

Social Media: A Quick Guide

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Top 5 Popular Social Media Platforms

1. Facebook: Facebook allows for personal profiles, business pages, event pages, private and public groups, videos, and live streaming. You can easily post and share text updates, pictures, videos, and links. Facebook's users generally skew middle aged or older and it is not the main social media platform for Millennials or younger generations. Facebook is a good platform for congregations as a public business page is accessible to everyone, whether or not they have a Facebook account, so it's an easy way to share updates, pictures, and videos. For those doing online worship or other events, it also gives you access to live streaming.
2. Twitter: Twitter allows for personal and business accounts and its focus is on sharing short updates or thoughts through "tweets". To keep it short, Twitter limits the amount of characters in each tweet so it's not great for longform text posts. Twitter does support sharing photos and other links as well. Generally, Twitter is more conversation and comment focused. Users will generally tweet thoughts or ideas and the main way to engage with those tweets is to comment on them or re-share them. Unlike Facebook, Twitter profiles are less about sharing curated information (photos, business hours, videos, etc.) and look more like a newsfeed of that person's recent tweets. Twitter's audience is younger than Facebook with users skewing more towards millennials and younger.
3. Instagram allows for personal and business accounts and is primarily picture focused. It's now owned by Facebook so there are options to connect a Facebook account as well. Also unlike Facebook and Twitter, Instagram is best accessed via their mobile application. There are two main ways of posting on Instagram. There are "grid posts", which are pictures or videos with a caption that are saved to your profile until you remove it, and "story posts", which are pictures, video, or live streams that are linked to your profile, but only for 24 hours. Instagram's audience is generally millennials and younger. Creating content for Instagram is different from creating content for Facebook and Twitter because Instagram doesn't really support linking out to information. Instagram profiles allow for one clickable link, so you need to be a bit creative to share multiple links. Since Instagram is so focused on pictures, you need to have good quality photos to draw people in to get them to look at your other information (such as links in your profile).
4. YouTube: YouTube is a video streaming platform. It's a great way to share and organize videos that you have created. Unlike a lot of other social media platforms, it's not really focused on sharing other people's content so it's great if you have videos to share or want to do live streaming. YouTube's users are varied in age. A lot of users use YouTube to look up specific videos or to follow specific channels. For churches, Youtube is a great way to share videos from worship, events, special messages, or live stream worship services.
5. TikTok: TikTok is a video based platform that allows users to create and share short videos. Popular topics include life hacks, quick recipes, sharing experiences on a specific topic or just random, fun, videos. TikTok users are young, mostly Gen Z or younger. Similar to Instagram, it's primarily designed to be used on a mobile device.

Best Way to Use Social Media: Engage with it!

The best way to use social media is to actively engage with it. For example, if your congregation has a Facebook page, like, comment, and share their posts, pictures, and videos. While liking and commenting on a post is helpful, sharing it is a great way to help boost the post and get more people to see it. All social media platforms use an algorithm to determine how many people will see someone's post. Posts that are being liked, commented on, and shared are prioritized more and are therefore shown to more people. So by being actively engaged with your congregation's content, you're helping more people see it.

Creating Content: Tips and Resources

Understand the differences between social media platforms. For example, knowing that Instagram is designed for sharing pictures tells you that your Instagram content needs to have interesting and good quality pictures and not long text posts. Given the different audiences and focuses for each social media platform, something that works well as a Facebook post might not work for Instagram, so take the time to think about the platform you're using so that you're sharing content that plays into the platform's strengths and is relevant and easy for users to engage with. You don't have to be on every social media platform. Choose the ones that fit the content you want to create and the community you want to develop.

Make sure you're posting content consistently. Creating new and interesting content is how you get people to engage with and follow you. There are a lot of ideas and studies out there about how frequently you need to post to social media to engage your community and get new followers. However, it's mainly about posting quality content on a schedule that works for you. If you don't have the content to post every day, that's okay. Make a schedule to post a couple days a week and stick to that schedule. Those following along will come to expect posts on those days and that will help your content be engaged with and grow.

Have a social media team. Creating content for social media can take time, so having a small group of people working together can be helpful, especially if you're using multiple platforms. One way to do this is to have specific people for specific platforms. That way if someone is familiar with Facebook and another is familiar with Instagram, they can focus on the one they're more comfortable with. If you do have multiple people, it's helpful to set guidelines around the voice and tone for the posts and what is and is not acceptable for the congregation's profile to engage with. Business accounts often allow multiple people to be editors or admins of an account so it's also helpful to create a posting schedule so that everyone knows the days and times things will be posted so that posts on different platforms can coincide and so there aren't multiple people posting on the same account at the same time. Also make sure you know who has access to the accounts so that if someone ever leaves, you know what needs to be transferred over.

There are a lot of helpful tools that you can use in creating and posting content. Some of my favorites are:

1. Canva ([canva.com](https://www.canva.com)), a graphic design platform that lets you create images and graphic text for social media.
2. Hootsuite ([hootsuite.com](https://www.hootsuite.com)), a social media scheduler which lets you create and schedule posts on multiple platforms in advance so you don't have to actively log-in and post on different accounts.
3. Unsplash (unsplash.com) and Pexels ([pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)), both are free stock image sites.