

## **NEXT STEPS: Making the foray into Mobile Ministry**

by Marty Lange

After reading the results of the survey “The Voice of the Next Generation” some may be inspired to move forward and do something in mobile ministry but may not know where to start. Following on from the survey, here are some possibilities for those interested in taking further action.

Learning how to leverage the power of mobile technology is important in order to be relevant in the lives of today’s youth. This is just as true for minority ethnic youth as it is for others. We are proposing four areas an individual or an organization can explore, get training in, and begin implementing fairly quickly: Social Media, SMS, Media Content, and Apps.

### **SMS:**

Text messaging is undoubtedly the biggest use of mobile phones worldwide. In 2014 there were 9.2 Trillion text messages sent worldwide. In January of 2015, 26 billion SMS text were sent every day.<sup>1</sup>

The “La Voz de la Nueva Generación” survey results indicate a great willingness among those aged 12 to 24 to receive text messages of hope, encouragement and prayer. This is an opportunity for the Church to build on, creating lists of subscribers and sending them micro-messages on a regular basis, or as might be appropriate for events that are happening in the community. The key is developing messages that are relevant to the subscriber’s life and that speak to him or her in an inspiring and helpful manner, all in just a relatively few words. These micro-messages emphasize only one point that is made in a memorable way.

The Church can be creative in how to add subscribers to their lists, starting with adding all of their youth to a “group” on it’s phone. The youth can invite their friends to be part of the group. Once a list is built and the messages are being sent, responses from subscribers will reveal the themes that are meeting a felt need. More messages can then be developed along this topic.

*Suggested links:*

[How To Use Text Messages To Connect With People](#)  
[Short and Sweet Scripture Thoughts for Youth](#)

### **Social Media:**

Facebook is making agreements with service providers around the world to offer access to the Internet and Facebook for free.<sup>2</sup> This presents great opportunities for those churches and Christian ministries that have accounts on Facebook, Google+ and WhatsApp. When their social media pages are updated on a regular basis with news, photos, videos and event notifications, they can easily build their user base and foster a feeling of community.

Through their social media connections, churches and ministries can raise awareness and promote the use of Scripture, apps, music videos, music albums, dramas, Scriptures and publications that can be accessed on phones. Direct links can be embedded in their posts, so anyone visiting their page can launch from their page to obtain the promoted product.

The Church has a the opportunity to learn how to use social media to encourage and build up the Body of Christ, rather than using it to criticize other Christians. Social media is very powerful and can be used for great good, but it can also cause great damage. In the past, other media (e.g. radio) have been used to condemn other believers who don't line up exactly with a particular doctrinal stance. Since social media is a public platform, a strong effort should be made to maintain Christian unity rather than for destructive purposes.



Jesus said “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (Jn. 13:35) If we don't, we can easily damage our ability to shine the light of Christ into the world.

*Suggested links:*

[Social Media Guide for Ministry by Nils Smith \(hard copy book\)](#)

[Social Media 101 by Cru](#)

### **Media Content:**

Creating content that will be consumed on mobile phones, and especially smartphones, represents a new challenge for the Church. It means focusing less on generating printed materials and putting more time, energy and resources into creating non-print media such as audio recordings, videos and images. It means moving away from passages of text, audios, and videos that take a long time to “consume,” and instead, creating short, easily “consumed” programs instead.

An overwhelming number of young people responding to our survey showed that they want to hear a Bible story in their language. This represents an opportunity for the Church to focus on producing Bible stories in audio format because they have an audience waiting for their product. There is a lot of room for creativity— Scripture dramatized in the local language, dramas that take a bit of artistic license, or contextualized Bible stories are just a few ideas. For groups that have a larger creative pool to draw from, audio soap operas are a very effective way to bring Scriptural

principles into the context of everyday life. The audio soap operas can introduce themes where Scripture and culture meet. Listeners can evaluate their lives when hearing how the characters in the story, very much like themselves, are transformed when they apply the principles of Scripture to their lives.

The number one use of cellphones, according to the survey, was listening to music. This is a wonderful opportunity for the Church to engage in producing Scripture-based music in the local language and style(s), as well as public performances of that music. Multiple distribution channels are available: mp3s, MicroSD cards, closed wi-fi networks (eg. [BibleBox](#)), and YouTube —all of which can be accessed from smart phones.

It has been forecasted that video will account for 60% of app traffic by 2020.<sup>3</sup> Since smartphones can play videos, local churches with indigenous congregations would be prudent to learn some simple video-making skills to create short videos. The videos can cover a wide range of topics. The key element is including Scripture in each video in the language of the viewer. This gives them, whether literate or not, the opportunity to hear God's Word and with repetition, memorize it.

YouTube offers free video-hosting accounts. They are called YouTube "channels." YouTube channels include a basic video editor, so all editing can be done on-line. YouTube offers thousands of tutorial videos on how to plan, shoot, edit and upload videos. There are also some good video editors for both Android and iOS phones.



Cellphone users are also very fond of images overlaid with text. The Church can experiment with this format, finding creative people from the 12-24 year-old generation who can create the images, and older believers who can make sure the image and text present a coherent message.

It is also very easy to produce eBooks that can be read on smartphones. This represents a paradigm shift from the way that churches and seminaries currently operate. The Church can encourage the authoring of books that will be distributed as ePub books and/or PDF files. Many tools are already available for producing eBooks. eBooks can be created from previously existing materials, such as Bible studies, Sunday School materials, and evangelistic materials.

The cost of producing an eBook is minimal, especially compared to the cost of publishing a paper book. This is a tremendous financial saving to the Church and its congregants, in light of the fact that the younger generation is even less likely to purchase a paper book or paper Bible when they can read it on their phone instead.

Another option is to offer a "dial-a-message" service where callers dial a published phone number and hear a daily or weekly Scripture-based message. In the Philippines, one person inserted flyers in a local newspaper with a few words that encouraged readers to call a certain number. He had over a thousand callers in just a few days.<sup>4</sup>

*Suggested links:*

[Creating Culturally Relevant Content](#)  
[Available Audio and Video Resources](#)  
[Global Recordings Network Good News](#)  
[How To Create a YouTube Account](#)  
[How To Create a YouTube Channel](#)  
[How To Set Up A Dial-In “Message-A-Day” Service](#)

### **Apps:**

This is a new area for the Church to explore. Apps are an effective way to get young people engaged with the Scriptures and Scripture-based content on their phones. There are many formats that can be used to present the content: games, quizzes, digital songbooks, storybooks, how-to tutorials, sermon series, etc.

A lot of planning goes into creating an app. The basic steps are to determine who your target audience is, understand their needs and desires, and design the best format for presenting Scriptural content. All of these steps need wisdom and planning.



Previously, developing apps was a costly endeavor or something that required a programmer. But with the advent of Scripture App Builder and Reading App Builder, it has become quite easy to create apps in a short time. If the planning has been done correctly, putting the resources together into an app can be done quickly. For more information about Scripture App Builder and Reading App Builder, see <http://software.sil.org/scriptureappbuilder> and <http://software.sil.org/readingappbuilder> These App Builder workshops are a week long and are offered in English, Spanish and French.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the church in the next ten years is learning how to create apps that engage the user to keep them coming back for more. This means taking time to study and learn how to create games, quizzes, and information apps that motivate the user to keep engaging with the app. **It means being willing to invest the money and human resources necessary to create an excellent product, taking time to pray and ask God for guidance in knowing what to develop, being immersed in Scripture, and being sensitive to His leading.**

People who speak a minority language will often install an app that is available in their language just because of the novelty of it. However, unless they continue engaging with it, there is no difference between that app and books that sit unpurchased in warehouses or websites which no one visits. The goal is to motivate them to install the app and like it so much that they keep coming back to it on a regular basis because it meets a felt need or provides them with something that they can apply to their daily life.

*Suggested links:*

Apps:

[Scripture App Builder Downloads and Links](#)

[Scripture App Builder Documentation and Tutorials](#)

[Reading App Builder Downloads and Links](#)

[Reading App Builder Documentation and Tutorials](#)

[Subsplash Ministry Apps](#)

[MIT App Inventor](#)

Group Engagement:

[Bible Listening Groups](#)

[Using What'sApp for Group Bible Studies](#)

[10 Tips for Digital Engagement](#)

[Digital Engagement Tools and Websites](#)

### **Distribution of Media Content and Apps:**

Without a solid distribution plan in place from the very beginning, even the greatest products can go unused. As the Church begins to develop plans, strategies, content and products for a billion new cellphone owners, it is critical that distribution be considered from the very beginning.

Every community and people group has natural channels of distribution. Churches, hospitals, radio and television stations, public transportation systems are all examples of places where products can be promoted (advertised) and even distributed. Each community must evaluate the best channels through which they can distribute their products. Since all of the products for cellphones are digital, there are many options by which they can be distributed. MicroSD cards, Bluetooth, closed wi-fi networks (eg. [BibleBox](#)), Google Play Store and Apple App Store, or the Internet are just some of the ways to offer content to your target audience.

*Suggested links:*

Planning:

[Planning - Mobile Assessment for Your Country](#)

[Planning - Priorities of Product Development](#)

Distribution:

[BibleBox: A portable, closed wi-fi network](#)

[Sharing Apps and Files Where There Is No Internet](#)

[How To Set Up an Account in the Google Play Store](#)

[Three-In-One: The Lightstream](#)

### **Conclusion:**

The best time to start doing something is now. Every day, thousands of youth around the world are obtaining their first phone and are eager to start using it. Individuals and businesses are producing content and apps that appeal to these new users, encouraging them to spend their time and money on apps and services. Unfortunately, much of the content that is being offered is of negative value.

The Church also has the opportunity to engage these youth with Scripture and Scripture-based materials. But it is important to act now, while this wave<sup>5</sup> is still building. Many minority language speakers have smartphones and would be interested in apps and content in their language. This offers never-before-dreamed-of possibilities to the Church, which values the life-transforming Scriptures, to produce apps and content in the minority languages that draw people into a relationship with Christ.

In order to do that, it means taking a serious look at how we are currently ministering to youth and adults, and being willing to make some changes. It means doing some studies, developing new skills, and investing money in mobile phone strategies. It means taking some risks.

May God bless you as you seek how to leverage this new technology to grow His Kingdom.

Marty Lange

SIL Americas - Mobile Technology for Scripture Engagement

*More suggested links:*

[Mobile Ministry Made Easy Guide](#)

[Equipping Short-Term Teams for Mobile Ministry](#)

[Your Phone God's Glory - A How-To video series](#)

[Virally Share Gospel Media with Mobile Phones](#)

[Mobile Technology Case Studies and Research](#)

Footnotes:

1. Tomi Ahonen Almanac 2015, pg. 65
2. See <http://www.peruthisweek.com/news-facebooks-internetorg-arrives-in-peru-to-offer-free-internet-107679>
3. See <http://techcrunch.com/2015/06/02/6-1b-smartphone-users-globally-by-2020-overtaking-basic-fixed-phone-subscriptions/>
4. Allen Derksen of Telemensahe in a presentation to the MMF Consultation in Orlando Florida, December 2013
5. See <http://communities-dominate.blogs.com/brands/2008/05/deeper-insights.html>