

Evaluating The Effectiveness of Your Screen Usage During Worship

By Cathy Townley

If you have a screen in your worship center, chances are you misuse it. Most churches think screens exist to impart information.¹ Instead, a screen can help us communicate the beauty and value of the *relationship* between worshippers and each other and God, by encouraging participation, community, teaching / learning, artistic expression and action. See how well your screen usage fits into those five categories. Ask yourself, *When we use our screen, does it promote ...*

1. Participation?

It's beautiful to influence each other toward deeper faith during the service. We do so when we praise God together. Your screen will help facilitate participation during congregational singing if you:

- ***PROJECT SONG LYRICS*** I often see titles of hymns on screens instead of the lyrics; and titles sermons during the entire message, and that's it! That's an "information" approach, and there is no value added with it. For songs, project lyrics. For sermons, keep reading...
- ***USE FOUR LINES PER SLIDE*** It's common to see too many words on a single slide, which hampers participation. Only use 4 lines per slide, in a 44 font for PowerPoint or 72 for Keynote.
- ***KEEP MOVING BACKGROUNDS IN THE BACKGROUND*** Moving backgrounds can add a lot to the look of your slide. However, don't have too much movement so as to distract from the words. And make sure there is enough contrast between the brightness of the background and the song lyrics so that people can actually read the words and sing them!

¹ Search for *Death By PowerPoint* vids on YouTube. Here is one I like: *How Not to Use PowerPoint* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORxFwBR4smE>

- *PRINT OUT THE SLIDES AND ANTICIPATE* The person advancing the slides needs to keep pace with the up-front worship leaders so that the congregation isn't wondering what words come next. The easiest way to do that is to know what's on each slide. The print-out allows the techie to change what's on the screen just in time.
- *TRANSITION SLIDES SMOOTHLY* Put a dissolve on each slide to transition to the next. You can go fancier, but don't go overboard so as to become distracting. Keep it simple, but smooth.

2. Community?

Public worship creates a sense of belonging. Help people get to know each other and your faith community:

- *DURING ANNOUNCEMENTS DON'T* use announcements to try to get sign ups for a ministry. That's an information approach, and a misuse of the worship service in general. We're there to experience and praise God, not to try to save a ministry by getting sign-ups from a captive audience! **DO** encourage relationships during announcements by focusing on mission. What is your church doing in the neighborhood? Talk about that. **DO** project a picture of people who are involved in the ministry you're talking about. People will be much more interested in getting involved if someone to whom they relate is involved. And **DON'T** assume everyone knows who you're talking about at any time. **ALWAYS** project a picture of persons you refer to by name. For everything else, scroll important items on the screen *before* the service starts, during the gathering. Refer people to your website for more info. Publish your web address in your bulletin and make it easy to remember (eg www.churchname@churchname.com)

- *DURING THE SERMON* As noted in item 1, pastors default to information when the only thing that's on the screen during the entire sermon is the title, and maybe a picture of a blue-eyed Jesus praying. Forget the title and especially forget the generic Jesus. Instead, find places in your sermon to tag people and events. For example, if you're talking about your fishing trip, use a picture. If you're talking about someone in the congregation, show a picture. If you're talking about your work in the mission field, put up a picture! ² You can project words, but do so infrequently. See more about using images and bullets in sermons, below.

3. Teaching and Learning?

Screens offer a tremendous platform to help you emphasize the most important points you want to make that day. For example:

- *ONLY USE ONE VERSE OF SCRIPTURE* Sometimes it's important for the body to read scripture together out loud. If you want them to read all 25 verses, make sure to have a good reader / leader speaking into a microphone to set the pace. Use verse numbers to separate lines. Follow the guidelines for song stanzas to keep each slide readable for maximum participation. However, maybe there is just one verse that is the most important. Put *only* that one on the screen. Have worshippers read it twice for impact. That's much harder to do with all 25 verses!
- *FIND THE LITERAL OR METAPHORICAL MEANING OF YOUR SERMON AND PROJECT THE REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR SERMON* Talking about taming the tongue? Find a fun picture of a tongue. Talking about different ways of understanding Scripture? Search for images on vision, perspective, or photography. You

² Read *The Tremendous Staying Power of Image*, By Jason Moore.
<http://www.churchleaders.com/worship/worship-articles/160960-the-tremendous-staying-power-of-image.html>

may need to look at several before you find the one that best expresses your theme. Use images like these instead of the title in words. It will impact your congregation much more than words.

- *IF YOU'RE SHOWING A MOVIE CLIP, KEEP IT TO A MINUTE AND MAKE SURE YOU CAN SEE AND HEAR IT.* Run it ahead of time and work out the kinks!
- *USE BULLETS SPARINGLY.* Bullets on the screen can be powerful at the right time in your sermon, but not if they're wordy. People will remember one or two word bullet points much better than entire sentences. Besides, you will be expounding upon each item verbally. Only use bullets once or twice in your entire sermon.

4. Artistic Expression?

The latest trend in home-electronics is projecting art onto your flat-screen TV. You can do the same thing in the worship service on your screen, particularly art that the community creates. Some places in the service you can use art as a backdrop or a stand alone piece are:

- *DURING SCROLLING ANNOUNCEMENTS* eg, a picture of something created by kids during an announcement about children's church
- *DURING SONGS* eg, as the backdrop to the lyrics. Use one image per song; don't change the image for every stanza.
- *DURING COMMUNION* eg, as a continuation of the theme from the sermon, especially if communion *follows* the sermon. This would probably be stand-alone, not a backdrop for lyrics or words. You can keep one picture on the screen during the entire communion experience, or you can change slides periodically (use discretion!).

- *DURING PRAYERS* eg, the invitation to worship, or prayers of the people.

5. Action?

Worship does not exist for the church alone; it's for those that aren't yet there too. Using technology well improves the overall ethos of your service and that allows you to welcome guests and encourage regulars to invite their friends. You can "push" that point with intention, as it's part of our calling as Christ followers to reach out to others. What do you want people to do when they leave? That's what you should project on the screen. One approach would be to use the same words on the screen each week, like a liturgy. During the dismissal, you might project the following directive:

TELL SOMEONE ABOUT JESUS THIS WEEK

FOR SLIDE BACKGROUNDS AND IMAGES:

1. Shutterstock is a good resource for still and animated images. You can purchase packages to keep costs down. www.shutterstock.com
2. Google-search *free moving backgrounds for slideshows*. You will find a lot of them!
3. You'll find numerous free images on Flickr, as long as you use an attribution license. www.flickr.com.
4. A church I know that uses their screen well recommends the following resources for slide backgrounds: ProPresenter 5; www.sharefaith.com ; and www.MediaShout.com
5. Bring your camera or cell phone with you wherever you go and remember to take pictures with it!