

New Media, Social Networking and ministry

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Date: 09.05.2010

Category: Media & Technology

Each year I have the privilege of teaching some classes on new media and ministry at Media Village's School of Video Production.

Since most of the persons on the course are not theologically trained we spend the first day discussing issues related to the 'message' of ministry. In particular we talk about the message of the Kingdom of God and our responsibility to be agents of transformation in society (thus pitching the content of the message towards individuals in order to engage the individuals with the Gospel of Christ, and also empower individuals to transform systems and communities to embrace the ways of Christ).

I have recently become increasingly aware of the fact that the Church sees its mission mandate as a geographical mandate (i.e., go into all the 'world' making disciples of all nations...) However, there are 'worlds' that are not part of our regular geography - these include social networks and new social media. I'm not sure about you, but I so much more connected with many more people because of the technology of social media. I communicate with more than 1000 people each time I send out an update on my twitter feed - <http://www.twitter.com/digitadion>. I have over 900 followers on twitter, and since my twitter feed automatically updates my facebook profile the 800 friends I have on facebook (some of whom are also friends on twitter) receive my updates. This phenomenon shows when I look at the logs for my website! I see a huge spike in hits to my website after an interesting tweet!

The lectures themselves offered quite a lot of insight into the tools of social media (twitter, facebook, linkedin) and new media tools (which primarily are communication tools to get rich content (such as audio, video, electronic text, or still images) to large groups of persons).

My media strategy, as you shall see from the video below, is quite simple:

1. Build a wide range of relationships. This is where twitter and facebook come in. The intention of these relationships is the create opportunities to interact around common interests and concerns, and particularly to drive traffic to my content! I cannot emphasize this last point strongly enough!
2. Having built a wide range of relationships I use various means to present rich content to my network. These include videos through youtube and qik, electronic text via my blog, and of course audio via my podcast and images via flickr.
3. When persons visit any of these sites I try to provide content for free (books, podcasts, videos etc.) that will bring about returning visits.

The long and the short of this relationship is that it creates a model for engagement around issues of the Gospel (the love of God in Christ, justice, social transformation etc.) Furthermore, the model also serves as a platform from which to launch my thoughts and ideas - I cannot tell you how many wonderful opportunities have come because my blog is rated in the top 5 in the Mail and Guardian's religion blogs section. I frequently get emails, telephone calls, do radio and television interviews and have generated many sales for my books etc. through these contacts.

The 'secret' if I can put it as such, is to give away ones content for free whenever possible. My idea is that the most valuable thing I have is not the paper on which my books is printed, rather it is the ideas, concepts and engagement that form the books - and of course my time. So, persons can have my work for free since it eventually leads them to contact me to engage around the content. This in turn allows opportunities for me to share the Gospel of Christ and to encourage others to work with

me for the transformation of society and creation!

If you're interested you can watch this short video that I made on new media and social networking for ministry.

And, here's a copy of the Powerpoint Slides I used over the three 2 days. Simply click the link to download them. There is a "reading list" in the middle of the slides that may be of some help. Please feel free to use them as you wish, if I could simply ask that you give a linkback to my blog (or site <http://www.dionforster.com>) if you use them.

I'd love to hear your perspectives on how the Church, and Christians, can use social media to bring God's will to bear on society.

Website Link:

<http://www.dionforster.com/blog/2009/7/11/using-new-media-and-social-media-in-ministry.html>