

Appendix A

Digital Tool Categories

Following is a list of the primary categories of digital tools at the time of this writing. This is by no means a complete listing, but you can use it to get started thinking about some of the ways you might incorporate digital technologies in your ministry.

Blog

A blog (short for *web-log*) is a website centered on short- to medium-length articles and videos and photos. An individual or a group can author these articles, with the latest article appearing on top. A blog is generally used to provide opinions or inspirational messages on a regular basis. Blogging software is generally very easy to use and provides a simple interface for posting to the blog. Blogging software can also be the basis for an entire website, which is a good fit if the blog is going to be the primary content around which the site is centered.

A good example of a ministry blog would be something like ChurchMarketingSucks.com, which has the latest article on the front page and links to other articles. You can get started blogging for free at wordpress.com or blogger.com. If you want to do more than blogging, using a content management system will be the best direction to go.

Microblog

A microblog is a place to post quick status updates or links to stories or photos. Twitter and Tumblr are examples of microblogs,

although even Facebook status updates could be considered a form of microblogging. Microblogging includes a form of social networking, in that you “follow” the posts of microbloggers. Unlike on social networks, however, the person you are following does not have to follow you back. Your ministry could have a microblog, or you could opt to make it more personal by doing your ministry microblogging using your own personal account.

A good example of the use of microblogging for ministry purposes is the Twitter account of *DesiringGod*. Microblogging does not cost anything but the time you put into it.

Podcast

A podcast is a series of audio recordings (and now more frequently video, though those can be called *vidcasts* or *videocasts*) that are available over the Internet. Getting their name from the iPod, podcasts are audio and video files that users can subscribe to through iTunes or other “podcatchers” and receive the new recordings as soon as they are posted. Podcasts could be used for distributing a radio-type show over the Internet or as a way for church members to keep up with weekly sermons.

An example of a ministry podcast would include those at *LifeChurch.tv*, where they podcast the audio and video of their weekly service. See rss.lifechurch.tv/archive.php for a listing of their latest podcasts.

Email Campaign

The idea of an email campaign is to send regular email messages to a list of subscribers to keep them informed about your ministry. Software for managing an email campaign generally includes ways for people to subscribe to your mailing list and unsubscribe. The software will manage your mailing lists and help you generate your email. It will also track who opens the email and give statistics on

whether they click any of the links in the email. Constant Contact and MailChimp are two examples of software in this category.

Content Management Systems

A content management system (CMS) is a software package designed to manage a medium-to-complex website that contains many different types of information (content). This software separates the complexity of website management from the creation and posting of content such as videos, discussion boards, articles, slideshows, blog posts and social media integration. A CMS is not as simple to install, set up and use as a blog, but its capabilities are much more comprehensive. Some of the more popular content management software tools are wordpress.org, joomla.org and drupal.org.

Church Management Systems

A special subset of content management software, called a *church management system*, deserves special attention. This software provides specialized content management for churches, including pages for staff, sermons, donations and pages for specific ministries that are already set up. This software also may include features to manage attendance and mailing lists. There is a wide range of church management system providers, from the inexpensive Web-Empowered Church (www.webempoweredchurch.org) to the full-featured software offered by Monk Development (www.monk-development.com).

Short Message Service (SMS)

SMS, or text messaging, can be used as a way to communicate directly to the mobile phones of those in your ministry. This can be an effective way to coordinate for events or simply encourage those who subscribe. For sending to a small number of people, you can

simply use your phone; for larger groups or more structured campaigns, you will want to use a service such as ohdontforget.com or trumpia.com.

Another way to do an SMS campaign is through SMS response. In this case, you have people text-message you with a request for more information, and then you reply with a link or email address. You may want to purchase a “short code” SMS number, which is a five- or six-digit number to which people can send a text. Trumpia.com also provides this service.

Social Network

A social network is a website where users can interact and share messages, photos, videos and links and even play games with one another. Users give each other permission to interact by identifying them as “friends.” The social network category is quite broad and, really, there is only one relevant player right now: Facebook. Do not build your own social network unless there is truly something unique that you can offer that Facebook does not. Ning.com is an example of a tool that allows you to create your own social network.

Mobile App

A mobile app is simply a software application designed to run on a mobile device. Mobile apps can be designed to specifically take advantage of the mobile device’s capabilities, such as GPS, text-messaging and the ability to make a phone call. The difference between mobile apps and mobile-friendly websites was discussed in chapter 2. Creating a mobile app is not easy and generally will require the work of a consulting service.

Photo and Video Sharing

Photo- and video-sharing services allow anyone to upload a picture or a video and instantly make it available. As more and more people

have high-quality cameras on their mobile devices, the popularity of this service is increasing rapidly. Many of these services integrate directly with social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter, allowing near real-time access. Some of the most popular of these services include Flickr, Instagram and YouTube. Ministries can use these types of services to share photos or videos of events or to highlight a recent news story.