

## A Response to Tony Whittaker on 'Evangelism, Mission, and that New-fangled Interweb Thingy'



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I find Tony's article an encouraging read. The potential power of the Internet as a God given tool within mission is a subject that deserves a much higher profile in the academic world, in the church and in para-church organisations. When I was doing my research for my Masters dissertation, the Internet Evangelism Day website was the most comprehensive site I found on the Internet pointing to a wealth of resources from around the world. I would have found my study near impossible without it.

I see it as very significant that the article begins by laying out the change in '**communication cultures**'. Once grasped by people who did not grow up with technology, it can help promote an understanding of how many of us will need to change our approach of communicating the Gospel in order to affectively engage with "citizens of the digital age". It is a whole new area of cross-cultural mission, only this time our borders are from 'print' to 'digital'. As stressed, the digital divide is sweeping the world, yet it is a subject you will seldom find on a college curriculum and I think this is food for thought.

**"If Facebook was a country, it would be the fourth largest in the world."** It is amazing how Facebook has grown. It is would be extremely unhealthy to put all our relationship building online. We have been made by God as physical beings, with physical needs; a smile, eye contact or 'arm around the shoulder' are all so important in everyday life. So I do like Tony's description of it being an "extension of the natural relationships we build in the physical world". I find Facebook a great aid to cultivating my relationships with Christians and non-Christians alike. For example, if I find I have a similar taste in music to a new acquaintance – next time I see this person I have an instant conversation starter that is so much more personal than 'the weather'. Social networking sites are a fantastic opportunity for quickly sharing some of the more meaningful parts of your life (including your faith), that may take ages to come up in natural conversations.

**"Internet Evangelism Day offers a self-assessment questionnaire, to help churches develop their sites to be more outsider friendly"** ... this is a great resource to help churches find direction with their website. I found the tool most helpful for my dissertation analysis. It doesn't just point out the problems but it also suggests solutions. I also found asking non-Christians for their opinions of church websites very telling and would want to encourage every church to do this.

There are however many people in the world who will never get online, perhaps older/elderly people or those who simply do not have access to even basic computer technology. In agreeing wholeheartedly that the technological opportunities for mission that God has given need a much higher profile and need to be used to their potential, I close by remembering the people whom technology cannot reach, being cautious to never tip the balance the other way.

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