

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

Traditional Christian media has struggled to adapt to the new digital economy. Mainstream media spends billions to own the eyes and hearts of our children. Here's how we fight back.

*A White Paper compiled and written
by Mark J. Aubry
The Impact Capitalist*

*With extensive insight
and data provided by:
Erick Goss, Dan Raines
Stewart Heath, and Timothy Nobles*

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

*"The eye is the window to the soul."
--William Shakespeare*

*"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light."
--Matthew 6.22*

As we all know, there is a fundamental shift taking place in our society from a mechanically focused (analog) life to one that is digitally focused. When this shift is coupled with the cultural battle that has been raging in the United States for over 40 years now, we need to begin to understand the importance of, and prepare for, the battle for the eyes of our children.

Unfortunately, Christians are late to the battle and have lost much ground. Whether it is from complacency, burying our heads in the sand, or simply a general aloofness, Christians can no longer accept the mediocrity that many of us have come to accept.

This shift to digital is massive. And companies know that in order to compete in the future, they need to get customers now, for the future. These companies are "mining for gold" through the eyes of our children.

***"There's a secret war brewing for the attention of children everywhere. And the soldiers in that conflict are the cutest characters you can imagine."
NPR's Morning Edition on Children's Media, June 2013***

Almost two years ago, Victor Luckerson, wrote an article in Time Magazine entitled, "How Kids Will Help Decide the Future of Television."

"Will someone please think of the children? [T]he online-streaming services have been spending bundles of cash on programming that skews toward a younger demographic. It's these kids' shows that will play a large role in determining who comes out on top in the streaming wars."

According to Cyma Zarghami, president of the Nickelodeon Group, media companies want to "[g]et them early, the thinking is, and these viewers can be hooked for decades, shepherded through a media company's offerings, whether ad-dependent or subscription-driven, as the youngsters grown up. As the generation turns over at this particular point in time, they're more important to us than ever before."¹

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

One need not search very long to find that mainstream media continues to make a HUGE commitment to children's programming:

- DreamWorks has recently commissioned over 300 hours of original programming
- Over \$350 million is paid annually for the Disney catalog
- 20% of all viewing on Netflix is done by children
- \$5B being spent by Netflix on content creation
- Amazon is spending \$1.5 billion on children
- Nickelodeon's new programming deal is for several hundreds of millions of dollars
- Amazon has 5 new original programs; 3 are for children
- The PBS Kids catalog is worth several millions of dollars
- Hulu has recently purchased 9 new children's shows from Jim Henson

Mainstream media also understands how culturally important and financially significant our children are:

- Companies spend \$17 billion per year marketing to your children²
- Children under the age of 14 spend \$40 billion annually³
- Children under 12 influence \$500 billion in spending each year⁴
- Kids ages 2-11 see more than 25,000 TV ads annually⁵

All of this information is difficult enough to handle, but what makes it worse for Christian parents is that there are very few viable alternatives to what mainstream media offers:

- VeggieTales, the leader in Christian media, is more than 20 years old
- VeggieTales was purchased in 2013 and the content has been watered down (read: very limited scriptural influence) and it is becoming less appealing to its core audience
- Major Christian media companies view the Children's category as "too risky"
- The 20th C. model of retail merchandising is dying. It is broadly known that a new form of marketing is required that traditional media companies do not understand.
- There have been no major innovations and no new products developed by the traditional companies for over a decade
- There have been some companies that have tried, but the marketing execution has not yet been successful

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

Christian families have very few media options that actually have compelling entertainment value and support a biblical worldview. In fact, Christian children live in two media worlds because the traditionally Christian media companies have, at worst abandoned them, and, at best don't know how to provide content that Christian families want. And the Mainstream media is there and more than willing to help focus your children's eyes on their content.



As media companies retreat from providing programming for children that acknowledges faith, more and more families must choose between content that is not compelling or turn to mainstream media outlets that are all too willing to welcome them into, at best, an amoral and faith-free environment or, at worst, Godless programming that is anti-faith and hostile towards the biblical worldview. (Or, Christian parents can choose to have their children watch content that is 20-30 years old that they didn't even like watching when they were children.)

It is not difficult to find the evidence that this is a battle that Christian parents are not just willing to fight, they *want* to fight. But where do they turn? How can they fight this battle without resources, let alone the proper resources?

Educating. Informing. Entertaining?

The biggest issue is not a lack of audience or opportunity, but creative and marketing execution.

The Battle for the eyes of our children is being fought with content that is either:

- a. secular, with, at best, a moral message
- b. secular, with no message or, at worst, one opposed to a biblical worldview
- c. poor quality, with a Christian message
- d. *some* content with good quality and a Christian message, just not enough of it

It is unfortunate, but Christians must arm themselves with inadequate resources. For this battle, Christians keep showing up with knives trying to battle tanks and bazookas. And, as of yet, traditional Christian media companies have been unwilling to pay for the resources to fight this battle. It's the media equivalent of having a form of godliness, but denying its power.

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

Let me be frank: the vast majority of Christian-themed content does not even remotely compare to the quality of the product that the mainstream media companies pump out year after year.

The only innovator in the Christian children's marketplace to have any real success is Phil Vischer. Phil is the creator of *The Big Idea*, which includes VeggieTales. Yet Phil no longer writes or produces any of the VeggieTales productions.

Christian families know what the problem is: there is a tremendous need for awesome, engaging, and compelling content that is educational, informational, and, (is it too much to ask?) entertaining.

This content needs to be provided in such a way that it meets Christian parents and their children where *they* are and where they are going to be: on the web, mobile, and dynamic. This will make or break the content and access to it.

In conjunction with being dynamic and mobile, that content - or catalog - needs to grow, because kids are voracious consumers of content.

And, with all of this, the content must have the ability to do ministry. Why can't the content be interconnected with daily devotionals, curriculum, or books that support the message of the video the child just watched?

Phil Vischer is responsible for almost 90% of the Christian content available today. While he continues to create awesome, engaging, and compelling content that is educational, informational, and entertaining (more on this later), he is one man, he is mortal, and he needs help producing the munitions of this battle.

Surely God has created other creatives. Why is there little compelling content beyond Phil Vischer?

Creatives have not been developed; neither have they been compensated fairly

Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will perform before kings.

--Proverbs 22.29

The effort it took to find quality content and quality content creators has traditionally been too hard and not cost effective. But, that was based on the old model and, as we now know, that model is broken and almost dead.

It has been too hard for businesses to attract, develop, manage, and compensate content creators, simply because they didn't know how to do it and still make a profit.

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

Yet, the marketplace is changing. For a long time, most Christian parents have accepted secular, but moral, content and/or poor quality, but Christian content. This is no longer the case, as tech-savvy Christian parents are demanding great quality and compelling content. (It's about time!)

If Christian parents are actually no longer going to accept a mediocre product, then companies need to figure out how to effectively attract, develop, manage, and compensate content creators.

Phil Vischer is a genius. He is the Michael Jordan of Christian children's education and entertainment. And, just like there will likely never be another MJ, the National Basketball Association (NBA) goes on and is just as popular as ever. There may never be anyone that comes anywhere close to PV's vast array of abilities. Yet, there are many creative people out there that may have one or two tremendous talents that can be used in the creative process to provide compelling content like creating voices, or with the ability to act, sing, write scripts, direct, write books, write curriculum, write code, develop websites, write music, and give speeches, to name only a few talents.

Is it too much to expect from a company to be able to attract, develop, manage, and compensate Creatives? Of course not, as mainstream media does this all of the time. What is different is that I'm asking for a Christian company to provide Creatives the opportunity to create awesome, engaging, and compelling content that is educational, informational, and entertaining.

In order to do this, a Christian company will need to partner with and protect the best and brightest Creatives. Once a company has secured a strong relationship with the Creatives, the company can build a pipeline of quality and compelling content and product for years to come. This will make Christian families happy by giving them the proper resources to battle for the eyes of their children. It will also give businesses, Creatives, and investors the ability to make both an Impact *and* a Profit (more on this later).

The market is asking for this. No, the market is demanding it. That's why traditional Christian media companies are dead or dying. The market no longer wants inferior products, inferior content, or content that does not come from a biblical worldview. And the market wants it on the web and mobile.

Deciding to provide awesome, engaging, and compelling content to the market is step one for a Christian media company. The second step is securing and/or strengthening relationships with Creatives and content providers and fairly compensating them for their work. The last step is figuring out how to get the content to the Christian families.

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

Content, Community, Commerce - The Reinvention of Distribution

"Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production."

--Adam Smith

As discussed earlier in this paper, the 20th C. model of distribution is no longer accepted by 21st C. consumers, Christian or otherwise. The next generation of distribution is to engage directly with your customers. This is made possible by the use of technology; you develop a feedback loop and maintain a conversation with your customers.

What every business wants is sustainability. Without profits, there is no sustainability. Without compelling content, there are no profits. Without Creatives, there is no compelling content. Without customers, nothing matters. Christian families, as consumers, are no longer going to be told what is good content. Christian families, as consumers, have the power to partner with a Christian media company to provide the content they so richly deserve.

In a recent study by the California-based research company Barna Group, VP Roxanne Stone observed: "Gen-Xers and Millennials have a reputation for wanting to be individualists - for wanting to break away from traditional cultural narratives and to resist being 'boxed in' by what they perceive as limited expectations." This same reputation continues to manifest itself in the way content is consumed (or at least the way these individualists desire to consume it).

It is great to have content created by talented Creatives. However, the purpose of developing compelling content is for it to be consumed by Christian families.

Isn't it very interesting how all three of the the points of this paper - the need for developing compelling content, the need to develop Creatives, and the ability to distribute the compelling content developed by Creatives - are all tied together. The glue that holds them all together, however, is money. Not only from the Christian family that buys the product, but also from investors who see the vision of the company and how both a positive impact and a profit can be made.

Yet, buying the product is not the only role the Christian family/consumer plays. The Christian family/consumer has a responsibility to communicate with the Christian media company. Communicating with the Christian media company includes, but is not limited to:

- Feedback regarding products, services, content, creatives
- Feedback regarding technology and the platforms you use to consume content
- In what ways can your home be enriched?
- In what ways do you and your family want to consume media?

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

It's no longer about buying a DVD that can be thrown into a DVD player. It's about delivering compelling content based on the needs of the consumer - on the web, mobile, dynamic. While DVDs will be around for some time yet, it's impossible to miss this massive shift in the consumption of media. Unfortunately, the traditional Christian media companies have.

Impact and Profit... Yes, it's both!

"When a person acts in his own interest, he frequently promotes (the intent) of society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it."

--Adam Smith

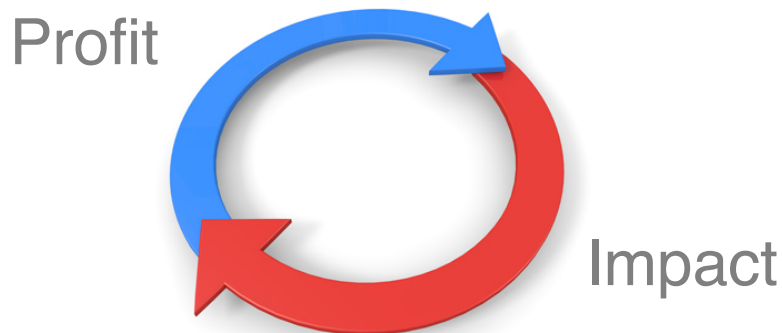
"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

1 Peter 4.10

As strange as it sounds, one of the ways that will help us battle for the eyes of our children, is if the company (or companies) providing the compelling content, and their investors, are wildly successful.

Capital (money to run a business), and access to it, is the "life blood" of any successful business. And, as you can imagine, it takes a lot of money to develop, create, and distribute compelling content. But that is the only way we're going to begin to win this battle for the eyes of our children.

A good business is a steward of its resources. And a business looking to make an Impact on the world will reinvest profits to create more content, develop more Creatives, and create new and inventive ways to deliver awesome, engaging, and compelling content.



The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

There is currently very little investor engagement in "Christian" businesses as investors have traditionally avoided Christian-led businesses like they were carrying some sort of plague. And there have been very few compelling reasons to get investors excited about investing in Christian companies, let alone Christian media companies.

Investors want to make money. But, contrary to what many believe about capitalists and investors, most would like to make an Impact - a meaningful difference in the lives of others - while they make a Profit, not just after it. A company that has a platform described in this paper - content, creatives, and distribution - will make a huge impact on the lives of families. And, if infused with the "life blood" of business, that company will be able to provide a tremendous profit. Which allows the company to start the Impact-Profit cycle all over again.

The market is there:

- About 64 million people in the US are considered regular attenders of church.
- There are about 80 million Millennials in the US today
- Millennials are giving birth to approximately 9,000 children per day
- 29% of Millennials are self-identified Christians
- This does not even take into consideration the Gen-X-led families that are looking for content *right now*
- 4-6 million "easily reachable" Christian households in the US

There is help for Christian families

As discussed, if you are going to ask for awesome, engaging, and compelling content, you need to have empowered creatives. But if you don't have a platform to deliver the awesome, engaging, and compelling content, there is no reason to engage the Creatives. All three parts work together. And there is only one company that has the ability - and the track record to prove it - to deliver all three for the Christian family battling for the eyes of their children: **Creative Trust** (<http://creativetrust.com>).

Creative Trust has been building brands and developing audiences for leading content and content creators for 25 years. Creative Trust clients and partners have received over 100 Grammy, Juno, Dove, and Literary awards. These clients and partners have sold over 25 million records, 30 million books, and 55 million videos. They've done all of this while quietly redefining the paradigm of content creation and media distribution for Christian families.

The Battle for the Eyes of Our Children

As the media industry becomes more secular, there is a growing need for a new approach to media that supports the Christian way of life amidst a highly pluralistic cultural environment.

The current focus of Creative Trust is on kids and families in the US, to give parents the content, and therefore, the power, they deserve to fight the battle for the eyes of their children.

To learn more about Creative Trust and their compelling content, please visit:

<http://creativetrust.com>

<http://whatsinthebible.com>

<http://jellytelly.com>

References

1. As quoted in The New York Time, July 4, 2014. <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/resource/marketing-children-overview>
2. Schor, J (2004). Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture. New York: Scribner, p.21.
3. James McNeal quoted in BuyBabies. (December 9, 2006). The Economist.
4. Campbell, K. & Davis-Packard, K. (2000, September 18). How ads get kids to say I want it! Christian Science Monitor.
5. Federal Trade Commission Bureau of Economics Staff Report. (2007, jun1). Children's Exposure to TV Advertising in 1977 and 2004. Holt, D.J. Ippolito, P.M., Desrochers, D.M. & Kelley, C.R. p. 9.

About the Author



Mark Aubry is many things: entrepreneur, basketball missionary, teacher, speaker, basketball player, husband, and father of three young children. The phrase that best captures Mark is *Impact Capitalist*. An Impact Capitalist is one who uses business and capitalism to make a positive impact - or a meaningful difference - in the lives of others.

Mark has been an entrepreneur and business owner his entire adult life. He has spent the last 15 years providing strategic guidance for entrepreneurs and business owners, many of which have been early stage ventures.

Mark is a member of the Illinois Basketball Hall of Fame, has managed both public and private investments, and has taught business and investing courses as an adjunct professor at two different institutions. He has also taught economics and psychology courses.

From 2012-2013, Mark lived in Haiti with his family. While in Haiti, Mark ran the social enterprise, Hoops for Haiti, that he and his wife co-founded. He also taught and lectured on business as an adjunct professor. It was while living in Haiti that Mark first began to see the importance of becoming *The Impact Capitalist*.

Since returning from Haiti, Mark has co-founded a resource management and consulting firm, has co-founded a global biotechnology start-up, and, most recently, Mark works with a media company.

A speaker whose style is informative, educational, and entertaining, Mark engages audiences through stories and data that reach both intellect and emotion. To find out how Mark can help your group or organization, contact him here: <http://mjaubry.com/contact-mja/>.