

Ways forward for Project Reconnect

4 possible paths are identified for Project Reconnect over the next 2-5 years.

Options

Do nothing different

The costs of are mainly borne by the volunteer project contributors who generously give their time and skills to the project. I would expect to see many of these contributors moving on to areas with a fresh vision in the next 6-12 months. It will remain difficult to take PR beyond the bounds of the MLMA.

Fund the technology

At a cost of between \$25 - 30K the existing technology can be upgraded making the work of existing volunteers much easier. This could extend project life by 12-18 months. It will give some direction to existing participants and may create opportunities for spreading the project beyond the MLMA.

Fund the technology and a project co-ordinator

At a cost of between \$100 – 125K a project co-ordinator can be employed to consolidate existing efforts, grow the size and quality of the creation team, improve internal communication, build project profile, encourage new contributors, develop new markets and opportunities. This could extend project life for 18-30 months. Contributors and users outside of the MLMA could have a more prominent role in developing its growth.

Fund the technology, a project co-ordinator and project growth

At a cost of between \$200 – 250K promotion, marketing and advertising can increase the scope of a rejuvenated and stable project in ways that will enable PR to be useful to the wider church and create an ongoing income stream that will resource its future growth. This could extend the life of the project for 24-60 months. PR could become a resource of national significance to the life of the UCA and wider.

How to Grow Project Reconnect

For growth PR needs an evangelist. A person who is able to take PR, and its core ideas “on the road” and sell it. Without an evangelist PR is just another “resource” that competes with all the other resources for attention. PR is then merely a “TV church” substitute rather than a vehicle for bringing about change in the nature and expectations of village churches. With an evangelist PR will actively pursue and create new opportunities.

For growth and consolidation, PR needs a co-ordinator. A person who can ensure that the many parts of the whole enterprise fit together. Without a co-ordinator PR will be less than the sum of its parts as the many different demands of production compete with each other for time, money and energy. With a co-ordinator PR will be able to filter its opportunities for best effect.

For growth, consolidation and clarity PR needs organizational independence. A structure that gives portability and flexibility when new opportunities arise. A structure that gives a clear identity and brand to distinguish PR from its origins. A structure with its own budgeting that will allow PR to set its own priorities.

Vulnerabilities of Project Reconnect

Project Reconnect currently has 4 main areas where it is vulnerable.

Technology

The problem.

The use of a common level technology for content delivery, (ie a DVD) has made it easy for village churches to access and use the material. The equipment used to produce this content is aging and becoming less able to meet current expectations. New content requirements like indexing the existing content base, finding the means for distribution of content online, and securing intellectual property rights to the material will all exceed the current capabilities.

Some solutions.

Spend some money upgrading the current systems.

Spend some money and time providing training for PR participants

Outsource non-core facets of PR. ie DVD production, post and packaging (only effective when volumes are over 50 units per week.

Co-ordination and Planning

The problem.

Over the past 3 years the MLMA ministry team has taken the lead role in providing coordination and management to PR. Tom Stuart has acted as project creator, champion and promoter and wants to take PR and MLMA into other areas. It is very difficult to both maintain the current requirements and promote a new vision. It takes a varied skill set that is rarely found in one person.

Some solutions.

Introduce a Project Co-ordinator to oversee all facets of PR and ensure that all areas are adequately covered.

Make PR independent of the MLMA. Set it up as a separate business. Make it able to manage its own budgets, set its own spending priorities, turn its own profits and take out its out capital loans.

Volunteer Fatigue

The problem.

PR participants have mainly been co-opted into the project by Tom Stuart. His vision, enthusiasm and encouragement have been the motivation. As the project has demonstrated its success participants have been ready to continue their efforts. However, as Tom shifts his focus to other parts of PR participants are now finding that they are not helping to grow something new and exciting but are maintaining something that has a lot of responsibility attached. There is no identified recruitment process other than a member of the Ministry Team asking a member of the MLMA to consider coming on board. There is little in the way of introductory material to promote the idea and encourage others to join in.

Some solutions.

Actively pursue new PR participants as a form of missional stewardship within MLMA and beyond.

Prepare PR role descriptions and job statements.

Build a training schedule into PR for volunteers.

Prepare a promotional DVD that can be used to introduce PR to end users and new participants.

Ensure that technology and processes reflect current good business practice.

Create new opportunities and products from PR that continue to engage participants interests.

Rotate or schedule participants involvement to ensure that time commitments are better balanced.

Perception

The problem.

There is some confusion of how PR is perceived. This occurs between PR leadership, participants, end users and the wider church / community. For some PR is a method for transforming individuals and churches. For others PR is a way of keeping church going. For some it's a cheap attempt to avoid the rising costs of paying for ministers. These perceptions change the further one moves out from the "core" of PR.

Some solutions.

An evangelist will work on taking the vision of PR to the wider church, and interpret and mediate that vision back to its sources.

Gaining further Synod and Assembly recognition and acknowledgement of the effectiveness of PR will help the wider church to consider PR as a means for its own renewal and growth.

Employ a Project Coordinator to draw together and coordinate the different threads of Project Reconnect.

Coordination

1. Have regular meetings with MLMA Ministry Team.
2. Report as required to MLMA management.
3. Institute regular gatherings of PR stakeholders for encouragement and engagement.
4. Create a schedule/ timeline of work to move production cycle to be one month in advance.
5. Contribute to an online newsletter marking current PR milestones and challenges.
6. Regularly review performance of each PR component.

Promotion

1. Create a set of press releases for general media on developments within PR.
2. Create a set of press releases for use within nation UC publications.
3. Create a "what is PR" guide for new contributors.
4. Create a "what is PR" guide for new village churches.
5. Create a "what is PR" guide for use within the broader church.
6. Create a sample DVD with above guides and other promotional material.

Business Consolidation

1. Shift PR into a separate Business Unit.
 - a. Register ABN
 - b. Register business name
 - c. Setup separate postal address
 - d. Setup incoming contact phone services
2. Create task descriptions for all contributing roles.
3. Create Content Style Guides for internal and external contributors.
4. Identify and integrate new PR products.
5. Identify and integrate new sources of PR content.
6. Implement suitable record keeping systems for...
 - a. Tracking customer requirements
 - b. Indexing and Archiving PR back catalogue
 - c. Invoicing and Billing with integration into online ordering system.

Clearly define the separate components of Project Reconnect and draw up operational guides and responsibilities for contributors and participants. This will include finding ways of reviewing the effectiveness of each component.

Improve the quality of the currently available technology for Project Reconnect

1. Purchase at least one new camera.
Currently PR only has one reasonable quality camera for its use. This restricts the styles of filming available and bottlenecks the whole recording process. A second camera will allow for more content to be gathered more quickly. It will also make the training of new contributors much easier. A good quality “professional” digital video camera, like the Canon XM2 or Panasonic AG-DVX100A or Panasonic AG-DVC30E will cost between \$4000.00 and \$6000.00.
(http://www.canon.com.au/products/visual/cameras/cameras_video/xm2_specs.html)
2. Purchase at least one new PC based video editing system. The existing PC used by Alistair Weller is working at the limits of its capacity. It doesn't have adequate disk storage for 4-5 DVD's worth of material. The software regularly faults in the middle of production. There is no facility for dual screen editing. There is no broadband internet connection to allow for product updates and online transmission of content. I suggest that PR discuss their requirements with a PC provider who specifically targets this sector of the market. Expect to pay between \$4000.00 and \$6000.00 for a suitable machine.
3. Purchase a simple, portable autocue system. This will allow for a more natural style of presentation of messages. Expect to pay between \$1500.00 and \$3000.00 for a device that will work with a notebook computer that has a foot activated paging system and autocue software. (<http://www.prompta.com/>)
4. Purchase a small DVD/CD duplication system. A standalone 3 DVD duplicator will cost between \$1700.00 and \$2000.00. A Dual DVD duplicator and printer will cost around \$3600.00
5. A proper lighting kit.

Other Ideas

1. Enhance the weekly DVD content sheet to include more guides for worship and how suggestions on how the material can be used.

Consider integrating it into “off the shelf” Christian Education materials. For example, Seasons of the Spirit offer a wide range of lectionary based resources with thematic approach for worship and learning that the PR DVD could neatly tie into. There are licensing implications to this but a co-operative approach with the producers of SotS could produce some very interesting and useful enhancements to PR.

2. Examine and grade distribution formats.
Currently there is one “grade” and type of content... the DVD.

Consider taking the raw content and producing a range of lower quality but smaller output segments suitable for online distribution. A “best of” PR collection might will be something that could be extracted from the current pool of material. Also consider distribution content in VCD format. The quality is not quite as good but its easier and cheaper to produce and can be played on many computers as well as on most DVD players.

3. Improving the available production facilities will offer more flexibility in how PR video content can be distributed. The current setup at a participant's home, while convenient for that person's use is not optimal for quality production.

Consider establishing a space specifically set aside for PR filming and production. This

could be at one of the church properties or at other premises within Parkes.

4. Setup a customer contact and relationship management system together with product invoicing. Currently few records are kept of the distribution and use of PR content. It is not certain who it is being sent to, how current their usage is and how, if at all, they have paid for it. As PR grows the need for good record keeping will only increase.

Consider purchasing and using billing software with a strong customer relationship focus. There are several systems available online for low or no cost (ie SugarCRM or Info@Hand)

5. Establish a set of Contributor content style guides.
This will make it much easier for people new to the PR idea to provide their own contributions to the project.

Consider producing a DVD which shows how to produce a PR DVD!

6. Broaden the pool of message presenters.
At the moment PR draws almost all of its content from within the MLMA. This is has the benefit of helping current end users closely identify with the material. It also encourages the wider church to recognize the quality of input available in areas like the MLMA. However its only one small part of the wider church.

Consider talking with some of the many UCA training institutions about how they can contribute material to PR. A good mix of local MLMA content and broader material could bring many benefits for a broader based PR.

7. Index all content and create a back catalogue.
At present all old PR material is “stored” on DVD’s. No attempts have been made to index or collate or protect this content as current needs always override such concerns. However the 3 year pool of content contains some great material that would be of benefit to existing and future requirements.

Consider appointing a PR librarian whose sole job is to gather, index, annotate, store and place online PR content in such as way as to protect and enhance the value of this investment. This means that as PR grows its asset base also grows.

8. Place content and ordering system online.
Most of the parties outside of the MLMA who were told about PR wanted to know if the material was available for purchasing and downloading across the internet.

Consider building a simple system of uploading PR content onto a website as part of the weekly production cycle. Also look at ways in which this content would be sold.

An important part of this would be to integrate this function with the NSW synod’s digtree project.