

Media and Arts Task Force

1. The Need/Challenge

The 6,500 distinct unreached people groups of the world¹ reflect the incredible complexity, diversity, and greatness of our God. One media form, or one message, will not reach them all. As we pursue the task of world evangelization, we must identify the major priorities that will be integral to ensuring that all the peoples of the world will have the opportunity to hear the gospel, in their ‘heart’ language, near where they live, with access to a healthy, indigenous church to help them grow in faith.²

Social, cultural and linguistic barriers are keeping nearly one-third of the world’s population hidden from the gospel. Without a culturally contextualized message in their heart language, these people will never know Jesus, and an indigenous church cannot be established. In addition to cultural barriers, one quarter of the global population is illiterate. Among unevangelized peoples, the illiteracy rate soars up to 70%. Without audio-visual presentations of the gospel, the majority of these people will remain just as they are - unreached.

Unreached people need to hear, understand and respond to God’s truth in their own cultural contexts, through their preferred communication styles, languages and forms. Yet, sadly less than 5% of Christian media efforts are focused on reaching unreached people. Most of the media currently produced is not in the heart language nor adapted to their culture. Even merely dubbing foreign films is not sufficient to communicate the gospel in a dynamic, understandable way.

As new pioneer teams go to the least reached areas language and cultural barriers can make clear communication of the gospel incredibly difficult. Accurate translators (who are believers) in most of the unreached areas are most likely non-existent. Thus we need to be aware of proven methods and resources that help both short and long-term teams share the gospel message with Biblical accuracy and relevance to the culture to create understanding for our audience. (Matthew 13:23)

However, reaching unevangelized peoples is not just about preaching the gospel message. Jesus commanded us to go out and “make disciples of all nations.” To do that, churches must be planted and multiplied. Multiplication will happen on an indigenous, grassroots level only if local believers can worship in a way that is familiar to them, not foreign. Unreached peoples who have heard the message of Jesus need to see examples of how they can worship Jesus as their Lord, through the unique creative expressions God has instilled within their culture.

2. The Strategy/Present assessment of Media ministries/agencies

There are keys to discovering the most strategic way to bring heart understanding and transformation to a people group. In order to create a strategy, message, and tool that are unique for each people, we must understand the needs, the most effective media to use, and the cultural context for the message.

A number of wonderful, innovative groups are utilizing media in evangelism and discipleship efforts. However, the majority of media efforts are not contextualized for the heart language and culture of specific unreached people groups.

Create International has made it their ministry goal to produce culturally relevant media tailor-made resources for unreached people. Currently there is a potential audience of over 2 billion unreached peoples who can be reached through 50 of their culturally relevant evangelistic films.

But we need hundreds more joining in our and other media ministry efforts to complete the task and see some from every tribe, tongue, language and nation worshipping God forever. (Rev 5:9) That is our mandate and way forward from Tokyo 2010.

3. The Way Forward: Intentionality, Strategies, and Determination

To complete the task and mandate we will need greater intentionality to create media tools clothed in the culture and in the heart language of unreached peoples.

A. Some media tools:

- Cultural Arts

Serious consideration must be given to the nontechnical media already available in the audience's culture. The Christian message conveyed through a familiar indigenous expression is far more likely to be embraced by the audience than the same message introduced through a strange or foreign medium. New Christians who have received the message through a familiar medium can quickly pass the message on to others, without needing to spend time learning a foreign medium. Traditional cultural forms such as music, art, storytelling, and dance can be redirected to reveal one's true relationship with God and to communicate his message of love and salvation.

- Film

Many agencies and churches have partnered together to distribute millions of their films in video compact disc (VCD) and DVD formats worldwide. The Jesus Film is produced in 1,000 languages to an estimated viewership of 6 billion peoples to date.

“Among all the varieties of evangelism, film makes one of the deepest impressions on recipients. Even more than those who hear a proclaimed message, or read words of Scripture or listen to a friend's witness.” Atlas of Global Christianity p. 306.

- Internet

The continuing growth of the Internet is phenomenal. In many countries, Internet usage is doubling every one hundred days! Internet usage is increasing in several Middle Eastern countries by more than 200 percent. Most students worldwide have free access to the Internet; among graduates and young professionals, Internet access in many countries may be as high as 90 percent. Internet cafes are popping up all over the unevangelized world and are particularly popular in poorer countries where “pay-for-use” phone shops are very common. This is strategically significant information for those wanting to influence the new generation of unreached peoples and nations. The challenge to the church is to use the Internet for evangelism! “The Internet is the first medium that allows anyone with reasonably inexpensive equipment to publish to a wide audience. It is the first medium that distributes information globally at almost no cost.”³

Communication technology is reshaping the world around us. Previously, to communicate with tens of thousands or even millions of people in their own language, one needed to utilize very expensive high-tech electronic media. Now, with the ability to capture the message using new digital technology combined with careful cultural research, reaching the masses cheaply and effectively is possible!

From Evangelism to Church Planting: Discipling New Believers

Discipleship tools are being created to help new believers in a particular people group understand how they could start contextual home fellowships that are both faithful to Scripture and relevant to their culture. The response to these videos has been dramatic. The local actors, themselves believers from a Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist backgrounds, told us that these films would also be very effective for

evangelism. This is confirmed by testimony after testimony of people who have given their lives to the Lord after viewing these presentations. We are hearing many testimonies like this: a new believer was viewing the contextual worship video with his wife who was not yet a believer. After the presentation, his wife exclaimed, “If that is what you have been talking about, then yes, I am interested. I could worship Jesus like that!”

B. An integrated media strategy

Missions’ current need is not for a new, one-time approach, but for a coordinated process that combines various media forms over a period of time. The combined use of multimedia elements, e.g., music and visuals, increases the emotive and persuasive appeal of the presentation. It’s also important to remember that media alone is not enough; “media combined with human interaction is one of the most effective means of communication.”⁴ A follow-up with group discussion also increases retention and allows for clarification of the message. Media can optimize every level of church growth and discipling nations. For instance: Radio spots and flyer distribution could spark community interest in attending a movie or short video showing. At the movie showing, tracts or MP3 messages could be distributed. Having a printed tract or audio tool in hand for people can help bring the message home to them as individuals, giving them something to take home and reflect on privately. The distributed literature or verbal request could extend an invitation to a home Bible study; Christians in the Bible study could then develop relationships that lead to a conversion of the attendee.

After conversion, a workbook and video for new Christians could be used to enhance the Bible study during the week; radio and TV programs could help the new believer grow in faith. A multimedia kit (MP3, VCD, workbook, and correspondence) could be given to the new leaders providing discipleship in some aspect of biblical education. Internet Bible training courses, including streaming video of lecturers and graphic illustrations of the lessons could also be made available.

Focus: To focus on creating integrated media packages for field workers who are laboring among any of the 168 least evangelized mega people groups (unreached people groups over 1 million, and less than 50% evangelized). These packages are specially designed to meet the broad spectrum of needs involved in reaching unevangelized peoples and establishing an indigenous church.

Distinctive: The resources are created specifically for the target people group, utilizing indigenous actors, arts, music, costumes, settings, and in the people’s heart language. The evangelistic films weave the gospel into a story that the people will relate with. The contextual gathering videos show an example of what an indigenous “church” could look like, if the people worshipped using their own cultural forms.

The vision for nation discipling is to see men and women reconciled to God, released into their gifting and finding their place in fulfilling the Great Commission. They will do so as they are free to worship and work through their cultural expressions, in order to impact their people group to see transformation in every sphere of their shared life.

Several mission organizations get some help with the necessary research and planning of the effective use of media through media strategists. These strategists can help missionaries consider how to effectively use media in six different tactical areas: evangelism, conversion, discipleship, leadership training, church planting, and initiating church planting movements.

Some strategies to consider: “the **more** in the way forward”

- More Internet partnerships and local and regional follow up of inquiries to evangelistic websites reaching Hindus, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikhs and other religious blocks of UPG languages. More multi-language evangelistic & discipleship websites on the internet need to be produced
- More contextual additions to existing films (opening and endings to existing and newly produced films, i.e. JESUS film and other feature films)

- More mobilisation videos and other tools for top sending nations and widely spoken languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, French, Hindi, etc.)
- Contextual artwork to assist orality teams and audio storying sets among UPGs
- More appropriate contextual resources: Produce evangelism training tool kit and viral evangelistic videos in various formats (short and dynamic gospel presentations in various formats.)
- More Distribution: Greater use of technology, knowledge of current devices and production of inexpensive MP4 players to share films to all peoples
- More equipped media and mission mobile teams challenging the Body of Christ toward the unreached and equipping outreach teams to reach out to UPGs in a way they can understand
- Developing more Evangelistic, Mobilization and Discipleship materials for children of unreached peoples

What a media partnership could accomplish: One major focus plan proposed

20/20 vision partnership campaign:

Produce and distribute contextual media resources for every one of the least evangelized Mega People by 2020 so that every UPG can clearly see and understand the gospel message.

Concluding Remarks and challenge

At this point in history, while we carefully select the most effective technologies for each context, there is an even larger movement toward integrating the technologies themselves. The “convergence” of television, satellite, mobile telecommunications, and the Internet will spark a revolution in how we see and interact with our world. It will literally launch the world into an unprecedented free-flow of information that will dwarf the effect experienced by the invention of the printing press! Almost overnight, the simplest evangelistic websites will have an international television ministry. Those who have a presence on the Internet now, will be first in line to reap the rewards. All of this has brought the Internet closer than ever before to over a billion people. As Christians we stand at a very important point in human history and the evangelization of the world.

Passion and determination are two keys to being an effective communicator: passion for the Lord and His heart to reach all peoples, and determination to keep pressing on despite obstacles. We must never give up until all peoples have heard! Media production can be relatively expensive and time consuming, but when the goal is clear, the creativity, energy, and resourcefulness are released to get the job done effectively! As communicators of the good news, we must constantly be seeking to utilize all forms of technology to ensure wider and more efficient communication of our message worldwide. Communicators must work hard to choose the appropriate media to communicate a contextualized message for salvation, discipleship, and community transformation. All the passion and determination in the world still falls short unless our ministries are anointed, and only humility will generate the blessing of God. He wants our involvement, using all of our gifts, by all possible means, to bring all the nations the greatest story ever told. Let’s take full advantage of all the multiplicity of media forms, ask God for new insight and creativity, and together with him create new communication tools that will bring salvation and transformation to the unreached.

God has millions of new ways to reach the peoples of this earth, and he will give them to us if we seek him earnestly. The apostle Paul’s words ring true for us today, “so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

Have we exhausted all possible means? In discipling all nations, and finishing the task of world evangelization, we must follow the admonitions of the apostle Paul, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s

foundation. Rather, as it is written: ‘Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand’” (Rom. 15:20–21). Paul’s ambition and devotion to God’s call to extend the kingdom of God, ignited a passion in him that could not be quenched, a passion that drove him to the frontiers. Following his example, let’s take the gospel to all peoples, discipling all nations.

Footnotes

- 1 Joshua Project website
- 2 Paul Eshleman “A North star report”
- 3 Web evangelism bulletin 2009
- 4 World Association of Christian Communication 2004 Bulletin

References

- Eshleman, Paul, “A North Star Report,” Lausanne strategy working group report, 2008
Sogaard, Viggo, Media in Church and Mission, Willam Carey Library, 1993