

How the Digital Revolution has changed church community

The Digital Revolution has changed the way we work and interact, even the way we think. For those in church leadership, it continues to force us to re-evaluate our structures for communicating, connecting and worshiping.

In his book *Boiling Point*, researcher George Barna restates an estimation that by 2010 between 10 and 20 percent of the population will rely on the Internet for *all* spiritual input. If the church hopes to build—or maintain—relationships, it must go where the people are. And survey after survey proves they are already in the “digital stream.” It’s time for churches to jump in.

The truth is, people are no longer reliant on forming social bonds with those in their surrounding community because the Internet is expanding exponentially and personal time is being increasingly stretched between more activities and responsibilities. More people are turning online for relationships with others who think like them and reinforce what they believe.

Tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogger, Tangle and others make it possible to connect Christian teachings with the “digital natives” (those who have grown up in the digital technology era). To reach these tech-savvy natives and those just now jumping into the stream, there are a few important things to keep in mind as you use digital technology.

1. Be mindful of your first priority. Plain and simple: Focus on ministry.

2. Be conversational, encourage dialogue. Communication is a two-way street. People like to hear *and* to be heard.

3. Be community-oriented. We are relational creatures, which is why we enjoy community. It's how God designed us, so be inviting.

4. Be respectful of everyone. Digital communication, especially on the Web and through texting, Tweeting and so on can present boundary problems. Communicate in a responsible manner to maintain trust and integrity.

5. Be servant-minded. Do your best to provide information for not only the wants but also the needs of those with whom you communicate. Service applies to main groups: those who are regularly available and those who are available by request. Not everyone will want or need everything you have to offer. Make it easy for users to get the things that are of value to them.

6. Be devoted. If you plan to use digital technology for communication and building relationships, you must be committed to being available, consistent and timely with

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communication. In the digital environment, if you can't honor this commitment, you almost instantly lose credibility.

Social writer Eric Hoffer said, "In times of change, learners inherit the earth while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists." In this Digital Revolution, adaptability is critical for staying relevant to the culture with which you hope to communicate. You may not agree with the change, but you must understand it to effectively navigate it. When you're unwilling to adapt, you lose the ability to communicate, which leads to the inability to effect change.

Ultimately, there must be a balance between using these new forms of connection for relevancy's sake and not compromising true relationship. Words teach, encourage and heal, but being the hands and feet of Christ requires physical interaction—meeting the needs of others and growing together spiritually. No matter how digitally entrenched our world, this core characteristic of the church remains timeless.

Making the Digital Connection

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