

# More than just Technology

*Phil Jump asks are New Technologies making some visions of God's Kingdom more possible?*

I've never met Serjo, but his homepage assures me that this young Russian musician is continuing to make his music even as I am putting this article together. I am though, one of Serjo's "Patreons" – in return for a modest monthly commitment, I have free access to his music tracks with full permission to reproduce, include and broadcast them within my own creative content. I'm not sure I'd have got through lockdown without Serjo, or Keys of Moon to use his professional name. It's his music that plays quietly in the background during those meditations and psalms that have become a key feature of our online Sunday services, that many within our Baptist community and beyond have relied on during sustained periods of lockdown and isolation.

But it's not so much Serjo's creative talent that causes me to highlight his work in this context, but his business model – a model that is becoming an increasingly familiar feature of the

economic landscape of that generation of young adults that we call "millennials".

Thirty years ago, when I was proudly plugging in my first dial-up modem to connect to the internet, it would have been unthinkable to exchange high quality images and music recordings in a matter of seconds with someone on the other side of the world. Yet the rapid development of technology has not only made that possible, but also enabled some quite different ways of doing business.

Much of my relationship with Serjo relies on trust. I might harbour secret hopes of one of my reflective videos using his music "going viral", attracting significant revenue income through its constant re-showing. Should that be the case, Serjo has no legal claim on me. He does however trust me to share with him the cash proceeds of the video – our collective endeavour – if they ever become substantial. In the meantime, he is glad

that the combined modest monthly contributions from myself and a few dozen other patrons at least puts bread on the table.

I guess like many people, the sudden advent of the pandemic lockdown launched me on an incredibly steep learning curve. In the space of a week I had to go from being the visiting preacher who turns up at a local church, to the host of a YouTube channel. For me, as a Baptist Regional Minister, I at least had a platform and a role that helped to make sense of it. But as I rushed to put together some kind of meaningful act of online worship, I found that many of the traditional sources of Christian music and content were locked into licence agreements that made it virtually impossible to use them legally at short notice. Although some acted to try and offer some temporary permissions, it was clear that they were forged in a world that never imagined the Church going online in a matter of days.



**High quality music recordings**

Photo: Gabriel Gurrola on Unsplash



**TROTRO Tractor, Ghana**

Photo: TechCabal

Meanwhile, amongst those who were already familiar with this digital world, there was a host of images, music tracks and many other resources, instantly accessible from download platforms, and made usable through such things as Creative Commons licences, shareware and the like. They were already well and truly on the page!


So why does this matter? Is this just an opportunity to air a personal gripe or does it truly offer some insight into the world of faith and business?

My response comes from recognising that in other contexts much of my time is spent speaking out on issues of justice, and commending a set of values that we often summarise as defining the “Kingdom of God”. And when it comes to the world of business, the economic and trading models that are emerging through the new technology platforms seem to resonate with the Kingdom of God far more than those that have tended to reside within the capitalism of the 20th Century. Yet while many who would not describe themselves as religious seem to be

readily embracing these new business models, Christian producers and publishers remain wedded to the old world, even to the detriment of our shared mission in a digital age. The internet has at the same time enabled a fair number of fraudsters and scams, so this is more than a matter of technology alone; but we should recognise that it has also enabled new models of business relationship.

Similar stories are emerging from other technology platforms. One high profile example is TROTRO Tractor Limited in Ghana. Using a platform that somewhat resembles the one used by Uber Cabs, farmers who could never imagine owning such a piece of plant are able to connect with TROTRO Tractor owners and operators in order to use their services for key tasks in the agricultural process. This has made a significant contribution to tackling inequality, as individuals who were locked into poverty by being locked out of mechanised farming, are suddenly able to compete and prosper in the wider marketplace.

We cannot deny that in some contexts the advent of the internet and associated technologies has exacerbated inequality and monopolies of wealth. But there are clearly other examples of genuine "democratisation", whether this is the growing presence of YouTubers challenging traditional big broadcasters, or the ease of access to equipment and resources that were once the sole domain of big business.

What this suggests is that the traditional dichotomy between capitalism and socialism is less and less relevant to the emerging age. Technology is impacting not simply what we are able to do, but also how we access and pay for it, and therefore impacts the business models we create in order to facilitate our work. Those of us who believe there is a natural and creative dialogue to be maintained between faith and business now have a rapidly expanding new world to explore, populate and even celebrate. We should also ask the degree to which our traditional Christian activities need to break free from the inherited business models that have enabled them. 



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