In the Post-Covid World, Online Training Opportunities Continue to Grow

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Dave Adamson, a.k.a Aussie Dave, author of *Metachurch* declared on Twitter recently.[1]

> 91% of adults keep their smartphones within an arm's reach all day. If church leaders want to go into ALL THE WORLD to preach the Gospel, we have to turn our smartphones from a tool for distraction into a tool for discipleship.

Though a US-based statistic, it is still notable.

Statista.com reports that there are 2.9 billion internet users in Asia, the largest percentage of any region of the world.[2] What does this mean for missions? How do we recognize and lean into this digital reality as we pursue DMMs and CPMs among the unreached? We would be remiss if we failed to step into this great opportunity to connect with so many.

There are real limitations to what can happen online in terms of relationships and disciple-making. But what if those barriers are not as significant as we once thought? The pandemic thrust many of us into online training and ministry more than we ever imagined possible. As disciple-making and training communities have been experiencing online, the outlooks of those once solidly established assumptions about what is possible have shifted.

Openness & Vulnerability in the Online Environment

Ronald* first heard about our training course through a Facebook advertisement. He attended a free webinar we offered that cast vision for disciple multiplication and movements and his heart was deeply stirred. "This is what I need in my community! I want to multiply disciples, not just preach to church members," he declared. His congregation was small and he didn't

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1 twitter.com/aussiedave/status/1630325736220377088

2 Petrosyan, Ani. "Worldwide Internet Users by Region 2022." Statista, January 4, 2023. www.statista.com/statistics/265147/number-of-worldwide-internet-users-by-region/.

have much money, so he requested a discounted price for the *Getting Started in Disciple Making Movements* online course. As he went through the modules, it revolutionized his thinking about himself, God, and how to make disciples. He became passionate about DMM thinking and there was no turning back. But there were still many questions, like how to apply these things in his unique context.

After finishing the course, Ronald joined an alumni peer group for his region. Meeting regularly with that group for prayer and mutual encouragement over the months and years that followed, deep friendships formed. Those in the group felt isolated in their contexts. Each was attempting to do something quite counter-cultural compared to their other pastors and missionary friends. Their new friends in the alumni community genuinely cared and relationships grew as they prayed for one another. Persecution and financial challenges created further opportunities for mutual support. In times of frustration, when progress felt impossible, or when someone they thought would be their Person of Peace lost interest, they encouraged one another, shared Scriptures, and leaned on each other's faith.

> *Who could have imagined that this level of authenticity, transformation, and community life could take place in a solely online, Zoom-based community?*

As the group's trust grew, deeper conversations began both online as a group and in private. One group member confessed to having beaten his children in anger. The group rallied to help him find a counselor and be restored to his family.

Who could have imagined that this level of authenticity, transformation, and community life could take place in a solely online, Zoom-based community? I certainly would not have thought it possible. But it has. And it is.

More than Courses or Zoom Calls— Communities of Learning & Support

Media to Movements and the use of technology to find potential Persons of Peace is growing daily. This is exciting and should continue to be pursued!

Not only can we use digital means to find open seekers but we also can utilize the internet to identify potential movement leaders. We can train, filter, and coach these potential leaders to see movements released among the unreached.

Over the past three years, Disciple Makers Increase (DMI), the part of YWAM Frontier Missions I have the privilege of leading, has trained 2,590 people in over 90 nations in our five online training courses. Just this year we have had over 25,000 people register for our free online webinar called Keys to Kingdom Impact, where we cast vision for Disciple Making Movements. In it, we tell the story of how God is using ordinary people across the globe to make and multiply disciples and cast vision for DMM/CPM efforts.

As people come into our courses and receive training, they become a part of a disciple multiplication-focused global community. This community prays together, meets regularly online, and together is pursuing the release of at least 50 new movements in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and the Americas as well.

How Does it Work?

In the initial courses, coaches filter and watch for key apostolically gifted implementers. They then invest further in those whom God is highlighting as obedient and active disciple-makers. Trainees and alumni connect with others in their nation or region as they meet on Zoom calls or in WhatsApp groups.

Here's another story that demonstrates how this works.

Ebot first heard about the DMM course on Facebook. Initially, he wasn't very interested but when he asked a question online and it was answered well, he grew more intrigued. The word *disciple-making* was new to him. What did this mean? He decided to attend the online seminar to find out more and then enrolled in the 12-week introductory course.

As he went through the course, his vision for the multiplication of disciples grew. He began to dream of a movement that would help him reach not just a few areas, but his entire region. The first module's lessons talked about casting vision to others and building a team. He tried first with local pastors but there was no interest. They were too stuck in their traditional mindsets.

Undeterred, Ebot and his wife and sister-in-law went out for prayer walks and to look for Persons of Peace in their neighborhood. A discovery group soon began. It then multiplied, and those in that group began another. The growth continued as Ebot trained and taught his wife and sister-in-law how to multiply disciples. Within just three months, they had multiplied to four generations! Ebot was thrilled about this surprising growth and I could hear the excitement and energy in his voice as he shared with me what was happening.

Rejoicing, I posted a short story about this in our alumni group. Everyone rejoiced at what God was doing. One brother, Mark, was particularly interested. Ebot happened to be in the same country and Mark sent me a WhatsApp message asking for Ebot's contact information. The next day Mark and his wife visited this brother. They had already planned to go to that same city and it seemed God-ordained that they would meet! What a joy and encouragement it was to get to meet another DMM practitioner face to face, eat food together, pray for one another, and dream together about what God could do in that region!

This is not the only instance like this. Online training is spilling over into offline relationships, friendships, and kingdom collaboration.

Keys to Training Practitioners Online

1. **Recognize both the strengths and limitations of the environment.**

People tend to go to one extreme or the other. Fed up with the limits of online Zoom calls or experiencing Zoom fatigue, some are dismissive of the opportunity we have before us. This is a grave mistake. The pandemic may be nearly over, but digital training is here to stay and continues to be a growing means of communication. Ignoring this trend is unwise.

Over-reliance on digital communication with no effort to grow key relationships offline as well is also a mistake. Online environments provide a stepping stone to further connections. Be intentional about creating pathways for online training to spill over into offline follow-up, coaching, and community.

2. **Don't just share content; build relationships and community.**

One of our greatest temptations in training is to be too content-oriented and fail to be practical. Skill-based, just-in-time training is far more effective and fruitful in any context! This is particularly true in the online environment. Keep your training segments short and only communicate one key point rather than multiple points. In our online courses, we aim for five to ten-minute videos. These are far easier to digest and absorb. At the end of each training segment, encourage discussion and action. Then direct participants toward a community to engage further. In most of our courses, we use WhatsApp groups for this purpose.

3. **Be consistent and keep showing up.**

Regularity and consistency win the game in online work. Posting content at the same time every week or showing up for an online call or live broadcast every week builds trust. Over time, people begin to expect you will be there and they look forward to your email, video, or that Zoom call. Irregularity or being too infrequent will not grow the relationships and community you need to make online training effective.

4. **Listen for the chickens.**

On internet-based calls, listen for what is happening in the background of the call and show interest. Comment on it. Welcome family members to come and say hello and wave at you. Do you hear a rooster crowing in the background? Don't be annoyed. Comment on it. Ask about it. Do you have chickens there in your neighborhood? Are they yours or your neighbor's? Build relationships that go beyond the discussion you are having. Be observant and responsive.

Take time for chit-chat in the online environment, just as you would during a tea break at a training that is in person. This grows stronger relationships with those you meet online.

Maximize the Opportunity

The Romans built roads for business and empire. God used them as a means of travel and kingdom expansion. Today, the internet provides us with a similar opportunity to reach out to the lost and to train the saved. Let's lean in and maximize it for His glory. MF