# Digital Evangelism:
# Effectively Using Digital Media for the Gospel

Today's public square is largely a digital one, so it's vital that Christians, ministries, and Churches think creatively and clearly about how to engage the world of media, social media, and other digital spaces. Andy Bannister, Director of Solas, a UK based evangelism ministry that specialises in digital content creation, will help us explore how we engage hearts, minds, and souls through the digital realm. How can we create content that will be read widely and shared? Do some things work better in digital spaces and others less effectively? What are the positives and what are the pitfalls of digital spaces? Does digital evangelism need huge budgets, or can one do a lot with a little? We'll explore all this and more in this interactive session.

**Dr. Andy Bannister, PhD** is the Director of Solas, a UK based evangelism and training ministry. Andy holds a PhD in Islamic studies and is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the Arthur Jeffery Centre for the Study of Islam and Other Faiths at Melbourne School of Theology. Andy is the author of *The Atheist Who Didn't Exist (or: The Terrible Consequences of Really Bad Arguments)*; *Do Muslims and Christians and Worship the Same God*; and the forthcoming (in July this year) book *How To Talk About Jesus Without Looking Like an Idiot: A Panic-Free Guide to Having Natural Conversations about Your Faith*. When not traveling, speaking, or writing, Andy is a keen hiker, mountain climber, and photographer. He is married to Astrid; they have two children, Caitriona and Christopher, and they live in Wiltshire in the UK. See more at www.solas-cpc.org.

## 1. Introduction: Our Digital Context

- Living in an increasingly digital world
  - The Electric Monk

  - Changes in technology, especially communications technology, changes culture

  - Vast amounts of time spent online

  - Media is consumed digitally

  - The big ethical questions tend to be technology related (e.g. Artificial Intelligence)

  - The public square is now (largely) a digital public square.

## 2. Challenges

- Busyness

- Distraction

- Disconnection
  *We say we turn to our phones when we're 'bored'. And we often find ourselves bored because we have become accustomed to a constant feed of connection, information, and entertainment ... There is now a word in the dictionary called 'phubbing'. It means maintaining eye contact while texting. My students tell me they do it all the time and it's not that hard ... [All this] adds up to a flight from conversation—at least from conversation that is open-ended and spontaneous, conversation in which we play with*

*ideas, in which we allow ourselves to be fully present and vulnerable.*"[1] ~ Sherry Turkle

- Everyone has their own truth and their own experts

- Shrillness and lack of nuance

- Digital flocking


## 3. Opportunities

- Christians have always embraced new technology, especially communications technology

- Engaging those who would never come to our churches
  - Statistics from the UK on digital engagement, especially during and post COVID

- Extended reach (any message can now go global)

- The potential of virality

- Direct engagement with an audience


## 4. Principles for *Personal* Digital Evangelism

- Remember that the real world will always be better for communication

- Extend your tribe (especially on social media; don't just hang out with Christians)

- Be authentic

- Don't be weird

- Share content that aims to intrigue people
  - Some examples (and the rationale) from Solas:
    - *Have You Ever Wondered?*
    - *Undercurrents*
    - *Short Answers*

- Don't encourage people (especially young people) to spend *more* time online

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[1]    Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015) p. 4, emphasis mine.

## 5. Principles for Churches and Ministries

- Do less better so you can do more well

- Keep it simple, keep it as professional as possible

- Keep it fresh

- Use those in your churches / teams with a gift for digital

- Involve younger people

- Be creative: experiment, iterate, adapt

- Learn from others (including our secular friends)

- Be Biblical (the Bible is *incredibly* creative; we don't need to choose the Bible or creativity!)

- Tackle the big questions

- Don't get sucked into the culture wars

- Be available (e.g. engage with those who comment, share, like etc.)

- Be generous (allow others to use your material)

- Story driven content (you can't fight stories with facts; but what a story we have!)

## 6. Further Resources

Solas (https://www.solas-cpc.org)

Speak Life (https://speaklife.org.uk)

Mark Crosby, *So Everyone Can Hear: Communicating Church In A Digital Culture* (SPCK, 2019)

Daniel Strange, *Plugged In: Connecting Your Faith With What You Watch, Read, and Play* The Good Book Company, 2019)

Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Basic Books, 2011)