



The Television Producer's Perspective...

What Do You Do When You Don't Know What To Do?

by:
Phil Cooke

"I'm going to get out of this film business. It's too much for me. I'll never catch on. It's too fast. I can't tell what I'm doing or what anybody wants me to do."

-- Charlie Chaplin

What do you do when you don't know what to do? It's a fair question. In today's world of television, video, audio, computers, and the growing world of technology, every pastor, evangelist, teacher, church administrator, and audio-visual staff member is constantly faced with this important, and often horrifying question.

The fact is, *today* it's just not enough to be a competent pastor, teacher, counselor, minister of music, or administrator. Today, church and ministry leaders are faced with the nearly impossible task of not only *having expertise in their chosen field, but mastering the art of new technologies as well.*

After all, few churches or ministries would not benefit from today's advances in computers, video, sound or lighting, in either their presentation

of the gospel, or the multitude of administrative tasks that surround those ministries.

I'll never forget as a preacher's kid in the 50's and 60's when my father made the change from recording his sermons on bulky and hard to operate reel-to-reel audio tape and began using smaller audio cassettes. As the one usually stuck with the task of sitting in the little booth and ineptly operating the machines, I was thrilled. It took awhile to figure it all out, but soon all I had to do was pop in a cassette and we were off and running! *No more threading the machines... no more letting the tape run off the reels... and most importantly, no more tangling up my dad's sermon.*

We thought that audio cassettes had ushered in the space age, but in reality that change was incredibly easy compared to what church and ministry leaders are facing today. With the advent of inexpensive lighting, sound, and video technologies, nearly any church can have professional quality sound and lighting, and many are in a position to move into television and video as well. And with the advances in design and technology, the presentation possibilities are endless.

But the questions remain:

How do I do it?

Where's the best place to start?

How much will it cost?

Where can I get the best advice?

What do I do when I don't know what to do?

If you're a pastor or evangelist who's pacing the floor late at night watching Christian television thinking: "I can do that..." a teacher who's wondering how these new technologies can impact and improve his or her message... a church administrator who's wondering if his church or ministry can really afford to take the chance... or a church and ministry audio-visual

staff member who's trying to find the perfect equipment mix... there really is hope.

And the good news is you don't have to be a trained engineer, designer, or computer expert to learn the answers.

For instance, in upcoming issues we're going to look at many different possibilities: lighting, audio, music, video, broadcast television, computer technology, interactive possibilities, and explore what's both realistic and affordable for your church or outreach. In addition, we'll cover the angles: legal, financial, ethical, and others you need to understand.

Most importantly, we'll explore these areas *from the point of view of a church or ministry leader, administrator, or staff member*. After all, I'm a television producer, not an engineer. I'm interested in the *creative* aspects of technology - how it will effect my message, how much it will cost, and most important, how my audience receives that message.

We'll leave the *gigahertz*, the *lumens*, and the *scan lines* to other magazines.

So this month, I want to begin with one of the most misunderstood aspects of technology:

"State of the Art"

The term *state-of-the-art* is thrown around television as much as any other technical field and I feel sure you'll hear it often as you begin to look at any area, whether it be video, audio, lighting, computers, etc. Ideally, this term means that the piece of equipment *is the latest and most technologically superior item on the market*. In reality, it is more often a matter of what is perceived in the eyes of the beholder.

Chances are, just about every sales presentation you hear will make some reference to *state of the art*. Everyone wants to believe his or her

equipment is exactly that, and in fact, many pastors and church leaders love to refer to their own lighting, sound, computer, or video equipment in just that way. Therefore, it's vitally important that you have a realistic understanding of exactly what the term means and doesn't mean.

First of all, don't believe everything you see is *state of the art*. Chances are the real *state of the art* is actually much more advanced, and still in someone's research and development department down the street.

The fact is, technology does constantly keep improving, and it's important to stay abreast of those developments. In television and video for instance, one of the fastest changing areas today is *post-production equipment* - the equipment you use to edit a program. In the past 15 years, just about everything in the post-production arena has changed dramatically. The quality, availability, and price are vastly more favorable. Yet, even as you buy, bear in mind that *state of the art today* is going to be *passé tomorrow*.

First of all, make a choice you can live with for a long time. You will only have *state of the art* equipment for awhile. You will have *workhorse* equipment for a lot longer. Your challenge is to make sure the new model you buy today will last, and that it is part of an integrated system or in a sequence of upgrades. (*You'll find that companies don't reinvent the entire wheel each year, but they come up with new innovations every quarter, six months, or year. Look for something that has the potential of being upgraded for an extended life.*)

The four factors you should consider most strongly are:

1) **The Source:** *Who is recommending this piece of equipment? Is it a reputable source? For instance, is it an experienced producer with years of ministry and church broadcasting under his/her belt? And what are his/her credits and track record? Never forget - Christian television and*

video production is an art form all it's own and has very particular requirements. For instance, while there's a crossover, we don't necessarily use the same equipment that's used in sports television, dramatic programming, ministry programs, or news.

2) **Service:** *Can I get the equipment serviced easily? How inexpensively? Can I get spare parts? What has been the equipment's track record with other ministries or churches?*

3) **Price:** *"Most expensive" isn't always best. Least expensive isn't always cheapest - by the time you've repaired it a dozen times. Weigh track records of similar equipment against the price. Virtually everything is negotiable, especially if you are putting together a package of several types of equipment or are outfitting a small studio.*

4) **Flexibility:** *Will the piece of equipment be compatible with other pieces of equipment? Can it move from one location to another or must it be permanently installed?*

The bottom line: Get the advice of experts. Find impartial judges, consultants, and/or advisors who can help you with proper equipment and software decisions from day one.

Where do you find them? Look at other churches and ministries you admire for their effectiveness. Talk with the pastors, administrators, television and video producers, lighting or sound people, etc. You'll be surprised at how helpful they can be. After all, they've been exactly where you are today, and many have the scars to prove it.

In addition, spend the money to keep yourself and your in-house advisors updated and trained. Your staff members can't help you if they don't know exactly what's out there. That's why it's so important to get them training and exposure to new products and ideas. That training may also involve bringing in outside consultants, teachers, producers, programmers,

etc, to hold in-house workshops for your staff and volunteers to familiarize them with current techniques and equipment.

Finally, it's important to attend trade shows to really get a grasp of the big picture. Shows like Inspiration North & South, The National Religious Broadcasters Convention, and the National Association of Broadcasters Convention are examples of conventions where you'll see truly *state of the art* equipment and get a better understanding of the broad marketplace.

So why begin with understanding the term *state of the art*? Because as I travel around the country working with churches and ministries, the greatest abuses and mistakes I've seen usually revolve around this very issue. In most cases, churches thought they were buying state of the art, and in actuality, were not. In the worst cases, they not only bought lesser quality equipment, but paid far too much.

Remember - *you don't have to be a trained engineer, designer, programmer, or television producer*. You just have to know where to get the information you need to make decisions that could save your church or ministry thousands, perhaps even millions of dollars - not to mention the potentially explosive impact on your message.

Have you signed 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/>