

TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE MISSIONARY

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INTRODUCTION

When I finished my training at Trinity Baptist College, I taught school for one year at a nearby Christian school and then went on full-time deputation. The year that I spent teaching Christian school was a good transition into our pre-field ministry because it allowed me to really begin preparing for presenting our ministry to the many churches that we would visit. During that time I was able to set up meetings, purchase a video projector, create a video presentation, have prayer cards printed, and do the myriad of other things that become necessary in the process of getting to the field.

As I look back on that time, I realize that the time I took in preparation and the three years of full-time deputation that followed were really the beginning of my graduate work. It was a four-year degree from the school of hard knocks in what works and what does not work when it comes to deputation. I think I passed many of those classes, but I have to also admit there are a few things I would have done differently. It is my hope and prayer that the information in this paper may help the readers use the technologies that are available to accomplish their pre-field ministry more effectively.

CHAPTER ONE
A BIBLICAL VIEW OF TECHNOLOGY

Definition of Technology

The Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines “technology” as, “the practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area.”¹ Stated in such simple terms it is hard to believe that such a concept has been the fodder for such heated disagreement among the brethren, but the truth of the matter is that the onset of constantly advancing technologies is one of the more divisive issues facing the church today. Many Christians view the church as an agency whose primary mission is to resist change; as a result, they view technology as an enemy of the church and a tool of Satan. This type of thinking is flawed at its very core and has caused those who embrace such philosophy to greatly reduce their effectiveness for the cause of Christ.

A closer look at scripture reveals that the Bible is not against technology; in fact, just the opposite is true. Man’s quest to gain knowledge and to apply that knowledge in a practical way is seen in a positive light and is even commanded by God Himself. It is apparent that this was God’s intention for man even from the beginning. The first recorded words of God to man are, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). The Hebrew word that is translated as “subdue” is defined as, “to

¹*Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*, 2006, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/technology>; accessed 5 January 2007.

subject, to subdue, to force, to keep under, to bring into bondage.”² Therefore, the first man and woman were given the task of controlling their environment. In essence, God commanded them to develop technology.

Negative Effects of Technology on Mankind

Without doubt, what causes many Christians to “demonize” technology is the many ways in which technology can be used for evil purposes. However, one must be reminded that no matter how commonplace or advanced the technology, it is the way in which that technology is applied that makes it sinful or not. The same car that carries someone to a bar can also carry him to church, and the same internet that can deliver pornographic images can also deliver the gospel. The outcome, whether negative or positive, is determined by the application. The scriptures illustrate the negative impact of technology vividly in some of its passages.

One pitfall of man’s technological advancements is the temptation to worship the results of our technology. The book of Isaiah describes the foolishness of skilled workmen crafting an idol and then falling down and worshiping the fabrication.³ The passage goes to great lengths in illustrating that the same wood used to make the idol is at man’s disposal to be used as fuel for warmth or baking of bread. It emphasizes the absurdity of worshiping something fashioned by man’s hands.

Another potential negative effect of technology upon mankind is the temptation to be overtaken with pride regarding our technological achievements. This is illustrated

²*The Online Bible Thayer’s Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1993).

³Isaiah 44:9-20.

clearly in the life of Nebuchadnezzar. In Dan. 4:30, the boastful king announces, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” As a result of Nebuchadnezzar’s haughtiness regarding the technological advancements of his kingdom, he was stricken with such insanity that his behavior was reduced to that of brute beasts. The scripture describes his condition in this manner: “He was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws” (Dan. 4:33). This example from the Word of God should provide ample warning regarding the dangers of being too impressed with human accomplishments.

In addition, there is one more bible story which provides a powerful insight into another ungodly attitude that man may be tempted to exhibit in light of his own advances in technology. The tower of Babel provides a stark background upon which to address another of man’s erroneous tendencies concerning technology. It is wrong to suppose that there is no limit to the technological advancements of man. To assume that there are no boundaries to man’s technology is to take Nebuchadnezzar’s attitude to the absolute extreme. Those that conspired to build the tower assumed they could elevate themselves to the highest level with no regard whatsoever for the God of the universe. They deemed themselves of supreme importance and declared, “Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4). Man must understand that all of his progress and advancements are carried out under the watchful eye of God. If we accomplish anything, it is because God in His grace allows us to succeed.

Positive Effects of Technology on Mankind

Aside from these negative examples of technology, there are several instances that stand out where technology has had a positive effect. As recorded in scripture, sometimes technology can actually bring glory to God. On several occasions technological projects were even ordered and outlined by God. He instructed Noah to build an ark, commanded Moses to build the tabernacle, and praised David for his desire to build the temple. All of these technological constructs brought glory to God and provided powerful illustrations as to God's master plan for the salvation of mankind.

The Bible seems to indicate that God takes pleasure in viewing the advancements of man and even finds great beauty in some of his achievements. When rebuking the king of Judah in Jer. 22:6, God declares that He finds the king's palace as beautiful as the fertile land of Gilead and the mountains of Lebanon. This amazing compliment is then followed by a stern warning that should Israel not heed the words of the Lord, it can all be brought to naught and turned into a desolate wasteland. This is another reminder that man's progress is subject to what God will and will not allow.

Many theologians have viewed man's development and use of technology as the natural result of mankind's being created in the image of God. It certainly seems plausible that our desire to create mirrors our great Creator who made all that is seen and unseen. If this is true, then this is another way in which technology brings glory to God. In this sense, every advancement of man and every new technology that is discovered points back to our origin and declares to the world that there is a master technician, master designer, master creator. There is a God.

Another way in which technology exerts a positive force upon mankind is when it is utilized to accomplish those tasks which God has given man. God expects us to be good stewards of all of our resources and to do the things that He has instructed. Paul uses this type of terminology in 1 Cor. 4:2 when he states, “Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” There are many technologies that can lend assistance to the servant of Christ in making the most of his resources and also aid in proclaiming the gospel and fulfilling the will of God in the Christian’s life. Technology can enhance or hinder our Christian walk. The difference lies in the application of that technology.

Biblical Guidelines for Using Technology

Though the Word of God does not directly address many of the technologies available to us in this day and age, it certainly sets forth some principles that can be applied. There is no “thou shalt not use the internet” or “thou shalt use cell phones” found between the covers of the Bible, but there are guiding principles that can be applied to every aspect of our lives. In other words, the Golden Rule still stands whether we are face to face with someone or communicating and doing business through copper wires. The Ten Commandments are as binding to the Christian in the virtual world as they are in the real world. Some poignant questions that should be asked include:

- Does it empower people or control them?
- Does it meet needs or generate wants?
- Does it value life or demean it?
- Does it respect people’s dignity as God’s image bearers?
- What is its potential for evil?

Does it appropriately use resources?⁴

The answers to questions like these may differ from individual to individual, but there is one supreme principle that must be followed by the Christians in the course of any pursuit. It is articulated clearly and concisely in 1 Cor. 10:31: “Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” “Whatsoever ye do” should be sufficient to cover the technology of the day and the many advancements of years to come. In truth, this should be the goal of every Christian: to use every tool in his arsenal to achieve this end and to bring glory to God.

⁴“Stewardship as a Christian Worldview,” <http://www.asa3.org/asa/education/views/stewards-km.htm#technology>, accessed 5 January 2007.

CHAPTER TWO
USING TECHNOLOGY IN PRE-FIELD MINISTRY

Audio-Visual Presentations

One of the most important parts of a missionary's pre-field ministry is his audio-visual presentation. The website of Baptist International Missions Incorporated, with whom I am not affiliated, explains clearly why this is such a vital part of the missionary getting to the field:

If you are a missionary, there are four things a pastor and a church judges when you visit their church: your character, your message, your display, and your ministry presentation. Unless you are asked to preach, your slide/video presentation will be the most visible and the most highly judged opportunity you have to present yourself, your burden, and your ministry. The quality you put into your presentation is your representation to the pastor and the church of the effort and quality they can expect you put into your ministry.⁵

I could not agree more with the statement. There is an old proverb which states, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Many times the pastor of the church may only give the missionary ten or fifteen minutes to communicate his burden to the church. By using pictures or video, the missionary is able to take that brief period of time and stretch it to communicate volumes of information to the audience. It would be wonderful if we could load everyone on a jumbo jet and take them to the given field of ministry. It would be wonderful to allow them to walk the streets, smell the smells, and see the people; but this

⁵"Planning a Missionary Presentation," <http://www.bimi.org/content/rePresentation.php>, accessed 8 January 2007.

simply is not practical. For many of the people sitting in the pews, this will be the closest they ever come to the missionary's place of ministry. For this reason it is imperative that the missionary have the highest quality pictures or video possible.

Slide presentations used to be the standard in audio-visual presentations, and I have had the experience of putting together a couple of slide presentations; but wise is the missionary who figures out that this is a thing of the past. Video projectors have dropped in price significantly. In fact, any missionary should be able to easily acquire a video projector that far exceeds their projection needs for less than one thousand dollars. Video projectors are far superior in their usefulness than their predecessor the slide projector. Combine the projection capabilities of the video projector with the photo and video editing power of a personal computer, and you have the necessary tools to create an effective presentation. The ability to easily edit photos and add text and graphics to individual slides, not to mention the capability of incorporating full motion video, makes the video projector the best option for the missionary.

Aside from the video projector's usefulness on deputation, it can also greatly enhance the missionary's ministry once he arrives on the field. We used our video projector extensively during our first term for everything from movie nights to discipleship training. It cannot be overstated; the video projector is a tremendous resource. Investing in a good video projector is money well spent for the missionary. That being said, there are some basic things to keep in mind when putting together a video presentation.

First, start with a script. The script is extremely important to the presentation, and much time should be spent in making sure it communicates the missionary's message

effectively. The presentation should not be a travel documentary or an advertisement for your mission board. It should be a clear declaration of what you intend to do on the field and an appeal for the viewer to help you accomplish that task. This should be the vision and purpose when constructing the script.

A missionary may already have pictures when he begins this process, but it is crucial that the presentation be “script driven” and not “picture driven.” Starting with the pictures is like finding some good sermon illustrations and writing a sermon around them. Some people do it, but it is not the best way to do a presentation. In both cases the message is the most important part, and the “illustrations” should serve to enhance understanding and amplify the message that is being communicated.

In addition, that message needs to be communicated within the time constraints associated with the modern day church service. Gone are the days of a missionary clicking through a slide presentation for two hours. I have met missionaries that are trying to revive the movement, but I doubt they will succeed, which is probably a good thing. Though the missionary has driven several hours for the meeting, it is important to understand that he may be a very small part of what is going on in that particular service. There is a song service, special announcements, special music, Sister Selma testifying, and an earthshaking message from the Word of God that all have to be delivered within an hour. Whether or not you agree with this trend is not the issue. The truth is that many churches in America run a tight schedule. If a missionary hopes to enlist their support, then he must be respectful of the time limits imposed and utilize the brief time he is given to the fullest.

With this in mind, it is best to create a presentation that is between eight to ten minutes long. If the pastor gives you ten to fifteen minutes, then you can introduce the video, show it, and still be well under the time limit. If the pastor gives you the opportunity to preach, then you could show your presentation, preach for twenty minutes, and be done in a half hour.

Unfortunately, the average person sitting in a church pew may have seen many boring missionary presentations. Therefore, it is necessary in the first few seconds of the presentation to wake them up and grab their attention. The presentation should begin with something that “hooks” the viewer. This could be accomplished through dynamic graphics or perhaps a thought-provoking question. The bottom line is that you need to give them a reason to watch.

Make sure the presentation moves along smoothly. Pictures need to stay up long enough to be understood, and video needs to remain on a given subject matter long enough to be processed. The American Research Group points this fact out in one of their laws for more effective advertising:

People have limited mental processing capacities. Quick cuts to different scenes require people to devote more of their limited resources to following the cuts and less resources to processing each scene. It takes people between eight and ten seconds to process and produce a lasting emotional response to a scene. Camera movement or different camera angles of the same scene can engage people through their orienting responses while providing enough time for them to process the scene.⁶

I violated this principle horribly on my first attempt at a video presentation.

Together with a missionary friend going to the same field, I put together my first video presentation. The technology was relatively new, at least for home video editing. My

⁶“Ten Rules for More Effective Advertising,” American Research Group, Inc., <http://www.americanresearchgroup.com/adrules/>, accessed 8 January 2007.

cohort and I were excited about all the different transitions that we could use between shots. By the end of our presentation we had pictures bouncing all over the screen. It was all really cool, but it was also very distracting! Thankfully, we recognized the problem and corrected it. Remember just because you *can* do a certain effect or transition with a given video editing software does not mean that you *should* do a certain effect or transition. I learned an important lesson from my first experience. The transition I use more than anything else now in presentations is a simple fade. It looks professional and does not distract from the subject matter of the picture or video.

I have found that the best way to end a presentation is with a montage of “people pictures” set to music. Ministry is about people. Pictures of the people to whom you plan on carrying the gospel can be a very powerful way to appeal to the viewer to help you get to the mission field. If you are good at photography and have your own pictures of people, this is the place to use them. Another good source would be the internet. Many sites offer professional photos for little or no cost to the consumer.

Do not use songs like “People Need the Lord” or “Thank You.” They are wonderful songs but have been overused for these purposes. Many church goers can name that tune in only three notes. The response is often, “Oh, I’ve already done this before,” and they immediately tune out. Use music that is appropriate and sets your presentation apart from other presentations.

One final comment regarding the use of this technology in pre-field ministry: make sure the finished project is of high quality. The Association of Baptists for World Evangelization points out on their website, “People evaluate video quality based upon

what they see on TV and in other movies; thus, a poor video is worse than no video.”⁷

This does not mean that you have to have CGI dinosaurs running across the screen, but it does mean that images need to be clear and the sound quality has to be good. If you are not creative or computer savvy, ask around. Someone who would enjoy the challenge may be closer than you think!

Prayer Cards and Packets

Another important part of pre-field ministry that has been changed drastically by the onset of new technologies is the missionary prayer card and ministry packet. Gone are the days of ink-smudged mimeographs making the cut. Church members are used to seeing high quality images in print on a regular basis. Just a walk to the mailbox should provide you with all the evidence you need to convince you that the quality of your printed materials needs to be set high. The missionary’s prayer card and ministry packet needs to look sharp and stand out.

At the very minimum, the missionary’s picture should be in full color. This will mean that at least one side of the prayer card is printed in full color, but it would be even better for both sides to be printed in full color. The prayer card is of utmost importance. It precedes your arrival and will be at the church long after you depart. For that reason, make sure your silent representative looks as sharp as possible.

As for missionary packets, the pastor’s desk is littered with them. Why is he going to look at yours? The packet needs to be attractive and inviting. When I was on deputation, my packet consisted of a VHS tape of our presentation, a tri-fold brochure

⁷“Video Presentation,” <http://www.abwe.org/resources/presmedia/options/video.asp>, accessed 8 January 2007.

about our ministry, two letters of recommendation, a prayer card, and a personal letter from me. Later on, I added a mini-CD that had an interactive power-point presentation about our ministry. Many would have side-stepped the expense of sending a video tape, but I found this was a great asset even if the pastor never watched it. Why? It made my packet different from the slew of others coming across the pastor's desk. More than once I was referred to as "the missionary that sent the video tape." The mini-CD had a similar effect. Pastors who were into computers could pop the disc in and navigate the presentation much like a web page. However, even those pastors or mission committees that did not watch the tape or use the CD could see that I was serious about trying to communicate my burden and enlist their help.

Websites

An additional way of communicating this same information with churches is through the internet. A website enables the missionary to provide large quantities of information about his specific field, personal background, and vision for ministry, without it being overwhelming. If the site is set up correctly, visitors to the website will be able to navigate to the information they are interested in very quickly without having to rifle through superfluous data. A further advantage of setting up a website is the ability to easily provide up-to-date information to people interested in your ministry. Recent newsletters, as well as other pertinent information, can be posted at the click of a button. A well-designed webpage will go far beyond the standard ministry packet providing an interactive medium through which visitors to the site will be able to chart their own course to understanding your ministry.

Creating a website is not as difficult as many think. Popular programs like Microsoft FrontPage can be used to create a website on a computer and then upload the information to the internet. However, many web hosting services provide free web-based software so that all one needs to create a website is access to the internet. Many of these services will host your website for free; the only catch is that they will place banner ads on your site. Sometimes the content of these banner ads are not appropriate for ministry websites. For that reason it is probably best to pay the small monthly fee and have the banners removed, but using the free hosting is a good way to get started.

Contact Databases

Another technology which can greatly aid the missionary in his pre-field ministry is the data-managing capabilities of the personal computer. All of the missionary's contacts can be arranged in an orderly fashion into something which is known in computing terms as a "database." For many of my college years I worked as a collector. We would call past-due accountholders in an attempt to work out a solution. During my years of collecting, I gained much experience as to how databases worked especially as it related to making phone calls and keeping records. When I started making calls for deputation, I set up a system very similar to what I was accustomed to using in collections. My wife and I acquired a list of contacts from our mission board, and then she was nice enough to enter them into Microsoft Outlook for me. She would enter the contacts from the huge list based on what area we wanted to target. Then I would call the contacts that she had entered into the system. Our computer was connected to our phone line, and so at the press of a button the computer would call the record that I had pulled up in Microsoft

Outlook. Whatever took place during the call was noted in the memo section of that particular record.

The key to raising support is phone calls. It may come as a shock to some, but not every church that is called by a missionary will schedule him for a meeting. In fact, the missionary will have to make many calls in order to schedule one meeting. In addition, every church that schedules the missionary for a meeting will not take him on for support. When I was on deputation, my wife and I calculated our “take-on” rate to be about thirty percent.

It may help to visualize the whole process as a funnel. An enormous amount of phone calls will be made resulting in a smaller number of meetings being scheduled. The many meetings that are scheduled will result in an even smaller number of churches committing to monthly support. Therefore, the more phones calls a missionary can make, the more support he will be able to raise. Using a contact database enables the missionary to accomplish this more effectively. I was amazed at how quickly I was able to make calls once I had everything organized in Microsoft Outlook. If a pastor asked for a packet, then that would be put in the memo section of the record. Later, I could do a search for all the records that had the word “packet” in them. This helped me in following up on those pastors that requested packets. Using the database helped me handle the large volume of information required in communicating with so many churches.

Global Positioning System

Once you have correctly used modern technologies to help you create a dynamic video presentation, assemble a sharp ministry packet, launch your website, and schedule

those all-so-important meetings, there is yet another item that can revolutionize the “on the road” part of your ministry. Three little letters that can greatly reduce the stress associated with finding your way to a location in unfamiliar territory are GPS. It stands for Global Positioning System and utilizes signals from satellites to pinpoint your location and help you navigate to your destination.

There are several different types of GPS receivers currently on the market for this purpose, and new products are continually emerging. Because of this, it will be necessary to do some research to determine what model will best serve the missionary’s needs; but without question this is a technology that is well worth the investment. When I did deputation, I started out printing driving directions off the internet. Towards the end of my deputation I had a GPS that connected to a map program on my laptop. By affixing the laptop to my dashboard, I had a moving map atlas that kept me on track as I journeyed to my destination. This helped immensely, but what I am using now on furlough is much more useful. My wireless provider offers a GPS function that is integrated with my cell phone. Once the desired destination is keyed into the program, the cell phone gives audible turn-by-turn instructions as progression is made toward that location. I have used this device extensively and am fully satisfied with the functionality it provides. It even has a search feature which allows the user to find the nearest Wal-Mart or McDonalds from his current position. This is an amazing technology that can greatly benefit the missionary by reducing the stress of constantly being in an unfamiliar environment.

After you have found the church and presented your work, you will need to stay in contact with them for the rest of the deputation process and continuing once you arrive on the field. This task of keeping churches informed as to the progress of the missionary's ministry is usually achieved by regular updates in the form of a missionary newsletter.

As discussed earlier, the missionary's printed materials need to be of high quality. The newsletter should be printed in full color and should have pictures that go with the content of the letter. The pictures do not always have to be pictures of the actual ministry. Pictures which portray a concept or idea can be utilized to make the letter look more interesting and invite the church member passing by it on the bulletin board to stop and read. For instance, a missionary reporting on his deputation travels could use a picture of a highway to accompany his text about his travels. This would certainly add interest and make the letter more interesting than just a full page text.

Speaking of text, do not put too much of it. If you are a novelist, save your talent for another time. The newsletter should read more like a short newspaper article and less like *War and Peace*. The pastor or missions secretary should be able to extract the main information included in your newsletter within a matter of seconds. One way to accomplish this is through the use of headings. Like newspaper headlines, a heading for each of the articles in your newsletter can get a lot of information across in a little bit of time. The headings of your articles should allow the reader in a glance to know exactly what the newsletter is about. Then if they want to read the main body of the articles for more information, they can. In addition, for the pastor or lay person who carries your newsletter to the pulpit on Wednesday night for the missionary update, the headings are

like little cue cards helping him to present what is going on in your ministry to the church.

With our newsletter philosophy out of the way, let us talk about printing. When I first started sending out newsletters, it was an involved process. The first challenge was to get my database of church addresses to cooperate with the program that would print the information on the envelope. The next hurdle was getting my inkjet printer to print the delivery addresses without “eating” the envelopes. My printer was constantly jamming; it truly seemed that plain white envelopes were its food of choice! In addition, it always seemed to run out of ink in the middle of the printing job. I guess it was using the ink to wash down all the white envelopes it was ingesting. The end result was that I absolutely dreaded when it came time to send out another newsletter.

However, all of this changed when I discovered a wonderful service offered online by the United States Postal Service. It is called NetPost Mailing Online. It is a printing service that allows you to upload a document through the internet to be printed and sent to whomever you want. First, you upload your newsletter, then your addresses from your contact database. You pay with your credit card, and the cost is less than a dollar per letter. This includes printing (one side full color), envelopes, postage, everything. The printer they use is a higher quality printer than my inkjet, and so the newsletter they send out is better quality than what I even have the capability of producing at home. What used to take a couple of days and much headache now takes a couple of hours and looks better than it did before.

Another benefit of using this system is that if you have internet access on your field of service, then you can continue to use online mailing even after you move to the field.

Since the letter is printed and mailed in the U.S., you will not have to pay international postage to send your letters. I have used this service for four years, which includes my first term in Trinidad, and could not be happier with it.

CHAPTER THREE
USING TECHNOLOGY TO STAY CONNECTED
ON THE FIELD

A 1996 article in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* lists some of the causes of stress for a missionary once he arrives on his field of service. One of the culprits that made the list was “loneliness”:

Loneliness comes from a sense of not belonging and a sense of being misunderstood. Many times, such feelings spring from the failure to form close relationships with other missionaries and nationals.

Loneliness strikes single missionaries in remote places, as well as couples in new areas. Husbands who travel a lot in ministry and wives who remain at home often become lonely.

Stress arising from discouragement and loneliness must be identified and remedied before more serious problems develop. The main goal is to find some way to focus on other things. For some people, physical labor helps—gardening or cleaning, for example—while others need to follow regular exercise plans.

Of course, finding a good friend to share burdens is a great help. Lonely, discouraged people need to be able to vent their feelings confidentially. A trusted friend can help to direct the person away from self-pity.⁸

One of the suggestions given in the article to help with the stress caused by loneliness is for the missionary to “talk over” his problems with friends at home. The article points out that technology like e-mail and the telephone have made this solution much more accessible for missionaries around the world. Indeed, technology can enable the missionary to maintain many of his relationships at home and stay connected even though he may be thousands of miles away.

⁸“Causes of Stress and What to Do about Them,” *EMQonline.com*, https://bgc.gospelcom.net/emqonline/emq_article_read.php?ArticleID=237, accessed 10 January 2007.

E-mail

The formal definition for e-mail is a system for sending messages from one individual to another via telecommunications links between computers or terminals.⁹ Recent studies by the Pew Internet and American Life Project described e-mail as the “killer app” of the internet stating, “E-mail continues to trump all as the most popular use of the internet.”¹⁰ The report goes on to reveal that 102 million Americans use e-mail. Its prevalence makes it an ideal option for meeting the communication needs of the missionary because those that the missionary would desire to communicate with probably already use e-mail or know someone who could show them how to use this technology.

That same report issued by the Pew Internet and American Life Project commented on the effect which e-mail can have on relationships stating, “We have documented the power and impact of e-mail in our reports. For example, we have found that the use of e-mail reinforces Internet users’ social connectedness to family and friends; the longer a user is online, the more likely she is to cite the positive effect e-mail has on her social ties.”¹¹

E-mail is the primary technology for bridging the communication gap between home and the mission field. Its widespread use makes it a viable option for both the missionary and the family and friends left behind. In the early days of modern missions, a

⁹*Dictionary.com Unabridged, Vol.11*, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/email>, accessed 19 February 2007.

¹⁰“Pew Internet and American Life Project,” <http://pewinternet.org>, accessed 19 February 2007.

¹¹*Ibid.*

letter would be written and sent by boat to the desired location. Then the response to that letter would need to be penned and then begin the long journey back to the missionary. Thank God for e-mail! What used to take missionaries months to accomplish can now be done with the click of a mouse. E-mail may seem like an insignificant part of the missionary equation, but the ability to maintain regular contact with friends and family could make the difference between staying on the field and giving up in despair.

Messenger Services

More advanced internet users may opt to utilize instant messaging. Though not as prevalent as e-mail, there are still many people who are familiar with and able to use this technology. The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that 46 percent of Americans online have sent instant messages.¹² This type of program allows two or more parties connected to the internet to have real-time conversations. Typically, users will log into their “messenger” service and then can chat with others who are on their list of “buddies.” Most of these services are offered free of charge.

I was able to use this technology extensively during my first term on the mission field. My mother and I had a time scheduled each week when we would meet and talk through Yahoo Messenger. The messenger service that we were using also offered voice chat. This allowed us to click a button and actually talk to each other like using walkie-talkies. Though it was not as reliable as the regular text messaging portion of the service, the times that we were able to make the connection and use the voice chat made us seem that much closer.

¹²Ibid.

Another internet feature we would often use in conjunction with our text message sessions was Yahoo Games. Using the same information with which we logged onto Yahoo Messenger, we could log onto the Yahoo Games server. We would often play a word game while we chatted. Using these features certainly added a dimension to our communication that e-mail alone could not fill. In addition, the capacity to play the game while using the voice chat made this method of communicating superior to the telephone. I was thousands of miles away, and yet because of this technology, it felt very much like those times that we would sit around the kitchen table at home and carry on a conversation over a game of Scrabble.

Webcams

Another feature of many instant messenger programs is video conferencing. Most of the popular messenger services have the capability to support video for users that have webcams. These small cameras that are used to broadcast video over the internet are usually inexpensive, and some computers even have them built-in.

This technology came in handy for me during our first Christmas on the field. We were blessed to have my wife's parents come and visit us for Christmas, but my parents were unable to make the trip. However, they did send gifts by way of my in-laws. On Christmas morning we set up the webcam and linked up with my parents so that they could watch us open our gifts. This may seem insignificant to some; but if you doubt the impact that such technology can have, you need to talk to my mom! The ability to connect through video and voice on that Christmas morning turned what could have been

a blue Christmas into one of our best Christmas memories. In fact, the webcam has become a Christmas tradition for us.

This is just one example of how a technology like this can close the gap between the mission field and home. There are numerous ways in which a webcam could be used to enhance communication with family and friends who are far away. Currently, my wife is pregnant with our first child. Once we return to the field I am sure that we will be using the webcam even more to broadcast video back to two sets of loving grandparents in the states.

Voice Over Internet Services

The idea of being able to broadcast voice over the internet is an idea that has been around for awhile. It first started showing up prominently through the various messenger services that were being offered on the internet. As internet speed increased, the ability to transmit and receive voice data over the internet became a more viable option. Now that there are a large number of users utilizing broadband connections, companies have started offering Voice Over Internet as a replacement to the traditional home telephone. Since these companies are competing with the traditional phone companies, their prices for phone service are comparable and sometimes even cheaper. This type of phone service is particularly beneficial to missionaries because the phone number can be chosen by the customer and is not based on geographic location. For instance, a missionary who is based in Africa and has a broadband internet connection can have a telephone number with a Jacksonville, Florida, area code. Therefore, his friends and family in Jacksonville can make a local call to that number and speak to the missionary in Africa.

Unfortunately, I have no personal experience with these services because the village where I minister in Trinidad does not have broadband service. However, my partner missionary who lives a mere fifteen-minute drive down the road from me does have the service and loves it. The strength of this option, where it is available, is that those calling the missionary do not even have to know how to use the internet; they just have to be able to work the telephone. The down side is that setting up the telephone on the missionary's end is a little technical and would require some computer knowledge as far as hooking up the router and getting all of the settings tweaked. However, the ease of being able to communicate with those back home at such a low cost makes this type of phone service a great option for the missionary.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Technology is simply the practical application of knowledge. It should be the desire of every missionary to practically apply the knowledge with which God has blessed him. Through the deputation process, the missionary should seek to use the technologies available to present the ministry which God has given him in the most compelling way possible. His video presentation should be sharp and his printed materials should be attractive, whether it be prayer cards, brochures, or newsletter. The missionary will need to make contact with many churches to gain the support necessary to do the work that God has given to him. Many may be able to keep all of that straight with a pencil and notebook, but some may be able to be more effective by using a computer database. If the missionary has that knowledge and can apply it, then he should. Additionally, in the world of deputation today, missionaries need an edge. They need to be able to get their message out in every way imaginable. Many pastors today are computer savvy, and a well-designed website speaks volumes about a missionary and his desire to get to the field. After he makes contact with a church, getting to the meeting can be a much less stressful experience with the aid of a GPS. It is a worthy investment if it allows the missionary to arrive at his destination with the soundness of mind to present his burden clearly. All of these areas of the missionary's pre-field ministry can be improved and

aided by the technologies available today. The missionary should seek to use the tools available to make his deputation as effective as possible.

Once the missionary family reaches the field, one of the greatest struggles they will face is the shock they will experience as a result of being separated from their home. This effect can be greatly minimized if the missionary will use the technologies available to stay connected with friends and family back home. It is crucial that the missionary understand the importance of staying connected. The cost of monthly internet access may be high where he serves, but it is cheaper than having to send another missionary. If having internet access allows that missionary family to beat culture shock and stay on the field, then it is well worth the investment.

Technology, when used correctly, has the potential to impact the missionary in a positive way. As missionaries we should seek to use every tool available to make our work more effective and efficient, never forgetting the underlying principle that should guide everything we do: “Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

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