

# New Research Describes Use of Technology in Churches

April 28, 2008

(Ventura, CA) Protestant churches across the nation are using various forms of emerging technology to influence people's lives and enliven their church experience. But the pace of technology adoption seems to have slowed in the past two years as some churches focus upon making the most of what they already have, and other churches attempt to get by without incorporating such tools into their ministry mix.

The new study explored the presence of eight technologies and applications in Protestant churches. Those tools included large screens used for showing video imagery; showing movie clips and other video segments during church events; sending email blasts to all or portions of the congregation; operating a church website; offering a blog site or pages for interaction with church leaders; maintaining a page on behalf of the church on one or more social networking sites; providing podcasts for people to listen to; and receiving programming and training via a satellite dish.

## Large Screens and Movie Clips

Two-thirds of Protestant churches (65%) now have a large screen projection system in their church that they use for services and other events. However, that number is barely higher than the 62% identified in Barna's 2005 study. At that time, growth was still evident, given that only 39% of churches had such a system in 2000. Since 2000, there has been a 67% increase in the number of churches using big-screen systems, but only a 5% increase since 2005.

The presence of a large-screen system is related to the church's size and theology. The smaller a church is, the less likely it is to use such tools. Among churches that average less than 100 adults each week, only half (53%) have such systems. The proportion balloons to 76% among churches that attract an average of 100 to 250 adults, and nearly nine out of ten churches (88%) that draw more than 250 adults each week.

Similarly, only 43% of churches described by their pastor as possessing "liberal theology" have big screen capabilities, compared to 68% among the churches that say they are theologically conservative.

Most of the churches that have a big screen mounted in the church use that monitor to show movie clips or other video segments. Overall, 57% of churches show movie clips or other video segments during their services and events. That represents 88% of the churches that have a big screen in place - up from 76% of the churches who had big screens in 2000, but a slight decrease from the 99% of churches with large screens who showed such materials in 2005.

The same pattern emerged regarding the use of movie clips and other video content, in which theologically liberal churches and small congregations were the least likely to use the screens to

display such material.

### **Sending E-Mail Blasts**

Sending email blasts to large groups of people or to the entire church body is common to a majority of Protestant churches (56%). Surprisingly, however, the prevalence of this practice has not budged since 2005. Small congregations are less likely to send out such blasts (47%) than are churches with 100 or more adults attending during a typical week (66%).

### **Internet Presence**

The ways in which churches are reaching out to people over the Internet are expanding. Back in 2000, just one-third of Protestant churches (34%) had a church website. That exploded to 57% in 2005, and has inched upward since then to 62%. About half of the small churches (48% of those drawing less than 100 adults) have a church website, compared to three-quarter of the mid-sized churches (75% of the congregations attracting 100 to 250 adults per week) and nine out of ten larger churches (91% of the churches with more than 250 adults attending).

One out of every four Protestant churches (26%) now has some presence on one or more social networking sites (such as MySpace). Again, church size was a factor in this with larger churches being more than twice as likely to have such a presence (20% vs. 47%). Charismatic churches were notably more likely (38%) than either mainline or evangelical congregations to use such pages in their ministry efforts.

Podcasting has been adopted by one out of every six churches (16%). Again, larger churches stood out in their embrace of this communications tool, with half of the churches attracting more than 250 adults (47%) utilizing podcast technology.

Bloggng is also invading the ministry world. One-eighth of Protestant churches (13%) now have blog sites or pages through which people can interact with the thoughts posted by church leaders.

### **Satellite Dishes**

One technology that has not shown any discernible expansion in the past several years is that of satellite broadcasting. In 2000, some 7% of Protestant churches had a satellite dish for receiving programming and training. That number has remained virtually unchanged since then, registering 8% in 2005 and the same 8% in 2007.

### **Technology Is Here to Stay**

The incorporation of digital technologies into church-based ministry is an important frontier for churches to master, according to George Barna, who directed these studies for The Barna Group over the course of the decade.

"The Internet has become one of the pivotal communications and community-building tools of our lifetime. Churches are well-advised to have an intelligent and foresighted Internet strategy in order to facilitate meaningful ministry," Barna commented.

He also noted that small churches are less technology-friendly. "Many small churches seem to

believe that new tools for ministry are outside of their budget range or may not be significant for a church of their size. It may be, though, that such thinking contributes to the continued small size of some of those churches."

Barna also addressed the slowing growth of certain tools in the church market. "The fact that market penetration of digital technologies seems to top out around two-thirds of the market could easily change if the digital-resistant churches conceived ways of facilitating their vision through the deployment of such tools. That is what made these tools so appealing to larger churches: being able to apply the tools to furthering their ministry goals."

## **About the Research**

This report is based upon telephone interviews conducted by The Barna Group with a random sample of 605 Senior Pastors of Protestant churches. For comparison, similarly drawn samples of Senior Pastors were interviewed previously, responding to the same survey questions. In the prior studies, 845 Senior Pastors were interviewed in 2005, and 610 Senior Pastors were interviewed in 2000. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the aggregate sample of 605 pastors spoken to in the most recent survey is  $\hat{\pm}4.1$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Denominational stratification was used to ensure a representative presence of the variety of denominations in the U.S.

The Barna Group, Ltd. (which includes its research division, The Barna Research Group) conducts primary research, produces resources pertaining to spiritual development, and facilitates the healthy spiritual growth of leaders, children, families and Christian ministries. Located in Ventura, California, Barna has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984. If you would like to receive free e-mail notification of the release of each new, bi-monthly update on the latest research findings from The Barna Group, you may subscribe to this free service at the Barna website [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org).

© The Barna Group, Ltd, 2008.

**Copyright Disclaimer:** All the information contained on the [barna.org](http://www.barna.org) website is copyrighted by The Barna Group, Ltd., 1957 Eastman Ave. Ste B, Ventura, California 93003. No portion of this website (articles, graphs, charts, reviews, pictures, video clips, quotes, statistics, etc.) may be reproduced, retransmitted, disseminated, sold, distributed, published, edited, altered, changed, broadcast, circulated, or commercially exploited without the prior written permission from The Barna Group, Ltd.