Wired

The Use of New Technology in Youth Ministry

Technology is bringing about new social, political, and business orders. It is affecting how governments, organizations and people interact.[1] And it is probably already affecting the dynamics of your youth ministry.

For young people are the most likely group to make use of new technologies. Take cell phones: although people of all ages use cell phones, young people are much more likely to utilize the text messaging and other data services on their mobile phones than their elders. This is partly because these services require the use of a keen eye and a steady hand, something less likely to be found in older people. It's also because younger users are more willing to adopt new forms of communication.[2] Other examples, such as Internet browsing and online shopping, show that young people take naturally to emerging technology.

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What has this to do with our youth ministry? If we are able to harness technology in our ministry, it will be one way of meeting young people where they are. Also, we would be able to enhance the way we minister. Cell phones, E-mails and communication software[3] make it easy and cost-effective to talk and coordinate over long distances. Video and computer presentation programs help to convey a message to the youth in ways impossible before. And it only takes a few seconds to get information on a certain topic you are discussing from the Internet.

Some youth ministries have already been using the technology I have mentioned, still, even if your ministry is in this category newer methods and tools are coming out that could be very useful for your specific situation. Indeed there are already a multitude of tools available that we may be overwhelmed in choosing what to use amongst a multitude of options. That is why we must clearly have our purposes and goals in mind when integrating new technology into our ministry.

Here are some ways that youth ministry has made use of new technology for its purposes:

Go Beyond the Classroom

Technology allows you to engage your youth beyond your regular meeting time. If your teens have easy access to the Internet (this may not be true for every youth group) interact with them through electronic mail, online discussion sites and social networking sites. You can even build a website for your youth ministry. If every youth in your group has a cell phone, make use of games, surveys or questions to engage teens through this medium. Many mobile phone services have ways to make this easier or cost-effective. Doing so will help your youth apply the biblical principles they learn in your teaching times to the world they walk and live in.

Cultivate Community

Through social networking programs such as Facebook, Friendster and Twitter, we can now connect, interact and know the details of other people's lives like never before. This will give your teens an avenue to connect with their peers and also allow you to know your young people. Better still, by allowing them to know some of the daily activities of your life, your thoughts, hobbies and interests, it will let them know you better.

Says Abraham Piper, *"These are the things*

that make you the man that leads your church. They're the windows into your personality that perhaps stay shuttered when you're teaching the Bible. Sometimes your people need to look in—not all the way in, and not into every room—but your people need some access to you as a person.

… It will give you access to your people's minds and hearts in a unique way by giving them a chance to know you as a well-rounded person. You will no longer be only a preacher and a teacher, but also a guy who had a hard time putting together a swing-set for his kids last weekend. People will open up for you as you open up like this for them. Letting people catch an honest glimpse of your life will add authenticity to your teaching and depth to your ministry." [4]

Create Contemplation

Steve Andres points out, "A teen in an internet café has access to 1,000,000 times more information than was ever amassed in the greatest library of ancient times. Yet such information forces people to read quickly, skim over main points and summaries and then continue on with the next piece of information that catches their eyes."[5] Many young people today have not exercised their capacity to think deeply and critically which will be important as they make life choices. As youth leaders we can help them develop in this aspect. One way is to incorporate the use of advertisements or pictures from popular youth culture in your teaching times and help them to analyze what these advertisements are conveying through a Christian worldview.[6]

Awaken Creativity

Even if you have an aversion to technology you don't necessarily have to rule out the use of technology in your ministry. It is usually the young in your group who can readily adapt to and have the time to dabble with new technology. Tap those teens that show natural talent for it, some youth may already have

incorporated technology into their lifestyle. Video editing and special effects for example will awaken the creativity that some youth have. Some teens have even converted these hobbies into lifelong passions. **Still, it will be up to the youth leader to show them how these tools can be used to point others to God.**

Now for a warning: The use of technology will have an effect on your life and your ministry. It affects how we process and discuss information, how we relate and interact with others and also how we use our time.[7] Making a video for example can help us effectively communicate to teens but it will also require more preparations. The cell phone is great for long-distance communication but in many circumstances it distracts people from face-to-face conversation.

Therefore, as we use these tools or are already applying them to our ministry, it is helpful to widely assess how these tools are affecting us. Some key questions for us: *"Are the use of these tools helping us towards our ministry objectives?"* and *"Are the results we get worth the financial cost, social impact and time investment?"* One well-known youth worker, for example, assessed his ministry and let go of the use of a technology tool so that he could focus on the most important goals of his ministry.[8]

Still, for better or worse--technology is here and will continue to shape the very nature of our society, affecting everyone. Yet it also has great potential for the good of your ministry and you as a youth leader are in a unique position to use the emerging technology for God's glory.

Going Deeper

1. How has technology 'invaded' your youth group?
2. Brainstorm with your leadership team on how you could harness existing technology for your purposes.
3. How can you extend your teaching time beyond the classroom?
4. Ask your youth what social networking site or service they are using and explore it.
5. How can you help your young people exercise their ability to think deeply?
6. Which of your young people are technology experts? If they are not yet doing so, list down ways that they can use their gifts in ministry.
7. Assess the technology you are already using:
   a. Are they helping us reach our ministry objectives?
   b. Are the results we get worth the financial cost? Or time investment?
   c. How is it impacting the way we relate with one another?

- Alvan Victor Tauli, Philippines Training Coordinator

References:
1. David Rothkopf in Thomas L. Friedman's book, The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century
2. Web article: "Study shows youth embracing technology even more than before" by Jeremy Reiner; http://arstechnica.com/old/content/2006/08/7401.ars
3. Skype, Oovoo and Yahoo! Messenger are examples of these. They are software applications that allow people to make telephone calls over the Internet
4. Web article: "Six reasons why pastors should blog" by Abraham Piper; http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1156_6_reasons_pastors_should_blog/dgblog.
5. Lecture given at Asian Institute of Youth Studies, "Understanding Youth Culture: Pointing Toward Meaning in the Noise" by Steve Andres
6. As an example of this is the organization, Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, www.cpyu.org that has a section on its website devoted to discussing popular cultural trends and images (US-based)
7. Web article: "How to Become a "Technological Idiot" in One Easy Step: Think Like a Christian" by John Dyer; http://donteatthefruit.com/2009/05/how-to-become-a-technological-idiot-in-one-easy-step-think-like-a-christian/
8. Mark Ostreicher ended his blog or web journal, http://ysmarko.com/2009/the-end-of-ysmarko/

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*Are there ways that you have used technology in youth ministry that has not been mentioned here? Contact us on our web-site **www.global-youth.com** and connect to our blogs at **gymnintl.wordpress.com**, **gymnafrica.wordpress.com** and **gymnasia.wordpress.com***