

Seeking a blessed union: Is a merger on your horizon?

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Earlier this month, CNNMoney reported some [big news](#): Chiquita Brands International — the big banana in the banana business — will merge with Fyffes of Ireland — the second banana in the banana biz — creating the world’s largest banana company. In the world of business, mergers seem to be no big thing. They are an inevitable rung on the ladder of growth, just one more step toward global domination. Seminaries share little with the ambitions of companies like Big Banana (or Ma Bell or Delta Airlines, for that matter), but it’s interesting to compare the matter-of-fact approach to mergers held up by the business world to the fear and apprehension that talk of a merger can bring to a seminary boardroom.

In the seminary culture, there are an untold number of stakeholders with strong emotional attachments to their school. This is not just brand loyalty but often a fierce commitment that has

been kindled by faith and stoked by visits to alma mater, church conventions, and annual fundraising campaigns. A merger may absolutely be the best way for two or more schools to continue the pursuit of their missions, but persuading stakeholders that a consolidation is the best way forward can be tough.

Then there are the resources. When Chiquita Brands decide to acquire a new business, not only do they have deep pockets and access to capital, but they also have staff, consultants, and lawyers to steer the company through the process. Seminaries have not-for-profit constitutions and by-laws to dissolve and re-write. There are negotiations and capital considerations that need to be addressed, and much of that work falls on the shoulders of a volunteer board.

As more schools feel the crunch of declining enrollments, consolidating with another school is becoming a very real option for leaders who never before imagined such dramatic change.

Do your administrators and staff understand the implications of consolidation — both the possibilities and the pitfalls? Whatever the answer, take a look at the section of our website on [Mergers/Partnerships/Affiliations](#).

Two articles in that section are especially helpful if you're trying to figure out how a partnership or affiliation might work:

- "[Forging Partnerships](#)" by Robert E. Cooley
- "[Due Diligence: Considering a Partnership with Another Institution? Ask the Right Questions](#)" by George K. Brushaber

Once you've read the resources, if you still have questions about how to move forward, give a call to the In Trust Center for Theological Schools at 302-654-7770 or e-mail us at resources@intrust.org. We'll put you in touch with people who can help you consider options and move forward.

Photo by [Matt Forster](#)