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feature article

OPEN LIFECHURCH.TV

Technology and the Church:
An Interview with Bobby Gruenewald
by Kelly McFadden

Last month we interviewed Mark Clement of Big Picture Media on the on the impact of social networking on churches (read it here). For this issue we asked Bobby Gruenewald, pastor and innovative leader at Lifechurch.tv in Edmond, OK, to share how his church is successfully using technology and media on an everyday basis.

How are new technology and media shaping church ministry?

One of the changes already taking place is that social tools have created a culture in which people contribute and expect to have a voice. People don't just post something online and say, "Here is the information." You post something and expect 20 people to comment on it. The church context it is still by and large one-way communication, but inevitably that dynamic is going to change--or need to change--in order to address the fact that people are expecting to engage.

How are you creating a two-way communication environment for engagement to happen?

YouVersion was initially created as a website that allowed users to take the conversations already taking place online--blog posts, photos, websites, pod casts, etc.--and associate any of those elements with a Bible verse. Then we realized that if Scripture is really going to be something we connect with in the way we live and function, it will have to be accessible through a mobile device.

YouVersion has now expanded into an online resource and a free mobile Bible application with over 5 million users. We have a feature called YouVersionLive that allows communicators and pastors speaking at live events to put content into a nice, easy-to-read format that works on a mobile device. Speakers using this see the benefit of two-way interaction in their church experience because it allows them to get feedback, and it makes the content they are communicating more interesting and engaging.

What are your goals in using technology in ministry?

Our goal is to use technology in a connecting way. The number one win for us at Church Online--our online website which offers multiple live worship experiences throughout the day--isn't to get someone to look at content, but to actually connect with someone and interact through a live prayer or chat. If in that moment they can share something about themselves and something they want prayer for, that is the most meaningful interaction I can aim for. In all honesty, this is often more likely to happen in an online context than in the context of a physical church environment.

In fact, a man from Ireland who described himself as a thug, googled "church" one morning at 3 a.m. and landed at ChurchOnline. He joined a chat group and started talking with one of our online pastors. God used that interaction to completely turn his life around. Most churches are not open at 3 a.m., but this man was able to find a way to connect with God and with others from his computer. We have tools to connect with the world's population in ways that were not possible before.

What advice would you give leaders who are considering using more technology at their church?

Pastors and leaders need to decide what they are comfortable with. Leaders don't need to start adding everything the church down the street is using, but I do believe every pastor should be familiar with Facebook. It has made its stand and it will survive and grow. There are over 400 million people using Facebook to connect, so it's pretty safe to assume people in your neighborhood are using it.

Churches can easily use Facebook to create a page for their church, share upcoming activities or post photos from church events. Then see what happens. If there is a positive reaction then start adding more social communication tools. Part of our strategy at LifeChurch is to see where God is moving and do more of that and where He is not moving we do less of that and repeat the process.

What other online resources should pastors know about?

Open.LifeChurch.tv is our website which allows churches to access, download and use our creative content for free. We give away everything--all tools, videos and graphics--and you can remove our logo and put your logo on it.

There is also <u>YouVersionLive</u> which helps churches interact in more of a two-way context. For example, pastors can upload ahead of time what verses they will be discussing and church members can respond or mark it in their online journals. Small groups can also use it to set up Bible reading plans.

There are so many resources out there; it's really just finding the right ones for you.

You can find Lifechurch.tv on Facebook at <u>http://www.facebook.com/lifechurchtv</u>.

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