

MEDIA IN MISSIONS: POTENTIAL FOR MOVEMENT

Peter Higham

My passion is for training people to use media and technology as a ministry tool in missions. More than eight years ago in a remote Aboriginal community, in the outback of Australia, I sat with an Aboriginal elder using a tablet and a solar power player. Both devices were filled with God's Word in various languages. I firmly believed that as a missionary one of the most effective tools that could be used to reach the community was God's Word being packaged in a way that could be understood in an audio/visual format. I witnessed countless times how gospel media, which was being played to people in their local language, brought tears to their eyes, softened the proud hearts, and challenged many to consider allowing God the chance to transform their life.

Years later I am in Ghana and the same passion remains in me to see media being used as a tool to reach people with a message of hope and truth. My approach to using media in the mission's context has changed slightly as the focus is now on training others to use the tools of this day and age to reach the audiences around them.

The COVID-19 lockdown period in Ghana stirred my heart to action and I knew I needed to do something more to help individual missionaries and churches in regards to using Media in Ministry. Now more than ever technology has shown the importance of connections. God made us to relate to each other through whatever means possible. Therefore connections are vital, connections are lasting, and connections allow new doors of opportunities to reach the unreached. Connections bring forth a blessing that goes both ways in giving and receiving.

So, along with the assistance of two other field missionaries, I created an online series called 'Media in Missions' which was focused on educating, encouraging and equipping people to do their ministry via media. I thought the participants would be a small group of Ghanaians but soon there were registrations from 10 African countries.

Over the years, the Lord has allowed me to have close connections with the Mobile Ministry Forum (MMF) team, which is a network of missional innovators representing more than 250 ministries. Media ministry leaders from this network over the past 2 years reviewed thousands of online resources in order to produce a comprehensive introductory-level media ministry curriculum. The design of the 'Mobiles, Media, and Ministry: Lessons for Trainers and Learners' curriculum suited me well with my desire to help train and empower individuals and small teams to connect with the lost through media devices.

Having had a small involvement in putting the lessons together, I knew this material would be the best starting point. I got to work preparing a 'Road Map' for training over a 7-week period that would be suitable for an African context. The training was to cover the following: *Foundations of Media Ministry ~ Mobile Ministry ~ Social Media ~ Photography ~ Video & Audio & Communications.*

Countless hours behind the computer were put into preparation for each lesson but as the team logged onto zoom each week, we knew it was worth it. Those participating in the training were missionaries on the field, mission agency representatives, pastors, students, media creatives and more. Each person represented tremendous potential for taking media ministry to the next level.

Early in the training the following question was asked: **How do you think mission agencies, missionaries, and the church should help feed the digital hunger that is growing?** Digital hunger can be explained in this way: Just like when one is hungry or thirsty, they will do everything possible to fill that thirst or desire. It is the same with digital hunger. We live in a world with a population of 7.7 billion. Nearly 60% of the world is connected to the Internet and roughly 50% of the world's population are connected via social media. **The world has come such a long way in an incredibly short time!** People have become so accustomed to using their devices with on

average people spending more than 2 hours a day on social media alone. When one is not 'connected' as such, they feel isolated and disconnected. People are consuming media more than ever before and the church can definitely build on this and make use of this opportunity.

Therefore, now more than ever the Gospel must be present and visual on all levels. Believers must be investing into using media strategically to reach the lost, strengthen the church, restore hope, reinforce truth, which in the end translates into lives being transformed. The participants in the course responded to this obvious challenge by stating, *'We need to start doing more digital evangelism. We need to be more present on social media. We need to be involved in creating Gospel media. We need to be involved in distributing Gospel Media.'* What an opportunity!

Our media world is driven by visual and audio stories. This can be anything from film and television to podcasts to stories on social media. Because this is a means by which most people in the world communicate, it's important for ministries to learn to do it well.

I believe that media ministry can be summed up in one word: 'communication'. Everything we do is a form of communication, whether it be sending or receiving. God is a Communicator; it is a part of his ultimate nature, so he expects us to be communicators as well. When communicating, we must seriously consider the following three words: **Who, What, Where!**

Who – Who are we really trying to reach? We cannot reach everyone, but we can all reach someone. Many times, our focus is too wide on reaching the whole world, when maybe God is just trying to encourage us for example to use WhatsApp to reach university students.

What – What am I communicating? Our message is critical as it must be tailored to meet the needs of our audience. As well as being clear on our message, we need to be certain on what response we are expecting from our audience. For example, before we create a design with a scripture on it and post it on our Facebook page, we need to consider what we want people to understand from it. Equally important is to think of what do we want people to do as a result of seeing the content we have created. Maybe we just want to encourage someone by

our media message but we need to make sure that the message they receive is the same than what we intended.

Where – Where will we connect with our audience? Do we know where our audience is? Are they on social media or messaging platforms, or will they be found at events, or only at the individual face to face level?

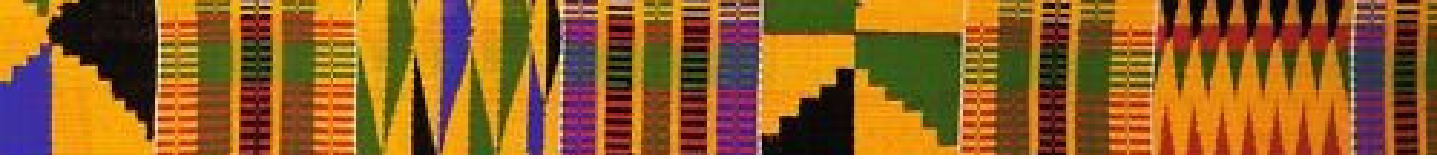
The 3W's keep the focus right!

Halfway during the training, I wondered if the team was truly educating, encouraging and equipping people to do ministry via email. Doing all the training online via zoom brought its challenges - mainly with the fact that interactive aspect was limited. So, a survey was run and the couple of comments below confirmed that a need was being met:

- *I am grateful how it is done so far. God bless you and strengthen you for offering this useful training.*
- *Thank you for the sessions, they are really broadening my knowledge, perspective and passion with regards to media in missions.*
- *But of recent I've been a bit dissatisfied, a sense of unfulfillment you might say, I felt I ran out of ideas in a way...but these sessions have been so inspiring and have me going back to the drawing board.*
- *The information is challenging and exposes us to the many ways we can send the gospel out.*
- *I am encouraged. And I am planning to introduce some of the things I learnt in "my social ministry".*
- *A lot of eye-opening stuff.*
- *I am challenged to do something with the information I have received. My passion is awakened.*

The training may have finished but in a sense it's only the beginning. Many have committed to a further round of bonus training sessions because they understand the huge potential technology brings. **'For such a time as this our desire is to use what God has given us to be a blessing to others.'**

My name is Pete and I am passionate about seeing God's name proclaimed in this world. I recognise in this very moment of time that we need to get seri-



ous about reaching people with a message of ‘Hope, Truth and Love’ that connects with their hearts.

So, now is the time more than ever to refocus our approach to using Media in Ministry. The opportunities are endless, the potential for movement is huge, but what will be our response.

“Lord Jesus, help us to be in tune with your voice so that we know what we need to do in this time and season so that your name is glorified. Amen.”

Peter Higham, from New Zealand serves as a Missionary in Ghana with ACTS 13, a ministry of WEC. Pete is creative and highly skilled in various media tools and is passionate about utilizing media to fulfil the Great Commission. Peter voluntarily serves on the Communication Team of GEMA and also offers media training to interested churches and mission organisations. Pete is married to Tiina and they are blessed with two kids.