MISSION AGENCIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 2: MISSIOLOGICAL CONCERNS

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Providing a platform that allows partnersâ€™ stories to be heard by Christians in the UK in an unfiltered form (especially partners from the majority world) is not just a good use of social media, but it is a theological necessity, honouring to God and to our fellow believers.
Category: Observations

This is the second in a series of posts based on my analysis of the social-media profiles of five mission agencies. You can download the full paper here (sorry, it will cost you a couple of quid, unless you are a Patreon of this site).

Yesterday's post introduced the topic. In this post, I'd like to examine some concerns which are broadly missiological in their scope. Tomorrow, I will address some communications issues.

Whose Voice? The question of whose voice is heard and whose stories are told has been touched on already. However, in an age where the church is growing around the world and people are increasingly connected, this is a very important issue. It is no longer appropriate (if it ever was) for the only voices to be heard from â€œthe mission fieldâ€ to be the voices of expatriate missionaries. Agencies need to create space so that their partners can tell their stories without the mediation of a missionary giving an explanation or using the partnersâ€™ story as a fund-raising exercise. Social media, with its capacity to share and retweet what others say provides a simple vehicle for providing a voice for others.

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Ecclesiology.Â Social media provides an excellent platform for agencies to reach out to individuals, especially to those they would like to mobilise as future missionaries. However, most agencies also stress the importance/centrality of the church in sending missionaries. However, by reaching individuals directly through social media (or other media), agencies are essentially cutting churches out of the early part of contact with potential recruits.Â There is no obvious solution to this problem, however agencies need to be constantly aware of it and need to take action to mitigate its effects.Â

Collaboration.Â The British mission agency sector is facing some serious stresses, which I have outlined elsewhere. Over the years there have been numerous discussions about ways in which agencies could collaborate, most of which have led nowhere. The use of social media provides a simple mechanism for agencies step away from a competitive stance. It is not difficult for agencies to retweet or share articles and videos that have been posted by others. There were some examples of this sort of cooperation in the samples which were examined, but they were few and far between.Â Another approach which could be explored is the use of shared hashtags. At the moment the agencies use tags such as #wecprayer and #praywithwycliffe. Tags such as these create a walled garden in which agencies focus on themselves. The adoption of a generic hashtag such as

#ukmissionprayer which could be adopted across the sector would create a more collaborative space and would facilitate people in gaining a wider appreciation of the mission world. I also suspect that if such a generic tag were created, church leaders and others would start to use it, broadening the number of people who would potentially have access to the information. Essentially, agencies have the choice between a social media strategy which focuses on themselves, their supporters and their own needs or one which opens themselves up to the broader mission world. Both theologically and pragmatically, I believe that the latter is by far the most appropriate.Â