

# REDEEMING TECHNOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH

Using the newest tools to connect with the culture

BY SCOTT MURLEY

**H**ave you ever spent a protracted period of time in a foreign country? If you have, you'll have experienced culture shock. That vague, queasy feeling in the pit of your stomach that says, "I don't belong here, I don't understand what's going on, no one understands me, I am alone."

Two weeks in a strange land is not really enough time to get one acquainted with culture shock. It takes a good six months to a year in a foreign land, driving on the 'wrong' side of the road—with a different language thrown in for good measure—to fully appreciate what it's like to be lonely and unable to communicate with those around you.

The perplexing thing is, we can all communicate, we just don't do it in the same language, or even on the same type of phone! Our parents call each other on land-lines, we talk to each other on cell phones, and our kids text each other in the back of the van. A phone is in use in each instance, but the mode of communication is vastly different.

Can you imagine growing up in a strange land, where you understand no one, and everyone seems so weird—like they've just stepped off a spacecraft from another planet?

**"Mr. Watson! Come quick, I need you."**

Alexander Graham Bell

My friend and his daughter got into a 'discussion' some months back. She was out at a youth event and the deal was if she needed a ride home, she'd call. There was no call, so my friend went to bed. The next morning, some old-fashioned husband/wife/daughter communication got going precisely because my friend's daughter did not call in the manner expected. Turns out she 'texted' him—that's text the verb, not the noun—and couldn't believe he didn't check his text messages while in bed. "Why didn't you call me?" he asked. "But I texted you" came the response. They all still live in the same house ... I think. Just because you're using a phone, doesn't mean people at the other end are connecting with you.

**"Blessed are the cheesemakers."**

The Life of Brian – 1979 – Scene 2

As a child, my mother would call our wintery visits to Massey Hall our 'evening to get cultured.' Of course, the implication was that we were going to listen to classical music and thereby be raised higher. With me, I'm not quite sure the experiment worked. I don't think anyone would argue that classical music is a type of communication, but it isn't 'culture' per se. Art—whether that be music, the spoken word, drama, photography ... which are all various types of communication—is informed by the culture in

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which it is conceived. Successful communicators know this, and use it to their advantage.

Culture is really a common basis of understanding, and you can't force someone to appreciate something outside of their culture, no matter how much you happen to value it. You can, however, make an effort to understand and value someone else's culture. As communicators entrusted with getting a tremendously important message across, we should stretch to do so. A little bit of culture has the tendency to turn us into something new, which is why we need it to make cheese.

**"I know only enough of God to want to worship him, by any means ready at hand."**

Annie Dillard

It is not enough to earnestly believe that the newest piece of technology will 'really help us connect with the culture', which it will, but content in the correct cultural context must be present as well. I believe in using whatever tool is at hand—with excellence—to help connect and drive the point home.

In the work that I do, I am continually amazed by the number of people who are trained in the art of communication who use the wrong 'phone' when attempting to connect with a different culture. Christ, who was arguably the greatest Storyteller ever, never fell into this trap. He told stories with whatever tool was at hand to connect with his listeners. Cultural authenticity and content are keys and should be combined with choosing the correct 'phone' on which to place the call.

We should not equate production values with connectivity, and we need to continually use the appropriate words, hardware, software, and environment, to draw our assemblies into Communion with the Most High. We must communicate with excellence in a culturally-relevant manner, to bring the family together in unified praise of him, and then perhaps to party together a little afterwards.

**"Preach the Gospel always. If necessary, use words."**

St. Francis of Assisi

*Scott Murley spends most of his time making people and technology live together peacefully. If you wish to respond to this article, please contact us at [magazine@cmacan.org](mailto:magazine@cmacan.org)*



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A poster for General Assembly 2010 in Antalya, Turkey. The poster features a man in a white robe walking on a path towards a large stone archway. The text on the poster includes the title 'GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2010', the dates 'March 16-20', and the location 'Antalya, Turkey'. Below this, there are three bullet points: 'Retrace the path of the Apostle Paul', 'Review our strategy to reach the unreached', and 'Renew your passion for the world'. The poster has a decorative border.