

Paul Crouch Jr.: To Reach Our Lost Generation, Pastors Must Be Willing to Embrace These 3 New Trends

Over the last several years, I've been consulting with various churches of all sizes in the area of television production and program distribution. Pastors who have a burden to go beyond their church walls and "reach the world for Christ" *must* have a vision and determination to use the technological tools of today to build a media ministry capable of becoming a lighthouse to the world. It is doable! And less expensive than you would think. Even small- to medium-sized congregations can rise to the level of creating a professional looking program that successfully carries their relevant message to world hungry to know God. I'd like to share with you my thoughts for creating an effective media ministry within your own church or organization.

When TBN started in 1973, individual had access to only two screens: the movie screen playing mostly film, and the TV screen in our homes being fed "over the air" from local TV stations. Today, we live in a five-screen world with not only cinema and television, but also computers, tablets and cellphones. They can all play content, and now with video on demand, we have an unprecedented freedom to play what we want, when we want it, almost anywhere on earth!

The internet has changed everything in the broadcast world. Just as Uber redefined the taxi industry, AirBnB the hotel business, YouTube and other video on demand services are reshaping how we watch and consume video content. In the early '70s, many cities only had seven or eight channels to choose from, and TBN was one of those! With the internet, there are

literally millions of choices, so getting people connected to your church or ministry is the challenge. It's the old needle in a haystack scenario, but the key to reaching an audience is to create something relevant. The internet now allows content creators to directly connect with viewers, bypassing the traditional media outlets. It's the wild West all over again!

In the early days of Christian television, those who feared this new medium were *not* the secular TV stations or networks. Believe it or not, it was the local church! Many with no vision for the future feared that if this new "Christian TV" thing ever caught on, the pews of the local church would dry up, and the offering plates would be empty. The first person to hand my father a check and say, "Paul Crouch, I want to be on Christian TV and open up a new audience to my church" was Dr. Robert Schuller. He was a true visionary; he realized that TV was going to bring a new audience, not cannibalize his current one.

For years, the church often preached against new technologies. Movie theaters were the devil's playground, radio and TV were for secular entertainment only, and the internet? Well, do you know how much garbage resides on the internet!? My father was told in the late '40s by his grandmother that if you are caught in one of those awful movie houses, even watching Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, and the Lord returned, you would be left behind. It sounds silly now, but that was his reality. It took true pioneers like Pat Robertson, C.M. Ward, Lester Sumrall, Jim Bakker and my dad to say, no. Technology should be used to propagate the gospel, it was created by God for us to help fulfill Mark 16:15a (NLT): "Go into all the world and preach the Good News!"

I heard an interesting story a few years ago about a church on the East Coast that was built in the early 1900s. One hundred years later, the current pastor and congregation were preparing to remodel, and the original blueprints had long since been lost. As they were in the balcony breaking down the

back wall, they suddenly realized that they had broken into a perfectly preserved projection room! Everything in there was pristine, perfectly preserved, like a time capsule.

After some research, they discovered that the pastor who founded the church wanted to have the latest technology at his disposal to reach the lost. At the time, it was movies! He wanted to show films like *Ben Hur*, *King of Kings* and other biblical films. Unfortunately, he died only one year after the opening of the church, and the new pastor said, "Oh no! Movies are of the devil!" He had that brand-new projection room sealed up, where it sat idle for almost 100 years.

If we are to reach the lost and go beyond the four walls of our local churches, we must use all the technological tools at our disposal. Setting up your house of worship or ministry to capture relevant content is cheaper than ever, and well within the reach of even small- to medium-sized congregations.

There are three levels of production when it comes to capturing a church service or concert event.

1. The first is iMag, (short for Image Magnification). (Budgets range from \$10K to \$100K): Most churches now have one to three screens in the auditorium, with multiple TVs usually distributed around the building or campus. An iMag feed is pretty simple, with one or two cameras and a feed from a computer. This is for graphics, slides and words being presented during announcements as well as praise and worship. ProPresenter is by far the most popular software in use right now for that purpose, but there are others. This setup can usually be switched by a single person at your front of house or technical area, and many times, the cameras are simply locked off, with no camera operators. For someone sitting in a congregation, this is adequate, but in my opinion, to try and stream something like this is boring. It's like tuning into the 7-Eleven security camera channel; it creates a voyeuristic experience for someone watching at home or on their phones.

Most viewers need more visual stimulation than one locked-off camera, unless you're watching your daughter's wedding or piano recital. In that case, it works.

2. The next level of production is what I call a "streaming" experience. (Budget range is \$100K to \$500K): This usually requires three to five cameras, with live camera operators and a separate control room for the director and video control person. Some churches are using a combination of manned cameras and robotic units; this works also. Some of the newer PTZ (Pan, Tilt, Zoom) cameras are very good, with one person controlling two to six units from one location. This will create more of an immersive experience for the viewer and make them feel a part of the service, not just looking in, as mentioned earlier. This is a quantum leap up and requires true dedication by your ministry to commit to what it takes and make this happen on a week-to-week basis, especially when it comes to equipment and personnel. In this scenario, a director will be on headsets or communication to the camera operators, switching from wide shots to close-up as needed.

I could write another whole article just on the theory of directing a live event, but as we all know, some are done well, and others need a lot of help! Also know that a quality production is not always based on the size of a church's budget or how much people are paid. I've seen many productions done with all volunteers that looked better than ones done with all paid professionals. Much of this is determined by dedication, hard work and training!

Another very important part of this level of production is audio. You must have a separate feed to a dedicated audio board just for the streaming or broadcast feed. Just taking a feed from your PA board is a huge compromise, and usually sounds terrible to person watching the feed. You must also have dedicated audience mics so the audience or congregation can be heard. I want to hear what I see, and if I see people worshipping, clapping or laughing, I must hear it. There's

nothing worse than a pastor telling a joke or attempting humor, and at the punch line ... total silence. People may be laughing in the congregation, but I must hear it at home also!

This also brings up the issue of lighting an audience or congregation, I've seen on more than one occasion where the people are sitting in total darkness, and I can't see a soul on TV. It looks like the pastor is preaching into a black hole. This must be addressed if you are going to do a truly compelling production.

3. The third level of production is what I call the "broadcast" experience. This is basically streaming on steroids. (Budget range is \$500K to \$5M.): It usually requires four to 10 cameras, but more importantly, every step in the production process must be maintained at a high level. Cameras must be of broadcast quality, good lenses are extremely important, the color and black level settings on every camera must match, the audio levels are critical with no distortion, camera moves and zooms need to be smooth, your graphics should be formatted properly within what we call "safe title", lighting must be clean and even, with adequate backlighting and so on. (I'm working on another whole article just on lighting.)

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and every step of the production and post-production process must be monitored and made perfect. If not, many of the Christian networks will reject a program for various technical reasons. It must be fixed before playing on air. While equipment and hardware are important, the quality of your people is more important. A mix of experienced industry professionals and younger people wanting to learn is the norm. I encourage churches to recruit individuals of all ages, and most work with a mix of full-time paid positions and volunteers at others. (This too could be another lengthy discussion, with no real right or wrong answers.)

Engineering is extremely important, and maintaining a complex facility can be a full-time job depending on the size, but most of the manufacturers are very good at helping support their gear. Engineering is most of the time either right or wrong, while producing and directing falls into the creative world. They say, "One man's treasure is another man's trash," so I encourage all the ministries I work with to push the limits of creativity and not get stuck in a rut. In a broadcast production, the sky is the limit when it comes to directing, style, graphics and lower third supers, camera movement, stage or set layouts and general production creativity.

Many productions will include hand-held cameras on the platform for unique shots and camera angles; others will include camera dollies or jibs for boom shots and additional movement. This is all to create visual interest for the viewer; much of it is very subtle and falls into a creative decision category, as opposed to the must-have category.

Over the years, I've seen many churches raise millions of dollars to construct another building or gymnasium where 50 kids can play basketball. And I'm not trying to make light of that, but put just a small percentage of that into your media department and I'll help you reach way beyond the four walls of your local area. It's now possible. I have one client who may have 1000 to 1500 people sitting in front of them on Sunday morning, but 10 times that watching live, and thousands more viewing later with video on demand. What would it cost to construct a building to seat 15,000 people? \$30, \$40 or \$50 million?

Another effective use of technology is the ability to link multiple sites or campuses together. Gateway church in Dallas and Sandals Church in Riverside can have dozens of buildings connected to their main sanctuary with thousands worshipping simultaneously with no limit to the distance or number of connected campuses.

We are living in a whole new world when it comes to technology. The message of the gospel does not change, but how we present it should! The internet gets into countries that are closed to Christianity. In fact, it gets into places where we would be jailed or killed if we were to share the Good News in person. Buildings are needed, and there is no substitute for the local church, but put a fraction of your building budget into television equipment and personnel; you will not only create an effective church media department, but potentially build a lighthouse to the world. {eo}

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