

Christian website offers YouTube alternative for wary Baptists

December 13, 2007

Posted: 12/14/07

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By Grace Thornton

The Alabama Baptist

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (ABP)—Move over, YouTube. Baptists have video cameras. And they're using them, now that they have a "safe" place to share their videos online, said Bill Nix, CEO and president of Axletree Media.

Axletree's E-zekiel, a website builder and host used by churches and other nonprofits around the world, has come out with a video counterpart to its popular web service: E-zekiel.tv, which launched in early November.

"E-zekiel.tv is the answer to the question many churches have been asking," said Nix, a member of First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. "Many of our churches whose websites are on E-zekiel have been wanting to share videos online, but the option of going to YouTube wasn't an option."

With YouTube, Nix explained, the possibility always exists that users could encounter sexually explicit content.

Videos posted on E-zekiel.tv are monitored for such content so that the site remains Christian-based and family-friendly. And anyone can use it for free, Nix said: "You don't have to have an E-zekiel website to use E-zekiel.tv."

Jim Jackson, director of missions for Elmore (Ala.) Baptist Association, can attest to that. Nix handed Jackson and several others small video cameras at the recent Alabama Baptist Pastors' Conference in Mobile, Ala., and asked them to give it a try with the E-zekiel.tv site.

Jackson tried it, and he said he's sold.

"It's very simple. You just have to sign in and create an account, then you can start uploading," he said. Elmore Baptist Association's site isn't powered by E-zekiel, but Jackson said there are plans to link its site to E-zekiel.tv so videos can be posted.

"We've been thinking of some of the ways we could use it," said Jackson, who's already envisioning his churches using it for online videos welcoming visitors, among other things.

The site already has made an impact on his family, too. Jackson's son-in-law, Brian Gay, recently went to Guatemala and was able to upload videos of mission work in that nation while still on-site.

"It was really neat for us because he had left an itinerary behind so we could be praying for them, but when we could see the video and see the folks they were working with, that made it even more real," Jackson said.

Nix noted that YouTube and GodTube.com, one of the pioneers in Christian video sites, plowed some of the ground for E-zekiel to get into this line of ministry.

GodTube, the “video-driven social network,” launched officially in August and offers video-sharing, chatting, messaging and blogging.

Currently the Plano -based service is the largest broadcaster of Christian videos on the Internet, with more than 500,000 unique visitors hitting the site each month.

Nix is getting on board with that trend, but said he has different plans for his site than the one-to-one relationship that happens on YouTube and GodTube.

“I imagine that there will be churches setting up groups and using this to communicate with their members,” Nix said, explaining that churches could use it for all kinds of purposes, such as sending videos to their members.

“I can envision a person visiting a church, filling out a visitor card and providing the church with an e-mail address,” he said. “Then when that person gets home, there’s an e-mail invitation asking them to be a part of the church’s video group online. That person then has access to videos explaining the church’s mission, giving a virtual tour of its facilities and ministries — the list could go on and on.”