



## **Make a Media Impact!**

### ***A Successful Christian Television Producer Shares Seven Ways Any Church Can Use Media to Impact the Culture***

We live in a media saturated world. When I grew up in the South of the 1950's, the moral climate of this country was usually decided in the pulpit. But in this new millennium, the moral climate is decided in movie theaters, prime time television, and the popular music industry. In fact, today, my experience indicates that most young people get their behavior, morals, and attitude not from their families or even peers, but from movies and TV. So there is no question that if we're going to make a significant impact on this generation for Christ, modern media must play a major role.

Traditionally, Christians have taken a negative view of the media. We've criticized Hollywood, boycotted TV programs, and shunned movie theaters. But the negative approach can only go so far, and today more and more Christian leaders are realizing just how limited that approach can be. In fact, I'm told that during the last major Christian boycott of Walt Disney Studios, their business actually increased - a sad testimony to the failure of that strategy.

That's why in my work in Christian media over the last 25 years, I've pursued a different path. Early in my career, a famous evangelist told me *"There's just too many positive things in the Bible to preach for - I don't have time to preach against anything."* While there is much evil in the world that I'm certainly against, I've always taken that statement to heart, and spent my time on a quest to create positive alternatives in television, movies, and now, on the internet.

As more Christians embrace that approach, we're beginning to see a new harvest of programming alternatives. Slowly - even Christian television is moving away from 24 hour preaching programs, and exploring documentaries, music specials, news, and lately, even movies.

But media projects are often expensive, and although I have a few clients like Pastor Joel Osteen at Lakewood Church in Houston who have a keen understanding of the power of media, I've discovered that most churches feel like it's just too expensive.

However, in the last decade, technology has changed so much that now, any church can make a real difference in the media. Even if you have less than 100 members, here are some innovative ways you can get started, and make a surprising impact for the gospel:

- 1) **Understand the Power of Effective Public Relations** - Few local newspaper, television, or radio reporters really know much about religious issues. Most news organizations are understaffed, and when budget cuts start happening, it's the religious reporters that get the axe first. That's why you should contact your local news outlets, and develop a relationship with the reporter who usually gets assigned the religious stories. Let them know that you understand their situation and are happy to offer your expertise or even do research when a religious story comes up. You'd be surprised how often they will take you up on it, and when they do, guess who they'll probably use for an interview? Talk about free advertising! One pastor in a major city has done an incredible job with this idea, and whenever a big story on Christian issues hits, he's nearly always interviewed in the newspaper and on television. You couldn't possibly afford that kind of "free" publicity.
- 2) **Set up your own Internet Site** - Today, my 14 year old daughter has her own internet site, complete with family information, photographs, a listing of her friends, and other things important to her. Setting up an internet site is inexpensive (many high school kids can do it), and amazingly effective. Remember that your internet site can be accessed globally, and you should include information about your church or ministry, service times, directions, how to order teaching tapes or books, class listings, information on the Christian life - anything a perspective visitor or potential supporter would need. You can even create a sermon or teaching library using digitized audio and video tapes.
- 3) **Send Video Cameras to Your Missionaries** - Tired of the old slide-tape presentations by missionaries on furlough? For less than \$1,000 you can send them a digital video camera and let them capture their work on video. It will be a far more effective way for them to tell the story of their mission experiences and raise funding for future efforts.
- 4) **Videotape Your Services for Shut-ins** - Many churches have long time members who are now confined to nursing homes or other care facilities. Sure they can see other churches on Christian television, but chances are - they really want to see their own church. They aren't looking for something fancy, just a simple home video camera will do, and it will be such a treat during a difficult time.
- 5) **Illustrate Your Sermons** - With a video projector, a very effective way to enhance your messages is through dramatic illustrations. Use video to visually show locations, people, objects or other things you mention in your sermon. You

can also show clips from appropriate movies, or scenes created by your church's drama team. For a media generation, what better way to relate to your audiences?

- 6) **Produce Local TV Commercials** - I once had a church client with a real heart to reach men. So instead of producing another "Sunday service TV program", they focused their resources on sponsoring the sports report on the local NBC TV station. They would produce low budget - but creative - commercials designed for a male audience and broadcast them during the sports segment of the evening news. For instance, they would videotape the pastor wearing a hard hat on a construction site, talking about how Jesus can rebuild our lives. Or he would report from a local high school football game talking about how to deal with the "hard knocks" of life. It was a remarkably unusual and effective approach.
  
- 7) **Record the History of Your Church** - 20,000 member Lakewood Church began with a handful of folks in a Houston feed store in 1959. The Oral Roberts ministry started in small town Oklahoma, and many large churches began in living rooms. No matter where you might be today, 10 or 20 years from now, you'll wish you had videotape of the early years. Record special events, anniversaries, important guests, new buildings, etc... Begin now to document what God is doing in the life of your church - not only as a historical record, but as a visual testimony to His power and faithfulness.

Where to start? I recommend you invest in a "DV" or "Mini-DV" (DV means "digital video") format video camera that can be purchased from a local electronics store like Circuit City or Fry's. They cost between \$600 and \$2,000, and make amazing pictures. Many will also allow you to "grab" still shots from the video to use in publications or on your website. It's a small investment that can yield amazing results. Then, just start shooting!

The debate on whether or not to be involved in the media is over - now the question is how to begin. I highly recommend the following resources:

Sign up for the Cooke Pictures e-mail newsletter. It's a monthly journal filled with media research, creative concepts, production resources, and great ideas.

**Sign up today at** <http://www.cookepictures.com/resources/newsletters/>

Check out the bookstore on the website of the National Religious Broadcasters at 703-330-7000 or [www.nrb.org](http://www.nrb.org):

Order the book:

Successful Christian Television - Making Your TV Ministry a Reality, by Phil Cooke. Available through local bookstores, amazon.com, or the NRB web bookstore.

On a Shoestring and a Prayer - (Producing Christian Programming on a Budget), By Doug Smart. Available through the NRB web bookstore.

Also, many basic how-to books on radio or video production and the internet can be found at Barnes and Noble or Amazon.com.

These websites are also helpful:

[www.nrb.org](http://www.nrb.org) - The National Religious Broadcasters.

[www.tfwm.com](http://www.tfwm.com) - The Inspiration Conference and Technologies for Worship

[www.cookepictures.com](http://www.cookepictures.com) - Contains a resource library with helpful information for church and ministry producers.

[www.churchmedia.net](http://www.churchmedia.net) - A great website for local churches.

[www.christiansandmedia.com](http://www.christiansandmedia.com) - The Christians and Media Conferences

[www.faithfilm.com](http://www.faithfilm.com) - Resource for Christians in the film industry.

[www.churchproduction.com](http://www.churchproduction.com) - Church Production Magazine