead a very full life in Christ through the equipping services of their seasoned pastors and teachers! Have you been part of a modern-day Antioch-style church that supports hundreds of missionaries worldwide? It’s an incredible linkage!

So now, we arrive at God’s specific plan for the role of His *end-nodes*, that is, every believer’s privilege to witness...to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God! And that’s worked for two millennia! But sadly, not everyone who claims Christianity is mindful or even believes that is their role. Such folks have chosen to become a weak link in God’s strategic marketing. But, hallelujah, God is not limited by this faltering!

Similar to the Internet’s multiple paths, God has *spiritual-path options*...*other willing believers can and do become effective witnesses of the good news*, helping fulfill God’s desire that all people be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Yes, that’s the answer to “how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard” (Romans 10:14 ESV) And it’s fascinating that God often compounds the witness of more than one believer in the lives of willing hearers before their decision to accept Christ is made!

Hey, in God’s marketing network, the Originating Node—the crucified and resurrected Christ—is *definitely not* the weak link! Instead, it’s some churches and some people that prove to be weak links...whether by ignorance, disobedience, or bad theology. But that’s not our focus as individual saints. Rather, our glorious privilege and humbling role is to personally be faithful witnesses for the Originating Node. Astounding!

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Quick, which is more impressive to you—the Internet or God’s Kingdom? Identify the features and workings that undergird your thinking, contrasts, and answers.
  
2. Ponder the story and track record of the church at Antioch in the Bible. How is your local church doing as a router-node sending out believers with the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—locally...regionally...and internationally, as per the beckoning of Jesus just before His Ascension in Acts 1:8? Be specific.
  
3. Every believer is to be a witness for Christ and Him crucified—designed and instructed to be a strong link in the network for the Kingdom of God. Just how effective is your witness in your spheres of influence—family, workplace, neighborhood and beyond? Be specific.