

MinistryTech



**SOCIAL MEDIA
FOR CHURCHES**

*Where to Be,
and
How to Use It*



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by **Yvon Prehn** | *The world of social media is vast. New options appear frequently. It's both exciting (in that we have new ways to reach and disciple our world for Jesus) and at the same time overwhelming because of the challenges in the time and skills needed to make the most of these opportunities.*

In the midst of this challenge, what channels should your church focus on, where should you be spending your time? And how do you get all the work done you want to in order to make the most of social media for your church? First, we'll look at the where and then some ideas for the how.

Where should your church be on social media?

The answer isn't easy, primarily because of the qualifier: "your church." Keep foremost in your mind as you plan and execute any social media strategy that you are doing this as a representative of Jesus, serving his sheep in the church. This is a challenging group of sheep! They come in all ages and all stages of interest in and interaction with social media. To answer where a church should be, you both need to look at where to be in the secular world of social media, and then you need to apply it to your church.

Current social media trends

One of the best overviews of current trends in social media was put out this year by [WordStream](#). It was updated in May 2017. Among other fascinating tidbits it shared that:

- 83 percent of female Internet users and 75 percent of male Internet users are on Facebook.
- 22 percent of the world's total population uses Facebook.
- 32 percent of teenagers consider Instagram to be the most important social network.
- Most Instagram users are between 18 to 29 years old, which is about 6 in 10 online adults.
- 81 percent of Millennials check Twitter at least once per day.
- On any given day, Snapchat reaches 41 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds in the US.
- YouTube (and even YouTube on mobile devices alone) reaches more 18- to 34- and 18- to 49-year-olds than any cable network in the U.S.

Word Stream developed several conclusions:

1. Facebook continues to be the most

widely used social media platform, reaching 79 percent of American Internet users. Based on the total U.S. population—not just Internet users—that's 68 percent of U.S. adults!

2. Every other platform trails behind: Instagram receives the silver medal with 32 percent of users; Pinterest comes in a close third with 31 percent, followed by LinkedIn and Twitter at 29 percent and 24 percent respectively.

population. Young adults were among the earliest social media adopters and continue to use these sites at high levels, but usage by older adults has increased in recent years.

And:

Facebook is the most widely used of the major social media platforms, and its user base is most broadly representative of the population as a whole.

Social media is both exciting (in that we have new ways to reach and disciple our world for Jesus) and at the same time overwhelming because of the challenges in the time and skills needed to make the most of these opportunities.

Another excellent overview of social media usage was compiled in [January 2017 by the Pew Research Center](#). Their statistics were similar to the study above, but two summary quotes are worth noting:

As more Americans have adopted social media, the social media user base has also grown more representative of the broader

What a striking statistic: 68 percent of the U.S. population as a whole uses Facebook. Many of the people your church wants to reach are on Facebook. Is your church reaching them through it? The other channels also reach a large number of people more dependent on age and interest, but still, they too touch many people your church reaches and disciples.

Your first step: Refine the statistics for your church and your area

Though the statistics and studies are a great overall starting point, you don't have unlimited time, volunteers or money. Take a little time to refine the data for your church. You can do this in two ways:

Look at your community: who do you want to reach? Study your community by using one of the many demographic studies available to churches (check with your denomination or the census bureau for data). You will be able to refine where you want to put your efforts. Though Facebook is a constant, if your community is younger and urban, you'll need a different social media outreach emphasis than a church starting in a retirement community (and yes, churches are starting in them).

In using social media for your internal church communications and discipleship efforts, I highly recommend a survey of your church attenders and

members to see what they use. You can use online surveys such as [Survey Monkey](#), but the problem with that is you will only get responses from people who care enough to be on email.

One of the best ways to get an accurate measure is a short survey on Sunday morning that contains a list of social media channels and asks people to check which ones they use. It's short and simple. Warning: no one will want to do this. The pastoral and worship staff will complain about the interruption (it will take maybe five minutes). The administrative staff won't want to hand count the responses (just quick checks on how many of each one checked), but if you really want to tailor your communications to the people you have been instructed to serve, nothing beats knowing where they are in social media usage.

How to reach people via social media

Does it make you tired to even think about all the work that needs to be done to reach and disciple the people you want to on social media? If you are like most overworked church communicators the answer is an obvious "yes," no matter how much you wish you were doing more. What is the answer?

Haley Veturis, from Saddleback Church, has a fantastic solution. Her answer is to acknowledge that one person can't do everything that needs to be done in your church in social media. You need a group of people, an army that she calls "advocates."

Veturis suggests you start with a community of people who care

about the church and each other. Come up with some basic guidelines and expectations they can agree to. These people overflow with love for Jesus, the Word, your church, and are already on social media. Commission them to speak for the church on social media in these three primary areas:

CONNECT: First, engage with people on social media. Respond to comments, mentions, tags; follow back. Like and comment. One of my favorite ideas is to have a "Prayer Time" on Facebook, where you ask people to share their prayer requests and tell them that every "Like" they get means someone is praying for them.

TEACH: Use social media to educate people with content from

weekend teaching. Turn sermon notes into bite-size pieces. "Serve them a little snack and then show them where they can get the rest of the meal," Veturis said. "Give them lightbulb moments that can create self-reflection."

One way Saddleback did this was to create a social media graphic with a quote from the sermon on it. (You can easily do this with Canva. Check out the lesson, [How to Create Social Media Images for Church PR](#)).

SHARE: This is where you expose your community to ministry opportunities and events that have practical, helpful, and transformative content. There was much more to her presentation, but I trust these three areas give you some initial ideas on ways to

start your own team of advocates who can do effective social media sharing for your church.

What is important overall in her approach is that because you have a team to share the social media ministry, you can take time to build community, to be real people online and to present the love of Jesus as much more than a hurried, “get the notice out there for the upcoming special event at church.”

And Finally...

Social media is here to stay. It will continue to evolve and expand.

The most important advice I can give you in your approach to it is not to worry or work overly hard on trying to achieve social media expertise as you try to figure out where your people are and how to reach them. Instead, pray hard that God will give you a team of people who can share the ministry and who delight in using the new tools of social media to share the eternal story of God’s love for us, his desire for our salvation, and his goal to help us all grow to become like Jesus. **MT**

Yvon Prehn is the founder and director of Effective Church Communications, www.effectivechurch.com, a ministry that helps churches create communications that will help them fully fulfill the Great Commission. She has been writing and teaching about church communications for over 20 years. Her latest book is The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing.

Keep foremost in your mind as you plan and execute any social media strategy that you are doing this as a representative of Jesus, serving his sheep in the church.

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Step	Chapter	Summary	Key Points
1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5

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