



Business Research Project

for the Romans 15:4 Project Blog:

Can a blog be a useful nondenominational cross-ministry tool?

Research by: Mick Dobra

Research for: Professor Monts, AD305

October 2, 2006

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Executive Summary

Purpose

Can a blog (web log), be a useful ministry tool? Finding answers to that question is the primary purpose of this research project.

Blogs as Effective Ministry Tools

Yes, a ministry blog and web site can be useful ministry tools. In fact, it is imperative that ministries do a better job of engaging the new blogosphere culture! The research for this project shows that the competition (enemy) is doing a better job of engaging people online. Tony Wittaker, a member of the UK Evangelical Alliance and Evangelical Missionary Alliance, and Web Director of SOON Ministries says, “God has given us a new and highly-effective means of evangelism: the Internet.”¹

Blogs are the new medium that not only present information to the world, but are critical to increasing search engine rankings of other ministry web sites. They are a tool that should be immediately used by ministry teams to ensure they are relevant and accessible to the information age culture.

The Church needs to engage in the blogosphere culture as it has engaged other cultures of the world.



Introduction

David Krejci explains,

“Many pundits suggest that blogs are to the 21st century what the printing press and moveable type were to the 15th – a development that generates broadly transformative change. We know that the printing press helped bring down monarchies and end feudalism. Similarly, blogs are eroding mainstream’s media monopoly on information and authority and requiring corporate communicators to think more in terms of dialogue than monologue.”²

Recent history verifies the transformation that is ongoing because of the internet generally and blogs specifically. Peter Himler describes, “Who’d have thought that . . . [bloggers would] have the capacity to not only influence the national news agenda, but force real change. (Just ask Dan Rather.) The blogosphere is the largest focus group and living laboratory the world has ever known.”³

Blogs also have the added benefit of increasing search engine ranking for Church web sites, whether they be ministry, mission, discipleship, or church promotion. This is a very important point that will be discussed in more detail. When searching for a topic, like abortion for example, in a search engine, it would be most beneficial to have our pro-life web sites dominate the search results. The fact is they don’t, and that needs to change.

Research Methods

The research departed from the original proposed methods of interviews and surveys because of time constraints, and instead focused on literary review and web search case studies.



Blogs as Effective Ministry Tools

What is a blog? Blog is short for weblog, an online journal or log; blogging is the act of writing in a blog; the blogosphere is the community of blogs on the web.⁴

Here are a couple of corporate benefits of blogging:

- A platform for data, knowledge and opinion sharing.
- A way to boost public relations and improve recruiting.⁵

The Church can benefit from these same features.

Ken Gosnell in an article called “Preaching and Blogging” indicates that, “With a blog in tow, the preacher will be able to post a sermon idea at the beginning of the week and give the congregation a chance to respond. By Sunday, when he delivers the sermon, many will already be tuned in to the topic. . . Let me repeat, blogging will change how preaching is done.”⁶

Case Study 1: Church Promotion

This is a sample of how effective web site promotion can be for a local church. About a year ago I was a member of a technology team for our church, Richwoods Christian Church in Peoria Illinois. We took some steps to improve the search engine ranking of our church’s web site by cross linking, many other sites overtly and covertly linking to a common web site. Just based on informal communications, many people transferring into our area for work found our church by first doing an internet search. The results of that search are below:

Search Date	Oct. 20 2006, 12pm
Search Term	Peoria Church
Search Results	Results 1 - 10 of about 1,530,000 for peoria church http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=peoria+church
Rank	Link
1	http://www.richwoods.org/

Ranked number one out of over a million and a half search results! Would the staff, elders, and members of this church say that web pages are an effective ministry tool? Yes!

**Case Study 2: Web Search for “abortion”**

What would happen if a young woman found out she was pregnant and went to the web to find information about abortion?

Search Date Oct. 7 2006, 2pm
Search Engine Google.com
Search Term Abortion
Search Results 1 - 10 of about 46,800,000 for abortion
<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=abortion>

Rank	Link	Pro-Life	Pro-Abortion	
1	http://www.religioustolerance.org/abortion.htm	1	1	Both
2	http://www.abortionfacts.com/	1		
3	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion	0	0	Neutral
4	http://www.gynpages.com/		1	
5	http://www.prochoice.org/		1	
6	http://www.abortion.com/		1	
7	http://ethics.acusd.edu/abortion.html	0	0	
8	http://hometown.aol.com/abtrbng/	0	0	
9	http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/frontdoor.cfm?issue_type=abortion		0	
10	http://www.abortiontv.com/	1		
		3	4	

From the results of our search, 4 of the top 10 results were decidedly Pro-Abortion. This is an area of the blogosphere culture the Church could do a better job of engaging. By using blogs to promote Pro-Life websites and increase search engine ranking, the Church could make a greater impact on young women searching for answers concerning abortion.

Case Study 3: Web Search for “Jesus”

What would someone seeking information about Jesus find on the web?

Search Date Oct. 8 2006, 7pm
Search Engine Google.com
Search Term Jesus
Search Results 1 - 10 of about 15,000,000 for jesus
<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=jesus>

Rank	Link	Pro-Jesus	Anti-Jesus	Evangelical	
1	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus	0	0		Neutral
2	http://www.jesusdressup.com/		1		



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3	http://www.ccci.org/whoisjesus/	1		1	
4	http://www.rejesus.co.uk/	1			
5	http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/	0	1		Skeptical
6	http://www.jesusfilm.org/	1			
7	http://www.mccchurch.org/obitpulling.htm	1			
8	http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm	1			
9	http://www.jewsforjesus.org/	1			
10	http://patriotboy.blogspot.com/	1	1		Strange
		<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	
		7	3	1	

The results of this search are a little better. At least the majority of the top 10 search results are Christian. But only 1 is decidedly evangelical in nature. If someone was seeking answers, they would be overwhelmed with information meant as a resource for people that are already in a relationship with our Savior or meant to steer people away from the truth. Here we have another opportunity for effective ministry and missions blogging.



Recommendations and Conclusion

The ultimate conclusion from this research is that blogs are an effective ministry tool. Not only are they effective, but they are the public forum of the day where the Church needs to be meeting and engaging people with the Good News of our Savior.

Recommendations

- Immediately determine how your ministry team could effectively implement blogs.
- Form ministry team bloggers to promote ministry goals and increase search engine rankings of ministry web sites (cross linking).

Here are some tips from Ken Gosnell's article on "Preaching and Blogging"⁷:

- Use blogs to interact with people on sermon ideas and get real time responses.
- Input and feedback on sermon ideas can help eliminate bad ideas before they become sermons.
- Blogs can improve accountability on sermon preparation.
- Blogs can help church members to have a more transparent relationship with the Preacher.
- Blogs can act as a single on-line place to store ideas and sermons.
- Blogs can be an interactive tool to help improve discipleship.
- Blogs can improve collaboration without geographic constraints.

Limitations

First, the second and third web search case studies are primarily literary and subjective. Many of the sites did not fit neatly into a Pro or Anti category, and some were deceptive, not overtly declaring their intentions. Determination of the content was made by the researcher.



Second, blogs are the medium of the day, but internet and technology is changing rapidly. Audio, video, and picture blogs are already increasing in popularity.

And third, due to time constraints, no formal interviews were conducted as originally proposed. Informal conversations were used to gain some insights for this research project.

End Notes

¹ Whittaker, Tony. "An open letter to mission agency executives". 10/19/2006. <http://www.web-evangelism.com/resources/openletter.php>

² Krejci, David. "Answering the commonly asked client question: What do we do about the blogs?". Tactics. March 2005.

³ Himler, Peter. "Why I take the time to blog: Is it worth the 30 minutes spent per post every day?". Tactics. November 2005.

⁴ Gordon, Stephanie. "The image of blogging as the preserve of the web-obsessed is fading fast". IEE Review. March 2006. www.ieeorg.review.

⁵ Gordon, Stephanie. "The image of blogging as the preserve of the web-obsessed is fading fast". IEE Review. March 2006. www.ieeorg.review.

⁶ Gosnell, Ken. "Preaching and Blogging". Preaching.com. September-October 2006. <http://www.preaching.com/preaching/pastissues/kengosnell.htm>

⁷ Gosnell, Ken. "Preaching and Blogging". Preaching.com. September-October 2006. <http://www.preaching.com/preaching/pastissues/kengosnell.htm>