



NETcall
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Speaker: Tony Scialdone | Straight Street Design
Topic: Is Your Ministry Invisible?

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Is Your Ministry Invisible?

When Dean was pastoring a local church a few years ago, he met Tony who attended this church and provided their web services. Over the years, Tony has educated Dean as to how important the elements “behind the scenes” are in getting people to visit your website.

Websites can be great to look at but if the code is not written correctly, nobody will find your website on searches.

Tony introduced himself and shared his heart about helping ministries reach more people.

What do these four people have in common, Liberace, Little Richard, Hulk Hogan and Muhammed Ali? Think about this and we’ll talk about the answer in a bit.

Everyone who is touched by your ministry can be broken into two groups – those who already know about you and those who do not.

People who already know you and the people they know are your personal network. That is one group of people that your ministry can touch easily. You need a strategy to stay connected to these people. This can be through friends or advertising – word of mouth advertising. And your personal network promotes your ministry for you.

But in this NETcall we will learn how to reach people who don’t know about your ministry primarily through the web and your website.

The raw material of all of your ministries is people - those you serve, your staff and those who get involved. Where do you find more people so you improve the chances that these people will learn about your ministry and give to your ministry?

So what do these four people have in common, Liberace, Little Richard, Hulk Hogan and Muhammed Ali?

Answer: they all have one man in common that helped them utilize their skills and raise them to international status. A professional wrestler from the 1950's named Gorgeous George. He was a phenomenon during the era of Father Knows Best. He made television work around the country and wrestling became the first national based television series. All four of these people give Gorgeous George credit for taking their skills to stardom, for creating a gimmick for them to get people to care about what they did.

For some reason people in ministry believe that marketing and ministry do not go together. You need to be passionate about your ministry, what you do and be willing to toot your own horn to succeed.

People who already know you and those that know them are a breeding ground for getting the word out and marketing your ministry. So you need a strategy to reach out to these people and the people they know.

But what can you do for the people who do not know you or your ministry and are not already in your network?

How many have a yellow pages ad for your ministry? Nobody.

Tony asked why not? Answers: haven't done it yet, didn't think about it.

In the past, a yellow page ad was a must for your ministry. But now, the younger generation doesn't even like using yellow pages, they use the website instead.

If you don't have a yellow pages ad, don't fret because most people do not use them anymore. Tony wouldn't recommend spending the money for this type of advertising unless your market base uses this type of resource.

You need to be "findable" on the website. A website these days is the **number one** way people find you now. Tony says your website does not have to be pretty, fancy or complex to be good.

Your website needs to be findable. If someone cannot find you, it doesn't matter how much time and money you spent on your website. There are numerous people out there that want to donate or volunteer but cannot find you.

How many already have a website for your ministry? All of the callers had a website.

When people look for you on the web, they often do not know your name so they use a search engine to look for organizations that do what you do. Search engines read your website but cannot read pictures or graphics on your website. They use the code and words on your website to search. The key is to make sure your website has content related to your ministry. So you would be better off having words about what you do than to have a graphically nice looking website.

The bad news is that most of the website programs on the market today like Dream Weaver have code that gets in the way of the words on your website. The way around this is to have

someone personally write the code for your website. Get together with a computer geek you know who can help you around this or hire it done.

The church that Tony attends shows up as number four on search engines and he didn't even spend much time writing code to improve their findability. He just knew that the other churches in Littleton have such bad code that with very little code he made the first page on search engines.

With churches or ministry, it is all about getting the word out about your ministry. Try doing Google searches for "what you do", not your name, and see where you rank. How often do you go through the search engines to find what you are looking for? In order to get the word out you have to be findable.

Tony asked Larry Stevenson what the number one factor is in becoming findable on search engines? Larry said it is link exchange. Tony said that link exchanges are important because if you have many organizations linked to your website, it will go up in the rankings with Google and other search engines. Tony said from a search engine perspective their goal is to give you what you are looking for as soon as possible. So to do this automated function, it needs to read websites quickly and store the data in a database. It is the words that matter. There are so many websites these days, so much competition. Google has 120+ criteria on how they rank you. It does not take a lot to beat other organizations in the search game.

It is your responsibility to maximize the resources you have so that you can do more ministry.

When Tony first did the church website, they had three people in the singles ministry. Tony created a singles ministry web page which said "singles ministry, come join the fun". Because of his code, when people searched "singles, Littleton" he made the top of the list and even beat out all of the singles dating sites. He didn't have much on the page, but they were findable.

Tony asked what the ministries spent on their website development and their monthly fees?

Sunday Breakfast Mission had a volunteer build their site at no cost and they highly publicize it and because of that they get traffic. It does need updating which they don't have time for.

Tony says to get going, using a volunteer is a great way to get started. But make sure they know how to write the code. Tony recommends taking your top three program priorities and do a Google search and see where you rank on search engines.

New Horizons International Ministries commented she learned HTML and built her own site and they pay about \$65 per year. But she is not familiar with code.

Tony described code to content ratio. When there are multiple organizations that come up in the database on a search, they have to have a way to prioritize who goes to the top of the list. The code is in a style sheet and refers to a file with instructions for that page. That is a major component. Remove all of the code for decoration, font size, color, etc and place it in a style sheet that can apply to all pages. Then there is less "code congestion" and the search engines rank you higher because the code to content ratio is less. By using style sheets you can do major changes and updates easier, it is more cost effective and your website remains more searchable.

Dean commented that 40% of giving last year came from the internet.

Dean asked how many ministries are getting donations online?

One ministry commented they get some online donations from current donors and new donors. Another said they get absolutely nothing from online donations.

Tony said a topic for another day would be to talk about strategy to improve your existing website.

Tony offered free consultation for anyone who would like to review their websites and learn what they can do to improve it.

Most of his clients are asking Tony to improve their existing websites because of the amount of money they already spent on their sites. Many asked him what to do and Tony said for a long time the only option was to hire another company to do it again or to hire a computer geek to write code but then they had a lot of monthly expense to make changes.

There are also some FREE alternatives out there that are pretty good and he is more than happy to share those with you. But remember you are not helping your ministry and those you serve by not spending any money. On the same hand, you don't do your ministry justice by spending lots of money to end up with a site that is not findable.

This is the main reason Tony and his partner created a new website software program that has the code to make you findable and allows you to do the updates internally to keep your monthly fees down. Contact Tony if you'd like to learn more about this new program. YPN is in the process of converting both of our websites over to this new program.

Tony use to be a pastor and has a heart for ministry. He wants you to know that there are ways to honor God and your ministry by creating a great website that is designed to help people outside of your network find you and get involved.

Tony recommends that you search your ministry by what you do to see how visible you are.

Dean also encourages every ministry to go to www.ChristianVolunteering.org to list your ministry on this website for volunteer participation.