

On-the-Grounders Missing Media-Generated Inquirers

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The number of people online and exploring faith issues is staggering. So also those responding to broadcast/radio/satellite and replying via mobile phone! I won't attempt to cite statistics here, but what a friend of mine said is most assuredly true: People ask their secret questions online. Some questions asked are for ill, granted -- but just as certain is that people are exploring faith, asking their most pressing spiritual questions, even indicating their decisions to follow Christ on evangelistic websites.

THE CONNECTIVITY GAP

One fairly immense gap is how poorly we are connecting those who are indicating spiritual interest online with those on the ground who can follow up with them and incorporate them into local fellowships and churches. Closing this gap has to do with media generators and website ministries providing a system and software tools that channel names of inquirers to on-the-ground Christians. This topic deserves its own discussion and I will not address it here.

THE GAP OF GETTING ON-THE-GROUND MINISTRIES TO RESPOND TO ONLINE INQUIRIES

For this conversation, specifically, I want to examine another gap, this one just as critical: How well are on-the-ground ministries doing at connecting with the "air force" of broadcast, mass media, and online ministries in order to follow up on those who, having had their interest piqued by media, want to learn more about Jesus and Christianity?

Put another way, how might we increase the number of *media-connected* on-the-ground mission workers, evangelists, pastors and Christians ready to share the gospel?

A wide array of online ministries report astoundingly positive response rates to their evangelism web sites, all around the world. In 2009, for instance, Global Media Outreach reports that more than 10 million people from around the world indicated making a decision for Jesus on one of its many web sites.

What barriers might there be for on-the-ground evangelists to respond to this large stream of interested inquirers generate by the media? Traditional on-the-ground (OTG) people might not even be aware of this firestorm of interest being generated online. Connecting with that firestorm may be the farthest thought from their minds! Traditional OTG people may not *want* to follow-up on people that their own ministry efforts haven't generated. This is the "not converted here" mentality -- and it's really unfortunate. Traditional OTG people may be thinking that the media realm is too far from their areas of experience and expertise for them to engage with. For example, they may think that one already has to be a media specialist in order to incorporate some (even initial, minor) aspect of media into their strategy. Would not a campaign to help them know some basic first entry steps into incorporating media and media follow-up be helpful? It may be that some mission agency OTG people are "too low" on the totem pole to decide to incorporate media, that those decisions have to happen higher up their organizational chain. Would not an effort to find contact points where we can influence organizational and agency leaders be beneficial? There may be a wider cultural gulf at work than we think. Might those already espousing media be projecting some message that just can't make the leap into the (non-media-using) OTG people's cultural worldview?

What might be other possible reasons? And what are your thoughts about this "gap" of how on-the-ground Christians are failing to respond well to those expressing interest from media sources?