SOME THOUGHTS ON WEBSITES

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Some oddities on mission agency websites.
Category: Observations

I'm currently working on a project to try and identify, as far as is possible, what mission agencies in the UK do and what level of support they receive. My starting point has been the Global Connections list of member mission agencies, which you can find here. What I've been doing is to take each agency in turn and by visiting both their website and their information on the Charity Commission site, to build up a picture of what they do, where they do it and what their income has been over the last few years. It's a fairly dull and time-consuming process, but I believe that it will give an interesting picture once I have all of the data in and can start looking at trends. Working through alphabetically, I'm now at the letter F, which, strangely enough, gets me about forty per cent of the way through the list. For the most part, the agency websites are clear and informative. Some are old-fashioned and haven't been updated for ages, and others are clearly the product of a well-resourced media team and have all the latest bells and whistles. However, there are a few that have "issues" that I thought I'd highlight - they may be of interest to anyone in charity communications. I won't name and shame the agencies involved - do your own digging if you want that level of detail!

Charity Registration: when organisations are registered as charities, they are given a number by the Charity Commission which they are supposed to quote on certain types of materials - especially fundraising. The Charity Commission make this a relatively easy process by giving a few "form of words" which can be used in different contexts. Best practice says that charities should list their registration on all communications. If you scroll down to the foot of the Global Connections' link higher up the page, you will see their details in the webpage footer. However, despite this, about 10% of the agency sites I have looked at, have no indication of their charitable status. In most cases, I have been able to find their charitable registration by searching for the charity name - but that doesn't always work (Charities are often registered under names that sound nothing like the organisation name that they are known by). Perhaps one or two of the agencies I've looked at aren't charities at all, but a significant number are not following best practice when it comes to their communications.

What Do They Do? It sounds odd, but for a handful of agencies, I haven't a clue what it is they do, nor why they do it. This is despite scouring their websites and their Charity Commission reports. Possibly by digging deeper or contacting them directly, I could find more information, but what is publically available is far from clear. Religious phrases like "bless the nations", "build God's Kingdom" or "in obedience to our call" abound, but there is nothing to explain what it is that people actually do day to day with the money or support that the agency receives. I suspect that these websites are designed by insiders for insiders, all of whom know full well what the agency does and who need no further explanation. However, this isn't a great help for those of us outside of the tent.

Vanished Websites: the Global Connections website has a link to the sites for all of the agencies listed - except it doesn't. In a few cases the link goes to an obsolete page on the agency site and by a little judicious ferreting around you can make your way to the home page. However, in other cases, there is no website to be found at all. It has either lapsed or perhaps the agency has changed its

domain name and forgotten to keep its information updated. My absolute favourite is the agency whose link takes you to a Chinese mining company. I've got no idea what has happened, but when you click on the agency link, it redirects you to somewhere completely different.