

What the Future of Christian Broadcasting Should Look Like

The TBN studios in London are unlike any TBN studios I've ever seen. In a crowded urban setting, they are modern, sleek and impressive. Only in the lobby are there fancy classic-looking columns and gold leaves like I've seen in other TBN facilities.

The London studios were the vision of the late Paul Crouch. He invested more than \$25 million in state-of-the-art studios, and this has obviously paid off. In the last year, there have been 1,200 original programs produced for the United Kingdom and Europe. In less than a year, TBN U.K.'s viewership has grown to 2.5 million in Great Britain alone.

All this has been under the impressive leadership of Leon Schoeman, who is originally from Cape Town, South Africa. Leon came out of traditional advertising and owned a broadcast design strategy company which, at the time, was rated in the top five in the country. He was involved in international television and his company launched 60 international networks of some major brands and over 100 television shows.

At the same time he and his wife, Zania Visser Schoeman, were also pastors.

God called Schoeman, TBN's U.K. channel director, into Christian television in a rather dramatic way. He woke him in the middle of the night and impressed these words on his heart: "They are merchandising my anointing, and I am not pleased."

Schoeman told me: "I didn't know what that meant, and the picture began getting a lot clearer when I started analysing what this platform is about—what Christian television is about, what Christian content is about. The second night He

told me, “change is coming to Christian television.”

He soon met Matthew Crouch, the son of TBN founders Paul and Jan Crouch, and now the head of that huge organization.

“He is a visionary,” Leon said of Matthew Crouch. “He and Laurie are a beautiful couple and they have a strong vision that aligns with what God has told me, and here we are in the U.K.”

I met Leon at the Empowered 21 conference in London in May. He asked if he could interview me at their studios. His questions were both probing and respectful. He has a professional, easygoing manner that makes him easy to talk to.

After the interview, I interviewed him on my Strang Report podcast, which you can listen to [here](#). Much of the rest of this newsletter has been taken from that podcast, in his own words:

“We have a pure channel here that just preaches the unadulterated Word of God. It is not polluted with anything else. It started when Dr. Paul (Crouch) answered the call of the Holy Spirit and built the facility in London.

“We believe we are called to be game changers in Christian television. Matthew Crouch, myself and a whole bunch of very bright people are working tirelessly to change the way in which we present the gospel, from a television broadcast point of view. Dr. Paul’s calling was focused on access to every nation around the world. That should be our focus.

“In Mark 5, it says to take the gospel into all the world. In this next generation, for Matthew, his question is: “How do we disciple these people?” Where the previous generation focused on access, our job is to create impact. And how do we create impact? We can only impact if our product is relevant. We know that Jesus is always the product and that is the what.

"We work with the United Christian Broadcasters, and we work with a variety of television networks, Rhema TV and all these amazing television networks and we want to have a spirit of unity. We ask them what they have to offer that will complement what we do. The umbrella over that is to get the brand competitive with the major international television network brands. If you look at all these big brands like FOX, HBO and ABC, that's our competition. We need to flip between the channels, and there should be a difference from a design point of view. When people look at content—whether it is a music show, or live music broadcast, or a talk show—we need to have exactly the same quality shows. But what does that look like? That is what we're currently working on— to give Christian TV a breath of fresh air, to just breathe new creative inspiration in that amazing media of television.

"The future is not what we do, but how we bring the gospel. It needs to be the same message but in a current, relevant way so people don't have to tune out or have that weird cringe factor."

I asked Leon why he feels there is sometimes a "cringe factor."

"First of all, we need to honor to all of these great men (who pioneered in Christian television)," he says. "So many lives have come into the kingdom because of that, so many miracles were done through that, and it is all the Holy Spirit. No man can take honor and glory for that, but we have to celebrate the labor of these media generals, if you will. But we have to ask ourselves some hard questions, such as why so many people reject Christian TV and Christian media at-large.

"In certain areas, people have merchandised the anointing of God. We've allowed certain things to filter through that maybe we shouldn't have. And I am not talking any specific network—I'm talking about the wide scope of Christian television. If we were to do a complete analysis of where the

root issue is, I think that, often times, we find something that works and we follow that recipe. My wife often says you shouldn't be vomited to your destiny, like what happened to Jonah. Often times we follow the same recipe and we'll get the same result from that.

"If you look at secular television, there is a lot of time spent on strategy, developing the brand and how to effectively communicate with the audience. They are engaged in strategies. We've never been good at that stuff. We've never been good at developing all those different aspects. We need to effectively market Jesus. If we want to stay in line with trends, we have got to put a strong focus on those things and change some of the financial models that are driving Christian television. We need to be smarter and more effective.

Finally I asked: "What do you expect to see in Christian media in the next few years?"

"I think platforms are going to change," Leon says. "When I speak to younger creative people (I tell them) just because you put a skateboard or a surfboard in a promo or in a brand doesn't mean that all of sudden you're going to speak to a new market.

"We must be relevant and we need to let youth speak to youth, and peer groups speak to peer groups. We need to be absolutely relevant and feel the pulse of what's going on. We need to get the right people and not a bunch of gray-haired men sitting around a board room deciding what the next youth trend is within youth media. We need to speak to people where they are. We need to speak to people from the right platform in the right way.

"We need to activate Christians. We just can't broadcast to them, we need to activate them to disciple people in their area. We can only do that if we speak to from the right platform in the right way."