



Publicly displayed text-messages can alter the dynamics of an event in interesting new ways by making the event more interactive than presentational.

Photo courtesy of Pangolin IMU.

Interactivity:

Three Technologies You Should Know About

By Cathy Hutchison

In his book, *The Millennium Matrix*, Rex Miller explores the move from a broadcast culture to a digital one. One of the changes described is from seeking a passive experience (sitting in front of the television) to an interactive one (instant messaging with friends).

As churches become more missional in their approach to reaching a digital generation, there are technologies available that can break down the barriers between the platform and the congregation.

PowerPoint on a Tablet PC

Microsoft's PowerPoint has become a staple in church services for song lyrics and sermon support, but the results can seem a little canned as the operator flips through slides. When PowerPoint is run from a tablet PC — a notebook computer with touch-screen technology that allows the user to operate the computer with a digital pen instead of a mouse — there is an added level of flexibility because the operator has the ability to write live on top of the image. Much like a whiteboard or an overhead projector, the pastor or worship leader can underline a point, draw a diagram, or scribble thoughts in real time. In the corporate world, this technique is used powerfully in live Q&A sessions, where questions are written up on the screen as they are spoken.

Another technique gaining popularity in the corporate world using this technology is "scribing". Using a tablet PC, an artist draws images in real time that capture ideas and concepts as they are being presented. When used in worship to capture spiritual ideas, scribing can be a dynamic way of engaging non-linear thinkers and visual learners.

To use this capability, you only need a tablet PC and to download the Microsoft Office XP Pack for Tablet PCs (Tablet Pack). This is a free download at Microsoft.com. (If your tablet PC came loaded with MSOffice, there is a good chance it is already installed.)

Pen style and ink color is selectable when in presentation mode by hovering over the lower left corner of the screen.

Text Messaging to Video Screens

More than five out of every six Americans over the age of nine has a cell phone, making it highly accessible technology. Pangolin's Interactive Messaging Unlimited (IMU) and Video Messaging Unlimited (VMU) add a new capability by allowing people with cell phones to send text and

Instant Messaging can create a more collaborative experience. Not only can people in the congregation have input on the content, it also allows people to ask questions they might not stand up and ask.

picture messages for display directly on video screens.

The package makes it possible for audiences or guests at events to communicate or interact with a speaker, panelists or an entire group. TV broadcasters and cable systems can create an environment where viewers converse — in text — with other viewers.

The technology is fairly simple to use. The software is bundled with a cellular modem through a unique cell number. A Windows-based computer is connected to the modem and the cell number is distributed to the congregation. Any text or picture message that comes into the IMU system is queued for display. A

system operator can determine when and whether messages are shown, their order of appearance and their duration on screen. Filters can be applied, automatically or manually, to allow protection for what is displayed.

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In the secular world, IMU is being used to “warm up” audiences prior to concerts.

In addition to receiving text and picture messages, IMU can also send them. Bulk text messages can be sent such as “Youth services start one hour earlier” or “Read Psalm 23 in preparation for Sunday’s service.”

IMU systems can also be incorporated into church services as a means to connect with hearing- or speech-impaired members of congregations. At points where congregational participation is desired, members can text directly to the screen and engage in conversation.

There are two different versions of Pangolin’s IMU system which come with a cellular modem, IMU and VMU software. The IMU Basic — designed for use with video projection — runs \$995. The IMU Pro, which has special features for professional high-volume applications such as broadcast and cable TV chat channels, is \$2,395. Both versions come with a portable wireless modem, USB cable and software.

Wikis

While websites offer a certain amount of interactivity in allowing users to choose the content they view, wikis are blurring the lines between webmaster and web-surfer. In a wiki, anyone and everyone can edit the content, which evolves as

people contribute.

Editing a wiki is much easier than editing HTML and typically involves simply clicking an “edit page” button and typing in text. Though there are a few protocols to learn for displaying pictures and formatting text, it is fairly easy to learn and there is generally a help page that can teach the technique.

The current largest use of a wiki is the Wikipedia (wikipedia.org) — an online encyclopedia that can be edited by anyone in the world. (In case you think this is a free-for-all, the Wikipedia has an error rate comparable to standard encyclopedias, according to nature.com.)

Corporations are using wikis to replace the company intranet and to run projects. Socially, people are using them to share vacation photos and swap recipes.

For churches, this can add a whole new dimension to the church website. Wikis can be public or private (requiring a password). PBwiki.com hosts free wikis and is a good place to experiment with them if you are interested in exploring.

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