



Convergence - A Special Report from Hollywood *Will We be Ready when the Digital Future Arrives?*

By Phil Cooke

Possibly the single most important question in the minds of media producers today is the question of "Convergence" - will streaming media bring the worlds of television, radio, movies, and the internet together? In other words, will we all be looking at the same box within a few years? That's the question we asked Producer and Director Phil Cooke. With the industry moving faster than ever toward technologies that will converge media, Phil Cooke is creating an all day, intensive look at how we can produce Christian programming to compete more effectively in this dramatically new world. Here's a preview of the fascinating possibilities:

Convergence. It's such a popular subject, even *The Hollywood Reporter* has dedicated an entire page of their daily industry newspaper to the subject. If you've read the business section of your local paper, or recently looked at national news magazines, you're bound to have encountered "convergence", or the global re-alignment of major companies attempting to pave the way for it's arrival. AOL's merger with Time Warner, Disney's acquisition of ABC, Dreamworks failed attempt to create "Pop.com", Microsoft's relentless grab for more and more web-based companies - they are all indications that big business understands the coming wave and wants to be in position to take advantage of the assault.

But what about the Christian media world? Where are the re-alignments and partnerships designed to take advantage of this new technology? Is anyone in Christian media following the lead of secular big business? Historically, Christian media has almost always been behind the curve, and chances are, not many will dispute the fact that Christian media has rarely been perceived as truly innovative and cutting edge.

However, if I didn't think there was hope, I'd toss myself off a cliff. In fact, I'm hoping that this article begins a new dialogue about these possibilities and challenges Christian media leaders to begin to think creatively about the possibilities. Perhaps more important, realize the devastating consequences if we fail to act.

What exactly are the possibilities? With *convergence*, the options are nearly endless. A 500 channel universe? That's nothing. For instance:

- *The local video store will be a thing of the past - we can download any movie in existence as easy as downloading our e-mail.* - Proof? Blockbuster Home Video has recently announced that video rentals are on their way out, and within a few months, Blockbuster stores will be offering a host of other options, including satellite dishes, and equipment for downloading movies off the internet.
- *We can finally make television programs truly interactive.* Proof? You can now access the "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" website and play along with the television program. And network executives are working on an interactive system that will allow that to happen right on the television program itself.
- *We can video conference anywhere on the planet.* Proof? In most places, it's old news. But as wireless communications companies grow more compatible worldwide, we'll be able to video conference from the Sahara Desert as easily as Wall Street.
- *We can find out immediate and accurate information about who's watching particular programs and why.* Proof? Look at the growing list of companies specializing in accurate audience reporting for web-based applications and programs.
- *Literally millions of music, movie, television program, book, website, and other entertainment choices will be at our fingertips.* Proof? Check out websites such as:

[Http://www.ifilm.com](http://www.ifilm.com)

[Http://www.creativeplanet.com](http://www.creativeplanet.com)

[Http://www.atomfilms.com](http://www.atomfilms.com)

[Http://www.contentville.com](http://www.contentville.com)

Or a host of other entertainment sites, many of which are located on the "Favorite Links" page of our website at:

[Http://www.cookefilm.com](http://www.cookefilm.com)

But we keep coming back to the critical question - *"What does this mean to Christians, and how can we be ready to use the new medium for presenting a message of hope to a world desperately in need?"*

#1 - Understand that Convergence is here. Christian media professionals have a hard time with the word "change". We have to understand that if we don't understand and utilize this technology, we will become the dinosaurs of the digital age. Perhaps the best way to start is to partner with creative Christian producers who understand the potential of the web and fund some experimental projects. Could we fail? Of course! But if we don't get in the game, we'll never have a chance to win.

#2 - Invest in the Digital Age - Remember - good stewardship isn't just saving money - it's investing money in the right directions. Begin to invest in equipment and people that can help you reach into the digital future.

#3 - Let's Move from the Age of TV Preachers, to the Age of TV Producers - I've often said that if I have a reason to be on this earth, it's to take us from the age of TV preachers to the age of TV producers. Preachers were the pioneers of Christian media. However, the media world of today is vastly different from the 40's and 50's, and yet, most Christian radio and television stations are still broadcasting mostly sermon-based programming.

There will always be a place on Christian media for powerful and anointed preaching, but if we're going to be successful in the *age of convergence*, we have to think more creatively in our programming choices.

That's why the simple techniques of storytelling are as important as ever. The ability to criss-cross between the internet and a television program, add a hyperlink to a movie, or integrate moving video into websites, will allow us to tell our stories as never before. Essentially, it hasn't changed from the time Hebrew storytellers sat around campfires in the desert telling the stories that became the Old Testament.

The medium doesn't matter as much as the message.

The issues of "convergence" can be both frightening and exhilarating at the same time. But if you will stay near the heart of God in your decision making, and seek the help and counsel of both Godly men and women, as well as experienced media professionals, your chances of success will be greatly increased.

And don't forget the 2001 TV Bootcamp in Dallas. We'll spend the entire day discussing the implications of convergence and how you can impact your world with a message of hope, using this new technology. For more information on attending, call the NRB at 703-330-7000.

We are standing at the door of an historic new period in history. As Christians, this can be our chance to breakthrough with a message of hope to a culture desperately in need. Let's take that next step with authority and boldness, knowing that we worship a God who is the ultimate Creator, and following that lead is our key to success.

How Convergence Begins

Examples from the front lines:

Recently Phil Cooke Pictures, Inc., produced a music video featuring Kathie Lee Gifford, former host of the hit TV program "Regis & Kathie Lee". The video was based on the title song of Kathie Lee's new album "*Born for You*". Directed by Phil Cooke, the music video - which the Los Angeles Times called "stunning" - has received a great deal of acclaim, premiering on ABC's *20/20*, and *Entertainment Tonight*. As of this writing, the strategic purpose of the video was for it to be the centerpiece of the marketing campaign to promote the album.

To that end, it was cross promoted in a variety of ways - each directed at the eventual "convergence" of the mass media. For instance, when the video was produced on-location in Malibu, California, Julie Moran of *Entertainment Tonight* brought their TV cameras and did a full length interview with Kathie Lee between the takes of the song. In addition, Holly McClure, entertainment reporter for Christian website "Crosswalk.com" did location interviews with both Kathie Lee and Phil Cooke on digital video. Finally, the video itself was going to be marketed on Kathie Lee's website at www.onthelambrecords.com.

Knowing that each of these media tools would be used in conjunction with the music video, director Phil Cooke and director of photography Steven Blake used a very high resolution low speed 16mm film to achieve the best quality possible for the video. Then, after offlining the video on Discreet Logic's EDIT, editor Brad Knnull onlined on Discreet's SMOKE - an uncompressed online editing system. Phil Cooke shot plenty of close-ups of Kathie Lee, knowing that much of the world would see the video in the small frame world of the internet.

Christian internet portal **Crosswalk.com** broadcast both the video as well as Holly McClure's on-location interviews with Kathie Lee and Phil Cooke through the internet. In addition, Julie Moran's interviews and clips from the video were scheduled to be broadcast on the ET website as well. Finally, Kathie Lee's website broadcast clips from the video and enabled viewers to purchase the video as they watched online.

It's a small example, but it shows the incredible number of options open to broadcasting and marketing projects in the world of "convergence".

About the author:

Phil Cooke is President and Producer at *Cooke Pictures* in Santa Monica, California. Committed to the world of convergence, his upcoming project list includes a feature length motion picture, various television and video

projects, an effort to archive a major ministry's video library on DVD, and a consulting relationship with a fast growing Christian internet ISP. For more information on media ministry, consult his internet web site at www.cookepictures.com.

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