

## Technology and Mission

Issue 31 Editors: Mike Frith and Tim Davy

Whether you are a technophobe or a technophile, this edition of Encounters makes for important reading. We have gathered experts in various fields relating particularly to digital media and asked them how technology has and is impacting mission.

They discuss a number of key issues, such as the role of IT in mission, the place and potential of internet-based evangelism, and the vital importance of video for engaging with the current and forthcoming generation of new missionaries and their peers.

We also wanted to illustrate best practice for using 'social media' such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs as part of a mission organisation's activities. A huge thank you is due to Wycliffe Bible Translators for showing how it can be done, and for sharing their thinking behind it. They have also furnished us with numerous examples of individuals on the field who are using these technologies to communicate about their work, with supporters and the wider world. We have no book reviews this edition, so why not check out some of their blogs instead?



Mike and Tim

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# How Technology has Affected, and is Affecting, Mission



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I am an American computer consultant who trains missionary IT people how to set up and deploy computer technology. I have worked with over 100 mission offices in 13 countries, and consider myself having seen a good overview of how missions use technology.

Recently I attended a prayer-time at a mission organization with whom I was volunteering. They introduced the morning by announcing that, over the previous weekend, one of their pilots and a passenger were killed in an accident. They shared a lot of information about how the plane went down, how two of the four people on-board were alive, and about the desperate attempts of some bystanders to rescue the pilot and passenger (both of whom ended up perishing). Everyone there knew the pilot and their family, and so the prayer-time was intense and heart-felt. As an outsider, I thought this was an excellent example of technology in action. Nobody paid any attention to the fact that the first announcement of the plane going down went out over email, that half of the information came by reading the African newspaper on the Internet, or that the desperate fight for the lives of the pilot and passenger was captured on YouTube. The focus was on ministry, not the technology that enabled it to happen smoothly. Most missions do not know how to express the impact technology has on their ministry, simply because technology is so ingrained that they take it for granted.

## What is technology?

Computers are a normal part of our everyday life. We have computers in cell-phones, computers in our cars, and computers on our desks. It is very easy for us to take them for granted unless the technology is being problematic. When I was in Indonesia, I once worked on computers while in the middle of flood-waters. Standing in a room where the water is up to your knees makes you think about turning off your computer equipment (we ended up moving to the third-floor of an office to do most of our work). And while I was in Sierra-Leone, Africa, I found out how to set up computers when there is only electricity for a few hours a week. Conditions do not always lend themselves to having computers, and yet, missionaries continue to take them into the most outlandish areas. At the same time, one regularly hears of these computers crashing because ants ate something vital, rain shorted it out, a customs official decided to steal it, or that the military chose to impound it so they could find all the missionaries one communicated with. How has technology impacted missions? Are computers worth the time and energy being put into maintaining them?

As a computer guy, I will focus primarily on computer technology, but I will start by explaining something of technology in general. We use the word technology in a very strange way. Technology, as defined in the dictionary, refers to our use of knowledge and crafts. But we typically use it by referring only to the "latest" stuff we are using, not to things that we take for granted. For example, there was a time when the wheel was the latest in technology. If I used this article to explain the role that the wheel has impacted mission, this article probably would not be published. But at the same time, we sometimes still have to discuss various technologies that are not the very latest, simply because they have impacted mission in some amazing ways.

For example, the airplane not only allowed missionaries to arrive on the field in a reasonable amount of time and have regular “return visits”, it created the possibility of “short term missions.” Short-term missions created a shift in how missions were done, and we are continuing to find new uses of short-term ministry. But also, the airplane allows us to do what we call “deputized fund-raising”, which is how many United-States based mission organizations run. The missionary returns from the field every few years to talk with those who have supported them financially, and this relationship helps with the funds for the next section of time. The airplane is still shaping the concept of how we as Christians spread the Gospel, so it is a viable “technology” to discuss, even though we mostly take it for granted.

So technology is a tool through which we do a task, and “mission” is the task that we are currently talking about. Let’s spend some time looking at some of the history of how technology has impacted mission in the past.

### **How technology has impacted Missions**

In the 70s and 80s, there was a serious push in missions to have the Bible in every language, and a church for every people group. But there was a problem with this; we did not know how many people groups there were. Actually, we did not know how many languages there were. The first part of that goal was met by starting to collect and distribute information, and most of this was done using computers. (One thing that you will note, as I relate these stories is that people do the work, but they use computers to do it.) Through the efforts of those collecting this data and those trying to focus on the world’s least reached peoples, the “10/40 window” was discovered. It was not that these countries did not exist prior to our discovery of the 10/40 window, but rather, the focus of missions was elsewhere. The 10/40 window helped missions focus its efforts.

From this initial listing of languages and people-groups (now hosted at the Joshua-Project: (<http://joshuaproject.net>) came a new outgrowth of potential. Groups like AD-2000 (<http://ad2000.org>) put a lot of effort into encouraging mission organizations to spread out their focus. For many years, most of the missions focus was in the same cities that other missions were working in. With AD2000, they started trying to work in different areas so that the unreached peoples could hear. When AD2000 closed down, other approaches to making sure new missionaries were heading out to unreached areas began to spring up. <http://Worldmap.org> is a site that allows us to see relatively up-to-date information about the status of world evangelism. Using this site can allow an organization to send people to areas that have never heard the Gospel.

Bible translation has also undergone an amazing shift through the use of computer technology. While translations used to take 15 to 20 years to do, many of them can now be done in three to five years. Missions researchers have put a lot of time into understanding languages, and programmers took that learning and created tools which made the translation process more exact and simpler. The Bible translators go through some extra training in these tools, which enables them to be much more effective in their translations.

Computers, as a tool, have changed how a lot of things are done in missions. At one time, when someone went off to missions, they packed their belongings into a casket and basically vanished from history. Sometimes letters from them would come back home, but it would take multiple months to arrive. Imagine getting a letter, dated four months previously, saying, “Please pray for the neighbor next door who is dying with HIV.” By the time you receive the letter, the situation has already been resolved. That age did not allow the Body of Christ to work as a body, but rather it worked more as a collection of individuals. With the airplane and international postage, communication became more regular. But email and blogs allow people to pray for things as they happen. This allows people who are “prayer warriors” to be able to pray for situations around the world.

Communication does not only come from missionaries, but it goes to them as well. People from churches can encourage their missionaries by dropping them an e-card, a short email, or even using "Skype" to talk to them for free. But something equally as important, the sending mission office can communicate with them. Finances can be sent through digital methods, enabling those of us who are not "sent" as missionaries to meet the needs of missions in ways that could not be conceived of just a few years ago. All this allows the church to treat their remote missionaries as if they are part of the local congregation. To pray for them when they are hurting, to offer words of support when they are needed, to help meet their financial needs, and many other things.

Technology is also used in direct evangelism through websites, online chat, blogging, Facebook, and other interactive web. Some of the more creative technologists use online games to make relationships through which they share the Gospel.

Digital media has added a new facet to evangelism. Global Recordings (<http://globalrecordings.net>) is a mission organization that has created verbal tracts in over 5,700 languages and dialects. They have put together a number of simple things for mobile devices (cell-phones, mp3-players, etc) that can enable you to determine what language someone speaks, and play a quick tract for them in their language. This is often used at a mall or other public location. You find someone dressed in national garb of some sort, engage them in conversation to ask them where they are from, and then you can play a sample of their language for them. If you have someone with a laptop in the area, you burn an entire CD of content in that language. Because the media is in digital form, it can be transported very easily. The Spark VMS group (<http://sparkvms.org>) lists many forms of media (digital and non-digital) which can be used to spread the Gospel, as well as amazing stories of how these technologies can be used effectively.

### **Issues Missions have in using technology**

The first issue with technology in missions is that, the more technology a mission uses, the more technology people they need to set it up and maintain it. While there are lots of trained computer people in the Body of Christ, there are few of them in missions. Finding a good computer person for the mission organization is a very difficult task. This is primarily because few techie people are called to full-time ministry. We have a very odd mindset in that, we think that people called to full-time ministry should attend Bible Seminary instead of a computer college. When, in-fact, there are needs for virtually all skill-sets within missions. So a person should be able to be a doctor, an engineer, or a computer-person, and be able to pursue that form of education even if they are "called to missions." But at this time, most people who are called to missions do not have any formal computer training. The people that have computer training (most of whom are not called by God into full-time missions), whom the mission organizations try to recruit, often feel out of place. We have found that it is easiest to take someone who already has the call of missions on their heart and teach them in computers, than it is to take a techie and try to plant in their heart a call to missions. So there are a number of ministries geared towards training the IT people in missions about the technology they are supposed to be working with. (See <http://iccm.org> and <http://lightsys.org>)

But once a mission has a technologist, they need to decide which technologies to implement. Technology moves at a very rapid pace, and it is hard for even professionals to keep up with it. Missionary technologists have a difficult time determining what technologies they should use in a given situation. Missions are very odd in how they are set up. Most missions have their main headquarters based in a highly 'civilized' culture, but have their workers based in majority-world countries. If you had a corporate organization that had 30 offices scattered in thirty countries, your corporate headquarters would have a large team of computer staff. Most mission organizations have only one or two IT staff. There is also a huge discrepancy in funds available for technology. A large corporation has a large IT budget while the mission

that works in the same number of countries has a very small IT budget. Missions, when they roll out a new technology, want to get it right the first time. This means choosing the right technology, as well as implementing it the correct way. But they do not have finances for training, nor do they have large budgets for researching technologies and how they work in the majority-world. But missions have found a fairly good solution. The ICCM conferences (<http://iccm.org>, <http://iccm-europe.org>, <http://iccm-asia.org>) are where mission IT people gather every year to discuss what works and what does not work. They give each-other training on technologies, as well as bringing in Christian professionals to provide professional training at a fraction of the cost. Once a mission knows what technologies it should be using, then it can utilize volunteers to implement it. There are issues with volunteer IT help (contact <http://lightsys.org> if you wish to know more about that), but we will not discuss those details here.

One of the great limitations of technology is that the amount of impact relies on those who use the technology. Life would be simpler if we could roll out a new word-processor and expect people to be able to use it immediately. But with every new technology, we need to train people how to use it. There are two main “audiences” we will look at; the home office staff and the field missionaries. Home-office staff are usually in the same building as the technologist, so you would assume they should be easier to train. Most home offices are staffed by older missionaries who came off the field for some reason, and older people are often more resistant to changing technologies. (This is not so much an issue with age as it is with the cultures we grew up in.) The missionaries on the field are a mix of older and newer ones. Young missionaries usually adopt new technologies very rapidly, but they still require various amounts of training. The difficulty here is in getting the information to them in a timely manner. Many mission organizations have an annual meeting somewhere on the field where various things can be taught. But this teaching and training is still a work in progress. As distance-learning tools become ironed out (and as various specialists in distance education volunteer their expertise to missions) this problem will start to be addressed more completely.

One huge issue for missions is the problem of information security. This is a very important issue in the business world, but in many areas of missions, lives hang in the balance. There is a lot of security training that goes on during the ICCM conferences, and there are a lot of good, inexpensive security tools out there which can be used. But information security is not only about technology; people need to know how to use that technology, and they need to have good security practices. (For example, it is not only important to have a good lock on your door, but you need to know how to use it. But that is not even enough, you need to have the practice of locking the door at the appropriate times.)

Since there are so many computers on the field, there is a growing need for computer repair work to be done on those computers. Most of the time, there are no local repair places to take the computers. If you are a missionary working in the jungles, teaching literacy, it is fairly obvious that there will not be a computer-repair guy there. Oddly enough, missions have some good solutions to this particular problem. A few years ago, laptops were mailed, or hand-carried back to the home office for repair work. Now, many of them are repaired on the field. As missionaries gather during their once-a-year meetings, often a team of computer repair-guys show up to do basic help-desk work (see: <http://missionarytechsupport.com> or contact your local mission agency if you want to volunteer for such a trip.) As those meetings usually only happen once a year, there is a need for more regular helpdesk support. There is a move towards putting together a Day of Missionary Helpdesk (no known web-site at this time), where volunteer IT people will man a virtual helpdesk one day a month and missionaries will be able to log in and have their computers looked at. Some excellent remote helpdesk tools, like Bomgar (<http://Bomgar.com>), have emerged on the market and are exceptionally cost-effective for mission organizations. This allows a techie who is not



called to full-time ministry to volunteer one day a month, and still be able to help repair missionary computers all around the world.

### **How has Missions impacted technology?**

If you think about it, you may know a number of technologies that were produced as part of a different goal. For example, the United States Space program invented a number of very interesting technologies as a part of their discovering problems about space (<http://science.howstuffworks.com/ten-nasa-inventions.htm>). Cordless drills and some water filtration tools are part of these things. But has the world benefited from missions technology? The brief answer is, "Yes."

Amazingly enough, things as basic as Email were heavily impacted by missions. Email was once broken up into many segments that could not communicate with the other segments (AOL, Compuserve, etc.). Christians, working on trying to help their missionaries, were the first ones to make Internet Email Gateways to bridge this gap. The first PC-Based GIS software has its roots in missions too. Missions wanted to begin to track the details of people-groups, languages, and the status of world evangelization, but mapping software was not available for personal computers. The first GIS software was built for missions, and one of the first things ever to be mapped resulted in what is known as the 10/40 window. Missions has impacted computer programming languages like Perl (see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry\\_Wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Wall)), and some well-known computer programs (Squirrelmail, Centrallix, Etc.).

If you are into a lot of reading and wish more information on this topic, you might consider looking at this article: <http://www.articlearchives.com/humanities-social-science/religion/2319257-1.html> which describes a lot of other examples where missions have impacted technology in the early years of computing.

### **In Conclusion**

Part of the reason we use anything in missions is not just because it has an impact. Often it is simply a natural outgrowth of the body of Christ. We are to be stewards of what we have been given. As people develop skills in being doctors, engineers, pastors, teachers, or athletes, we find that the Lord enables these people to use these skills to grow God's kingdom. It should not be surprising that the same holds true for computer technologists. God has given everyone the task to further His kingdom through the skills He has given them. And so there are people whose calling in life is to use technology for His purposes. When we are called to serve God, the impact we have is not due to the technology or the person, but to the Spirit working through us. Even with computers, the old proverb still holds true; "The horse is made ready for Battle, but victory rests with the Lord." (Proverbs 21:31) Or written for computers, it would read: "The computer is loaded with software, but the impact rests in God's hands."

While it is interesting to think about technology and its impact in missions, we should never lose sight of what technology is. Technology is just another sort of tool which people have at their disposal, something we are stewards of as we strive to be obedient to Christ. Technology has enabled the common man to impact people and situations far removed from himself. This makes the question, "Who is my neighbour?" much more vague. But while it adds a different perspective, it is the same age-old question. Technology seems new and different, but there is truly still "nothing new under the sun." Each person will be called to give an account of himself unto God for what we have been given. Each generation has been given different things, but we are still called to the same task. To be obedient. It is not technology that does the work, the work is done by obedient people, following the leadership

of Christ. In the end, we cannot give any credit for the impact to technology, the same way that we cannot take the credit ourselves. The credit for the impact that technology has had in missions can only be given to Christ, the one to whom we try to be obedient.

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# Evangelism, Mission, and that New-fangled Interweb Thingy



Author: Tony Whittaker, coordinator of [Internet Evangelism Day](#) and part of WEC International's SOON Ministries team in Derby.

“The colour of the world is changing day by day” – *Les Misérables*

## Introduction

It is mind-blowing to examine the dramatic way that technology is transforming our lives for ever. In the first 50 years of the 20th century, the new engineering arrived: electricity, cars, planes, and sadly, mechanized warfare. Then the second half of the century brought us the new electronic media – radio, TV, tapes and CDs. And finally, affordable home computers, the Internet and ‘go-everywhere’ phones.

## Communication cultures

An equivalent far-reaching media revolution hit the world 550 years earlier: Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press. As books became vastly cheaper and easier to distribute, Western society was transformed. Education, science, the written arts – the Renaissance blossomed. The Bible was unlocked for the masses. The Reformation was enabled. The ministry of the Church was dramatically enhanced and changed. Because it was now easy to codify and distribute concepts and information on paper, the way that people actually thought and communicated – **even when not using paper** – was transformed too. The West moved from an ‘oral communication culture’ [1] to a ‘print communication culture’.

By about 1950, radio, TV and record-players were increasingly impacting our lives. Communication at a distance was no longer confined to the written word, usually read by one person at a time as an individual experience. It became oral or visual, and was very often a shared experience. However, like print, it was still a one-way linear medium, with the audience as mainly passive consumers. This was the era of the ‘broadcast communication culture’.

The quantum leap came in the last decade of the 20th century. The Web, computers and mobile phones became cheap and mainstream. The speed of adoption of the Web has been faster than any previous medium. Radio took 38 years to achieve the market penetration that TV achieved in 13 years, yet the Internet did it in only four. The ‘digital communication culture’ [2] was upon us. By the end of 2009, researchers claimed that 1.75 billion people were using the Web [3], and over 3 billion people owned a mobile phone. This is – remarkably – 25% and 50% of the world’s population respectively, with the majority of users outside the West.

Those who grew up with home computers and other electronic gizmos can be regarded as ‘citizens’ of the digital age. To them, digital is natural and instinctive. But over-25 adults came to these things later in life. They are the ‘immigrants’ to the digital world, some of them only occasional, even reluctant, ‘tourists’.

It is vital to understand the nature of our new digital communication culture, because it is shifting the way we think and communicate, **even offline**. Christian writers such as Shane Hipps in *Flickering Pixels* [4] and Rex Miller in *The Millennium Matrix* [5] reveal that our digital culture is rapidly becoming nearer to the oral communication cultures that have survived in countries where literacy or availability of reading materials are not high. Story, visual imagery, dialogue and community are key elements of the digital communication culture.

## **Not just 'print on a screen'**

The Internet is not just 'print on a screen'. And more than any other medium, the user is in control, free to choose her path through any of billions of websites, blogs, video clips or Twitter streams and interact with them. The Web is far more than the biggest reference library in history (though it is indeed that – an incredible 'ask the planet' repository of knowledge). It's a market place, a strategic connecting communication system just as Roman Road network was in New Testament times, and almost anything else you need it to be.

Concurrent with the emergence of the digital media has been the transition to the new postmodern post-Christian worldview [6] across the West and beyond. Truth is perceived as relative and personal rather than absolute and universal.

Christians were quick to see the significance of this new communication medium, though slower to use it in evangelism. The vast majority of Christian websites are 'insider' resources for other Christians – the same situation that pertains with books and DVDs [7]. Even when we create evangelistic sites, we may instinctively try to use the Web in the same way we used previous mediums, for example writing one-way linear material more like online tracts and booklets (so-called 'brochureware'), or as an equivalent of church sermons. Only those who really 'get' the nature of the Web as a postmodern medium can use it effectively.

The 2008 US presidential election illustrates this graphically: it was the first election where digital media were decisive. The Obama campaign instinctively understood the Web, how to integrate it with mobile phones, social networking, other media and people on the ground [8]. They created a bottom-up, grass-roots campaign that gave a sense of ownership to millions ('together we can do it'). News was often announced to people first by text message, and only later to the news media. Inquirers were quickly linked with follow-up from volunteers on the ground. The McCain campaign perceived the Internet as just another top-down one-way advertising medium like TV, and suffered accordingly.

North America has had the critical mass to pioneer much of the digital revolution, and is still the centre of gravity for the English-speaking Christian Web. In USA the *Internet Evangelism Coalition* (a partnership of major ministries, including the *Billy Graham* organization and *Campus Crusade*) was strategic in the early days to envision people for online evangelism, using conferences and other initiatives. One spin-off was *Internet Evangelism Day*, which is both an annual web awareness day each April, and a year-round resource guide on all aspects of digital outreach.

## **Online evangelism is for anyone, not just techies**

It's important to correct a common misconception: that online evangelism is only for technical people. This is completely untrue! Not only are there many opportunities [9] within e-mentoring and social networking that only require normal keyboard skills, but modern CMS (Content Management) software [10] allows the easy creation of blogs and websites using online text-editing boxes. The *TruthMedia* outreach sites (referred to later) are built entirely on the Wordpress CMS system. Anyone can create a blog or simple website using a CMS system.

## **Properties of the Web as a medium**

### **1. *Non-linear and interactive***

Unlike a novel or video, there is no real start or finish point to a website. Users pick and choose what they want to do online and usually go directly to resources that relate to them, often by using a search engine and bypassing the homepage.

One of the key attractions of the Web is interactivity. Users choose what webpages they view. Each person will have a unique route of personal choice through any website, and across billions of webpages around the world.

The two-way nature of the web means that the user is no longer a passive recipient. When we listen to radio, the experience is one-way – unless we can phone in or write a letter. But the Web makes it easy for users to express opinions and interact with others by email or instant messenger, online forum or blog comment. At last, 'my opinion counts'. The Web is essentially relationships, and this is reflected increasingly in the whole field of social networking – Facebook, Twitter, etc. Since effective biblical evangelism and ministry is also highly relational, there is rather a close fit here!

### **2. *Pull medium***

Outreach literature is a 'push' medium: for instance, people place tracts into others' hands. Radio too is largely a push medium – within a limited range of available stations, the user listens (or turns off). The Internet however is a 'pull' medium. It draws people in – but only within the topics on which they wish to be drawn. It is therefore more like a reference library or shopping mall rather than a literature distribution program. There is no automatic audience for a website. Many Christian websites aspire to be evangelistic, yet in fact largely 'preach to the choir'. To engage with not-yet-Christians, particularly those who are not already seeking, requires us to meet people on their ground, rather than ours, on the basis of their felt needs or particular secular interests. This is termed the 'Bridge Strategy' [11]. Research suggests that at any one time, around one third of any population are suffering some level of personal life issue more serious than the inevitable day-to-day minor knocks [12]. The Web can be a fountain of hope to those who are hurting.

A very helpful modification of the Engel Scale, called the Gray Matrix [13], helps us to visualize what a person (or grouping) feels about the Gospel, both in terms of attitude and knowledge.

### **3. *'Anonymous intimacy'***

People can ask questions online they might not dare to raise with even their closest friend. This is hugely significant, especially in 10-40 window countries where being seen publicly to inquire about faith can result, at minimum, in considerable disapprobation from family and the community [14].

## **Opportunities around the world**

There are many online opportunities to share the good news of Jesus internationally. Yet in many non-English languages, there is little evangelistic outreach designed for outsiders. Even in some European languages, particularly Eastern Europe, there is almost nothing.

Japan is a highly-wired nation of sophisticated web users with an advanced mobile phone network that is used to access the Web more often than desktop PCs. It is also a nation

where Christianity is mainly regarded with benign indifference and ignorance rather than active hostility, and where most Japanese people are unlikely to know a Christian personally. In this context, digital media can be crucial to building relationships with Japanese, starting them thinking and moving into a spiritual journey [15]. But in comparison with the huge need in Japan, these God-given tools are not yet being used sufficiently.

Surprisingly few mission agencies are yet involved in online outreach (though the Web has transformed all mission communication, recruitment, prayer support, news distribution and research). *Campus Crusade* is a major exception, with ministry (not just to college students) in a range of languages. Their Canadian *TruthMedia.com* team has a portfolio of websites designed for different audiences, such as men, women and students. These sites are highly outsider-friendly, frequently addressing felt-needs and life issues. A comparison between their women's outreach site *WomenTodayMagazine.com*, and an outwardly similar site they operate for Christian women, makes a valuable case study [16]. They have also created a valuable e-mentoring system, so that any inquirer who contacts the site is linked with a volunteer mentor to answer their questions by email, build a relationship, and lead them on in their spiritual journey. Real-time chat follow-up is used too.

The Middle East is one area where mission groups are effectively engaged online. They also network together with other media and local churches to integrate ministry and follow-up. An annual conference helps to build and maintain these partnerships. There are a growing range of similar informal networks and conferences for other countries too [17].

One remarkable inter-mission multimedia project for a Himalayan country demonstrates the potential. The team took an existing bible-storying DVD called *The Hope Video*, and with permission added new scenes in that language and culture: contextualized artwork, music and dance, interwoven with the existing acted narrative of the NT story from the *Hope* video. Filming in another Himalayan country used diaspora nationals for dancing, music and the spoken story. This project integrates the distribution of the new DVD with a three-language website, radio ministry in the target language, and believers on the ground. It's an approach that could be adapted for other countries and cultures.

The Web also provides retired and returned missionaries with a unique opportunity to continue to minister to their country of service. Through blogs, websites, Facebook, forums and discussion groups, chat-rooms or other forms of social networking, former missionaries can build redemptive relationships across the continents.

It is worth noting that in the 21st century Western church, there is a growing awareness that we must now use here the same insights that the mission movement has long understood:

- understanding and relating to an alien non-Christian culture needs respect and sensitivity – any attitude of entitlement to preach is misplaced and off-putting
- finding areas of redemptive analogy in popular culture and using them as starting points (see below)
- using their language, not ours
- evangelism as a two-way dialogue and story-telling, not one-way lectures of abstract concepts
- no quick fixes – evangelism is long-term relationship-building
- social service and ministering to felt needs are integral to the Gospel
- an outwardly homogenous society is actually made up of many different people- or affinity-groups, and each may need a different route to reach them

All these conceptual changes are key to online and offline evangelism, even in the West. We can note wryly that there may still be churches very happy to send missionaries out to other countries to use these principles, but who would regard such approaches as dangerous and un-necessary innovations for home ministry! Equally, it is sad to see that in some nations where the national church was planted by missionaries, the church may have replaced these insights with Western models of ministry acquired via, for example, Christian TV, leading to 'quick fix' preaching or a prosperity gospel.

Dave Hackett of *visionSynergy* sums up effective evangelistic communication: "Appeal to their authorities, speak their language, use their imagery."

## **Popular culture**

Suppose God sent you a letter. And in it, He offered you a gift – a simple evangelistic approach similar to the parables that Jesus used. Something that would engage with people's interests, and employ a common language and experience. Would you want to use it?

We are convinced that this is exactly God's heart, and that He does indeed offer us a resource which is grossly under-used for ministry: contemporary culture – that is, the world of film, TV, music, theatre, books. Just as missionaries look for embedded parallels in their host cultures, we in the West can equally find many compelling redemptive illustrations from secular culture [18].

## **Mobile devices**

By 2020, experts predict that the majority of web access will use mobile devices. In the mobile arena, developments are proceeding at lightning speed. Desktop PCs and laptops are much the same as five years ago (just a bit faster with more memory), and the chances are that you are reading this on a computer several years old. But mobile devices and applications are advancing month by month. What will the mobile world look like by 2020? *Pew Internet* suggests that mobiles will be 'More Computer Than Phone' [19]. We need to be ahead of the curve, and develop strategies that will match the new mobile context [20].

## **Social networking**

Much online evangelism is intentional and attractional, based on a website and aiming to entice people to read, interact and respond, hopefully entering into dialogue with a real person.

However, the growth of online social networking introduces a different area of potential. If Facebook was a country, it would be the fourth largest in the world. Social networking can be visualized as a highly-leveraged extension of the natural relationships we build in the physical world – friends, family, co-workers. We do not constantly preach at them, but our incarnational presence in their lives may be a route to sharing truths at appropriate times. Gentle references to faith on a Facebook page can also start such a dialogue, with those we already know (or even with friends of friends) who visit our page. There is even an annual 'Online Missions Trip' for young Christian people using Facebook [21].

Social networking sites can also be used to find people of another nationality or ethnic group. If done appropriately and sensitively, this 'Facebook hopping' can build real bridges. For instance, a literature outreach ministry for a certain ethnic group in West Africa is finding Facebook a great way to make new contacts, and point them to evangelistic material in their language, online or available by post. By searching on Facebook for various family names which are unique to this people group, it is easy to make one-to-one contact with them,



giving an invitation to become 'friends' with a Facebook page carefully designed for this purpose. (This has to be done slowly, so that it does not trigger Facebook's spam filters.)

The microblog service Twitter became mainstream during 2009 [22]. It first gained widespread public awareness when Twitter users shared news and pictures of the Airbus ditching in the Hudson River, well in advance of the news media; and when actor and broadcaster Stephen Fry tweeted his plight of being trapped in a broken lift (elevator)! As users have probed its potential, Twitter has evolved into various niches. In young tech-savvy churches and conferences, it is common to find an ongoing conversation being conducted by Twitter during a sermon or conference session. College lecturers may invite real-time feedback and questions about their session via Twitter. Nothing illustrates the digital 'citizen/immigrant' divide more graphically! 'Citizens' brains are truly wired up differently – they find it natural to send frequent short text messages (often with one hand) while listening to something else.

New Twitter tools seem to come online almost daily. Twitter has a similar potential to Facebook for evangelism and relationship building. Because people's 'tweets' are public, it is also possible to make contact with people tweeting, for example, about a certain life problem, and who are in a particular geographical location, using publicly-available web tools. This enables churches or ministries to make contact with people who may be open to receiving help. (Once marketers start to exploit this opportunity too much, this avenue will doubtless be increasingly restricted or blocked.)

### **Church websites**

Church sites represent a huge opportunity to reach the community. Without a web presence, a church is almost invisible, yet the Internet can offer the wider community a unique 'shop window' into their fellowship. Unlike a normal evangelistic site, a church website has to straddle two very different groups: Christians (members or potential members), and non-yet-Christians.

Church sites can fail to effectively relate to both groups. Yet when they do, they find it is possible to engage with non-Christians. A major conceptual problem for many church sites is that they position themselves as a building where meetings happen, a place where 'we'll preach the answers at you'. This impression is often reinforced by the homepage, where the only graphic is a photo of the building! It is far more effective (and biblical) to portray the church as a family of people who long to be inclusive, saying: 'we welcome you to join us on our spiritual journey'.

*Internet Evangelism Day* offers a self-assessment questionnaire, to help churches develop their sites to be more outsider friendly [23]. *Redcliffe College* student Ceri Longville recently completed an insightful research study on church sites called *Reaching the Community with Church Websites* [24]. There is a great need for research into many areas of digital evangelism, otherwise we are 'flying without radar'. Check our page of research studies, including Dave Bennett's vital 'How Adults Become Christians' [25] which demonstrates the paramount importance of relationships.

### **Helping you: the Guide Network**

The *Guide Network* [26], in which *Internet Evangelism Day* and *visionSynergy* are lead partners, exists to help missions and other groups find opportunities using the web and mobile platforms. We also have a speaker panel [27] offering a wide range of strategists who can speak at Bible College seminars or conferences, or provide consultancy help to mission agencies and other groups.



We also want to encourage Bible Colleges to consider ways to develop web evangelism modules within their courses [28], and we also hope to create ready-made course material for this purpose if there is a demand.

Our *Digital Evangelism Issues* blog [29] and email newsletter *Web Evangelism Bulletin* [30] supplement the growing resources at *Internet Evangelism Day*.

### The challenge for the future

We believe that the Web and digital media are God-given tools with a huge potential to integrate with other forms of Great Commission evangelism around the world. We need the 'Issachar Factor' – to be like the men of Issachar, "... who understood the times and knew what Israel should do..." (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Let George Verwer have the last word: "The Internet is one of the most key tools that God has given us in the church today. Internet Evangelism is a dynamic, effective, cutting-edge ministry that more people should get involved in!"

### Footnotes

- [1] [www.internetevangelismday.com/oral-communication.php](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/oral-communication.php)
- [2] [www.internetevangelismday.com/digital-communication-culture.php](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/digital-communication-culture.php)
- [3] [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com)
- [4] [www.internetevangelismday.com/bookreviews/flickering-pixels.php](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/bookreviews/flickering-pixels.php)
- [5] [www.internetevangelismday.com/bookreviews/millennium-matrix.php](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/bookreviews/millennium-matrix.php)
- [6] [www.internetevangelismday.com/postmodern.php](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/postmodern.php)
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- [9] [www.internetevangelismday.com/vacancies.php](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/vacancies.php)
- [10] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Content\\_management\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Content_management_system)
- [11] [www.internetevangelismday.com/bridge-strategy.php](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/bridge-strategy.php)
- [12] [www.internetevangelismday.com/felt-needs.php](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/felt-needs.php)
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- [26] [www.internetevangelismday.com/guide](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/guide)
- [27] [www.internetevangelismday.com/speaker](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/speaker)
- [28] [www.internetevangelismday.com/bible-college](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/bible-college)
- [29] [www.internetevangelismday.com/blog](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/blog)
- [30] [www.internetevangelismday.com/newsfeed.xml](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/newsfeed.xml)

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Tony is available for consultation or networking on any area of digital evangelism. For more information please visit [InternetEvangelismDay.com/feedback](http://InternetEvangelismDay.com/feedback)

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# A Response to Tony Whittaker on 'Evangelism, Mission, and that New-fangled Interweb Thingy'



Author: Ceri Longville, Web Developer with OSCAR. Ceri has an MA in Global Issues in Contemporary Mission and her 2009 dissertation is freely available here:

[Reaching the Community with Church Websites](#)

I find Tony's article an encouraging read. The potential power of the Internet as a God given tool within mission is a subject that deserves a much higher profile in the academic world, in the church and in para-church organisations. When I was doing my research for my Masters dissertation, the Internet Evangelism Day website was the most comprehensive site I found on the Internet pointing to a wealth of resources from around the world. I would have found my study near impossible without it.

I see it as very significant that the article begins by laying out the change in '**communication cultures**'. Once grasped by people who did not grow up with technology, it can help promote an understanding of how many of us will need to change our approach of communicating the Gospel in order to affectively engage with "citizens of the digital age". It is a whole new area of cross-cultural mission, only this time our borders are from 'print' to 'digital'. As stressed, the digital divide is sweeping the world, yet it is a subject you will seldom find on a college curriculum and I think this is food for thought.

**"If Facebook was a country, it would be the fourth largest in the world."** It is amazing how Facebook has grown. It would be extremely unhealthy to put all our relationship building online. We have been made by God as physical beings, with physical needs; a smile, eye contact or 'arm around the shoulder' are all so important in everyday life. So I do like Tony's description of it being an "extension of the natural relationships we build in the physical world". I find Facebook a great aid to cultivating my relationships with Christians and non-Christians alike. For example, if I find I have a similar taste in music to a new acquaintance – next time I see this person I have an instant conversation starter that is so much more personal than 'the weather'. Social networking sites are a fantastic opportunity for quickly sharing some of the more meaningful parts of your life (including your faith), that may take ages to come up in natural conversations.

**"Internet Evangelism Day offers a self-assessment questionnaire, to help churches develop their sites to be more outsider friendly"** ... this is a great resource to help churches find direction with their website. I found the tool most helpful for my dissertation analysis. It doesn't just point out the problems but it also suggests solutions. I also found asking non-Christians for their opinions of church websites very telling and would want to encourage every church to do this.

There are however many people in the world who will never get online, perhaps older/elderly people or those who simply do not have access to even basic computer technology. In agreeing wholeheartedly that the technological opportunities for mission that God has given need a much higher profile and need to be used to their potential, I close by remembering the people whom technology cannot reach, being cautious to never tip the balance the other way.

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# What a Difference a Decade Makes: OSCAR's observations on changes in technology



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Author: Mike Frith, Founding Director, OSCAR.

It's been ten years since OSCAR [1] began. Research was undertaken in the autumn and winter of 1999 and the OSCAR website was launched on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2000, right at the peak of the dot-com bubble.

This was an era when the Internet really was the 'Information Superhighway'. The early years of the digital age saw many organisations starting to move their services from using traditional to electronic forms of propagation. Part of this was to have a presence on the World Wide Web, initially resembling an online version of their sales brochure but later becoming more of a depository for specific information and advice. The web quickly became the first port of call for anyone looking for information, overtaking the telephone, paper directories, local libraries, reference books, newspapers, periodicals, etc. One of the big challenges was organising all this information and making it accessible for Internet users. Search engines were in their infancy and often struggled to return relevant results, so web portals appeared offering categorisation of the growing chaotic mass of Web information. The vision of OSCAR was born in this era, part of which was to provide an information portal for all things 'mission' on the Web.

During the last ten years the Internet has really 'come of age'. Driven by a combination of Moore's Law [2] and globalisation, the Internet has taken on a life of its own, defying many predictions and producing new opportunities at every turn.

So what have been the big changes [3] of the decade?

## **Increased Connectivity**

World Internet usage has grown 380% in the last ten years and an estimated 25% of the world is now online [4]. But it's not so much the fact that more people are online, as it is the variety of ways by which people now connect to the Internet. The rapid expansion of the mobile phone industry has been driven by the need to have a more permanent and mobile way of connecting to online services. This has created what many refer to as the Digital Divide, where the increased use of technology by the privileged few just serves to increase the gap between the digital 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

Whilst a large portion of the world remains unconnected directly to the Internet, there are most likely some people who are connected in every part of the world and some of these will be Christians (either ex-pat missionaries or nationals). Through their connection with the Internet, OSCAR has sought to resource and encourage these folk, to help them reach the people around them. We have also tried to improve the connections between Christian workers, mission organisations and supporters, understanding that mission is a team game and only really works well when every team member is released and enabled to play their part. For those of us who belong to the Kingdom, the ultimate aim, of course, isn't to connect everyone to the Internet ... but to connect them with the Good News of Christ and to the God who loves them. OSCAR lives for this purpose.

## **Increased Pace**

Do you remember when technology was supposed to free up our time? The initial dream was that we would work less and have more time for other pursuits. However, the need to work and be productive is still a strong driving force and the temptation to do more with the help of technology seems to increase with each technological advance. But time itself is also a

resource to be treasured. Being wise stewards of our time is implicit in so much of Scripture's teaching. Whilst OSCAR has attempted to embrace and utilise the technological advances of the last decade, I'm always conscious that the appropriate use of technology for mission is to enhance the message and not detract from it. I try to pass everything through this filter.

## High Touch-High Tech

*High Touch-High Tech* was the title of a book written by John Naisbitt in 1984. He proposed that technological solutions led to an increased need for face-to-face relationships. As impersonal devices have become more a part of our lives, many have lost out on human interaction. I think that this has been one of the most significant factors behind the post-modern revolution. Again, technology promised us more time with each other, but the early Internet years have just drawn us into a world with little direct interaction with other humans. The last ten years, however, has seen the Internet develop into a tool that can enhance relationships. I hear so many people of a certain age (usually the Baby Boomer generation and above) who like to rubbish social networking as a poor substitute for 'real' relationships. This usually comes from the fact that most of their close relationships were formed before and without the use of such facilities. As stated earlier, technology has the ability to enhance or detract, and as Christians we really should be looking to utilise these new developments to enhance our relationships, both within the body of Christ and outside.

Back in 2002, I spoke at an IT day organised by Global Connections. The main thrust of my talk was that the Web, whilst mostly a one way broadcast medium at the time, was soon to become something much more two-way and interactive. I never realised just how this would happen but today we have an Internet that empowers all users to participate and interact.

Over the last few years, OSCAR has introduced various facilities to connect users with each other and provide them with a platform for interaction. Our latest venture in this area is OSCARactive [5], a mission-focused social network launched back in March 2009. Part of my vision for OSCAR is to be less of a centralised resource and more of a peer-to-peer network where individual users are empowered and enabled to help each other, despite the large distances between them. This, ultimately, is about building relationships... where people can serve each other and pass on the blessing that God has given us.

Even with all these advancements over the last ten years, I'm still amazed at the potential that the Internet has to enhance life and ministry for those working in cross-cultural mission. A potential which I'm sure, in time, will be realised. Whilst it's important to recognise that the Internet can be used for both good and bad, it's up to us in the Christian community to both inhabit this domain and use all that it offers to promote God's purposes and build His Kingdom.

## Footnotes

[1] [www.oscar.org.uk](http://www.oscar.org.uk)

[2] Moore's law states that the number of transistors that can be placed inexpensively on an integrated circuit has doubled approximately every two years. This law subsequently effects anything enabled by computer hardware and is often used to describe the driving force of technological and social change in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

[3] Titles are based loosely on some of the chapter 'The Impact of New Technologies: Life in the Virtual World and Beyond', in the book 'The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends' by Pocock, M, Van Rhee, G and McConnell, D. (2005) Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

[4] Internet World Stats [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com)

[5] [www.oscaractive.net](http://www.oscaractive.net)

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# Lights / Camera / Mission

## Why using video is essential for mobilising Generation-Y



Author: James Clarke is a church youth pastor and mission mobiliser, and runs [RedArke Productions](http://www.redcliffeproductions.co.uk), a company seeking to develop the video production capabilities and approach of UK mission organisations.

I asked one of the girls in my youth group recently when she was born. I'm terrible with ages, especially when it comes to teenagers. Something of a blind spot for a youth pastor, I know. But even I was shocked when she said '1993'. Ninety-three?! Now I've always considered myself young, and I'm still the better side of my mid-twenties, but *I remember that year!* I remember where I was that year, what I was interested in, who my friends were and what I got for Christmas. And yet here is one of millions born in 1993, who are sixteen going-on-seventeen. She is choosing her University preferences and has a car sitting on the drive waiting for the moment in a couple of months when she passes her test and becomes a driver. Scary, when 1993 seems like only yesterday. If we subscribe to the current fashion of 'generation-ology' – we find that she was born right on the cusp of 'Generation-Z'. Where we go beyond that, who knows? But worryingly, I'm becoming old hat now, way back in Generation-Y.

I saw a video a few months ago which fascinated me. It was put together nearly ten years ago to attempt to point out the life experience of Generation-Y, those born since 1980. Alongside painting a picture of the type of world I have lived in, the video tells of the technological advances that have formed the landmarks in our timeline. All of them which have in turn revolutionised the way we communicate, the way we receive information and the way we connect with what is going on across the world. But don't take my word for it, the video is here:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2\\_CgM2btWzM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_CgM2btWzM)

Watched it? Good. Perhaps if you're my age then watching that will be like stepping out in front of a bus. Your whole life flashing in front of your eyes, from the recent realities of on-the-go information and connectivity, to the ancient histories of Ronald Reagan – or BBC computers. Of course the entertainment value of the section prefixed by 'what will the future hold for them?' is endless. With our glorious gift of hindsight, we look down our noses at the travelling gentleman's monolithic handheld computer and PDA, as we watch the video with crystal clarity on our iPhones. While the Star Trek architecture of the concept bridge may not have materialised quite yet, the telecommunications advances have far outrun the imagination; in just nine years.

And they've outrun the Christian mission sector too. Perhaps I am speaking out of turn, or perhaps I've been consistently in the wrong place at the wrong time; but ever since I stepped foot in the 'mission game' in my late teens, I have had concerns over the ability – or rather, inability – of mission organisations to effectively communicate to my generation.

Perhaps it is wholly inevitable. Just a quick search through the articles and videos on the internet brings up hundreds of pages devoted to the problems the business world face as they begin to integrate Generation-Y employees into a 'Baby Boomer' (post-war) run organisation. Communication and technology seem to be the biggest disconnect as a generation who have 'got by' technologically meet a generation who have learnt everything they know of the world through digital communication and are more than capable of moving as fast as the trends do. If those are the issues the business world are struggling with, is it any wonder that the same is true of mission agencies – who have always been great at jumping onto the bandwagon a good five or ten years after the corporate world? As the video admits, 'it's not easy to react to a revolution, when you are standing in the middle of it.'



A quick look at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites> gives you a quick idea of just where things are at the moment. The list of the top five daily visited websites consists of three search engines (unsurprisingly), Facebook and YouTube. This, I'd suggest, accurately reflects the division of time spent by my generation on the internet. Which begs the question – why aren't mission agencies and mission workers using these media to more effectively communicate with my generation? Sure, slowly but surely many of the bigger organisations are dabbling. Facebook pages are being used to update followers on this initiative and that prayer need, and a few have even ventured into Twitter to do the same. And yet there is next to nothing on YouTube that effectively tells the story of what God is doing through mission organisations and mission workers; how he's moving and how lives are being transformed across the world. Surely the website with the fourth-highest number of daily visitors is the prime platform for telling these stories? Of course platforms come and go, with fads and phases. But it's not YouTube that I'm worried about. Video in general seems to be something of an afterthought across the UK mission sector.

Video is in no way new. Remember, video killed the radio star way back in 1979, after all. If a picture paints a thousand words, video quite literally paints one thousand five hundred pictures every minute, and does it with more detail, depth, and directness than any ambiguously rendered paragraph can do. It's the *film* of planes hitting the Twin Towers; the *film* of the Berlin wall being breached; the *film* of Mandela being freed and the *film* of Princess Diana's wrecked Mercedes that lodge indelibly in our minds. These images allow us to feel connected to the events, no matter how far from the scene we are. Perhaps this is true for my generation more than any other. We have known no different. First the television and then the internet have kept us informed of the outside world. The majority of the information we've taken in and processed has been visual. We are a generation au fait with sound bites, status updates and video clips; but many of us will never have written a letter to a friend. The way we communicate and the way we receive information is different. Why then, has the ancient art of writing the 'prayer letter' endured as the only way mission agencies deliver news from mission workers to their supporters?

I am not waging war on the prayer letter. My parents and grandparents simply love the prayer letter. It was and is the way they best receive information. But at time of going to print, my Bible is loaded with four lengthy updates from missionaries who are *personal friends*, and each of them remains unread. Why? Not because I'm uninterested in their content or God's work; but because I find letters more difficult to connect with and receive information from.

A few months ago I sent a questionnaire out to seventy-five UK sending mission agencies, with the aim of looking at how they are seeking to inform and communicate with Generation-Y. I was amazed by some of the results. Shockingly, over eighty-five percent of the responses admitted that they have zero budget for video production. In other words, it's not even on their radar. A few responses even dared to suggest that they could see no good reason for video whatsoever, and were almost offended that I'd even suggested such a preposterous thing. Needless to say, when I asked the age of the bulk of their supporters, there were precious few below 65 years of age.

The question that mission agencies must ask is: do they want to share their experiences with Generation-Y? If the answer is 'no', then they are signing their own death certificate. But if the answer is 'yes', and they want to communicate to Generation-Y, then they have got to commit to speaking the same language. Paul himself recognized in 1 Corinthians 14 that no matter how wonderful the words are, if those listening can't understand them, they are useless. For Generation-Y, video is essential, not just desirable. And it needs to be essential for mission agencies too if they are going to transfer their vision and work to this generation. It's how we receive the bulk of our information, how we engage with issues across time zones, and how you're going to captivate us by showing us what God is doing. It's our language.



Generation-X (b. 1960-1980) have been called the 'Missing Generation' – a whole generation that the church failed to communicate effectively to, and consequently a whole generation largely absent from church services. Could Generation-Y be mission's equivalent? I for one hope not. But it will take a few brave mission leaders to recognise that we are not the next generation or the new generation. We are *this* generation. And that means we are *today's* doctors, teachers, nurses, lawyers, architects, administrators, social workers and engineers. And we love Jesus as much as the next guy. *Today's* potential missionaries. But so far, you're just not reaching us. And you're in danger of losing us. No, video is not some miracle drug that will instantly bring droves of Generation-Y would-be missionaries to your door. But this is the language we understand, and if we can engage with mission work visually, we stand a chance of being able to engage with it spiritually, financially, and personally.

In only five years time, that girl who is now in my youth group will have just finished University. She will have qualified with skills that could be transformative and Kingdom building throughout the mission world. By then, in 2015, will mission organisations be ready for Generation-Z?

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# Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Use of Social Media

## A case study



Author: Phil Prior, Head of Marketing, Wycliffe Bible Translators.

### Introduction

In 1996, my first year at university, I was one of the few people on my course who had used e-mail. Our assignments could still be hand written and when we wanted to call home there would usually be a line of people waiting to use the payphone at the bottom of the stairs. Three years later, at my graduation, I could either call or text my friends on my 'mobile' phone and as we parted we shared e-mail addresses to keep in touch in the future.

Today, 13 years later, when I want to contact friends I can text, Twitter, e-mail, Facebook, Skype or call them. I rarely write a letter, it costs too much to send and takes too long to get to its destination. On a daily basis I read the thoughts and opinions of business leaders and friends, politicians and Wycliffe members, based all around the world, without having to leave the comfort of my desk. Although, if I wanted to get out and about, my mobile phone will allow me to search websites and read e-mail, I could even call someone if I really wanted to.

Over the last 10 years the variety and reach of new communications tools has changed more quickly than at any other time in human history. Never before has there been so much opportunity to reach such a vast number of people, to engage them in a vision and to stir them to action.

I am going to share with you a few of the ways in which Wycliffe Bible Translators UK has been using Social Media <sup>[1]</sup> to communicate with our audience, share our vision and reach new people. Hopefully, our story will be a real inspiration to you.

### How Wycliffe UK uses Social Media: the big picture

#### The aim

One of the most interesting things about Social Media, is that it connects people who otherwise would never come into contact with each other. In my life Seth Godin is a very influential man. I've not met him in person but I regularly read his [blog](#) <sup>[2]</sup>. In 2008 he published a book called Tribes, in which he says,

"A movement is thrilling. It's the work of many people, all connected, all seeking something better. The new highly leveraged tools of the Net make it easier than ever to create a movement, to make things happen, to get things done." (Godin, 2009, page 4).

That's what we are aiming for with Wycliffe, a movement of connected people, inspired by the desire to see God's word in the hands of all people, in the language that they understand the best. Growing and developing this movement of people is something that Social Media is helping us to do. We no longer have to travel miles and meet everyone face-to-face, although, it's always nice when we can do. Instead, communications technology allows us to share our thoughts, opinions, our hopes and our dreams and connect groups which otherwise would never have made contact.

## Planning to use Social Media

Before getting too much into the question of 'what we do', it's important to answer 'why' and explain some of the decisions that have influenced our implementation of Social Media.

In practice, Social Media works best when multiple channels are used. In other words, what takes place on the blog doesn't just stay on the blog, it gets shared across Twitter, Facebook pages and other social networks that I don't even know about. This is the strength of Social Media. If I read something I like on someone else's blog I may well share that post on my Facebook profile or publish it on Twitter. In this way that one blog post reaches a far wider audience than it would have done on its own as each individual shares it with their own audience.

At Wycliffe in the UK, Social Media is part of an overall communications plan. Twitter, Facebook and blogging are all separate communications channels which are used alongside more traditional media, such as our print materials, press releases and website. Using the new tools to support and complement our established means of communication helps us to reach a wider audience and build relationships.

It is the personal support of these various audiences which give authority to what has become known as User Generated Content (UGC). In the world of Social Media it's not the corporate voice that drives the agenda, instead it is the opinions, view-points and conversations of individuals. Because of this, Social Media is best not viewed as a corporate mouthpiece.

Now, that's not to say that at Wycliffe we don't run a corporate Wycliffe blog or Twitter account for communicating with supporters, we do. However, our aim is to engage individuals outside of the organisation with individuals inside of the organisation. If that occasionally allows us to share a more 'corporate' message with followers then all the better, but the main focus should be to link up like-minded individuals.

Why? Well, let's be honest, people don't build up relationships with organisations. Relationships are built up between people. It's the strength of these relationships between people which allows organisations to occasionally butt into the conversation with their own message.

This is probably a good place to talk some more about generating content. The success of Social Media is in allowing users to generate the content (UGC). At Wycliffe we spend surprisingly little time on writing items, especially for the blog. Instead, most content is supplied by members who have their own blogs. This reduces the amount of staff time needed to manage this and allows a much wider variety of subjects to be covered.

Of course the important part of Social Media, and the element that makes it most exciting, is opening up dialogue by allowing followers to comment. Dialogue can be the part that requires the most time and attention, but this is about building relationships which can only be a blessing to an organisation looking to become a movement.

Dialogue also gives agencies such as ourselves, a way to communicate with supporters and find out what they are thinking or are concerned about. It allows us to gain more instant feedback and to discuss our views with a wider range of people.

The other spin-off from this is empowering staff to lead their own tribes. Say you enable 10 people to run their own blog. Encourage and empower them so that they can talk effectively about your organisation in their own way to their own tribe of people. They may then be able to influence 10 people themselves. Immediately that means that you have 100 people onboard with your tribe.

Even if those 10 people are the only people that you have time to engage with, the power of your communications is increasing, and going much further afield.

## How Wycliffe UK uses Social Media: specifics

### Blogs

[www.wycliffe.org.uk/blog](http://www.wycliffe.org.uk/blog) is a main communications tool for Wycliffe Bible Translators in the UK. It's used as a promotion tool for more traditional forms of communication, like announcing when the most recent edition of Words for Life (Wycliffe's magazine in the UK) or Call to Prayer (our bi-monthly newsletter) are released. We publicise press releases, which are frequently picked up by other blogs, increasing the reach of our stories.

But the blog also allows us to draw attention to Wycliffe members who blog. Directing readers to interesting blog posts by members working overseas or in UK roles allows us to talk more widely about the variety of things that we do and share the range of opinions that exist within Wycliffe.

### Facebook

Facebook pages are a good way to connect people who are interested in a similar topic. However, to make a site worthwhile it requires dedicated time and input to keep information up-to-date. We are currently running a Facebook Page [3] for a few months as a trial to see if it's something worth pursuing.

What Facebook enables people to do more effectively, is network. Many Wycliffe staff, around the world, use Facebook to keep in contact with friends at home, share pictures, tell stories and talk about their life.

Facebook is a good example of how personal communications can work much more effectively than corporate messages and sites.

The limitation with Facebook is the decision by many people to only connect with people that they know or have met. While this means that connections between people are of a high quality, it can limit Facebook as a way of spreading information more broadly.

### Twitter

Once again, Wycliffe UK has a corporate Twitter account @wycliffeuk which is managed centrally. There are also a number of Wycliffe staff on Twitter and it's possible to connect with a number of them under the hashtag [4] #wycliffeuk.

The #wycliffeuk also provides a direct feed of Tweets about Wycliffe to our website.

### Video

YouTube is the web's second largest search engine, and a popular place to share stories. Not only does it make content visual, but it also allows people to take the video and add it to their own website. This gives Wycliffe some editorial control, as the content of the video remains fixed, but it also allows the message to be spread more widely by embedding the video, or links to the video, in blog posts or Facebook pages.

You can view Wycliffe's videos through their YouTube channel, WycliffeUK [5].

## Podcasts

Podcasts are a bit of a dream for us at the moment. We have plenty of quality interview material and there's good, free, audio editing equipment available online which we can use to put Podcasts together. The challenge is finding the staff time to put programmes and interviews together.

## An example

Below is a picture of the Wycliffe Blog from the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009. Visible is an article about Eddie Arthur, Wycliffe's Executive Director, appearing on Peniel Church's Face to Face TV programme, [6] talking about Bible translation. Inserted in the blog post is a YouTube clip, and to the right of the post you can see that this has been 'retweeted' four times.

**Bible translation with the Kouya**  
September 9th, 2009 by Mark

Wycliffe UK's Executive Director **Eddie Arthur** was recently interviewed on **Peniel Church's** Face to Face programme, where he discussed what God is currently doing around the world through Bible translation.

Eddie's personal testimony is a highlight, as he recounts how God called him and his wife to West Africa to serve with the Kouya people.

If you don't have time to listen to all four clips, I would say that the final one gives a great insight into what is involved in Bible translation on a day-to-day basis.

4 tweets retweeted

**Wycliffe UK on Twitter**

- » #wycliffeuk on facebook by the man who created it: @phil77 - <http://bit.ly/3r3sf2> a day ago
- » RT @Phil77 #WycliffeUK Page now up on Facebook <http://tinyurl.com/npkshu> it's still a bit raw, but there's a start 2 days ago
- » RT @kouya: Up early for an exciting week ahead. Discussing the Biblical basis for the future of Bible translation worldwide 3 days ago

**Bible Translation Sites**

- » Vision 2025
- » Wycliffe International
- » Wycliffe UK

**English Bible Translations**

- » Better Bibles Blog

**People involved in Bible Translation**

- » Andrew and Clare
- » Clarke and Alison
- » Eddie and Sue Arthur
- » Hazel Gray
- » John Hamilton

**Wycliffe blog post**  
<http://wycliffe.org.uk/blog/?p=1342>

**Wycliffe Twitter feed**  
<http://twitter.com/wycliffeuk>

**Wycliffe UK on You Tube**  
Video:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1gqQ0sIg7I>  
Wycliffe UK Channel:  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/WycliffeUK>

This page also includes a feed from Twitter. Anyone Twittering about Wycliffe and using '#wycliffeuk' will appear here.

This illustrates how we use a number of different Social Media to interact with each other and broaden the reach of our message.

## Things to consider

### Planning

Probably the worst thing you could do is plough straight in to using Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, MySpace, YouTube, and all the other Social Media devices, without taking the time out to think and plan what is right for you. Identifying opportunities, testing and reassessing are vital steps to ensure that you are doing the right things to be successful. You need to think carefully about what you want to achieve and plan the most effective way to reach that goal.

That said, using planning as an excuse for doing nothing is no longer acceptable. In another 10 years the face of communications is going to be very different from where it is today, but what takes place today is a step on that journey. Not being involved, not trying and learning will just mean that in 10 years you will be further behind and the next step will look more like the long jump.

### **Individual v Corporate voice**

One of the great impacts of Social Media has been putting the message in the hands of the individual. Your customers, members, students and supporters can be more persuasive than the corporate voice of your organisation. People are no longer ignorant of marketing speak, they know when they are being sold to or fed a line. At Wycliffe we work to empower people to use Social Media to tell their story. Not the core message of the organisation, but the story of their lives. We all know how powerful personal testimony can be, Social Media allows those kinds of stories to reach masses of people and be shared worldwide.

With this comes some risk. Some level of control has to be given up in favour of your supporters posting their own comments and views. That said, if they are true supporters you won't have any problems, will you?

Good guidelines for staff members, are essential. They need to allow flexibility and not be too controlling, but they also need to consider that sometimes people make mistakes or phrase comments badly. We work a buddy system and make sure that things posted online are read by more than one person. We don't expect everything to be approved before publication, as that would slow the process down too much and be too cumbersome to manage, but we do give feedback and suggest changes where appropriate.

### **The future**

The truth is, in terms of technology, we don't really know what the future holds. 10 years ago we wouldn't have been able to foresee the success of something like Twitter, so trying to make predictions for the next 10 years is a little tricky.

One thing I am sure of is that Social Media isn't about to disappear. Online communications are here to stay. What kind of form they are going to take is a little more difficult to predict, but chances are the links between mobile devices and the internet are going to become stronger rather than weaker. I am pretty sure that it won't be too long before most of our communications, online or otherwise, will be conducted through a portable communications device, like a mobile phone.

It would be wonderful to think that there will be a whole range of different Christian organisations using these tools to make their voice heard and generating their own movements of people.

### **Where next?**

If you're interested in seeing how Wycliffe use Social Media, you can visit the blog at [www.wycliffe.org.uk/blog](http://www.wycliffe.org.uk/blog), or look up @wycliffeuk on Twitter.

For people involved with mission organisations or churches, or for individuals who are interested in taking this further, we could arrange to spend half a day discussing how to implement a Communications Strategy that includes Social Media. This would also provide



the opportunity to network with people in similar roles. If you are interested please contact [phil\\_prior@wycliffe.org](mailto:phil_prior@wycliffe.org).

## **Get Connected**

There are a number of people associated with Wycliffe Bible Translators who can be found using Social Media. Below are details of how you can find their own blog or Twitter feed, but you will also find many of them on other social networks such as Facebook or LinkedIn:

### **Eddie Arthur, Executive Director**

Blog: <http://kouya.net>

Twitter: @kouya

### **Phil Prior, Head of Marketing and Communications**

Blog: <http://philprior.co.uk/mylife>

Twitter: @phil77

### **John Hamilton is Director of the Mobilisation team**

Blog: <http://nornirn.wordpress.com>

Twitter: @john\_nornirn

### **Mark Woodward, Member of the Mobilisation team and due to be moving to Tanzania within the next year**

Website: <http://everytonque.co.uk>

Twitter: @woodwardmw

### **Matt and Liz Wisbey are Literacy workers in Tanzania**

Blog: <http://wisbeys.blogspot.com>

Twitter: @thewisbys

### **Philip and Judy Hewer have been working in a community in Ghana**

Blog: <http://hewersofwood.wordpress.com/>

Twitter: @hewersofwood

### **Steve and Johanna Pillinger only recently started blogging. Steve is a typesetter based in the UK**

Blog: <http://pillingersj.co.uk/>

### **Stephanie Angus is based in Northern Ireland and manages some of the short-term mission programmes for the UK.**

Blog: <http://upmytree.blogspot.com/>

Twitter: @stephangus3

Tim Robinson: @timrobsund

Jens Meyer: @jenssammeyer

Kent Anderson: @kentanderson

Stephen Thomas: @Rumble60

Attila Kovacs: @attilakovacs

Kat Fairbairn: @KattheKat

## Bibliography

Godin, S. (2009). *Tribes*. London: Piatkus.

## Footnotes

[1] I'm assuming if you are reading this that you are already aware of Social Media, and terms such as blogging, Twittering, Skyping, etc, etc. If you're not then the Wikipedia page on Social Media is a good place to start reading up on the area, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media). While there are issues with using Wikipedia as a reference source, the explanations provided will be helpful for you to understand what's being discussed here.

[2] <http://sethgodin.typepad.com>

[3] <http://www.facebook.com/pages/High-Wycombe-United-Kingdom/Wycliffe-Bible-Translators-UK/116701839012?v=info#pages/High-Wycombe-United-Kingdom/Wycliffe-Bible-Translators-UK/116701839012?v=wall&viewas=0>

[4] For more information about hashtags and how they are used by Twitter, <http://mashable.com/2009/05/17/twitter-hashtags/>

[5] <http://www.youtube.com/user/WycliffeUK>

[6] <http://www.penielfacetoface.com/home/television>

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