

Internet Strategies of U.S. Church Planter

Adapted from, “*An Evaluation of the Strategies Being Used by Church Planters in the Twenty-First Century*”, by Paul E. Fleming.

In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul was aware of the culture of his audience and spoke to them in terms they could understand. He was speaking their language as he referred to one of their own poets. The result was that “Some men joined him and believed.”

An emerging group of church planters is telling a similar story today, with a postmodern audience. The Areopagus is not the location now, but rather the Internet—the World Wide Web. The internet is becoming a primary tool of enterprising church planters and common ground with the unchurched. This is a paradigm shift more than simply a shift in technology.

Educational Strategies

Internal strategies relate to how planters are using the Internet to learn about the field of church planting. The Web provides an online conversation in which these young leaders can safely express their ministry views and receive input from multiple others. This “electronic buffet” is an unlimited source of idea exchange.

Some representative sites: www.theooze.com
www.the-next-wave.org
www.organicchurchplanting.org
www.vintagefaith.com

External strategies are produced largely by denominations and church planting organizations as they recruit, assess and train more church planters. Much material is provided here by those with proven success in multiplying new churches. Online assessments, temperament tests, coaching materials, demographics, sample budgets and checklists are available.

Some representative sites: www.efca.org
www.churchplantingvillage.com
www.a29.org
www.seattlechurchplanting.com
www.coachnet.org
www.stadia.cc

Awareness Strategies

These strategies relate to how church planters are using the Internet to let people know about their work. They communicate their vision to a core group and potential supporters. This is much more than a simple online brochure.

Search Engine Positioning

Planters can use advertisement services such as *Google Adwords* or *Overture* to specifically target their online audience. These allow church planters to select 'keywords' that are fitting to their new church and cause their links to appear as sponsored ads when users search for those keywords.

Viral Marketing

This involves creating interactive sites which allows viewers to recommend the site to others. For example, 'e-cards' can be used which allows core group members to generate an attractive email to their friends or anyone else they think would be interested in learning about their new church.

Email Lists

Such lists allow a new church to send messages to the lists on a frequent basis to keep their core groups and supporters informed. In addition, visitors to the website can be given the opportunity to join the email list. An example would be www.marshallchurch.org

Hybrid Awareness

Some are combined offline and online efforts to maximize the communication of their church planting vision. For example, offline materials such as business cards can point people to the website which allows them to explore the vision and be invited to partner with the new church. Some use local theaters to do the same thing.

Community Strategies

These strategies relate to how the Internet is being used to develop both physical and virtual community among their members and with the unchurched. 'Virtual' community is used to enhance interpersonal interaction in the 'actual' community.

Core Group Community Development

Culture Development

The church normally attracts those who are culturally similar. The internet is a great place to introduce the core group to their culture in unique, interactive ways. Downloadable media of music or messages one might hear at their church are getting the churches culture across. Online forums, blogs, links and leadership profiles are other means of doing so. Such sites often have an artistic 'feel' to them which engage people who share their style and culture as on www.kaleo.us or www.redseachurch.com

Online Care

An online presence also can be used to provide spiritual care and nurturing of their community. Such things as prayer requests and updates, databases of ministry opportunities, and the ability to give to the church are all possible online. Devotionals and reading lists of books to enhance spiritual growth are other examples.

Unchurched Community Development

Provocative Domain Names

A new style of nomenclature is in vogue with churches planted in recent years. Names such as “Providence”, “Highway”, “Red Sea” and “Mars Hill” are common. Domain names such as www.notyourmammachurch.com are intentionally hoping to attract the unchurched.

Philosophical Positions

The postmodern approach seems to value the authenticity and sincerity of one’s faith over its rational basis. Consequently, many new churches are much more willing to openly declare their philosophical/doctrinal positions online. Some even devote whole sections to explaining what the Gospel is and what it means to the viewer in a rather complete discourse on the subject.

An example from Vintage Church website; “We hope to surprise many, many people who have written off Christians as dogmatic, close-minded, and unintelligent, by showing that vintage-Christianity is actually quite the opposite. We will make opportunities during events and in our relationships for dialogue – not just one-way presentation. No question will be too foolish, too challenging or too insignificant to ask at Vintage Faith Church.”

Transformational Stories

Stories of transformation have a powerful influence in today’s culture. Planters allow members to ‘stand up’ online and share their ‘virtual’ stories and the unchurched can read how the Gospel has changed the lives of those who attend the new church.