

ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOLS FOR THE CHURCH

New Horizons for Kingdom Impact

by Stephen Shields

Special Report Summary

It's a new frontier and, true to form, churches are beginning to extend their reach into these new worlds for God's kingdom. Churches are seizing opportunities for online social networking in a wide variety of ways from blogging to the use of popular websites, both religious and non-religious.

Jim began attending the multi-site church's new campus just after it launched. "He was searching—a lot of different religions actually—and feeling that there's gotta be more," says Pastor Brandon Donaldson.¹ Jim didn't come from a church background and he had a lot of questions about Christianity. "I realized right at the first that he wasn't one of those who wanted to argue; he was sincerely seeking." Brandon would also frequently find Jim in the lobby speaking with others about their experiences with Jesus Christ. Jim came every week for two months and kept asking his questions.

Then one day after the Sunday morning service, Jim exited the church's lobby and entered the Campus Pastor room. Brandon picks up the story: "He comes in there and you could tell he was so excited. He goes, 'I just raised my hand; I committed my life to Christ.'" From the questions Jim had been asking, Brandon could tell that Jim was wired in such a way that he explored Christianity very intellectually. But after Jim's decision, Brandon reported that Jim said, "I don't know what to do—I just want to run out in the streets *and scream!*" Jim's spiritual adventure grew even more exciting when his wife followed him into a committed relationship with Jesus Christ some months later.

This story of spiritual transformation didn't take place in a bricks and mortar campus. It happened in **LifeChurch.tv's Internet Campus**, (<http://www.lifechurch.tv/p/91/Default.aspx>), shortly after its first anniversary. Jim lives in Colorado while Brandon is based in Oklahoma. And Jim's story is not exceptional in the life of his

church. LifeChurch.tv's Senior Pastor Craig Groeschel says the Internet Campus site reports *more decisions* for Christ per capita than any of their other eleven bricks and mortar sites found in Arizona, Florida, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and New York.² (A total of around 18,000 people attend one of LifeChurch.tv's geographical sites every Sunday.)³

Throughout its history, churches have adopted newly developed technologies in their passion to fulfill the Great Commission. The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century drastically lowered the cost of the written word making the Scriptures far more accessible.⁴ This technological development made it easier for church leaders to teach their followers the ways of God and also extended the Protestant Reformation.

Fast forward several centuries: churches begin using commercial radio broadcasts⁵ to extend their reach beyond the four walls of their sanctuaries.⁶ After the first commercial television stations begin to be established in North America in the 1940's,⁷ Billy Graham begins his transition from radio to television in the early 1950's by releasing footage of his crusades.⁸ All of these technological developments served to dramatically lower the cost of information by enabling organizations to disseminate knowledge far more broadly than ever previously possible.

There was, however, a significant limitation still in the use of these media. In all of these technologies, the flow of information was still largely in one direction.



LIFECHURCH.TV NOW HAS BOTH A PHYSICAL CAMPUS AND A VIRTUAL CAMPUS.

This restriction changed with the development of the Internet and when Tim Berners-Lee introduced hypertext in 1991, enabling users to more easily share information computer to computer. Then when two years later Marc Andreessen and his team at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications introduced the Mosaic web browser to the online world, the foundation was laid for a popular communication revolution.⁹ These developments created a communication medium that dramatically reduced the cost of broadcasting information, creating a platform which would eventually include the audio and video components of the radio and television revolutions. As a result, more organizations and even individuals would soon have the ability to disseminate information worldwide in an affordable way.

Perhaps most significantly, this new medium allowed those who received such communications *to respond*, making the cyberworld truly *interactive*. It is this capacity for interactivity that led O'Reilly Media to coin the term *Web 2.0* in 2004 to conceptualize that the next generation of internet development was moving toward more collaboration and away from mere static websites.¹⁰ Moreover, because the Internet platform was computer-based, the foundation was laid for a multiplicity of potential software implementations such as email clients, online discussion groups such as Yahoo! Groups, interactive sites such as Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace and Facebook, inexpensive video hosting sites such as YouTube and GodTube, and even virtual worlds such as Second Life.

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Futurist and *Millennium Matrix* author Rex Miller puts it this way: "Enter the iGeneration. The shift to a digital platform of communication changes all the old rules and power centers. Web 2.0 represents a new revolution on the Internet—open participation. It also provides a wonderful model for change and creates a critical mass that I hope unleashes an iGen revolution."¹¹

The variety of interactive online experiences now widely available to the developed world has resulted in a phenomenon where people can have a rich online life, with conversations, explorations, and the ability to discover and nurture friendships. In a way older generations might have difficulty imagining or even believing, new generations today engage in relationships and community *mediated by digital technologies*. In fact, they become so used to these technologies that even the awareness of them can fall away as they focus on the individuals with whom they are communicating. The typical iGenerational moves through her day in a syncopated technological dance, now sending a text message on her cell phone about her evening plans, now texting a no longer than 140 character update of what she's doing at that very moment to her Twitter subscribers,¹² now checking weatherunderground.com on her Treo to see what she needs to wear that evening, now blogging so that her friends can get the official scoop on how her date went, and then ending the day by chatting online with her three best friends on AIM about all the details of the day.¹³

Rex sees an opportunity here. "Web 2.0 provides a blueprint, platform and opportunity for churches to plug into the iGeneration's mindset and power. If the church creates a platform of participation... younger people will come. The Starbucks coffee or Krispy Kreme donuts may offer a perk—but iGeners see it for what it is—a hook to hang out. We have to take a deeper look at these hooks and honestly assess whether we are seeing the transformation we intend—or just simply serving up good coffee and conversation."¹⁴

It's truly a new frontier and, true to form, churches are beginning to extend their reach into these new worlds for God's kingdom. Churches are seizing opportunities for online social networking in a wide variety of ways from blogging to the use of popular websites, both religious and non-religious.

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Blogging

One of the earliest types of interactive media, the blog (short for “web log”), is a type of online journal that allows for reader comments. Various types of software that enable blogging began to become popular in the late 1990’s.¹⁵ After static websites and perhaps email, it is one of the most popular means by which pastors and other church leaders both network with each other and communicate with their parishioners online. In distinction to an online discussion group, the blog privileges the one blogging, while readers’ comments interacting with each specific post are typically in smaller print below the blogger’s post.

Mark Batterson, Lead Pastor of **National Community Church**, a multi-site church in Washington, DC (<http://www.theatrechurch.com>) began blogging mostly as a personal journaling exercise in 2003. But since then his vision of his blog— Evotional.com—has changed as he’s observed the response in his broader readership. He comments, “I do view it as digital discipleship. I feel like I’m mentoring people. I’ll have several thousand meetings today without really having the time to individually meet with all of those folks.” Mark’s not suggesting that the blog should replace face-to-face meetings. But Evotional has allowed Mark to stay more connected both with his local church community and the larger community of other Christian leaders online. Mark says, “As National Community Church gets larger, I can’t possibly meet with everybody I’d like to individually; but the blog is a way I can share my life and my thoughts with a lot of people at the same time.”

While the blog has empowered individuals to share their points of view and then elicit reaction from their readers, the newer online social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook seem to provide a better online environment for transforming individual users into collaborative groups. Churches are beginning to utilize such sites in interesting ways.

MySpace

The social networking site MySpace (<http://www.myspace.com>) started in July 2003. Users are able to create free webpages for themselves on MySpace where, among other activities, they can post their interests, link to

their friends’ MySpace pages and pictures, post recordings, imbed YouTube videos, and also blog. Over 100 million accounts have been created on MySpace and it was recently estimated that over 230,000 new users register daily.¹⁶

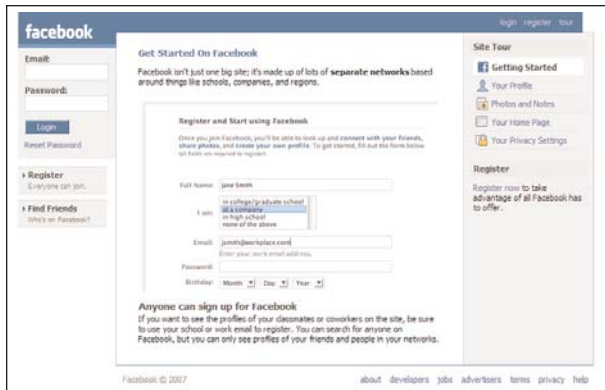


North Metro Church in Marietta, GA (<http://www.northmetro.org>) launched their young adults ministry Echo, along with a MySpace site (<http://www.myspace.com/whodoyouemulate>) in the Fall of 2006. They built the site after seeing the success of their student ministry’s MySpace site. Even though Facebook, which was launched with collegians in view, has been gaining popularity since its launch, Rob Greene, North Metro’s Director of Visual Media, believes that because of the music presence on MySpace, it continues to be popular among the 18-35 year olds that Echo is targeting. When visitors hit the site, they immediately hear one of Rob Greene’s original songs. Users are invited to join a mailing list. They can see pictures of any of the 113 friends that have associated themselves with Echo’s site. They can also see that some of Echo’s friends are online right now. Users can then choose to click on one of those user’s icons and begin text-chatting with them in real time. Or, users may choose to read the comments of those who have visited the site and then add their own comments.

Rob notes that the MySpace site that North Metro set up for their student ministries has been particularly helpful in getting a deeper insight into the lives of their students. He comments, “It gives you answers to questions that you don’t even have to ask.” The experience of finding that social networking sites can enable deeper connections and insight with others by somehow removing a filter often present in face-to-face interactions is echoed by Ben Jones with respect to his Facebook experience.

Facebook

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>), which was launched in February 2004, is similar in format and approach to MySpace except that it was originally developed for college students.¹⁷ There are currently over 15 million users on Facebook with 30 billion page views every month;



Facebook isn't just one big site; it's made up of lots of separate networks based around things like schools, companies, and regions.

nearly 800,000 users are over the age of 35. ComScore Media Metrix reports that Facebook is currently the sixth most popular website in the United States.¹⁸

Ben Jones, a member of **Grace Church**, an Evangelical Free church in Lynchburg, VA (<http://www.graceefc.net>), decided in the Fall of

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2006 to create a Facebook group for his church. He finds that it sometimes enables people in his church to more comfortably meet and reach out to one another. "That's the whole reason I started the site," Ben explains, "On Sunday mornings, there's a lot going on and a lot of people are not able just to go up to someone and strike up a conversation. I've met a lot

of people that I would normally never even strike up a conversation with." Grace's Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2210706717>) has over 50 members and Ben reports that the page nets an increase of two to three members weekly. Ben has also encouraged his friends and associates who don't go to Grace to visit the Facebook site as a way of getting a feel for the church's culture and history.

MyChurch.org (<http://www.mychurch.org>)

The success of some social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook or other types of sites

such as YouTube have led Christian entrepreneurs to create similar sites targeted specifically for their believing community. MyChurch.org is one such site. MyChurch.org beta-launched in the Fall of 2006 and in its first several months grew to 4,300 churches and 20,000 registered users. Each user can join groups—including their church's group—or modify their own personal site. On their own site, users can edit their profile to list their interests, blog, subscribe to other users' blog feeds, upload pictures, list their friends, and send their friends messages.



Joe Suh, a co-founder of MyChurch.org explains the personal reason he started the site: "I started MyChurch out of a personal need. I've been going to my own church (**The River Church** in San Jose <http://www.the-river.org>) for 3 years. But I only knew a handful of people out of the 800 members in our church. Outside of my small group, I didn't really interact with folks outside of a handshake and a 5 minute conversation on Sunday morning. I felt an online community could help strengthen some of the loose offline connections made on Sunday."



JOE SUH

Joe was also concerned to create a safer social networking site for Christians. He explains, "Yes, the dangers that lie in Facebook and Myspace partly motivated us to build a 'cleaner' social network. I'm all for Christians living missionally to partake in, and yet influence and transform our mainstream culture. But there still needs to be a cohesive community of believers gathered to encourage, edify, and equip one another. That usually happens in a meeting place on Sunday mornings, and MyChurch is trying to foster that community throughout the week through online interaction."

Calvary Community Church in Columbia, MD (<http://www.calvarycommunitychurch.com>), has been using MyChurch.org to foster more community in their Baltimore area church since the beginning of 2007. Around three hundred and fifty folks attend Calvary every Sunday morning while it has over ninety members in its MyChurch.org site (<http://www.mychurch.org/c3>). Senior Pastor Mark Scott comments, "We thought this was a great way for people within our church



MyChurch was started as a way to strengthen connections between members throughout the week.

to stay connected with each other.” Through MyChurch.org’s blog feature, members of Calvary’s site have been able to get to know one another at a more intimate level. Mark echoes Ben Jones and Rob Thomas when he observes, “You really get to know someone one on a deeper level when they’re writing their feelings.” Mark also mentions how the site has enabled the church members to rapidly enlist prayer support when needed. “You have immediate access to ninety people.”

Groopik

Strengthening the connections between church members between Sundays was also the motivation behind the creation of Groopik. Groopik (<http://www.groopik.com>) is an internet-based online management and communication system for small groups that was released in late 2006. The program enables small group leaders and members to easily communicate to each other between meetings through “group loops” and the ability to post private or public comments on each group member’s Groopik page. One



unique feature of Groopik that distinguishes it from social networking sites is how potential small group members can easily search online for groups in which they might be interested using customized tags that reflect the focus, characteristics, or geography of their specific small group. In this way, online visitors to the church’s website are potentially married to offline small groups.

THE EMERGING GENERATION IS MORE HONEST THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS THAN THEY ARE FACE TO FACE.

The developers of Groopik go to **Northwood Church** in Keller, TX (<http://www.northwoodchurch.org>) and Randy Miller, Northwood’s Discipleship Pastor, was consulted as the program was being developed and has been an enthusiastic user since January 2007. Randy told Leadership Network, “Our 20’s and young 30’s absolutely love it. It’s just a great system for us to use. One of the key issues for us was how to continually keep in touch with the emerging generation and their technology. Social network technology has been really important to us and very useful.” When asked what’s been the primary benefit of the software, Randy said, “Keeping people connected between the times in which they meet.”

In striking resonance with other Christian leaders working in the social networking sites, Randy also comments how they seem to precipitate more helpfully candid conversations between some of his over 1000 small group members. He explains, “What I’m discovering with the emerging generation is that they are actually more honest through the social networks than they are face to face.” This insight has actually changed his opinion about the quality of spiritual connection that can occur in a strictly online context. He comments, “Is a group that happens totally online really a group? 10 years ago or 5 years ago I would have said, ‘Absolutely not,’ but today I would say, ‘Absolutely.’”

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Internet Campus

Brandon Donaldson has no doubt that Randy Miller's observation about the spiritual legitimacy of online connection is correct. He's personally seen it and experienced it himself. Brandon is LifeChurch.tv's Internet Pastor. Every Sunday, about 700 folks gather around their respective PC's and worship as they watch and listen to one of LifeChurch.tv's worship teams and then view a live streaming sermon. Before and after the services, congregants gather in a virtual lobby, which is an online chat room where churchgoers can meet and talk. Craig Groeschel, LifeChurch.tv's Senior Pastor, comments, "I go

in there almost every week and I watch people praying for each other and encouraging each other and what's funny is they actually will stay there oftentimes longer than a person will stay in a physical lobby."¹⁹

The Internet Campus has both small groups—called LifeGroups—that meet exclusively online and those that meet face-to-face in areas where there is no bricks and mortar LifeChurch.tv site nearby. The groups that meet online will view a

video segment and then step into an online chat room to discuss together what they've just seen.

The Internet Campus' LifeGroups and other congregants also participate in small community projects called *micro missions*. The Internet Campus LifeGroups were recently invited to participate in a micro mission where they would be sent plastic bags filled with personal hygiene items to distribute to homeless folks when they are approached.²⁰ Or, an Internet Campus micro-mission might involve the members going online to MySpace accounts and inviting folks in their network to visit their Internet Campus services.

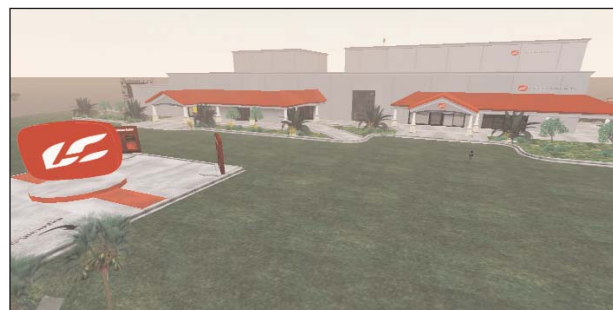
Like Randy Miller of Northwood, the reality of what actually happens in online contexts has

changed Craig Groeschel's thinking about what's possible online: "I sit back and think, 'This shouldn't work.' But then I forget that people text each other like we're talking live and it means just the same to them and they can actually relate and be the body of Christ in an unusual way."²¹

Second Life

On Easter Sunday of 2007, LifeChurch.tv extended its Internet ministry even further by holding its first service in Second Life.

Second Life (<http://www.seconddlife.com>) is an "Internet-based virtual world" which publicly launched in 2003. By May of 2007 it had amassed over 6.2 million registered accounts. Those who join Second Life exist in the virtual world as avatars (online characters) and have the ability to communicate with others, walk, fly, or teleport to virtual locations, and create and sell items. Several churches have established a presence in Second Life, including LifeChurch.tv.²² Bobby Gruenewald, Innovation Leader of LifeChurch.tv (<http://www.lifechurch.tv>), notes that his church decided to enter Second Life when they observed the rising number of registered accounts in addition to the attention the platform has garnered from mainstream media sources such as *Business Week* and *Fortune*. The church purchased a 16-acre virtual island in November 2006, began development in January 2007, and soft-launched their site for the public to visit on March 12, 2007 leading up to their first service on Easter Sunday.²³ Bobby reports that around 200 people attended that day. Sunday morning sermons are handled just as they are at



LIFECHURCH.TV'S CAMPUS ON SECOND LIFE.

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their other “real world” locations. Participants view the weekend’s message on a video screen within Second Life and can hear the message and worship music through their computer’s speakers. Bobby estimates that LifeChurch.tv’s total investment, including development costs, was less than \$10,000 but hastens to add that churches do not need to purchase that much acreage in order to launch a presence in the Second life metaverse.²⁴ Bobby believes that the Second Life experience—a three-dimensional interactive experience in a graphically attractive virtual world—represents a potential future of the Internet itself. He envisions such a future: “You’ll walk into a Circuit City and will be looking at their products in 3-D and will be talking with a sales rep with audio and will also be able to interact with other customers within the store. This is going to be an experience that people will sometimes prefer.” LifeChurch.tv has therefore positioned itself to be early missionaries within that emerging new online world. The church views the Second Life site as an extension of their Internet Campus. Bobby foresees that they will likely be staffing their Second Life location twenty-four hours a day with volunteers from both within and without the current LifeChurch.tv community.

goes both ways in the conversation. “In a “cold call” evangelistic conversation that you and I might have on the street, I can’t be asking you four sentences into the conversation if you have a relationship with God. But, ironically, inside this virtual world, that is not challenging to do.” Bobby recently posted a note on LifeChurch.tv’s blog (<http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/>) that illustrated the early effect their new site is having on the Second Life population:

Just yesterday I had an email forwarded to me that was from a 41-year old guy named Troy who is a Second Life user that found our island while roaming around the virtual world. In the email, he describes the challenges that he has faced in real life and then on to how he began crying when he watched the mysecret.tv videos in Second Life.

He went on to say “After watching and praying with Craig I raised my hands confessed my sins and gave myself to Jesus for the first time in my life... what a wonderful feeling to be free of my sins, to find out how to get rid of my bitterness, most of my fears, to understand how I’ve been holding all these dark crazy things inside me for so long and now learning how to follow the path God has for me, to give myself to Jesus.”

There couldn’t be any better answer to the “Why Second Life?” question than this guy’s story.²⁵

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Bobby emphasizes that the purpose of their Second Life Campus is outreach. “We’re not interested in building a clubhouse for Christians to come hang out in. We want to do something that’s going to be effective for reaching people for Christ.”

LifeChurch.tv now holds services within Second Life every Sunday at 8:00 and 9:30 AM (Pacific).

To read a first hand report from the Easter Sunday Service at the Second Life Campus visit <http://www.terrystorch.com/?=67>



BOBBY SIMON

Bobby also concurs with other online Christian leaders that in some way online interactions can facilitate more genuine and honest interaction. Real world filters are somehow bypassed in a way that can provide rich opportunities for Christians who wish to take conversations to

deeper levels. Bobby notes that “in some ways the way that people represent themselves through their avatar and in conversations is more real than they are in their real life. It breaks down so many inhibitions that a lot of things that are inside of them come out.” In fact, Bobby, who has the name Bobby Simon in Second Life, recently was speaking with a group of folks while on LifeChurch.tv’s Second Life Campus and asked them if it was easier to speak about spiritual matters in that environment. The group agreed that it was much easier. Bobby summarizes, “You don’t have to have relational equity to go deep in a conversation quickly” and he notes that this

Some Cautions

Be in the world but not of the world

Some Christian leaders, however, warn churches about *carelessly* using social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. Mark Stephenson, Director of Cyberministry and Technology at Ginghamburg Church (<http://ginghamsburg.org>) in Tipp City, OH, is blunt: “Social Networking sites are not safe places. We set one up for our youth and soon found illegal pornography within two mouse clicks.” Mark, also the author of *Web-Empower Your Church: Unleashing the Power of Internet Ministry*, elaborates, “We need to be in the world



MARK STEPHENSON

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to change the world by introducing people to Jesus Christ. But I am concerned when we publicly encourage people to go to these places. People assume churches and church websites are safe places, but unfortunately we can't keep people safe on social networking sites. So we should not invite them to go there. My big concern is that churches are naively creating a web presence on these sites and people will get hurt as a result.” Mark believes strongly that Christians must get involved with such sites but believes that they must do so in a discerning way; “Christians must recognize that these sites are *genuine mission fields*—with *all* the accompanying dangers and opportunities—and respond accordingly.” Mark suggests that we should only send mature Christians to such sites for the purpose of evangelism.

Beware of online addictions

Mark Scott, Senior Pastor of Calvary Community Church worries when he sees folks posting to their MyChurch.org blogs at 3 AM. “If someone is blogging and is getting in trouble at work or they're neglecting their family, that can be a potential problem,” he explains. The same caution, of course, applies to all forms of online activity.

Internet users can potentially exercise far more control over their online experience than they can over their every day offline reality. For some, this feature of online activity can precipitate an unhelpful and dangerous addiction.

Be mindful of your audience

Calvary's Mark Scott warns, “If I were a seeker and looking at MyChurch.org to get an idea of what Christianity were all about, I would be completely repulsed by some of the bickering back and forth over non-essential doctrine.” Especially with such secular sites such as Facebook and MySpace but even with sites targeted at the Christian community such as MyChurch.org, churches need to be ever mindful of the fact that *these are public sites* and that Christians need to conduct themselves in such a way that honors Christ before a watching world.

All users of social networking sites also need to be mindful of the fact that what is publicly posted on the Internet is available to anyone anywhere forever. Folks who publish all manner of personal information or opinion often forget that such information is not only available to the *intended* audience but also to all *future potential* audiences. Such personal information, for example, has snared many a potential job seeker when they've not counted on potential employers turning to google as a means by which to further qualify job candidates.

Stay nimble

Those who embark on online adventures also need to remember that the vehicles change rather quickly. The Internet is strewn with the remains of websites and software that in their day were immensely popular. The early social networking site Friendster (<http://www.friendster.com>), for example, at one point was all the rage, but it was surpassed in page views by MySpace in April 2004.²⁶

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And it's not only websites that fall out of vogue; those inhabiting the online world as a way of showing Christ's love need to also be aware of how entire categories of online interactions can quickly descend from excited hype to boring obscurity. As Michael Hirschorn comments, "In the Web hype-o-sphere, things matter hugely until, very suddenly, they don't matter at all" and goes on to speculate that even the current popularity of the social networking sites may one day go the way of GeoCities, Prodigy, and CompuServe.²⁷

This possibility, of course, does not mean that genuine human connections that were made through yesterday's star websites aren't valid. What it does mean is that those who wish to reach the online world have to stay vigilant to ensure that they have selected the areas that represent the most efficient use of their time and that they aren't ignoring potentially fruitful new frontiers.

Technology is only technology

With the "gee whiz" aspect of new technologies, the faithful evangelist and discipler must always remember that in the final analysis *they are only tools and contexts*. No amount of technological sophistication or online savvy replaces the critical importance of walking in the Holy Spirit as a basis for prayer-empowered Christ-centered kingdom ministry. The bright and the shiny can easily distract but those who work in the online context do best when they work to keep perspective and not get lost in a superficial technological triumphalism.

With all that being said, there's nevertheless no question but that the Internet provides the thoughtful Christian servant with a rich potential environment for genuine kingdom fruit. It is the place where millions have chosen to spend a significant portion

of their life and conscientious Christian leaders do well to seriously consider how they might best use this medium to expand Christ's kingdom.

“There are Ways of Doing Church No One Has Thought of Yet”

Mark Batterson is enthusiastic about the kingdom possibilities of the online medium. He observes, "Everybody thought that if people were sitting down at their computer all day that relationships would be hurt and people would lose that personal connection. I think that it's had exactly the opposite effect. People are now connected *more* because of the blog, MySpace, etc." Mark continues, "Our generation has an unprecedented opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission. If we redeem the technology at our disposal and use it for God's purposes, some pretty amazing things can happen. MyChurch.org's co-founder Joe Suh believes we have a responsibility to take these new areas of human interaction seriously. He comments, "There are opportunities for believers to be salt and light in dark places that cannot be ignored by those who have a gift for evangelism." Ginghamburg Church's Mark Stephenson concurs. "There is a challenge for us to think of how the Church can maximize the power of internet technology for the Kingdom. I believe we have barely scratched the surface of what is possible." Mark Batterson puts it this way: "One of our core convictions is that there are ways of doing church that no one has thought of yet. That's the thing that gets us up early and keeps us up late."

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What do you think? What didn't we cover?

There is so much activity in this space and the medium is so fluid that Leadership Network offers this article as a conversation starter. What is your opinion of what churches are doing in these areas? Will these efforts be successful or are they a distraction? What do you believe the future holds for both online missionaries and online Christian communities? What efforts are you aware of that we didn't address? To share your thoughts please visit the following link; <http://www.zoomerang.com/survey.zgi?p=WEB226H42Y42N9> (This is hotlinked for online readers) or email your comments to bonnie.randle@leadnet.org



STEPHEN SHIELDS



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Leadership Network welcomes your response. The primary writer is **Stephen Shields**. Editorial advisors were **Warren Bird**, Director of Research and Intellectual Capital Support for Leadership Network. Contact them via Bonnie.Randle@leadnet.org

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Leadership Network’s mission is to identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.

** Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NIV translation.*

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Jim” is not the individual’s name.
- ² Interview with Craig Groeschel, Catalyst Podcast, January 2007, <http://www.catalystspace.com/content/podcast/download.aspx>. Craig Groeschel, “LifeChurch.tv in Albany, NY,” Swerve, <http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2007/04/30/lifechurchtv-in-albany-ny/>
- ³ Bobby Gruenewald, “There Are no Megachurches,” Swerve, <http://swerve.lifechurch.tv/2007/01/16/there-are-no-megachurches/>
- ⁴ “Johannes Gutenberg,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Gutenberg
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