

Mission Information Systems : The Integration of Information and Relationships

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"The medium is the message," said Marshall McLuhan. He also coined the terms "media" and "global village" not so long ago in the 1960s. He saw technology as an extension of the body.

In *Riding the Waves of Change*, Gareth Morgan describes the trend toward networks: "The idea of a discrete organization with identifiable boundaries...is breaking down....Interdependence is the key....In comes the notion of a network that must be managed as a system of interdependent stake-holders."

In the global village of missions, full of emerging networks of interdependent stakeholders, we too have to learn a new way of relating and working together. Technology based information systems have the capacity to help us do this, and enable us to live in meaningful relationships over great distances. Nevertheless, information systems do not replace relationships. They can enhance them. Information systems do not create information. They help us manage, manipulate, and share it. Information systems do not communicate for us. They facilitate the communication between stakeholders.

As the WEA Missions Commission (MC) makes a significant investment in developing information systems for the benefit of national mission movements and networks, we will be paying close attention not only to what information we want to share, but also how we share it and use it together. Information systems were once databases of collected facts that people could access at their will. Today, information systems are morphing into multi-faceted relational systems.

The system we envision must be faithful to four core characteristics:

1. It must enable the building of relationships and community. Our focus is not the highway or the technology we travel on, it is the people that we journey with, those who we meet along the way.
2. It must ensure accessibility and relevance across cultures. The culture and content of this system must be international.
3. It must offer multi-modal interfaces. The Internet will not be the only manner of interacting.

4. It must be purpose-driven-focused on common causes and objectives.

Keeping these core characteristics in mind, the MC will be exploring the potential for Internet-based services in the following areas:

1. Operation of public online databases, where the content is relevant and useful to a broad range of ministries. For example, the World Mission Directory, already a part of the services at www.globalmission.org, is a broadly applicable service, with content provided by and used by many nations.

2. Use of the website as a major media outlet, delivering journals, papers, analysis, reports and other publications to the missions community at large. This may include international journal archives, bookstore and news releases.

3. Facilitation of networking, partnerships, and virtual teams. Certain online collaboration tools, proven within other organizations, may be employed to serve global teams.

4. Facilitation of online office and administrative functions. MC "business" may be enhanced by this information sharing system.

5. Provision of a point of contact for relationship with the Church at large.

The MC website, www.globalmission.org, will be the central meeting place for all products, discussions, and services offered.

Forthcoming articles in Connections will focus on issues we are currently wrestling with, inform readers of new services available at www.globalmission.org, and invite discussion on practical, philosophical, and architectural issues that will shape the way we work together. This will not be a technical column. It is more relational and strategic in nature, open to treatment of any tools that can be used to enhance global relationship building and information sharing.

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