

Confession of a Critic

A new generation of born-again producers is moving in innovative directions.

As a christian who is a producer and consultant in the media, I actively criticize leaders in our industry because we don't always model Christ's standard of excellence. But as a critic, I sometimes overlook the great things we do in the media.

From reaching a broader audience to offering better programming, Christian media has been making noteworthy progress. That's why I wanted to balance the scales a bit and acknowledge what's right in the industry. Here are some high points:

Increased distribution. The truth is it's tough to find a city or town in the U.S. that doesn't have Christian radio or TV. The pioneers of Christian media had strong business sense and today, giants such as Salem Communications, Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and Daystar are spreading the gospel across the country.

Even overseas, God TV, HCJB World Radio, the Far East Broadcasting Company and others are taking the message of faith literally to the ends of the earth. And Christian broadcast facilities and networks are worth billions of dollars.

Quality programming. Although there are far too many churches, ministries and TV stations using outdated equipment and facilities, major media organizations and churches have made a real commitment to quality.

TBN has gone completely digital, the Crystal Cathedral broadcasts its program in high-definition, Joel Osteen's television ministry has a look all its own and Salem Radio boasts of state-of-the-art radio studios. Today, even small churches and ministries have caught the vision to produce quality programs that reach larger audiences.

Creative worship. Churches are realizing the power of using video as a companion to worship. For example, The Work of the People () created Visual Liturgy, short films that prompt attendees to focus on the Word of God as they prepare to worship. The company is helping pastors incorporate powerful images in church services. And Web sites such as , , worship and others help churches leave a lasting impression with the use of visual media.

Better education. The first Christian media workshop I attended more than 10 years ago featured a TV station owner who taught attendees how to get your brother-in-law to help build sets for free. I walked out. But the National Religious Broadcasters, the Reach conference, Biola Media Conference, Technologies for Worship and Compass Academy are properly training a new generation of Christian communicators.

Media-savvy pastors. It's true that an earlier generation of ministry leaders pioneered radio and TV, but most of them didn't understand how to effectively use either medium. They were often great preachers but were limited in their knowledge of the media.

Today, people such as Joel Osteen, Ed Young, Mark Crow, Jim Reeve, Rob Bell, Erwin McManus and many others are pushing the boundaries of what media can accomplish.

Independent producers. Although some of the major networks are effecting change on a limited scale (check out some of the excellent programming Paul Crouch Jr. has introduced at TBN), most of the changes in the industry are a result of independent Christian producers.

With limited funding and inadequate resources, a new generation of producers is moving in innovative directions with short films, feature documentaries, interactive DVDs and other integrated media. In fact, the next Christian media pioneer is probably working right now on a computer in his dad's garage.

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