



The headquarters office of Adventist Media (formerly Adventist Media Network) in Wahroonga, NSW, Australia.

Photo courtesy of Kent Kingston.

Adventist Media, South Pacific Division

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Adventist Media (AM) is the official media production entity for the South Pacific Division (SPD). AM operates at two locations: The Adventist Media building adjacent to the SPD administrative offices in Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga, Sydney, Australia, and at Signs Publishing in Warburton, Victoria.

Background in Printed Materials

Since the beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific region, mass media has been an integral part of the Adventist evangelistic strategy. Among the first Adventist missionaries to arrive in Australia from the United States by ship in 1885 was Henry Scott, a printer, and William Arnold, a literature evangelist.¹ Only months later, in January 1886, they launched the Australasian edition of *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*,² a monthly periodical that Adventist Media continues to publish.³ The magazine was the forerunner of the many periodicals, books, and other printed materials that continue to be produced and distributed from Adventist Media's Warburton campus, Signs Publishing Company.⁴

Radio and Bible Schools

The first commercial radio broadcasts were launched in Australia in 1923.⁵ In the same year, New Zealand set up a licensing regime for its already burgeoning private radio station network. The public enthusiastically adopted the technology and radio quickly became an essential means of communicating news, music, entertainment, and educational content. Church leaders of various denominations were not slow to recognize the potential of radio for reaching mass audiences and, within the next few years, religious programming proliferated on Australian radio, particularly on Sundays.⁶

Some of the very first to bring the Adventist message to the airwaves in the South Pacific region were David Sibley, in Melbourne in 1927; Ken Wooler and Reuben Hare, in Sydney in the 1930s;⁷ and Charles Boulting, in Mildura also in the 1930s.⁸

Appointed by the Australasian Division (now the South Pacific Division), an Adventist pastor and New Zealander, Laurence C. Naden, commenced the *Advent Radio Church* ministry in Sydney on February 7, 1937, by wishing listeners "throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Islands of the sea a very happy and prosperous year."⁹ In order to engage listeners more deeply, Naden offered printed copies of each broadcast script and in doing so built up a mailing list. Listeners who expressed repeated interest were invited to participate in the Radio Bible Class, via a set of mailed Bible study lessons.¹⁰

Like many other Adventist radio ministries around the world, *Advent Radio Church*, in 1947, changed its name as part of a new affiliation with the United States radio evangelism pioneer H. M. S. Richards's *Voice of Prophecy* ministry.¹¹ The Radio Bible Class became the *Voice of Prophecy* Bible Correspondence School. An index of *Voice of Prophecy* radio scripts held by the South Pacific Division Heritage Center indicates that Naden continued as the speaker up to the end of 1954, after which George Burnside took over the microphone. In April 1957, Australia and New Zealand began to replay H. M. S. Richards's broadcasts in place of local content. This arrangement continued for eight years until, in 1965, *Voice of Prophecy* was phased out in favor of *Faith for These Times*, a new Australian radio program featuring Roy C. Naden, son of Laurie Naden (then Australasian Division president), as the speaker.¹² The potential reach of Adventist radio in Australia and New Zealand by 1965 was impressive: 200,000 homes via forty-five radio stations.¹³

In the meantime, the *Voice of Prophecy* Bible school model had been rolled out elsewhere in the Australasian Division, with Fiji (1953) and New Zealand (1956) among the early adopters.¹⁴ According to Walter Scragg, “In 1962 the *Voice of Prophecy News* had a circulation of 25,000. Applications for Bible courses totaled over 53,000 and over 250,000 Bible lessons were corrected. Fifty-three thousand booklets and other free offers were sent to listeners and viewers. At the end of 1962, reports indicated that, presumably in the years since the opening of the Bible School, 6,000 persons had found their way to Christ and been baptized through broadcasts and Bible lessons.”¹⁵

Film and Television

Commercial television broadcasting arrived in Australia in 1956 and quickly took its place alongside radio as an essential part of the media landscape. Not-for-profit groups, including churches, faced challenges gaining access to the medium. Production costs were high and the number of channels limited to two or three in any given market. Australian evangelist George Burnside, however, was determined to harness the power of this new medium for the gospel and immediately began to make arrangements to secure timeslots. When Sydney’s TCN Channel 9 commenced broadcasts in 1957, *Faith for Today*, featuring William Fagal, was on the schedule.¹⁶

Freelance Adventist Australian filmmaker Eric Were demonstrated the power of visual storytelling with his 16mm color productions, notably his 16-minute on-location mission report, *The Cry of New Guinea*, released in 1962.¹⁷ In the same year, Australasian Division leaders announced funding of £16,000 devoted largely to a new series of message films available in each conference. It was reported that

these films are a part of an *It Is Written* program...During this year a number of new television stations will be opened. To present our message through this medium entails a very heavy financial burden. A committee was appointed to give study to provide a firm basis for the use of television in presenting the Advent message.¹⁸

In 1964, the Australasian Division assisted two conferences, North New South Wales and South New South Wales, in experimenting with the television program *It Is Written* in their territories. With evangelist George Vandeman as speaker, the program was a technological ground-breaker, being the first religious show broadcast in color.¹⁹ But this innovation was largely lost on the Australian audience, who did not receive color transmissions until 1975.²⁰ Rather than simply mailing out the Bible lesson materials that viewers requested, “consecrated laymen” delivered the lessons. In 1965, *It Is Written* was rolled out in Brisbane and Rockhampton in Queensland; Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo, and Mildura in Victoria; Adelaide in South Australia; and Launceston in Tasmania. However, in order to pay for the airtime radio broadcasts at a number of locations had to be discontinued.²¹

Other Technologies

As a denomination birthed in the modern era, the Adventist Church has generally been quick to embrace emerging technologies and creative technological solutions, especially in the cause of evangelism. This was demonstrated in the mid-1950s when Adventist missionaries in New Guinea adopted an ingenious low-tech hand-operated gramophone, the “Fingerfone,” to cross the language barrier with remote tribes.²² Similarly, in 1961, the Australasian Division purchased a number of automated telephone response machines to inaugurate its new “Dial-a-Prayer” service to the public. The enthusiastic response prompted a number of local conferences in Australia and New Zealand to purchase their own machines and begin recording their own daily prayers.²³ Dial-a-Prayer is now available through an online platform.²⁴

Advent Radio-Television Productions

Adventist programs played on fifty-six radio stations and eleven television stations during 1965. The various Bible schools across the Division had seen 8,978 students baptized over the past two decades.²⁵ Thus, the scene was set for the consolidation of these various broadcast media projects. On Sunday, December 4, 1966, a new building at 150 Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga, adjacent to the Australasian Division offices, was officially opened and a new entity was launched: Advent Radio-Television Productions (ARTP). The first director/speaker was Roy C. Naden. The facility included a state of the art “floating” recording studio as well as housing staff offices and the Bible correspondence school.

ARTP’s correspondence school was the senior school among twelve similar mission centers around the division. It provided leadership and support to branches in New Zealand, New Guinea (now Papua New Guinea), Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), Tahiti, and Solomon Islands.²⁶

A constant of Adventist media evangelism in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific has been the tension between a desire for local content, and the financial burden of producing it. ARTP’s solution in late 1967 was to forgo the usual costly model of sustaining an indefinite series of half-hour television episodes in as many markets as possible, and to instead develop *Focus on Living*, a series of five-minute television spots hosted by Roy Naden. The strategy was to broadcast these episodes to a local television market for a limited period, with offers of free booklets and Bibles, and a dedicated call center standing by. “[D]uring its first screening in Rockhampton, Queensland...800 inquiries were registered in just four weeks,” reported *Australasian Record*,²⁷ which continued to note *Focus on Living* efforts in new locations, urban and rural, up until 1975.

Similar thinking applied to ARTP’s radio ministry, which, in 1967, included a new series of five-minute *The Bible Speaks* spots as part of “a complete series of 20-minute, 15-minute and 5-minute radio programs...sent to the conferences for broadcasting.” The audience response from ARTP’s efforts across the Division in 1967 was strong, with 935 baptisms recorded.²⁸

By the 1970s, the fashions, music, political questions, and attitudes of the counterculture were clearly making an impact on young adults in Australia and New Zealand. ARTP responded in 1971 with a new radio show, *Wayout*, anchored by Russell Gibbs and featuring documentary-style reports and youthful Adventist music groups with

their more contemporary, acoustic folk stylings. "This program has been enthusiastically accepted by a network of radio stations in Victoria," reported the *Australasian Record*, "but for experimental purposes ARTP and the Victorian Conference are anxious to air the program on only one station of the network, to test its effectiveness."²⁹

As was the model with many of ARTP's other radio and television shows, *Wayout* followed up its broadcast with a live evangelistic series. A report of the first meetings in the country town of Sale, Victoria, indicated that they were "geared for, and presented with, teenagers, late-teens and twenties in mind," such that they were likely to be "unintelligible to the sight and hearing of the sedate forties." But, "If the methods of the sedate have failed or are failing to attract and change the present generation, ought we not to investigate other methods?"³⁰

"Without question 1972 was [the Australasian Division's] best and biggest year for radio and television ministry," reported *Australasian Record*, noting that forty-three evangelists had spoken in thirteen languages via 111 radio and television stations over the previous twelve months. The eighteen Bible correspondence schools had mailed out "more than 250,000 individual Bible studies" during the period.³¹

ARTP speaker R. A. Vince launched a new ministry in 1973, Christian Services for the Blind (now Christian Services for the Blind and Hearing Impaired), which prepared audio versions of Adventist print resources for the vision-impaired and mailed them out to subscribers. The Christian Record Braille Foundation of America had been providing Braille books, vinyl records, reel-to-reel tapes, cassettes, and large-print book resources to Australia for many years up to that point, but the long delivery times from the United States and the damage caused to vinyl records as they traversed the equatorial zone by ship, led division leaders to approve the founding of the new organization.³² Five years later, Christian Services for the Blind had a client list of 400, about half of whom were not church members, and 154 spiritual and non-fiction titles on cassette tape.³³

The 1970s were a period of achievement, challenge, and innovation for ARTP. The widespread television and radio broadcasts continued. "At its peak during this period, *It Is Written* was being aired by 13 channels and 18 repeater stations, and *These Times* was broadcast from 105 radio stations every week."³⁴ Fagal's *Faith for Today* also continued in some markets.³⁵ But ARTP staff were also busily engaged in a variety of one-off projects: sacred music albums distributed by the Chapel label, a promotional film for the Sanitarium Health Food Company (in color), and films for use with the stop-smoking *5-Day Plan*, for example.³⁶

It was noted, however, that the religious broadcasts of other Christian denominations were "dwindling rapidly."³⁷ Costs were one factor. "Here at ARTP we were negotiating the renewal of one of our weekly half-hour T. V. programs and were dismayed to learn that the contract price had risen almost 100 percent," was reported in the *Australasian Record*.³⁸ Another challenge was broadcast scheduling. "We continually fight the battle of the time slots," reported ARTP speaker R. A. Vince, explaining that the number of broadcasts had been reduced due to inflation.³⁹

One victory in the “battle of the time slots” was won when ARTP produced 500 two-minute television spots, *The Carter Report*, featuring Trans-Australian Union Conference evangelist John Carter. Due to their brevity, these spots were classified as commercials and so could be played at any time, including, crucially, primetime.⁴⁰

In 1978, ARTP manager John Silver indicated that new methods, technologies, and mindsets needed to be considered. “In this modern world many acquire information mainly via radio and television instead of the printed page,” he wrote, conceding that Bible course applications in response to radio promotions could no longer be described as “a flood.” He suggested that “the day may soon arrive when our Bible study courses will be offered in cassette as well as printed form.”⁴¹

While this particular innovation did not eventuate, ARTP continued to seek new methods and strategies; for example, the replacement of vinyl and reel-to-reel recordings with cassette tapes for Christian Services for the Blind, exploring the feasibility of broadcasting on the emerging FM radio band, the development of new programs focused on “healthful living, vegetarian cooking, ethics, archaeology, etc.” in order to attract “specific segments of the community which may not respond to our regular programming,”⁴² and audio-visual versions of E. G. White’s *Conflict of the Ages* books for use by literature evangelists.⁴³

Archaeology appeared to be a particularly effective way to engage a religion-shy and better educated public in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Evangelist John Carter, on his own initiative, had produced a number of television spots in Egypt, advertising his upcoming public meetings. He was enthusiastic about the number of people now attending church who attributed their initial contact to the television spots. A private donor helped fund the travel expenses of six other Adventist evangelists, together with ARTP producer Warren Judd, to travel to the Middle East and North Africa in an attempt to replicate this success.⁴⁴

Adventist Media Centre

“We’ve changed our name!” proclaimed a headline in *Australasian Record*, April 1981, announcing the official rebranding of Advent Radio-Television Productions, which would now be known as the Adventist Media Centre. “So much more than ‘Radio-Television’ was necessary in the name to be an accurate reflection of our work,” was the explanation given by AMC’s production designer, Alan Holman. Indeed, the other functions included graphic design, copywriting, marketing, and the work of the Bible Correspondence School.⁴⁵

The name “Adventist Media Center” was already being used in California. The center there had some early success with *Teleseminar*, a satellite TV evangelistic broadcast that “reached 7,000 people simultaneously through satellite; and involved them in a full day of Bible study” as an extension of *It Is Written*.⁴⁶

Australasian Division communication director and AMC speaker Russell Kranz warned that other churches were moving ahead with media technologies. “The Mormon Church has ordered 500 satellite receiver dishes to establish what is believed to be the largest TV network via satellite in the world...The frank fact is, we’re lagging behind, not even keeping pace with media developments.” Writing in 1982, Kranz also noted predictions of “a

single, yet still unnamed medium” that would “blurr [sic], even unify, all media,” what would today be called the internet.⁴⁷

Beginning in 1981, all commercial television stations around Australia were supplied with a short Adventist-produced community service announcement modeling helpfulness between strangers in sometimes humorous situations and using the jingle “Do you need a hand?” Over the next several years, updated versions were produced, with ninety-one percent of stations screening the thirty-second or sixty-second community service announcement for no charge.⁴⁸

In late December 1982, evangelist Geoff Youlden delivered the first three one-hour lectures in a series that would run for three weeks in front of a live audience at Avondale College’s Ladies Chapel in Cooranbong, Australia. The series was filmed by Adventist Media Center employees and volunteers using video production equipment that, being either brand new or borrowed, was unfamiliar to most of the crew. The purpose of the exercise was to provide a live evangelism demonstration for Avondale’s summer school theology students, as well as producing an evangelistic resource for lay people. “For the first time, we now have on tape a professionally produced and directed evangelistic series consisting of twenty-four one-hour sessions, with all the features of a full-scale city mission,” said an AMC news release, printed on the front page of the *Australasian Record*. “In other words, we have a product that can be used by any church group or company, anywhere...A small [VHS] video unit, plugged into the aerial socket on any home television monitor, and the message can be clearly and positively presented, right up to decision-making.”⁴⁹

A year later, the *Australasian Record* reported that

The Youlden Evangelistic Video Series has now been used extensively around Australia, as well as overseas, and the results justify the usage. An enthusiastic Pastor Bryan Wood, of the Western Australian Conference, has successfully conducted a public evangelistic series using Pastor Youlden, despite the fact that Pastor Youlden, during most of that time, was located on the other side of Australia! The results have been exciting, as a number of persons have, after viewing this video series in a public hall, been convicted and converted. There are many other stories of how ministers and laymen and laywomen alike have been able to reach into the lives of individuals with the precious story of salvation.⁵⁰

AMC followed up the Youlden video series with a video-taped prophecy series featuring Australian evangelist John Carter, hoping to replicate the same success.

While the new strategy of home video was growing, traditional broadcast methods were struggling. In promoting the 1984 Media Center offering, it was noted that the annual expense of radio and television airtime was \$A364,000.

That's a staggering \$1,000 per day...For the past two years, the Media Center has operated at a deficit. You can see that we have a problem. There are many opportunities presented to us to use the electronic media to share

the Advent message, but at present we do not have the funds to take up these new opportunities.

The current slate of broadcasts had been cut back, with *These Times* heard on sixty-nine radio stations per week, as opposed to the 100-plus stations of previous years.⁵¹ The show was also shortened—available in fifteen-minute, five-minute, and one-minute formats.⁵² Within a few years, as speaker Russell Kranz departed AMC, to be replaced by Geoff Youlden, *These Times* ceased altogether.⁵³

Faith for Today, also ceased in Australia and New Zealand, after founder William Fagal handed over the reins to new speaker-director Dan Matthews in 1980. In ensuing years, Matthews took the ministry in a new direction with the news-feature *Christian Lifestyle Magazine*, which was not re-broadcast within SPD territory.⁵⁴ Similarly, *It Is Written* was also discontinued in Australia and New Zealand during the 1980s.

AMC was beginning to be regarded as a leader in video/film production. Just as Eric Were had been seconded for the production of various films around the world in the 1960s, Adventist leaders in other parts of the world looked to AMC for leadership and examples of what could be accomplished

The up-coming General Conference Session in 1985 has spawned a number of...requests, one of which is for a major documentary film on the work of the Adventist Church in Southern Asia. Recently a telephone call from the Far Eastern Division inquired as to the feasibility of our Media Center producing their General Conference film presentation.⁵⁵

“Video production grew into a major outreach of AMC,” according to then-manager, Nat Devenish, citing two of the best-received series out of the “many” produced, *Digging up the Past*, presented by archaeologist-evangelist David Down, and *Keepers of the Flame* with Allan Lindsay, which focused on the history of the Reformation and early Adventist movement.⁵⁶

In 1985, the first episodes were shot of a new television show, hosted by Australian evangelist Geoffrey Youlden. The name *Focus on Living* was revived from Roy Naden’s television spots. The new show was formatted as a half-hour weekly “magazine-style program” featuring a series of regulars and guests in five-minute segments focused on food, archaeology, sport, health, and family. *Focus on Living* was expensive to produce, but costs were covered by funding from the recently renamed South Pacific Division and Sanitarium, which enjoyed favorable financial arrangements in New Zealand. Consequently, *Focus on Living* was shot in New Zealand. AMC committed to producing twenty-seven episodes per year and the show was rolled out to every Australian market except Perth.⁵⁷

In response to the growing secularization of Australian and New Zealand culture, *Focus on Living’s* approach was to offer courses in health and archaeology, but nothing overtly religious—correspondence students who completed one of these courses were offered the opportunity continue with more explicitly biblical courses. Church members were also encouraged to share video tapes of the show, on the understanding that personal contact was an increasingly necessary component of the conversion process. In 1991, however, *Focus on Living*

completed its run—it was felt that the level of response from the public did not justify the considerable resources that went into making the program.⁵⁸

The shorter-format broadcast spots were still bearing fruit, however, with New Zealand's Bible Correspondence School receiving an average of 100 responses per day to television commercials for the *Digging Up the Past* archaeology course. AMC claimed that "some 12 percent of all people baptized each year are students of our correspondence schools." Efforts were made to update existing courses and create new ones.⁵⁹ Another eleven Bible schools operated in the Pacific islands, with most still using the *Voice of Prophecy* name.⁶⁰

In 1992, AMC declined to take up an opportunity to partner with the Uniting Church's Wesley Mission in purchasing eight percent of the struggling Sydney commercial radio station 2GB for the amount of \$400,000. Wesley Mission was at that time led by Gordon Moyes, who went on to a successful career in Christian broadcasting and politics.⁶¹

Short spots on television and radio continued to be used to promote both AMC correspondence courses and upcoming public evangelistic series by AMC evangelist Geoff Youlden.⁶² In 1993, just as television broadcasts were coming online in Fiji, Youlden worked with local churches to prepare for a mass public evangelism series, with promotional spots airing on television. "Those attending included the Deputy Mayor of Suva, the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's speech writer and many prominent business leaders," reported the *Record*. One of the 243 baptized at the conclusion of the series, traditional chieftan Ratu Timi Pio Baekesuva, credited the television spots with initially attracting his attention.⁶³

In 1996, the Adventist Media Center's Bible Correspondence School changed its name to "Adventist Discovery Centre." The word "Discovery" was strategic, as it suggested a wider range of topics, rather than just Bible studies. New courses included *Taking Charge of Your Life*, focused on personal development, and relationships. Analysis of student preferences revealed that forty-one percent of those who completed a health course accepted the invitation to continue with a more explicitly biblical course.⁶⁴

A cultural shift was highlighted at AMC's half-yearly board meeting on May 8, 1997, where the manager's report made the following recommendation:

Inasmuch as the Presenter's role as Media Centre Evangelist has diminished since the *Focus on Living* project ceased in 1991, and the radio programs involving the evangelist ceased in July 1996, it is recommended that we refer the future of the department to the SPD for consideration, in that the public evangelism function is not required or seen as a Media Centre activity.⁶⁵

The role of the evangelist had been central in the pioneering *Voice of Prophecy* days. Indeed, the evangelist/speaker was the natural leader of the operation. But as the number and complexity of media projects increased, specialists with specific technical, creative, and managerial skills had come to the fore, while the evangelist became the "face" of a particular media product. Contracted during pre-production as a scriptwriter

or script consultant, the evangelist became the presenter during production, and sometimes assisted with promoting the end product to church members through tours and other venues.

Finance was no doubt another factor in dropping the evangelists' wages from the budget. On December 15, 1997, a major extension to the AMC building was officially opened. The facility had more than doubled its floor area, adding a television studio as well as more offices and meeting rooms. A commemorative plaque at the site records that South Pacific Division president and AMC board chair Bryan Ball, and general manager John Banks officiated, while the ribbon was cut by the federal Member for Berowra, Philip Ruddock, who was also the federal minister for immigration and multicultural affairs at that time.⁶⁶

The documentary-style video series, *The Search*, featuring Youlden was launched by AMC in 1998. It was designed to tap into the secular mind, but with the recognition that church members would be the ones to share it. Thus, it had to have clear biblical content they would recognize as genuinely evangelistic. The results of *The Search* were positive, church members supportive, and Youlden followed it with a number of public evangelistic series.⁶⁷

In 1998, the New Zealand Bible correspondence school lessons began to be received by the Discovery Center in Sydney. This arrangement continued for about ten years, until New Zealand was able to restart their operation.

⁶⁸ The number of Pacific radio ministries had declined, with only two mentioned (Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands) in 1997 AMC meeting minutes. A "Report on Pacific Media Opportunities" submitted to the AMC Board called for "the Media Center [to be] an institution serving the whole of the South Pacific (not just Australia and New Zealand) with media outreach."⁶⁹

Impressed by the success of *It Is Written's* NET '95 satellite evangelism effort in North America, the SPD and AMC began preparing for a similar initiative, dubbed "Reach Out '97," using a mixture of live satellite feed and pre-recorded video featuring Geoff Youlden.⁷⁰ These plans evolved, however, and sites around the SPD, instead participated in the North American-led NET '98, featuring Dwight Nelson. AMC's *The Search* videos were offered as a giveaway during the satellite broadcasts. The series was an overwhelming success in Papua New Guinea, where crowds of up to 35,000 gathered at some sites and more than 3,000 requested baptism. Church leaders reported overflowing churches. The public response elsewhere in the SPD was not quite so spectacular, but attendance was strong.⁷¹ The ACTS 2000 campaign in early 1999, with *It Is Written* speaker Mark Finley, produced similar results. AMC prepared VHS copies for wider distribution.⁷²

Released in 2000, the 13-episode *Chasing Utopia* video series was funded by Adventist leaders in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and the General Conference, as it was intended for international distribution. "There won't be any preaching segments as such," explained series producer Gabe Reynaud ahead of the release date. "To be responsive to a television genre, I've opted for interviews and authentic stories." But, although there was reportedly interest from free-to-air television in Australia in airing the innovative series, the needed participation from church members in sharing the videos did not eventuate.⁷³

In 2003, the international satellite network, Hope Channel, was launched in the Pacific region. Initially, the downlink was via the large-dish C-band system, which a number of churches and Adventist institutions had already installed. The Australian representatives of independent television ministry 3ABN were, at this time, encouraging individuals to install the smaller and cheaper Ku-band dishes. Soon after, Hope Channel also became available on Ku-band with AMC providing the crucial rebroadcast link as well as programming that played internationally.⁷⁴

Dan Brown's 2003 novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, and its 2006 movie adaptation provoked wide public conversation around the historicity of the New Testament record and the person of Jesus Christ. In responding to this cultural moment, AMC produced a short documentary series, *The Code*, released in 2006.⁷⁵

Adventist Media Network

At the 2000 South Pacific Division session, an action was taken to work towards the establishment of a single entity that would integrate the efforts of the AMC, Signs Publishing Company, the SPD communication and public relations department, and the Adventist Book Centres. However, no decision was made until 2004, when the SPD executive established an ad-hoc committee tasked with developing and recommending a model, and a timeline for its implementation. The 2005 SPD session approved a model that consolidated the efforts of the three Division entities: AMC, Signs, and the communication department. The Adventist Book Centres, each being separately operated by local conferences, were omitted from the final proposal, which scheduled the official launch of the new combined entity on July 1, 2006.⁷⁶

"The objective was to reduce fragmentation and duplication of effort (and costs) to enable a more effective spreading of the gospel where everyone works together," according to Neale Schofield, who was chief executive officer in the late stages of the amalgamation.⁷⁷

The restructure meant that most senior management and finance functions were handled from the Wahroonga site, with some redundancies or transfers of staff from the Warburton site, which retained its legacy name, "Signs Publishing Company," as well as its printing, dispatch, and book publishing functions. Editorial staff of the *Record*, *Signs of the Times*, and *The Edge* magazines would also be transferred from Warburton, while the SPD communication director would be moved into the AMC building to take on the role of chief executive officer.⁷⁸

The transition to fully establish the new Adventist Media Network (AMN) took a number of years to implement and was difficult for some of the personnel involved, particularly those at the Warburton site. According to Neale Schofield,

the challenge was to bring about such change while understanding and caring for people who are impacted by that change. Some of the change included reduction in costs and moving locations, which impacted people (including redundancies). Another challenge was the shift in paradigm of thinking from working in media types (i.e., print, film production, etc.) to brand groups and broader teams.⁷⁹

The evolution of AMN continued even after the completion of the consolidation. The original vision of a combined CEO/communication director role ended with the departure of Allen Steele. Although successive communication directors mostly continued to be located within AMN's Wahroonga building and often took on the management of *Record*, they still reported to SPD presidents, who did not consider it entirely appropriate to relinquish direct oversight of the crucial communication function to the AMN chief executive officer:⁸⁰

The re-branded entity continued with its historic commitment to improvement and innovation:

... the print edition of the weekly *Record* has launched a new website, which internationally gives access to news from the division free of charge. The weekly InFocus TV program has also joined the emerging *Record* media brand and continues to share Adventist news and the unique message of Jesus' soon return with both the church itself and the wider Christian community. This broadcast runs on Hope TV, and will soon be available on the Australian Christian Channel and Shine TV (NZ)...A new music ministry label will soon be launched..⁸¹

AMN took on the management of a number of additional projects in its early years, including Dial-a-Prayer, Christian Services For the Blind and Hearing Impaired (2010), and *Archaeological Diggings* magazine (2013), which would be edited by Gary Webster, who also headed the SPD's Institute for Public Evangelism and was based at AMN's Wahroonga building.

As CEO, Neale Schofield negotiated the inclusion of the recently revived Greater Sydney Conference-sponsored *It Is Written Oceania* television ministry under the AMN umbrella.⁸² The agreement included the requirement that, while sharing some facilities and personnel with AMN, *It Is Written Oceania* would otherwise continue to rely on donations. For the first time since 1991, regular denominationally sponsored Adventist programming was airing on free-to-air television in Australia. The airtime was made available without cost, thanks to the advertising relationship between the Church-owned Sanitarium Health Food Company and commercial TV networks (Schofield had previously worked in marketing for Sanitarium).

At first, the *It Is Written Oceania* half-hour episodes featured United States-produced content presented by Shawn Boonstra. These episodes were introduced and concluded by Australian speaker/director Gary Kent. Beginning in 2009, *It Is Written Oceania* began screening fully Australian-produced episodes shot either on location or in its new privately funded studio in western Sydney.⁸³ Feedback from broadcasters indicated that viewership jumped sharply when Kent began to deliver these full episodes, leading *It Is Written Oceania* to claim the title of "Australia's No. 1 Bible television program,"⁸⁴ with a nationwide viewership larger than religious programs featuring well-known U. S. speakers such as Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer.

In 2010, the weekly SPD newsmagazine for church members, *Record*, first published in 1898 as the *Union Conference Record*, was redesigned and relaunched as a full-color fortnightly publication, complemented for the first time by a website and app for mobile devices. *Signs of the Times* magazine and the South Pacific arm of Hope Channel launched websites soon after, with AMN web design staff also assisting other SPD departments

and entities with developing or improving their web presence.

Beyond: The Search (2012) was the last of the “home video ministry” products for which door-to-door distribution was envisioned, although it was later made available free online.⁸⁵ It consisted of a fourteen-part feature DVD documentary series, a twenty-nine-part television talk show series, a book and Bible study series by Clifford Goldstein, a soundtrack music CD, and a new version of Ellen G. White’s classic *Steps to Christ* book, entitled *Step Beyond*. The project was shot on location in Australia, Brazil, Europe, Israel, and the United States, and involved a number of mainstream film industry personnel in the production.⁸⁶

The Adventist Discovery Center continued to develop new courses as well as launch online versions of many of its existing courses. A clear winner was the 2014 wholistic health course, *Living Well*, which quickly became the most popular of the Discovery Center’s courses both on paper and on the web.⁸⁷

Concerned about a lack of understanding and appreciation of Adventist history and identity, particularly by younger church members, the Australian Union Conference under the leadership of Chester Stanley, contracted AMN to produce a film drama re-enacting the history of the Church’s origins, from the Millerite Movement and the Great Disappointment of 1844 to the formal founding of the denomination in 1863. The result was the two-and-a-half-hour epic, *Tell the World*, officially launched at the 2015 General Conference Session. Many of the scenes were shot on location at Upper Canada Village and the Cumberland Village Heritage Museum, both in the vicinity of Ottawa, Canada. The General Conference purchased rights to worldwide distribution, while the Australian Union Conference retained distribution in local markets.⁸⁸

The full-color redesign of the *Record* in 2010 was the beginning of an “orange revolution” of sorts, with James Standish, *Record* editor/SPD communication director, consulting widely and working with freelance graphic designer Shelley Poole to develop a proposal for a unified corporate identity across the SPD, noting that, in Australia, the Adventist Church’s physical locations (churches, schools, aged care facilities, etc.) numbered more than KFC restaurants and yet the Church was hardly known. Standish championed a bold orange insignia for the Church’s corporate identity to replace what he called the “inconsistent, incognito, and not integrated” logos and signage used by various Adventist locations and entities.⁸⁹ After a number of new-look pylon signs went up in Australia and Fiji, amid concerns around the cultural meanings attached to orange in different parts of the world and the usurping of the General Conference role in managing the Church’s corporate identity, General Conference president Ted Wilson intervened, pausing the rollout .

Catalyzed by the SPD’s initiative, however, the General Conference began its own examination of the Church’s brand identity and released new global guidelines in 2017. Recognizing the need for the Church in different parts of the world to brand itself in ways that were locally meaningful, “Adventist Orange” was among the final palette of colors, allowing the SPD to proceed with the rollout without major changes.⁹⁰

Despite the addition of a website and the launch of a digital edition of the magazine, *Archaeological Diggings* continued to struggle financially. The income from Bible lands tours had largely dried up due to a surge in Middle East conflicts. In mid-2016, the magazine's final issue was printed and subscribers were instead offered a free archaeology newsletter via email.⁹¹

Adventist Media

In 2015, "Network" began to be dropped from the name of the organization, reflecting the reality that Adventist Media (AM) was a single entity with two campuses, rather than a dispersed network structure.

Up to 2015 in the South Pacific region, Hope Channel viewers had been watching the international feed from the United States, with AM interrupting the signal from time to time to insert local programming during prime viewing times, primarily Friday evenings. However, in April, 2015 the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference, with the assistance of AM, launched Hope Channel New Zealand on free-to-air terrestrial television.⁹²

Ratings data over the first few years of broadcast were encouraging, with Hope Channel New Zealand playing a key role in a number of decisions for Jesus.⁹³ AM unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate similar arrangements with union and conference church leaders in Australia, but they were unwilling to take on the expense of producing local content and licensing costs that were considerably higher than in the smaller New Zealand market. Thus, the responsibility for Hope Channel rebroadcasting in Australia and the rest of the SPD's territory (excluding New Zealand) remains with AM at the time of writing.

Since coming under the AMN umbrella in 2009, television ministry *It Is Written Oceania* had maintained its reliance on donors and a certain level of independence. Conflicts over the legal ownership of the *It Is Written* name and the management of the ministry led to *It Is Written Oceania* moving to a new location in Dora Creek, New South Wales, in 2016 and then closing down completely in 2017 when speaker/director Gary Kent left church employment. After mediation with AM and SPD leadership, Kent re-launched the ministry on an independent basis under the name *The Incredible Journey*.⁹⁴

Conscious of the popularity of mainstream women's media and sensing the need for niche products, Adventist Media launched the *Mums At The Table* half-hour television program in 2017, first on Hope Channel and YouTube, and later on commercial television in capital city markets around Australia. A monthly (later bi-monthly) *Mums At The Table* magazine was also launched along with a website and social media presence aimed at engaging and offering support to mothers. While funding the television show and magazine was a challenge, eventually leading to the downscaling of these aspects of the ministry, the rapidly growing closed Facebook group, where moms connected and organized face-to-face meetings, pointed the way to a new online relational model of evangelism.⁹⁵

Other innovative projects for Adventist Media included a *Signs of the Times* weekly podcast⁹⁶ and radio show playing on the Adventist narrowcast Faith FM network operated by the Australian Union Conference, and the *Am* young adult outreach video series commissioned by the Greater Sydney Conference in 2018,⁹⁷ as well as 2019's *The Tuis*, an animated children's video series depicting a Pacific Islander family produced in collaboration with the SPD's Discipleship Ministries Team.⁹⁸

In 2019, the SPD's publishing department, which coordinates literature evangelism ministry, was placed under the ambit of Adventist Media. It was a natural fit, since the publishing director has been based at AM's Warburton site for many years and AMN is now responsible for the purchasing, printing, and distribution of denominational literature. The Discovery Centre also changed its name to Hope Discovery Centre to bring greater alignment to its Hope Channel media presence.

Conclusion

Through all of its various iterations, the consistent experience of Adventist Media has been that audience tastes change, both in terms of preferred media platforms and the content itself; they do not respond to the same messages and promotional strategies as they once did. The challenge is to maintain cultural relevance while remaining faithful to the core message. This means making hard decisions about updating or eliminating much-loved media products that are no longer producing results. It also means maintaining an openness to new approaches, without alienating church members, who are called on for donations and to use the media products in their evangelistic efforts.

Media production is expensive—a reality demonstrated by the frequent pleas for donor support throughout the history of media in the South Pacific Division. New technologies and mass media access do not come cheaply; neither do the overheads of more traditional forms of media, such as print. Very few of these products turn a profit—they are designed to reach as many members of their target audience as possible, rather than operate on a commercial basis. New opportunities also become available. In recent years, for example, social media platforms and smart phone technologies currently being trialed by AM show huge potential. Anyone with a smart phone can now be a filmmaker and find an audience on the merits of their content alone.

Through the years, Adventist Media personnel, and the SPD leaders who have supported them, have demonstrated a consistent spirit of innovation and a willingness to take risks—technological, financial, and creative—in exploring new methods of media evangelism. The inevitable result is that some initiatives have failed to meet expectations. But others have successfully become vehicles to reach people in the community with the everlasting gospel.

Advent Radio-Television Productions Leadership

1966-1971 Director: Roy C. Naden

1972-1982 Manager: D. John Silver

Adventist Media Center Leadership

1981-1986 Manager: D. John Silver

1987-1996 Manager: Nat E. Devenish

1997-2000 General manager: John Banks

2001-2005 General manager: Calvyn Townend

Adventist Media Network Leadership

2006-2007 General manager: Robert Bolst

2007-2008 Chief Executive Officer: Allen Steele

2009-2015 Chief Executive Officer: Neale Schofield

Adventist Media Leadership

2015-2018 Chief Executive Officer: Calvin Dever

2018- Chief Executive Officer: Brad Kemp

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