

5 Things I Wish Everyone Knew

About TV Evangelists

By Phil Cooke

I recently helped pastor Bobby Schuller write an article on the flip side of TV evangelism – the things people don't know. We received such a good response on the news site that I thought I'd reprint it as a guest blog today. Here's his take on TV evangelists. Let me know what you think:

Bobby Schuller: I "accidentally" became a TV evangelist two years ago after pulpit-filling for my grandfather's nearly empty and bankrupt Crystal Cathedral church in Southern California. Since then our team has done a lot to revitalize both our church and its TV ministry – The Hour of Power. In the process I have discovered the reality of TV evangelism world, and trust me – it has been an adventure. Out of that experience, our new producer, Phil Cooke (who has worked with many of the most successful media ministries in the world) and I have put together this list of five things you probably don't know about TV evangelists.

1. The day of "big time TV evangelists" is coming to an end – which is good. The media world has changed dramatically over the last 25 years, and the digital revolution has transformed the way Christians use the media. While television is more important than ever for sharing the Christian message, most leaders are focusing online, using social media, podcasts, and other digital tools. Those who continue to use TV will be vital, but they won't

have the profile the previous generation of TV preachers had in the wider culture.

2. TV evangelists are pastors at heart. Most TV evangelists are not greedy or narcissistic. They are simply trying to be missional and reach a new demographic audience. Surprisingly, they are often uncomfortable in front of a camera, but see it as a necessity of the job. Most really love and care for the people they reach.

3. Most TV evangelists struggle financially. While a small group of TV evangelists from the previous generation were very wealthy, a new generation of viewers doesn't give financially at the same level. Therefore, many of the pastors you see on TV today struggle to keep their programs on the air. But they continue doing what they do because of the vast audience potential and the opportunity to share the gospel around what our producer Phil calls "America's Last Great Campfire."

4. Most TV pastors have a deeper theology than you think. The problem here is that the theology doesn't always translate well on TV. Media philosopher Marshall McLuhan famously said, "The media is the message." Meaning, because television is a medium of entertainment rather than discourse, it's a challenge to parse the doctrine of the Trinity on air. Other TV evangelists I know have incredible

knowledge of church history, doctrine, and the Bible but just can't find a way to make the ideas work well on TV. That doesn't mean we should walk away. The message just has to be simple, encouraging, and yes, in some cases, entertaining.

5. A new generation of "TV evangelists" will be more creative than you expect. Already, a new generation of Christian leaders is using documentaries, talk shows, short films, reality programming, and even dramatic movies to share its message with the broader culture. While many have weathered criticism from their own camp, they are boldly taking their message to platforms like OWN (The Oprah Winfrey Network), participating in secular media programming, or creating online platforms for the mainstream audience. For instance, Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia has partnered with Relativity Media to release a feature film about Hillsong United, the world's most popular worship band. Second and third-generation Christian TV personalities like me will succeed only when we discover our own creative identities, honouring the past while being truly unique.

The day of "TV evangelists" may be coming to an end, but what happens next, might just be worth watching.

CHANGE REVOLUTION

Is Google Censoring Christian Content?

By Phil Cooke

Recently, it was reported that Google's search function would begin focusing on "facts" rather than "opinion." This caused a small explosion among Christian content creators concerned that if Google considered Christianity simply a myth, they would move it to the opinion side, thereby lowering any Christian sites in search results. So I asked Nick Runyon, from Christian Vision to weigh in. Nick runs the U.S. office for CV, and was formerly Chief Operating Officer of Global Media Outreach, so he has extensive credentials when it comes to online innovation. I asked him to write a guest blog on the subject, and here's Nick's thoughts on the issue:

In an effort to avoid "misinformation" a Google research team recently presented the idea that the company's search algorithm should serve search results based on facts rather than opinion. Some would argue that matters of faith are one's own opinion. But, for those with a Christian worldview, the claims of Christ are truth. If Google follows through with this change, will Christian content suddenly disappear from view?

Change is constant, and one must anticipate change rather than fear it. The threat to those who create and publish Christian content online is the failure to understand the reason for the changes impacting content delivery and adjust accordingly. The responsibility to distribute content lies with those who produce it. Getting your stuff seen means that you have to know how to play the game. Here are three tips to help you stay on top of the wave of change when dealing with Google, Social Media and other online media channels:

Learn

User experience is key. Online services live and die by user behaviour. If the users leave, so do the profits. Social media can be a great way to promote your brand, but Facebook isn't interested in building your website or profile. They are building their own company. If you use Facebook to promote your content by directing people away from Facebook and onto your site, don't be surprised when a change is made that cuts the number of visitors to your fan page. You were working against Facebook, not with them. Hey, it was good while it lasted!

Learn what motivates the company you're using to distribute your message. Find a way to accomplish your goals, while fitting into their strategy.

Listen

Remember, change is constant. This means that the learning never stops. If Google begins giving priority to sites designed for mobile users, make sure that your site provides a good mobile experience. If you produce video, make sure it plays well on a variety of screen sizes. Keep listening, and keep learning. The website or blog where you learned information to help understand the motivation of your favorite social network's user strategy will help you listen for upcoming changes to that strategy. When a change is coming, you'll know and you can act purposefully rather than get caught off guard.

Measure Outcomes not Signals

A few years ago I was asked to help a well-known ministry drive results through their website. My first question was, "What outcome do you want?" This team was measuring the number of visitors to the page, visitor time on site, and other important user signals. But, what they really wanted was for people follow Christ. The problem was nothing on the site talked about who Jesus is or how to follow Jesus. When I pointed this out, I was told that they didn't want to come off as "too pushy" with the Gospel. No danger of that!

What is most important to you and your organization? Are you achieving that outcome through your activity? Online strategies should be measured by the outcome one wants to achieve. Jumping into the newest social media app without a plan isn't adapting to change; it's a waste of time. Stay focused. In the midst of all of this change, don't lose sight of the outcome you're trying to achieve.

Now, more than ever, the world can be reached with the Gospel. Christians must know and understand how companies/sites/services like Google, Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat operate and make decisions. We must keep market pace with production quality, user experience and measuring outcomes. We must act purposefully to take advantage of changes in online content delivery. Stay focused. God has placed believers in this point in history, and provided an incredible opportunity to share the hope and love of Jesus with the world.