Incorporating Cybermissions Strategies Into General Missions Approaches

By John Edmiston

Introduction

Cybermissions and general missions are alienated. High-tech and high-touch are being pushed apart by a deep theological and missiological misunderstanding of the nature of technology in spreading the fragrance of Christ.

Cybermissions is the application of digital ministry techniques to cross-cultural missions. Either alone or in partnership and synergy with conventional missions approaches.

At the moment, we tend to have specialized technology agencies such as TWR, GRN, MAF, and Faith Comes By Hearing alongside the more general church-planting agencies. This task of integration is a hard problem. Engineers just don't fit into many missions agencies and general missions have no criteria for understanding how to fit technology into ministry in general. This paper is about listing and explaining the necessary framework for integration.

The key term in the integration of technology projects into general missions approached is *quality assurance*; a definition of quality assurance is: "Quality assurance is a system for ensuring a desired level of quality in the development, production, or delivery of products and services." (Dictionary.com)

In this context quality means "lack of variance in output". So, to use a simple non-technical example, a preacher who delivers a wonderful sermon one week and a dreadful sermon the next lacks quality. When the preacher learns a system for exegesis and a system for sermon preparation, then he or she produces a consistently good sermon each week. That is quality assurance in action. Creating systems to reduce unnecessary variation in outcomes so that consistently good Kingdom results are obtained.

 In project management terms quality is the ability to produce consistently good results day-in and day-out. Quality in missions IT projects is about consistently achieving good Kingdom results whenever technology is applied to the task.

Unfortunately many technology in missions projects are disappointing at best. Technology in missions has now got a bad reputation. It is frequently seen as throwing big bucks at huge systems that the organization cannot maintain or manage in the long-term, which deliver awkward results and which eventually burn everyone out. This paper is about how to avoid those disappointing results.

I often say that: "The **only** way to ensure a consistently good result in **anything** (from washing the dishes to landing a rocket on a comet) - is with a good system - bad systems only produce bad results. "

A Brief Theology of Cybermissions

At this point the reader may be wishing for some biblical basis, since words like "system", "quality assurance", and "results" can, at first, seem rather unspiritual. The mere systems of men, the ways of this present age.

However faithfulness is simply the ability to consistently produce good results, to turn the one talent into ten talents. Diligence just means having a disciplined and wise system. Chaotic and lazy people lack systems. Jesus calls such chaotic, lazy people "wicked servants" (Matthew 24:28, 25:26).

The seeking of *chokma* or practical wisdom and knowledge means that God teaches people the correct way to harvest and process dill and cumin (Isaiah 28:23-29) or to do technical work such as building the tabernacle (Exodus 28:3, 35:25) and chokma is defined by Smend as "the art of reaching one's end by the use of the right means". Thus godly Cybermissions is chokma (wisdom).

"Doing good to all" (Galatians 6:10) obviously involves a commitment to use the latest beneficial technologies in order to create "shalom". This shalom involves God's Kingdom rule in all areas of life including managing the earth, arts and crafts and the spread of the gospel. Cybermissions is the use of a beneficial technology to create shalom through the spread of the gospel by digital means.

To those who object to systems, in need to be pointed out that systems are already a part of life in missions. Such systems include: systems of Bible interpretation, systems of Bible translation and translation checking, systems of support-raising, systems of member care, systems of recruitment, prayer systems for people groups, and systems of in-service training. If any system is inadequate or haphazard (e.g. member care systems) then painful results ensue.

When digital technology integrates seamlessly into such systems (such as word processors in Bible translation) then the technology enables the production of consistently good Kingdom results. When the technology is alien to those systems (such as giving iPads to Bible students in an indigent community thus disrupting the social order) then it does more harm than good.

Technology is not an end in itself. Technology is just one of the means to quality, where quality is defined as "producing consistently good Kingdom results". Technology exists alongside other Kingdom activities and alongside prayer, good doctrine, and holy living. This paper will explore how technology can be integrated with general missions approaches so that together they achieve consistently good Kingdom results.

Four Concepts

When it comes to the task of integrating digital ministry with more conventional ministry it helps to hold the following *four concepts* in mind:

1. **Information Is Digital** - all pure information can be digitized in some way as text, an audio file, a video file, an ebook, or even as Morse code. Once digitized it can reach the intended recipients through devices they own (such as mobile phones or radios) or devices they have access to (such as computers in Internet cafes). The information-only component of Bible and theological training can often be delivered most effectively using digital ministry strategies which may also foster it "going viral" in the target community.

2. **Impartation Is Spiritual** – the impartation of grace, anointing, the laying on hands, the reception of spiritual gifts and the ministry of the sacraments are spiritual impartations. They cannot and must not be digitized. They are "beyond information" and are a vital part of the priestly role of the local church. However digital ministry can assist such as the use of projectors during worship services or as means to invite and motivate people to attend.

3. **Formation Is Personal** - discipleship, spiritual direction and the training and formation of leadership are intensely personal face-to-face processes. As Elijah mentored Elisha or Paul mentored Timothy there is a deep personal touch and a knowing of each other as persons. However when missionaries have to move out-of-country they may still keep up some relationships of formation by the use of digital tools such as email, Skype or even social media.

4. **Transformation Is Communal** – social transformation proceeds from a Spirit-filled community such as the Jerusalem Church, Paul's Bible college in the house of Tyrannus or the Moravians at Herrnhut. Digital strategies can facilitate communication within such a transformational community and network groups of transformational communities (such as YWAM bases). Furthermore community formation can begin in cyberspace then move into the real world, or even exist only in cyberspace. The Internet can be utilized as a marketplace for creative and transformational ideas and online course can ignite the formation of communities of practitioners. Digital media can also be used to recruit members for such a community.

With these four rubrics in mind, let's look at some real world applications to missions. How could Cybermissions be integrated with more conventional missions to enhance, perhaps, the showing of the Jesus film among an unreached but not particularly hostile audience? With the prevalence of mobile devices in most parts of the world, invitations to the showing could be sent out via SMS messaging. Responses to the film could involve the collection of mobile phone numbers and follow up SMS messages with key Bible verses on salvation could then be sent out. When very large audiences are present text messaging may be the only feasible method of indicating a positive response to the message of the film.

Two additional concepts to ponder are:

a) Put the information online and do the relationships offline. For instance in discussing the Trinity it is generally better to build the relationship over coffee and then say : "Well that is a good question but it is a really complicated and divisive question but I know of a great website that discusses that in depth. Here is the website address…" That way the relationship is kept intact and the information is supplied to them from an expert source.

b) Increasingly, *the first touch is always a digital touch*. Before people go to a church they will look at the church's website online. Before people attend a Bible college, a Christian concert or a seminar they will seek out social media validation and information about the Bible College or Christian event. This is almost universal in the USA and Europe and increasingly so in South-East Asia.

Ministries without a good digital presence are becoming invisible. If joining an event or receiving a publication involves sending in a letter by "snail mail" then increasingly no one wants to be bothered. They would prefer to simply fill out a web form on their computer or mobile device.

Follow-up of listeners of missionary short-wave radio ministries (such as FEBC, Reach Global, or TWR) is now almost entirely digital. Missions projects with broken or inadequate digital response systems are missing out on a major portion of their effectiveness.

So integration between digital and conventional is now essential! Missions can no longer ignore mobile technology, websites, databases, response systems, collaborative software and encryption technology. **However much of this integration is left to the IT department and is not driven by C-level or board level strategic input.**

How can the integration of digital with conventional be done in a situations such as church-planting? One avenue is the networking of new church-plants, house churches and cell groups and particularly in ensuring that they are adequately resourced with Biblically-rooted theology through a common website or via a digital repository on a hard drive, SD card or USB stick.

Such digital collections of resources need to be carefully curated for relevance, cultural suitability, and linguistic and educational factors. They also should generally be a limited collection of high-quality articles, videos or MP3 files. Huge, poorly curated digital collections may even come across as frustrating or intimidating.

I am not maintaining that digital strategies can entirely replace conventional approaches to missions, however I am saying that they are essential to the success of conventional strategies in the 21st century. Digital strategies can add elements of virality and multiplication and can facilitate the spread of the gospel especially when the digital content is of high-excellence or highly compelling or interesting.

Four Stages of a Digital Ministry Resources Project

The challenge then becomes how to create, curate and distribute high-quality digital resources so that they spread by word-of-mouth and get to the people we want to reach on the devices that they actually own. This can be done through the four stages of:

A. Creating high-quality resources that are copyright-free, easily transmissible and culturally appropriate.

B. Delivering those resources to the devices that people own in that culture (e.g mobile phones, TVs, radios)

C. Training people in how to access the information on their devices and how to share it with others, also and very importantly, training facilitators who can take small groups of up to 40 people through that material so that they in turn can then train others.

D. Catalyzing a discipleship movement through webinars, conferences, websites, Skype, and social media so that it gains momentum.

Example: Using digital strategies to facilitate a TEE movement

For instance a TEE course for church-planters would first have to be created, and be copyright free, easily transmissible is some digital format such as text, doc , PDF for literate learners as a PowerPoint , audio or video series for oral learners. And, of course, it must be culturally sensitive, theologically correct and of a quality that is appreciated by the prospective learners.

Secondly, the TEE course would have to be delivered to devices that people actually own or have access to such as radios, TVs, mobile phones, Internet cafes, and even computers. It greatly slows things down if you have to give everyone the same device and can have complicated status implications in the local culture. No new device should be necessary for the success of the distribution strategy. The TEE course should be created so that it can be successful accessed on the devices the people already have.

In some areas, such as urban slums, the information will only reach the facilitators who will then print out the TEE course for students. In this case the facilitators may need to be supplied with black and white laser printers and a small budget for their operation.

Third, once the digital information arrives then the trainers must arrive with it. The facilitators should take the students through how to access, understand and apply the TEE course in their lives. This may be at an all day meeting once-per-month. Of course the trainers themselves must be trained by the national leaders of the TEE movement.

Lastly, the TEE course needs to turn into a lasting indigenous TEE movement, with an annual conference, webinars for trainers, a website, a social media presence and people building word-of-mouth strategies and collecting testimonials and feedback for improvement and for marketing the course. This needs to be locally led in order to build ownership among key stakeholders in the training.

As an indigenous movement it gains both credibility and technical support with people from many sources contributing to its further development. After a while Western funds and technical support can be reduced or eliminated and it simply becomes a natural part of the church or missions scene in the area.

A key requirement is that technical support, including security patches, updates and on-site editing and adaptation, should not be burdensome. It should be well within the technical capabilities of a tech-school graduate in that nation and should be free or at minimum cost. Video based training with its large editing requirements, and huge download costs and server costs is thus not yet an option in many parts of the world. This naturally leads to the question of the contextualization of technology on the mission field.

Contextualization of Technology

 Contextualizing technology is the art of making your project *workable* and *acceptable* in the local environment with its unique constraints, beliefs, languages, social structures and its view of what is acceptable and unacceptable.

As John Dyer says "technology is never neutral". Technology is a cultural artifact that is fitted into a person's worldview, and which can even change that world-view. Books changed Europe, and TV changes many indigenous cultures. Missiologically speaking, technology needs to be "contextualized" so that Christ is made clear and any unnecessary offense is minimized. This is by no means obvious nor is it at all intuitive.

In 2001 I arrived in the Philippines carrying a Phillips Twist mobile phone that was seven years old and about half the size of a brick. My personal view of mobile phones was that they were 'just a business tool'. I was a missionary, I didn't spend money unnecessarily and I was quite happy with it. It would have worked in the Philippines as they used the same frequencies as Australia. I just wanted to change the SIM card. The Filipino salesman refused to sell me a SIM card. To him I was being socially shameful. Not only that but all my Filipino friends all told me "John, you can't use that old phone!" So I had to purchase a new Nokia phone that was considered socially acceptable in the Philippines. My good old faithful phone had become a cultural obstacle!

Any technology-in-missions project must be workable under local conditions, practical for folk to use without feeling awkward, and socially acceptable in that culture. In some locations we had to remove the game of Solitaire from Windows XP machines because card games were deemed offensive. And in privacy conscious cultures we had to set up screens around the computers.

Second-hand donated technology may be acceptable in a few places, however some contexts are deeply offended by it, and in yet others it is even considered as illegal dumping. So you have to have deep local knowledge BEFORE you even launch your project.

Since both technologies and cultures are changing rapidly there is simply no anthropology textbook that you can pick up and read and figure out instantly how to contextualize your website, app or computer center for people group X.

You and your team will have to do local on-the-ground research. Therefore I have compiled a list of possible survey questions that you might like to use to jump start the research process. Feel free to add questions of your own, these are merely a guide. You might also want to combine these questions with some qualitative research process such as participant observation. The questions need to be asked gently, respectfully and with a very open mind.

Contextualization Survey Questions

"*You*" = the local population being surveyed "*It*" = the technology/project/software etc
WORKABILITY
- Will *it* (the technology you want to set up) work under these local conditions (voltage, dust, heat, power outages etc)?
- Can *it* easily be repaired here? If so who will repair *it*?
- Is *it* legal here?
- Is *it* likely to be stolen? If so how may *it* be protected?

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS
- What activities would *you* use *it* for?
- Is *it* fun to use?
- Can *you* afford to use *it*? If so how often?
- How easy is *it* to for *you* to use? Is *it* confusing?
- What do *you* (the locals) think of *its* user interface?

CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS
- How does *it* work?(Testing what they think the technology does, you might be surprised!)
- What does *it* do? How does *it* function in this culture?
- What do other people here think about *it*?
- What do people here like? What makes them jump for joy? How can we incorporate that insight into this project?
- What do people here dislike? What makes them feel bad or annoyed? How can we avoid doing that in this project?
- Do you think that *it* will cause infertility or disease? (e.g. mobile phones being thought to cause brain tumors)
- Will *it* offend the deity, gods, or the religious leaders?

- How could *it* make things better?
- How could *it* make things worse?
- Does *it* need to be changed in some way? What do we need to be careful about?
- Tell me a story that you have heard about *it*.
- What sort of people here own *it*? (bad people, good people, only rich people etc)
- Who are the most likely people to use *it*? Men, women, children, students etc?
- Will people share *it*? How will they share *it*? Are there caste, clan or gender issues involved in sharing?
- How will *it* affect or facilitate social transactions and conversations?
- How will it affect or facilitate trade and financial transactions?
- Is there anything that annoys you or offends you about *it*?
- How does *it* make you feel?
- Is it socially acceptable for a person like *you* to own/use/be trained by *it*?
- Will *it* cause feelings of inequality, envy or resentment? Will *it* start fights?
- What social systems would use *it*? How will *it* integrate with village life, urban life, farming seasons etc.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION QUESTIONS
- How is it named, what is *it* called, what cultural categories does it fit in? (list of nouns)
- How is *it* described, what are its qualities? (list of adjectives)
- What are *its* functions? (list of verbs, adverbs and participles)

You may even discover that your project is not needed, or is not desired, will blow up under local conditions or even might be totally illegal and get you arrested. If so you have got some very useful information! You have saved a lot of money, and gained valuable time you can use to "go back to the drawing board" which you would eventually have had to do anyway.

Knowing that it won't work in that particular location is not a defeat, nor is it a lack of faith. It is just God sending you to Macedonia instead of to Asia (Acts 16).

On the other hand if you do get the go ahead from your survey results then you have to be diligent to carry the project through to completion and that means working with a reliable, faithful and highly competent team of local Christians. Contextualizing technological solutions requires continual input from those who know the actual on-the-ground situation.

For instance in some cultures a large project may create a lot of envy and suspicion and hurt the church leaders in the area who are working with you because opponents of the gospel will be spreading spiteful rumors. In such a case every sensible person will tell you to start small. Listen to them!

Who should be on your local contextualization team?

1. Generally two or three very senior local Christian leaders who give their gravitas to the project and who can untangle major clashes with the community, these should be used sparingly as they are very busy people.

2. Then you should have two of the best technical people you can find who know everything about what can and does go wrong in that area.

3. Then you want some pastors and local businessmen who have their ear to the ground, and some workers who can make things happen. Businessmen will also know what people are prepared to pay if it is a business-as-mission project e.g. an Internet cafe.

4. You may also require a translator or linguist and a local graphic artist.

One important point: do not have your graphic art done in the West. I learned this when consulting on websites in the Chinese context. The Chinese seem to like "noisy", busy websites with many flashing icons. Only a Chinese graphic artist can understand the rules of Chinese website design!

So it is with every people group. The meaning of colors, pictures of people (esp. In Islamic contexts) how words are placed on a page and so on, is so varied that local input and local design is far and away the best choice (Even if you personally don't like it!) Remember it is not about you it is about the clarity of the gospel.

Branding is another sensitive issue. Conspicuous branding is considered ostentatious and egotistical in many cultures. In Australia or England naming a ministry after yourself is a huge mistake and is only ever done by very "flaky" people. In Japan where self-effacement is a strong value one of the major retail companies there is called Muji which means "no brand" and they have a minimalist "no logo" policy. If there is considerable criticism of your image or brand then you may need to do a major rebranding exercise, or even have a no-brand policy.

Stay out of the way. Local contextualization, when done properly, greatly increases the feeling of community ownership which is key to participants caring about the technology project after you have gone home and back to the office. The more local input the better. The more that local input is listened to and appreciated, the better.

Appreciative Inquiry and Missions IT Projects

Not so long ago I went to a mid-sized missions conference in Asia and spoke to dozens of people doing various projects around the world. I came away overwhelmed with an impression of "tractors stuck in the mud". Ninety per cent of the projects had failed or were going to fail. They had launched out, got bogged down, and were spinning their wheels. They had begun their various missions IT projects with a lot of hope and just half a plan and now the result was a struggle that was beyond their ability or resources or both.

The brutal reality is that most missions IT projects are small and have budgets in the tens of thousands of dollars not in the tens of millions of dollars. They tend to be driven by one or two people, a few part-time staff and some volunteers. They are also very unlikely to make enough money to keep going in the long-term. This means that most conventional project planning simply does not work. We require a special kind of project planning; one that does not assume industrial levels of resources and one that is tightly focused and which can cope with constraints and complexity.

Some missions IT projects simply should not be attempted. These are Christian versions of secular products, the next Christian FaceBook, MySpace or multi-lingual document format. There are very good reasons why you need to be Adobe, Google, Microsoft or a well-funded Silicon Valley operation to tackle such complex and ambitious ideas. No missions organization with a 50K project budget is going to create a new document format, roll it out, ensure global adoption and be able to provide support and security.

That said, what will work? How do we get mission IT projects that actually succeed? I have adopted and adapted the Appreciative Inquiry process, which was developed by David Cooperrider of Case-Western University.

Appreciative Inquiry examines the strengths of a team, project and context and from this deep, positive, solution-focused approach there emerges a clear idea of what that team should or should not be doing. AI has been defined in many ways but here is one from the Appreciative Inquiry Commons at Case-Western University (http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/definition.cfm)

AI involves, in a central *way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It centrally involves the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the "unconditional positive question, often involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. …AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of the "positive change core" – and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized." …As people are brought together to listen carefully to the innovations and moments of organizational "life," sometimes in storytelling modes and sometimes in interpretive and analytic modes, a convergence zone is created where the future begins to be discerned in the form of visible patterns interwoven into the texture of the actual. …Images of the future emerge out of grounded examples from an organization's positive past. … [This convergence zone facilitates] the collective repatterning of human systems."* Cooperrider, David L, et. AI, Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change, Stipes Publishing, 2000

The start of the process is deep positive internal inquiry. This grounds the resulting project or organization in the core beliefs and strengths and life of the team. This is essential because many missions technology projects are "add-ons" or "cool ideas" that are outside of the core passion and competency of those involved and so eventually they become difficult and even embarrassing burdens

and run out of steam. A small project that flows out of the dynamics and gifts of the team is better than a large visionary project which just burns everyone out in the end.

The process is easy to grasp and is outlined in the following resources:

1. Cooperrider, David; Whitney, Diana D. *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* , Berrett-Koehler Publishers; San Francisco, 2005

2. The Appreciative Inquiry Commons at http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/

In its classic form AI involves four steps, Discover, Dream , Design and Deliver. Because of the variety and speed of change involved in missions technology projects I have added a precursor step called Explore which involves scanning all the options and a follow-up step called Review and Redo which means updating the project with user feedback and any new technological advances. These 6 steps the are: Explore, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, Review/Redo

First **EXPLORE** all the possibilities out there. Do abundant research. Scan the environment for all options and possibilities.

Second **DISCOVER** one amazing thing, something you sense God is truly in the midst of and that emerges from the core strengths and vision of your team.

Third **DREAM** of what that amazing possibility can do for missions and paint your dream as brightly and vividly as possible. Get as much clarity as you can at this stage, decide what is part of the dream, what is truly essential and what is non-essential. Achieve mental clarity and emotional commitment.

Fourthly **DESIGN** very carefully. Steve Jobs says that design is what it does, what it accomplished and not what it looks like or how it feels. Get as much expert help as possible. Ask the 5W&H questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? and do a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats).

Fifthly **DELIVER** the project. Do a prototype. get something workable out the door. Perfection is rarely in the first or second draft. Funding will come once people see production and commitment by the team.

Lastly **REVIEW and REDO**. Fix the bugs, add features, trim off things that are unproductive, focus it more sharply, improve graphics, presentation and simplify user experience.

A Practical Example of Appreciative Inquiry At Work

An example of this applied to an actual project might be a Scripture engagement team in a minority language that wants to work out how to use mobile technology to increase Scripture engagement. In the Explore phase they come up with the following seven ideas:

- Using Scripture App Builder by Richard Margetts and building an Android app.

- Using Frontline SMS to broadcast daily SMS messages of the Bible translation to local believers on an opt-in basis.

- Putting the translation on SD cards and handing them out and then training the local believers in how to share the Scripture files via Bluetooth (something they were already doing with short boar-hunting videos).

- Reading the translation into audio MP3 files and using a oral storying approach in small groups using the speakerphone capability in most mobile phones or small battery powered speakers.

- Making the translation into a series of short narrated videos using hundreds of contextually appropriate still images plus voice-over and sharing via SD cards or Bluetooth

- Building a mobile website where the translation could be downloaded as a PDF and sharing a basic PDF reader app suitable for that people group.

- Having an answering machine with audio prompts that they could phone into for free and hear a portion of the translation being read to them.

With this list of options before them they move into the Discover phase where they discover their strengths and vision as a team and the best fit for them. During this phase they found out a few things while doing a long session on the whiteboard:

- They were primarily translators and not technical support folk and they didn't want to be patching software or updating security.

- Most people did not have smartphones and if they did they did not have data plans for downloading apps.

- They really wanted some form of daily contact that made them feel a part of the community and where feedback was possible.

- They wanted something that was very easy to maintain so they could leave and the system would still work well.

With this in mind they chose to use Frontline SMS as the platform because it was low cost and well supported by folk outside the team and was large enough to not be "going away next year". SMS was also something that every user had on their mobile phones and SMS was both private and popular. For our hypothetical team the Discovery was that Frontline SMS was going to be the One Big Thing they could use to increase Scripture engagement. (For another team it could be entirely different)

Now it was time to Dream. How big could this get? Could they get all 67,000 mobile phone users in their area to sign up? What would the results be of having a Bible verse a day? Did they want to include a short study question about the verse? Would they get any feedback? As they dreamed they sensed using SMS was from the Lord, was in line with their vision and gifting and was entirely technical feasible.

Things moved along rapidly to the Design stage. At another session they decided that when a user signed up the first 21 daily verses they would receive would be about God and creation, the next 30 about salvation, the next ten about healing, which was a big issue, the next twelve about dealing with demons (as it was an animist group) and so on. Details of how to set up the Frontline SMS messaging system were obtained and a train-the-trainers session was scheduled.

Soon the launch date was upon them and all the energy went into Delivery to the first test group of one hundred local pastors and key believers, people they knew were critical. If they got excited about it word would soon spread. The team had already run through the process themselves and it worked. Now to see how it fared on the wide variety of phones in the community. Success! The key leaders were elated to be receiving a daily Scripture verse in their own language. Word spread quickly over the next few Sundays and soon two thousand local believers were getting a daily SMS and some were then texting it on to friends and family who were not yet believers.

After three months the team gathered the local leaders in and asked them for feedback as part of the Review and Redo phase. They soon found that some verse were very confusing on their own, out of their chapter context. One verse in particular needed to be completely retranslated. After much discussion it was agreed the local believers would take all the responsibility for selecting the Bible verses, thus giving them ownership of the project. The humility of the translation team increased bonding and the leaders went back and gave a good report.

In this hypothetical Scripture engagement project we see that digital information (the Scriptures) was merged with existing leadership and community structures (personal formation and community transformation) to bring about spiritual impartation through Scripture engagement.

The creating high quality resource (the Bible translation, was followed by delivery to devices that people already owned (by SMS), training of a team of locals that knew both the technology and the resource, and finally catalyzing a community of action around the high-quality content (by getting them to select the verses and spread knowledge of the free SMS system in the people group.

Sensitivity to issues of the contextualization of technology and use of the six-step appreciative inquiry process meant that the technology, the team and the culture were in harmony. The project was neither too big nor too small and fit what was both needed and possible.

Strong face-to-face relationships and high-quality digital information combined to make the SMS service an outstanding success.

Other Random Thoughts, Tips and Tricks

1. Quality of production+ ease of transmission (copyright free, shareable formats, small file size) leads to virality of adoption. Now by quality I do not mean complexity, fanciness or coolness. It does not have to be a HD video with a famous presenter. Quality is more concerned with appropriateness, skill, consistency, and availability. A freely available, well-written PDF or PowerPoint that deals skillfully with a local spiritual issue will be shared widely by email attachment, by Bluetooth, by printing out and photocopying and by being uploaded to various websites. That is why Creative Commons licensing is so important. However a poorly written, confusing resource or a copyright-restricted, pay-walled resource will have far less potential to go viral and thus far less ministry impact.

2. **Understand how to come up with a good requirements statement.** The requirements statement helps you to define what is essential to the project, what is just desirable but not essential and what is not required in the project at all. A good requirements statement helps you talk to a vendor or programmer so that you both understand what is wanted and what will be built or bought. It can save you from thinking you were getting a chicken coop but ending up with Buckingham palace! Slideshare has some very clear presentations on this that you can click through in 30 minutes or so just type "Requirements Statement" into the search box.

3. Start small and stay within your level of mastery. Avoid complexity until you are sure that you can manage everything and anything that can go wrong. Once you have mastered that level,

then you can handle a larger project. Small wins build momentum, big flops lead to discouragement.

4. Ask, every time, whether you need to "build, buy or tweak". Build = make it yourself; Buy = get some commercial off-the-shelf software; Tweak = adapting something like Salesforce to your purposes. Writing code is fun but maybe the code already exists in a free or commercial product that you have not heard about. This is why the Explore stage is so important. Once you have a good requirements statement (see above) you can then sit down and ask "Should we build, should we buy, or should we tweak" the software.

5. Can you maintain it? If you develop an app can you then upgrade it, security patch it, adapt it when Android rolls out a new version and so on. What is the cost of keeping your code running?

6. Does the project revolve around just one very gifted individual who is expected to "live forever" and be available 24/7 in multiple time zones just to keep the show on the road? This is a serious vulnerability. No matter how passionate this person is about this project you must say "No" to them because they are just grabbing a tiger by the tail.

7. Appropriate technology is far more important than merely "cool" technology. The bosses often want technology for image value e.g. "isn't it great that we have our own app" without any idea of how much value the app is creating or not creating. In fact over 50% of apps are abandoned by users and just sit on the phone or are deleted (http://info.localytics.com/blog/app-retention-improves). So the $10K-$50K spent on developing an app might have been better spent on Facebook marketing. Will technology X get you the results that you really want or is it just a cool gimmick?

8. Treat your geeks well. Ask them what they need, don't just guess. Yes, you can negotiate budgets, but do so with courtesy. A Fast Company article on how to manage geeks well can be found at: http://www.fastcompany.com/37145/how-manage-geeks

9. Expect the project to cost three times and much as you thought and to take twice as long as you thought, unless you have a truly excellent vendor and a great requirements statement with careful project management of every detail. Let your geeks pick the outside vendor. Geeks know other geeks and can read their capabilities.

10. Don't outsource overseas for anything major because you are not there to supervise and you have effectively zero legal protection if anything goes wrong. Graphics, small websites, MP3

intros OK, outsource. App development, maybe, if you can find a great vendor. A massive financial database, never.

Conclusion

Technology used to be just a tool that missions used. Now technology is the ocean in which mission sinks or swims. Your digital presence is now your first ministry touch. Everything from fundraising to event promotion depends on the Internet. Unless you integrate Cybermissions into conventional missions the twenty-first century will steamroll you. You will be sitting on a corner with a bullhorn and a sandwich board when the rest of the Christian world is using satellite broadcasting and mobile ministry.

Four huge concepts guide the process and they are: Information is Digital, Impartation is Spiritual, Formation is Personal and Transformation is Communal. Quality information needs to be created and delivered to trainers who create communities. The technology needs to be appropriately contextualized to the outside culture.

Within the organization, Appreciative Inquiry needs to be used to ensure there is a good fit between the team and the technology. There needs to be more than an IT department, rather there needs to also be a Cybermissions department which is project-based and outwardly focused creating tools for transformational ministry at the coal-face.

All this is done for the sake of Quality (or what the Bible terms faithfulness) which is defined as consistently achieving good Kingdom results. Good results can only come from good systems and Cybermissions will help your organization to develop good systems for frontline ministry in the twenty-first century.