



Digital Opportunity in Missions Work

By **PAUL RATTRAY** All Bible verses quoted are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

After Roman roads and the printing press, digital opportunity, represented by smartphones and internet connectivity, provides perhaps the greatest opportunity to date of finishing the Great Commission task. Paul Rattray shares learnings about the reach, relationship, and resourcing potential of digital opportunity through pioneering work being done by Christian Vision (CV) across the globe.

Introduction

What is digital opportunity? Digital opportunity is using the tools that we literally have in our hands—smartphones—to preach the Gospel to all nations, especially people groups yet to hear the Good News. Nearly seven billion people around the world use smartphones and the internet today, which is 87 percent of the world’s total population.¹

A smartphone plus internet connectivity gives someone the ability to access and share information, talk with people, and train and learn from each other.

¹ <https://au.oberlo.com/statistics/how-many-people-have-smartphones>

All these activities and tools represent the enormity of digital opportunity, which is so significant I call it the “third Roman road” of mission work.

Paul the Apostle walked the Roman roads because these roads were the lifeblood of the Roman Empire. He was able to travel quickly throughout the Roman Empire on these special roads to *preach the Gospel, not where Christ has already been named* (Rom. 15:20).

Metaphorically, the printing press was the second Roman road because it gave unprecedented opportunity for printing and distributing God’s Word to people *en masse* in their own language.

Third Roman Road

The third Roman road is the digital opportunity that smartphones and online connectivity offer. With digital opportunity, we can reach more people and faster.



More importantly, we can form relationships with people across the globe like never before (even though we may never physically meet them) and resource them more efficiently and effectively. If we consider world mission through this lens, there have been three major epochs, or waves, of opportunity: 1) Roman roads helped spread the Gospel across the entire Roman Empire, 2) printing presses enabled multiple copies of the Bible in a multitude of languages, and 3) digital opportunity and technology are reaching more people with the Gospel, in multiple languages, faster than ever before.

Covid Connectivity

What we learned during the COVID-19 pandemic is indicative of digital opportunity. At Christian Vision (CV), we are called to introduce one billion people to Jesus.² We see digital opportunity as one of the greatest tools to finish the task that God has given us, which according to Matthew 24:14, *This Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations*, especially relates to Unreached People Groups.

In CV's pioneering work to impact 100 unreached nations globally, we see digital opportunity as one of the best tools to evangelize and equip people with the Gospel message. Through digital opportunity, we can entrust the Gospel message to many others to exponentially multiply the work we are doing.

Reach, Relationship, and Resourcing

That is why we are so excited about the incredible potential of digital opportunity to reach millions of unreached people with the Gospel, develop relationships, and resource them as believers to go forth and multiply. The potential of reach, relationship and resourcing are the three key areas I want to share with you about digital opportunity.

² <https://www.cvglobal.co>

Reach

By reach I mean we now have access to people online we have never been able to reach before because of political, social, and religious barriers. We are currently introducing one million mostly non-Christian people per day to Jesus in over 50 countries. For 295 days in 2022, globally, we reached more than one million people per day with the Gospel.

For instance, "Ali" [not his real name] is a young man in the Middle East who contacted us on Facebook asking to know Christ. Our response team shared several online resources with him about the Christian faith and how to know God through Christ Jesus. Ali believed and is now being discipled by one of our national pioneers who is not even in the same country because of a civil war and Islamic fatwa.

In our Asia Pacific region, we had 27,000 people accept Jesus through artificial intelligence (AI) conversation bots in 19 languages. Over 4,299 of these new believers continue to be discipled online, often because offline contact is physically impossible. While AI allows for greater reach, it has also become clear that most people want real human interaction and to meet physically with someone if this is possible. This requires human relationships.

Relationship

By relationship I mean that digital opportunity is not just about sharing information, even if it is the Gospel. Most importantly, it's about human interaction. First, we start with bots who can converse with people and work out if they are genuine seekers wanting to pray and accept Jesus as their Savior. Next, if possible, we connect them with a real person online. Then, if practical, this online relationship can move offline.

"Tom" is an example of this online to offline relationship. He saw Jesus in a dream and searched online to get answers, despite his family's strong opposition. After we connected him digitally with one of our national pioneers, Tom was baptized by one of our church partners. On the day of their first physical meeting, Tom even invited his wife to meet with the pioneer. Tom now has the courage to share his Christian faith with his family. He is consistently

discipled through Zoom meetings, because he has lots of questions about the Christian faith. Tom's online discussions with his discipler have grown his faith in Christ. Praise the Lord! Please pray that his wife will open up to Jesus soon and receive Him as God.

We need many more people who can do this digital pioneering work with us.



According to the data, in May of 2022 we were close to reaching one billion introductions to Jesus, which has been the key calling of CV. Without digital technologies, it would have been impossible to reach this many people with the Gospel so quickly.

Despite getting close to touching a billion people with the Gospel, we also need to impact more nations for Christ. In this case, our goal is to impact 100 nations of Unreached People Groups. Integrating our online and offline digital activities is a huge challenge and opportunity.

On the ground, we currently have 519 of these indigenous partners, whom we call national pioneers, in 38 countries serving among 59 mostly Unreached People Groups. Last year, collectively, our national pioneers personally evangelized over 300,000 people and grew more disciples through over 6,000 successors. Nearly 100,000 new believers are regularly meeting together. Thousands of people have been secretly baptized at night on beaches, in hotel swimming pools and in spas—even in mosque ablution areas.

This integration of online to offline connections has been highly effective, especially in closed, oppressive

countries. For example, we recently baptized a brother who is helping us pioneer with a Dari bot and another pioneer helping us with Pashto bots. Both brothers also do on the ground pioneering work.

Because of digital opportunity and these pioneers' willingness to literally sacrifice their lives in some cases, we can connect seekers with discipleship bots and/or directly with pioneers who are connected to our online systems. We praise the Lord for these pioneers and their successors, fluent in the local languages and cultures of the people we are impacting and the bot technologies that allow us to reach seekers digitally. Praise the Lord for them and please pray for their safety.

Resourcing

By resourcing I mean the digital tools and materials we share with the people who we reach with the Gospel, and also those with whom we have relationships from evangelism through to discipleship and succession. Digital connectivity has given us better access to the most important resource of any pioneering campaign—intercessory insights in real time. Digital opportunity allows us to connect with prayer partners who can give us intercessory insights into the nations and peoples we are impacting.

For example, intercessors were able to identify *fear* as the primary concern of a people the media call the happiest country in Asia. We were able to confirm this trend through our online *felt-needs survey* research campaigns, which confirmed that many of these so-called “happy” people were in fact spiritually consumed by fear. Because of this information, we were able to resource our teams (bots and pioneers) with Gospel pathways targeting fear as a felt need. This caused an influx of responses and people coming to Christ whom we then were able to connect with local pioneers and house-church fellowships.

Digital Connectivity

This sort of digital connectivity also gives entrepreneurs and pastors anywhere in the world the opportunity to share their unique insights and business sense with us as we move into spiritually hard places. Individual Christians also have a key part to play with digital opportunity.

Currently, over five million Christians subscribe to or follow our social media channels, using these online resources to evangelize their non-Christian friends. We have helped mobilize over 1,500 churches for evangelism and there have been over 44,000 downloads of mission resources or course completions. Our next challenge is the localization of digital, missional resources in up to 100 local languages as we aim to have pioneers in 100 nations this year.

Personal and Corporate Responsibility

Each of us can use this digital opportunity personally and corporately to connect with people and communicate the love of Christ. Three practical ways you can use digital opportunity are to share, shape, and send.

Share. Subscribe to and follow social media channels that you can use freely to share the Gospel with your friends.

Shape. My mother is 86, yet mentors and counsels dozens of her spiritual sons and daughters on her mobile phone around the world, weekly.

Send. Churches and mission organizations use people as pioneers into the digital world to preach the Gospel to all nations.

Digital opportunity is strategic for mission organizations who believe that preaching the Gospel to all nations is our responsibility in our time. If you are wondering how to do this practically, this testimony from CV's Southeast Asia Manager, Wendy Phodiansa (Phodi), can help.

Southeast Asia Case Study

Phodi leads a Southeast Asia team of 35 people working among 17 Muslim and Buddhist Unreached People Groups (UPGs) in eight countries. Digital pioneering is done through two key activities: social direct and pioneering (face-to-face or online). Three things we have learned about utilizing digital opportunities in these places are:

1. Integrate Social Direct with Digital Pioneering

Social direct utilizes digital opportunity to locate a seeker, while pioneering focuses on connecting personally and directly with the seeker for further



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discipleship, either in-person or online. Social direct is about sowing seeds while pioneering is about watering and harvesting those who are ready.

In digital pioneering, *digital* is the “radar” to locate and filter People of Peace (seekers) and the main focus of *pioneering* is personal evangelism and discipleship. Digital plants the seeds and prepares the seeker while pioneering is where the Gospel is shared through relationship. Digital and pioneering are two sides of one coin that need (ideally) to go together. In most cases, digital first is easier; however in countries that have strong digital barriers and religious persecution, it is often more effective to do pioneering first.

2. Focus on the Digitally Connected Unreached

In countries such as Thailand and Cambodia where mission work is mainly focused on rural places, we focus on cities and urban areas. These areas have the most unreached people, especially young people, who are also the most digitally connected. These people tend to be open to spiritual discussions and are the generation that will have the biggest impact in the future.

A recent testimony from Cambodia highlights digital opportunity among urban unreached peoples. Many people assume people groups unreached by the Gospel are in remote areas. Sometimes it's the opposite. In Cambodia, the most unreached people live in Cambodia's 25 biggest cities. Our pioneering work in Cambodia is urban focused. A church partner there

recently shared: “We are very blessed to be partnering with you in pioneering work. I am excited about pioneering possibilities. I believe we will continue to get closer to the ultimate goal. Only recently have I heard younger people (ages 35-45) say they want to launch out in Phnom Penh to pioneer new work. This is really the first time I’ve seen it in 12 years where there wasn’t a foreigner leading the way. Something is changing!” Praise the Lord— impact is occurring.

3. *Work in Partnership with local churches & missions*

We work in partnership with local churches or mission organizations that have a similar view of digital opportunity. We recruit pioneers and staff, partner with them, and provide them with resources, tools, digital strategies, and guidance on reaching the target UPGs. Our national partners provide spiritual coverage and local leadership insight.

We believe that each country and partner are in a different season and understanding when it comes to digital opportunity. Some pioneers are ready to go fully digital, like our partner in Thailand who is planting a fully online church, where others are more focused on direct, in-person connections, like our partner in Laos.

Opportunities and Challenges

Success for CV is to see our church and mission partners gain a fuller understanding that what we do in the digital realm is producing fruit—People of Peace (seekers) ready to be connected—and opens a new perspective on reaching UPGs.

Most of the challenges we find are in the knowledge and understanding of local people concerning this new church-planting model around digital evangelism. It is worth noting that using technology to reach people with the Gospel is not that common, despite our being familiar with digital technology and its potential to reach people in new ways for many years.

Because of this, it is often difficult to convince ministries to believe in the potential of digital opportunity, despite going through the COVID-19 pandemic where all things became digital. Another challenge is the lack of a movement mindset. Most mission workers focusing on evangelism and

discipleship don’t have an organic multiplication mindset, which means the mission work gets stuck once a church is planted.

Effective and Efficient Teamwork

Some things that lead teams to reach effectiveness and efficiency are clear vision and the right method. However, in my experience, the key is: Keep things as simple as possible and focus on the main things which are evangelism, discipleship, and multiplication. Anything before, in-between, and beyond needs to be consolidated to these three key focuses.

It is important to realize that this work needs collaboration and faithfulness. There’s no silver bullet to win a UPG to Christ. We need to keep doing what we’re doing by trying to improve all the time.

Conclusion

I encourage you to seize the opportunity to use digital reach, relationships, and resources to preach the Gospel to all nations. Please pray and praise the Lord with us for:

- Pioneers for the harvest! Jesus says in Matthew 9:38, *Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*
- Great teams and cooperation! Psalm 133:1 says, *Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!*
- Unreached People Groups impacted! Claim Psalm 2:8: *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*

Digital opportunity is strategic for mission organizations that believe that preaching the Gospel to all nations is our responsibility in our time.

If you have a smartphone, digital opportunity is, literally, in your hands right now. 



Christian Vision (CV) is a global Christian ministry with a mission to introduce people to Jesus and encourage them to become His true followers. Through CV, **Paul Rattray** leads a global team of more than 500 indigenous pioneering workers sent out by more than 50 local partners aiming to work in 100 nations mostly unreached by the Gospel.