

BEST PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA IN CHURCHES



MULTIMEDIA

SIZING

Each social media website has a recommended size for all images, including the cover photo, profile photo, timeline images, and any other multimedia content. Uploaded images should be resized to be the correct size before uploading the picture, as cut off images and text or pixelated images look unprofessional.

COVER PHOTOS

1. A cover photo should really speak to your page's visitors by explaining the character of your congregation in a five-second glance. If your cover photo is primarily text, make that text large and short, to the point. If your cover photo is a picture of something or someone, make sure it's high resolution, crisp, and sends a clear message about your brand.
2. If you want to use detailed images or text in your profile imagery, it should be in the cover photo section. Profile pictures are too small for images with numerous people or for messages with a lot of words.
3. Cover photos are a great way to make sure your page doesn't appear stagnant. Change the cover photo every one to two months.
4. Profile pictures are a great place for your church logo.

SETUP AND POSTING

SETUP

Make sure the “About” portion of your social media page contains the most accurate information about your church, at least including a link to your church web page, church office and service hours, and contact information. If there is something you highlight about your church (special worship style, it’s open and affirming, etc.), make sure you include that in the “About” section.

FREQUENCY

1. Maintain a healthy balance of text posts, links, and multimedia content. Most social media websites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) generate at least twice the interactions on posts with pictures or videos.
2. Do not use too many memes, especially on Facebook. Its algorithm punishes excessive memes or click bait. (Example: Like this status if you agree, share if you disagree.)
3. Don’t be afraid to interrupt your normal posting schedule for a poignant or witty post related to breaking news or a holiday. Social media is best when it capitalizes on what’s trending.

PERMISSIONS

Although social media is immediate, it is a best practice to at least receive spoken permission for each picture you take, especially if the picture is taken at a church event and you plan to share it with your followers. It is a best practice to get release forms from regular members, and it should be a requirement for social media staff to get parental consent before posting a picture or naming a minor on your church’s page.

WRITING FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

1. If possible, remove the links from your copy. For example, if you post a link to Facebook, clicking on the image associated with the link takes the user to your link, making the link in the copy unnecessary.
2. If you need to include a link in your social media copy, always use a shortened version of the links you post, whether an app (like Hootsuite) shortens it for you or you use a link shortening service like Bit.ly.

WRITING FOR SOCIAL MEDIA (continued)

1. Write conversationally. Stay away from long sentences, uncommon words, and uncommon acronyms.
2. If there are multiple page administrators, establish common types of posts and language you will use so users hear a unified voice from the page.
3. Vary the types of text posts you use. Ask questions, give interesting facts, provide commentary on breaking news.
4. USE THE 80/20 rule! Out of 100% of content, 80 percent should be “fun social media content” and the other 20% can be news, announcements, or donation requests. This balance helps maintain user interest.

PAGE MANAGEMENT

ADMINISTRATORS

1. Social media accounts should never be associated with a personal email address. There should be a church media address to which all social media notifications go. This email address should also be used if there needs to be a password reset email address.
2. A procedure should be established for each social media account when there are personnel changes. If someone who runs the Facebook or Twitter account leaves the church, what are the procedures for transitioning to a new administrator and when is an appropriate time to reset the social media passwords?
3. Create a policy for comment monitoring. Consider how often you will check the comments/replies/private messages on your account.
4. Establish a strategy for addressing negative feedback or inappropriate users.

POSTING

1. There should be an established posting schedule for whoever runs the church social media accounts. This schedule should reflect the peak times of social media traffic, which vary depending on the outlet and audience.
2. Make use of social media management apps such as Hootsuite and TweetDeck to schedule Facebook and Twitter posts ahead of time. This allows for better scheduling of content and gives an opportunity to proofread posts.
3. Use page analytics to evaluate what types of posts perform best and what times of day are your ideal times to post.

TWITTER

HASHTAGS

1. Try to stick to one or two hashtags. Hashtags are meant to draw focus to a particular topic. If you use hashtags for too many words in one tweet, that defeats the purpose of using a hashtag.
2. Use hashtags that never get old. There will always be someone searching #Christianity or #religion. That's a great way for your tweet to pick up steam.
3. Don't use hashtags to make statements. No one will ever search manufactured terms, and it will seem as if you used a hashtag for no reason. (#GodisGood. #ThanksbetoGod). If you need to make a traditional statement, make it without the hashtag.
4. Use hashtags related to a trending topic whenever possible. If a topic is trending and you use the hashtag, it increases the chances people will see your tweet. However, don't use a trending hashtag if your tweet is unrelated to the trend. People view this as a form of spamming.
5. Create a hashtag for special church events and advertise it during event promotion. Use that hashtag to keep people connected on your social media during your event. Also, use appropriate event hashtags if you are using social media to report live from an event your church members attend.

ORGANIZATION

1. Create Twitter lists. Twitter lists are a great way to keep track of Twitter users you really respect and Twitter users who typically have good information for retweets or favorites. Clicking on a list name will show your Twitter feed as usual, except the only tweets on the feed will be from the people added to that particular list. The list feature is on the main page of your Twitter profile, right under the favorites option. You have the option to make your lists public or private, which allows you to decide if people should know whose pages you check for important information. You also have the option to subscribe to the lists of other Twitter users. If a user has similar interests or posts as you, you should definitely subscribe to some of their lists.
2. Being repetitive on social media is usually a bad thing...except when it comes to Twitter. Experts say the peak times for Twitter interaction and views vary, especially depending on who your followers are. Experiment with repeating your most informative or popular tweets multiple times throughout the day.

PINNED TWEETS

Pin your most important tweets to the top of your page. That's a great way to promote a church event, church stance, or celebrate special achievements in the congregation.

REPLIES

If you type a reply to someone on Twitter but want the reply to reach the most news feeds as possible, make sure the reply starts with any character other than the @ sign. In other words, make an effort not to start any of your best tweets with another user's username.

If the @ sign is the first character in a tweet, a user has to be following the accounts on the sending and receiving ends of the tweet for the tweet to appear in his or her news feed. This is not the case when the @ sign does not start a tweet.

Do: I love worshipping with the @UnitedChurch.

Don't: @UnitedChurch has great worship service.

FACEBOOK

SETUP

1. Always run your church business from the church's designated fan page. A personal page should never represent the church's social media on its own.
2. The page name should be the church name, without abbreviations.
3. Like other fan pages. Just like your personal page, updates from these pages will show up in your news feed. You can also include pages you think are "competitors" and evaluate their analytics under Facebook's page manager dashboard. Social media is about finding unique ways to expand on trends, but you can't know what's trending if you don't know what's trending on similar pages.
4. Don't shy away from third-party apps that can incorporate other social media on your Facebook. You can embed Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest on your social media with such apps, and you can also run contests using third-party apps.

TAGGING

Facebook uses its news feed algorithm to award brands that tag other brands in their status updates. If you tag another fan page in your posts, Facebook may show your post to both your followers and followers of the page you tagged.

PINNING

If you have a special post you want to highlight after it's no longer the newest post, you can use the "pin" option to keep that post highlighted for as long as you choose.

EVENTS

Use the event pages on Facebook to your advantage. Use them to promote church-sponsored events or events where the church will be represented. Inviting people to events using Facebook is a great way to reach a large number of people with very little effort.

Social Media Policy Recommendations: Staff/Clergy

1. Always include a disclaimer that your opinions on your personal social media are your own.
2. Never post, like, or share something that could be considered obscenity, harassment, or bigotry by the average individual.
3. Differentiate between sharing something for conversation's sake or endorsement's sake.
4. Follow the church's leadership policy about adding church members as friends. It is actually recommended that clergy or church staff have a personal Facebook page. However, they should allow members of the congregation to request them as "friends" rather than the other way around. This could make some of the congregation uncomfortable or pressured to friend someone on staff who they might not choose to friend.
5. If you don't intend to use your Facebook page as a way to engage with the congregation, make sure your privacy settings are extremely tight.