

Social Media on a Mission: Increasing Your Ministry's Online Presence

by Lee S. Perkins

Lee S. Perkins is the College Ministry Pastor at Living Word International Church in Nashville, TN, and a Master of Divinity student at Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

It is difficult to deny the impact of social media on our modern, technology-driven society. In October 2012, Bloomberg *Businessweek* announced that Facebook had reached over one billion users—that's one-seventh of the world's population.¹ One Facebook page was the catalyst for the Arab Spring in Egypt.² The "KONY 2012" YouTube video attracted over 50 million viewers in less than one week and garnered global support for the capture of Joseph Kony, leader of the heinous Lord's Resistance Army.³ To say the least, the use of social media has the power to start and impact global movements.

Churches now have the opportunity to use social media to reach people they never will if they only stick to traditional means of communication. Here are six key points to remember as you use social media to reach people by increasing the presence of your church online.

Be Current. The major pitfall of most churches who use social media and have websites is that churches do not keep their social media page and websites updated. Buzzplant, a Christian-based digital advertising agency, surveyed 250 random churches of different sizes and from varying denominations to see how they are using social media. The survey results showed that only 40 percent of those churches updated their Facebook pages daily.⁴ Once-a-week and even once-a-day posts do not make as much of an impact as multiple daily posts do. Those who manage the church's social media accounts should schedule for themselves times when they will post or tweet. It may help to get the help of responsible and willing young adults to manage the church's social media accounts. They spend more time on social media than most and can easily post things. (However, the best way to ensure that your material is posted, when you want it posted, is to pay a person to do it.) Also, the quality of your posts should not be compromised to increase the quantity of your posts. You will not reach anyone if all you have is irrelevant and non-inspirational posts. The next key points will deal with the quality of what you post on your social media accounts.

Be Engaging. Your posts have to answer the question, "So what?" They have to draw your social media viewers in and prompt a response from them. When extending an invitation to a weekly service or special event, use very descriptive language that appeals to the senses of your viewers. With careful word choice, you can spark a sense of anticipation and excitement about your church's events. Another way to keep the people in your social media network engaged is to ask them for responses to questions such as, "What is a topic you want to see covered in Bible Study? What's your testimony for the day? What is your prayer request?" "What type of gun control legislation does the country need and what can we do to make our community safer? When people reply to your questions, the other people in their social media networks will see

that they replied to your question and may choose to visit your page, thereby increasing your online presence and reach.

Use Variety. Just having text on your pages will not look very appealing. Instead of mainly text, share pictures, videos, and links to interesting articles and to other webpages. For my church's Facebook page, I post pictures of new members after they complete the new members' class and pictures of people flooding the altar for prayer and deliverance. People in your social media network may also enjoy a short video clip of a high point of a sermon or a soul-stirring selection by your choir. Not only should you alternate between text, pictures, videos, and links, but also post material that will cause a variety of emotions from your social media viewers. Post things that will make people laugh, cry, and feel inspired—not all at the same time. Adding humorous stories, videos, or pictures may be just what one of your viewers needed that day. If you master keeping variety on your social media pages, you will motivate people to keep visiting your page and to share your postings with other people in their social media network.

Expand Your Network. To increase the number of people who see and are impacted by what you post on social media, you have to connect with more than just the members of your church. The entire congregation, especially those who manage the social media accounts, should invite everyone in their networks to connect with the church's network. You may never get a friend to visit your church by asking them personally, but a touching post on the church's Facebook page may. Another way to expand your network is every once and a while launch a campaign to get more Facebook fans or Twitter followers by posting or tweeting "We want more fans/followers. Invite your friends to follow/like our page!" You can even set goals of how many more fans/followers you want and post updates about reaching that number. Make reaching your goal fun.

Create Cross-media Connections. If you have multiple social media accounts, make sure that each one mentions the other and is connected to the other. You can place icon links on the church's website to the church's Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, or other social media pages. Making these cross media connections increases your visibility on the Internet and gives people the option of choosing on which social media avenue they will connect with you. Some people may not log on to Facebook very much but are avid Twitter users. By posting your Twitter page link on your Facebook page, you can reach those who prefer Twitter over Facebook. Hootsuite.com is a great resource for you to manage all of your social media accounts from one place. It is easy to use and best of all it's free! So you can post something on Facebook and Twitter at the same time with one click on hootsuite.com.

Be True to Your Church's Identity. This key point is very critical when getting people from your social media networks to actually attend your church. Whatever you post online should reflect the true identity of your church. Whoever manages your church's social media accounts must be familiar with the vision, mission, and programming of your church. If your Facebook page communicates that the church is an upbeat, contemporary church, people will be disappointed when they show up to a traditional church. If you have numerous ministries listed on your website but most are not operative, this will not bode well for you when people arrive at your church looking for these ministries.

There are a number of opportunities to reach people for the Kingdom and to grow your ministry; social media is one of the most effective and far-reaching tools of communication. I hope with the tips provided above that your church can begin having a meaningful and impactful presence online.

Notes

1. Vance, Ashlee. "Facebook: The Making of 1 Billion Users." Businessweek. October 10, 2012. <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-10-04/facebook-the-making-of-1-billion-users> (accessed 21 December 2012).
2. Vargas, Jose Antonio. "Spring Awakening: How an Egyptian Revolution Began on Facebook." The New York Times. February 19, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/how-an-egyptian-revolution-began-on-facebook.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed 21 December 2012).
3. "Fighting War Crimes, Without Leaving the Couch?" The New York Times. March 9, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/03/09/kony-2012-and-the-potential-of-social-media-activism> (accessed 21 December 2012).
4. "Church and Social Media: 2012 BuzzPlant Survey." <http://buzzplant.com> (accessed 21 December 2012).