

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Henk P. Medema (henk@medema.nl), of Medema Media (www.medema.nl) in the Netherlands, invites Christian publishers to make the most of electronic opportunities.

No big surprise—this world of ours is changing. Most of the virtual world, the World Wide Web, did not even exist 10 years ago.

How can we make the most of the Internet as a channel for communication, marketing, sales, and ministry? In Europe or Asia, Paraguay or China or Iraq, publishing for the Swahili or Arabic market, in Dutch or Danish or whatever language, Christian publishers face the same challenges. Should we be creating digital products? And, an even bigger question: how can we use the Internet?

Vision and mission

Your business and ministry are unique. Secular management theory tells you to focus on your core business. In the Kingdom of God, the same is true. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:21,22). It all starts with your vision and your mission statement. Check them before you pray; then pray (of course!); and afterwards, check your statements again.

Digital products

Christian publishing is about reading, but not every product, not even every book, is for reading. Not many people are in the habit of reading the

local telephone directory, a Bible concordance, or a Hebrew lexicon. Some books, from Diderot's *Encyclopédie* to the present times, are meant for reference, for interactive searching. Digitally organized media can handle more data in a smaller space, with more sophisticated storage and faster retrieval. This is where many Christian publishers, including Medema, began: Bible search programs.

However, there are other digital products that are for reading. For example, Medema produced the complete Rembrandt Bible etchings with the accompanying Bible text. We also reprint books as e-books, when there is limited demand. We offer selected chapters of new books for free, to entice people into buying the print copy.

A general rule that many publishers neglect is simplicity. Make your product look easy. Avoid show-off, high-tech applications that eat up a lot of memory and speed and that may not even run on most computers. Stay informed about technological advances, but use them only to enhance functionality, and check compatibility with older systems and other platforms. We are here to serve people and leave them satisfied, not to leave them flabbergasted.

The Web

Like the world we live in, the virtual marketplace is a place where sin and evil abound, but good and useful things can

be found as well. The difference is in how we handle it. What we as publishers want to create, then, are beautiful, good virtual places where it is a pleasure to stay, where there is love and truth. More than a billboard announcing products, you want to create a community that centers on Christ.

Some might say: "All I want is to sell through the Internet. Why can't I just publish my catalog?" You can, of course. But, remember that you do not stand at your shop's door, drag customers in, force them to buy, and throw them out quickly. Instead, you establish relationships with customers.

As you begin

Keep three things in mind:

1. Find fun. This may sound strange, but you want to make the digital adventure something you enjoy. If it is not, find someone else in your Christian network with skills for this development.

2. Find focus in fun. At the Samaritan well, Jesus tells his disciples about the joy He has doing the work of the Father. We want that, too.

3. Find people with focus and fun. What matters in the Kingdom of God is the multiplication of disciples. Pray for the people you want to reach and those who will join you in ministry. And you know what? True service in the Lord's work will always be rewarding.❖