

THE DIGITAL CHURCH IN 2019

Ali Johnson

ALI JOHNSON, THE DIGITAL EVANGELIST AT CLIFF, CONSIDERS THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL ON THE CHURCH IN 2019. THE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED, HAVE WE ALL GOT THE MESSAGE YET?

We all know it! During all our life-times the world has been transformed right in front of our fingertips. The biggest revolution since the industrial age, commonly referred to as the digital revolution. We now live in a different world.

Whether it is in the home with a house becoming a hotel with the explosion of Air BnB or every car becoming a taxi, with the eruption of Uber, the digital world has well and truly made a paradigm shift in all our lives. It has disrupted banking, high streets, education, industry and communication.

The numbers are a little bit mind-blowing. Here are some update stats on where we are today:



There are 5.11 billion unique mobile users in the world today, up 100 million (2 percent) in the past year.

3.26 billion people used social media on mobile devices in January 2019, with a growth of 297 million new users representing a year-on-year increase of more than 10 percent.

Stats taken from <https://wearesocial.com/global-digital-report-2019> true as of Jan 2019.



There are 4.39 billion internet users in 2019, an increase of 366 million (9 percent) versus January 2018.

The digital revolution is without a doubt the most significant event in information dissemination since Gutenberg's printing press and arguably marks a much bigger shift in human communication. To understand the impact the digital revolution has had let's take a look at Taxis in New York. In 2012 it costs \$1m to buy a medallion. Few taxi drivers owned theirs; most leased them, paying around \$100 for one 12-hour shift.

The limited number of medallions issued by the city made each one highly valuable; individual medallion sale prices went from \$50,000 in the late 1970s to over \$1m by 2014.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/20/new-york-yellow-cab-taxi-medallion-value-cost>)



For taxi drivers, owning a medallion meant you had made it. Homes would be bought. Dream holidays would be taken. Children would be sent to universities. This was a life defining moment.

Then it all changed.

Uber and Lift arrived on the scene. Suddenly anyone with a car became competition. The medallion had no value. No one wanted it, drivers went into debt and the world changed for them. That is the world in which we now find ourselves. A digital revolution has taken hold and we are now living with the consequences.

The Church has lived through many revolutions and adapted to them but it might be good for us to look at the where we are in terms of the Methodist Church and the digital world. A piece of research was undertaken in the Yorkshire North & East Methodist District by Elliot Crippen, the Digital Communications Enabler. The research showed that across the 216 churches 8,223 members and 9,218 attendees, there were 90 websites and 94 Social Media accounts. See the full report here <http://www.yorkshirenemethodist.org/digital-resources/>.

The research shows that we have work to do in relation to our digital footprint. We now live in a generation that uses the phrase 'just google it' as a verb. This phrase is the key to unlocking knowledge and answering many questions. We live in a culture that if we want to visit a place, go to restaurant or go on holiday we google it. The Church experiences a similar journey within the digital world, our footprint and channels say a lot to others about who we are and what we believe in. I wonder what your Church's digital footprint looks like. What does it say about your community and why people should come and find out more?

Our aim at Cliff College is to equip the Church, if you are interested in engaging in a conversation about digital and websites then please do get in touch with me on a.johnson@cliffcollege.ac.uk

My new role at Cliff College, in partnership with the Methodist Church, is as a Digital Evangelist. We as a College and as a Church are beginning to think about how we engage and equip the

Church in a digital-led culture. A culture which is hard to navigate, constantly changing but gives us unlimited possibilities and endless potential. Here are a few of the exciting projects we are working on:

1. NATWIVITY

Nativity, is the Christmas story told on Twitter and Facebook. It is a partnership between the Joint Public Issues Team (JUPIT) and Cliff College.

The beauty of the Nativity is that it helps us imagine the thoughts and feelings of a group of people caught up in one of the biggest stories ever told, and the Twitter platform is a great medium to express that.

Watch out for its launch on 1 December on twitter on @natwivity or on our Facebook page.

2. THE STORY PROJECT

Our stories are gifts that deserve to be shared and The Story Project aims to give people both the platform and the confidence to share their story. The Story Project is a partnership involving Cliff College, The Evangelism & Growth Team, The Learning Network and local Churches and Circuits and has a number of aspects.

- The Story Booth - Collecting stories that will be shared throughout 2019/20, on social media. These can then be used by local churches and circuits, on their own social media accounts, to engage with people external to the church.
- The Story Website - The website www.storyproject.org.uk will both store and share the stories that are captured, host the resources and share some of Wesley translated letters.
- The Story Resources - On the website you will also find a series of all-age resources to help improve confidence in storytelling.

Check out it at www.thestoryproject.org.uk

3. THE CLIFF CAST

Podcasts are now the hottest thing in broadcasting, with the number of Britons tuning in doubling over the past five years.

Six million of us now listen to a podcast each week, according to industry watchdog Ofcom, and that number is steadily rising. There are now 700,000? active podcasts and over 29 million episodes, including content in more than 100 languages. (source <https://musicoomph.com/podcast-statistics/>).

Cliff Cast is our first adventure into the world of podcasting. It will be centred around encountering, equipping and engaging. We will look at real issues that are affecting the Church, bringing great contributors to help us think through these issues.

Check out our website www.cliffcollege.ac.uk and Social Media channels for more information.

Imagination is a key part of the human mind. Without it, we wouldn't be able to look at nature and imagine new ways of ordering its elements for our convenience - like clothing, housing, roads, medicine and, of course, the digital world.

We therefore need to use our imaginations to understand the future of digital experiences and their impact on the world around us. This can give the Church ideas of how to use and also engage in it. Let's jump into our time-machine and find out!

What will digital look like in 10-years-time?

1. A MOVE TO SERVICES

The web is overflowing with information and content. Hundreds of millions of websites feature a lot of content that no one reads—or will ever read. Although more content is inevitable for the future of digital experiences, we will also see more of another digital category altogether: services.

What are services, you ask? A service is an application with functionality that allows you to perform tasks. Examples include AirBnB, Facebook, Uber, Google Maps, user dialogue, orders, and online banking. We have already seen that the web becomes a service-led industry rather a content-led industry.

The big question for the Church is how can we use, enable and inhabit these services to help us fulfil our calling as followers of Jesus.

2. DATA DRIVEN

As we spend more and more hours each day on the internet, the content producers deliver more and more bytes of data - essentially flooding the web with so much content that no one will ever be able to even consume a tiny fraction of it.

Our data is firstly worth big money and secondly is becoming increasingly more important to us. Digital Ethics and our response to a data - driven culture will become a larger question for us as followers of Jesus.

3. VOICE

The use of voice in search has exploded, with up to 25% of searches online now being powered by your mouth instead of your fingers, according to HubSpot (<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/voice-search-guide>). This will continue with growth of driverless cars, home control systems and smartphone assistants - activated technology is here to stay.

The technology offers the Church another platform in which to understand more of who Jesus is.

WHAT IS IN YOUR HANDS?

This question appears for the first time in Exodus 4:2, where God called Moses and told him to go and lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. Moses however was afraid that they wouldn't believe him and he asked for a sign of the power of God and God asked him this question 'What is in your hand?' To Moses, it was just a staff used to beat stubborn sheep but to God, it was the instrument by which miracles will be performed. To Moses it was just a rod, to God it was an instrument for miracles. The staff by the power of God became the staff of God (Exodus 4:20) and it was used to part the red sea, perform the 10 plagues, bring water out of the rock etc.

And this is the question that is presented to us as a Church.



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