

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR CHURCHES

by Justin Dean & Corrin Bauer



Social Media Guide for Churches

by:

JUSTIN DEAN

CORRIN BAUER

Updated January 2015.

© 2012-2015 [Justin Dean](#) and [Corrin Bauer](#). You are free to distribute this content without edits, provided you do not charge for it. If you'd like to use parts of this content to develop your own church policies and procedures, please feel free to do so, providing credit where necessary.

Cover design by Eleazar Ruiz. <http://www.eleazaruiz.com>

THANK YOU!

Whether you are a volunteer at your church, or on staff in a communications department, let us start by thanking you for using your time and talents for the glory of King Jesus!

Communicating through social media for a church can be time consuming and emotionally exhausting, but those of us who do it day in and day out know how rewarding it can be as well. You get to be on the front lines of God's work, not only in your church, but all over the world. We get to tell the stories of what Jesus is doing in and through our church and the lives of people that He is changing. That's a privilege and a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

This guide was created for church social media admins and is full of advice, lessons, and policies that we hope you find helpful for your ministry. We've also added a table of contents so that you can go back to this doc again and again as things arise. Feel free to use this guide as a starting point for creating one specific to your church. We found that this was a useful resource for volunteers or new staff joining a communications team.

Blessings to you and your church!

For His Glory,

Justin Dean @[justinjdean](#)
and Corrin Bauer @[corrinbauer](#)

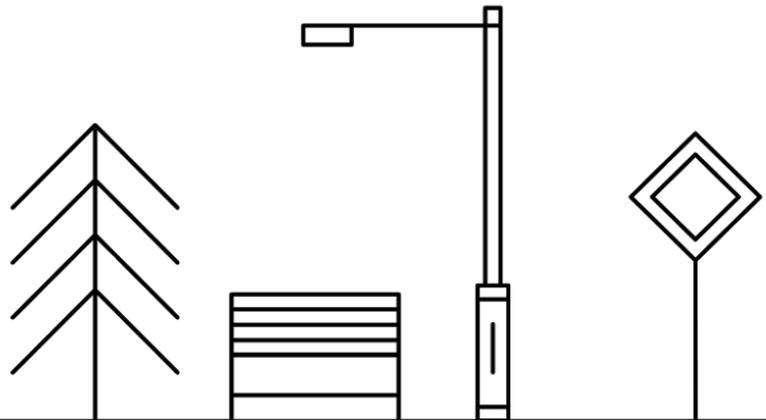


TABLE OF CONTENTS

About The Authors	(Page 6)
Why We Do Social Media	(Page 7)
Why We Love Social Media	(Page 8)
The Dos And Don'ts	(Page 10)
What Churches Should Post	(Page 12)
When To Post	(Page 12)
Facebook	(Page 15)
Twitter	(Page 18)
Instagram	(Page 19)
Youtube & Vimeo	(Page 21)
Tumblr	(Page 22)
Pinterest	(Page 23)
Google	(Page 24)
Yelp	(Page 25)
Management Systems	(Page 26)
#Hashtags	(Page 27)
How To Avoid Burnout	(Page 28)
How To Handle Haters	(Page 29)
Create A Comment Policy	(Page 30)
Insights & Analytics	(Page 33)
Additional Resources	(Page 34)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



JUSTIN DEAN

Justin is the founder of [DOXA Media Group](#), a communications agency that helps churches and ministries reach more people by supporting them with public relations, social media, and content marketing needs.

Prior to DOXA, Justin served as the Communications Manager for Mars Hill Church in Seattle for over three years, overseeing all content, blogs, social media, and public relations. His previous experience also includes leading sales and marketing teams for Internet startups and companies like AutoTrader.com and Home Depot for over ten years. He now lives with his wife and three kids in Atlanta, Georgia.

Learn more about Justin at [justinjdean.com](#) and follow him on Twitter at [@justinjdean](#)

CORRIN BAUER

Corrin Bauer started her social media career as just about everyone does—by becoming an avid user of social media. The sharp turn to professional came when she was hired as Mars Hill Church’s social media manager, running the accounts for Mars Hill Church, The Resurgence, and Pastor Mark Driscoll, as well as overseeing the volunteers and staff managing the accounts for Mars Hill’s 15 church locations.



During her two and a half years working at Mars Hill she had a ton of exposure to all types of social media and watched their combined followers grow to over one million. Now Corrin works for [Innovate For Jesus](#), a non-profit dedicated to helping pastors and ministry workers grow the church with practical ministry insights, technology, and innovations, as the platform manager and as a social media consultant. You can hear Corrin discussing social media on the [unSeminary podcast](#) and the [Social Media Church podcast](#). Corrin lives in Seattle with her husband and baby girl, Vivian.

Follow Corrin on Twitter at [@corrinbauer](#)

WHY WE DO SOCIAL MEDIA

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”
Matthew 5:14–16

PURPOSE of Social Media:

1. To **share** the gospel of Jesus Christ on mission through Social Media, a mission field populated with actual people who need the gospel;
2. To **encourage** one another with various glimpses of what God is doing within the body of your church;
3. To **understand** the greater scope of God’s work through the global church;
4. To **collaborate** and share resources, insight, scripture, etc.

We do social media because there are real people on social media - people who need Jesus, and who want to engage with your church where they already are.

This guide wasn’t created to help you decide whether or not to use social media - we are assuming you already are, or you plan to. This goal of this guide is to help you answer the question, *how am I going to steward our church social media accounts well?*

STEWARDED SOCIAL MEDIA

Whether you are posting from a personal account or from your church account, as members, deacons, pastors, and Christians, you represent not only your church, but the global “Big C” Church.

For many people, the first impression of Christians and/or your church is going to be your social media presence.

In this technology driven age, we’ve been given an amazing gift of reaching more people in more ways than ever before. From Facebook to Twitter to Pinterest, we have many platforms to share the gospel of Jesus. We want to steward that gift well by being Spirit-led, Christ-centered, and discerning about how we share our lives through words and photos.

Our priorities on social media should be to share the gospel, help disciple Christians, foster community, and ultimately encourage people to attend church.

We don't want to replace attending church for our followers, even if the account you admin is part of an online church. Whether church is online or not we want to help supplement Christian community into the social media world where people already are.

Let the Holy Spirit lead you in your planning, posting, and replying to comments. Things may not always pan out the way you thought they would, but we serve a big God who loves us and works all things for his purpose (Romans 8:28).

WHY WE LOVE SOCIAL MEDIA

We love social media because we love people. Jesus' last commandment to His disciples was to "*be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8) These days, our entire world is connected through social media. Facebook is "*the end of the earth*" because it's one way we truly are able to "*make disciples of all nations.*" (Matt. 28:19) Those nations are on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, and every other social media network.

As Christians, our biggest goal is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible, and we see social media as a mission field populated with actual people who need the gospel.

Jesus said Christians are the light of the world. The world is now on social media and Jesus loves every man and woman on social media sites, the popular sites and the not-so-popular ones. We want to reach everyone on social media so we hope to create posts that have purpose, and that fit each social media site. It's important for us to become all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22) because it's important to Jesus.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the most wonderful and compelling thing we can share with others. As social media admins, **our job is to make the gospel the hero of every post and get out of the way.**

JUMPING INTO SOCIAL MEDIA HEAD FIRST

Experts say social media is something we are all still trying to figure out. We believe this will always be true because social media changes every day, just as people, preferences, and trends change every day. If you post with love and discernment [[see the section on haters](#)], try new things and don't be afraid to fail! You know your church best. How can you best engage with your congregation online?

You'll learn a lot from trial and error. That's why research, stats, and analytics are important [[see the section on insights](#)]. Find out what worked and what didn't and see how you can make them both better. So much of social media is learning what's new and trying it out.

Reach out to other churches, or pay attention to how they are doing things online. Watch big brands, and see what they are trying. Just keep in mind that what works for one church may not work for you. What works for Chipotle, probably won't work for your church. If you're excited about teaching yourself and taking risks, you'll be an expert in no time.

THE DOS AND DON'TS

The following are tips and guidelines for social media that we have developed and used in churches over the years. These may not all apply to you and your church, but our hope is that they give you a good start to developing your own set of guidelines.

THINGS TO DO:

- Take your church leader's lead for tone and direction. What is the "voice" of your church? Is it funny? Serious? Whatever you decide, be consistent.
- Share stories, testimonies, and events going on at your church.
- Share posts from and link to other church and pastor accounts. But don't be redundant by sharing everything, unless it has a specific application to your church.
- Interact with your followers, care for your followers, pray for your followers.
- Ask a pastor how to best answer theological questions.
- Post photos during or right after each service of the life within your church.
- Do your best to get the legal permission of everyone you take a photo of. This means a signed photo consent form for any close up photos of any individuals.
- If you're filming/photographing a crowd, post signs saying something like "this event is being recorded and may be posted publicly..."
- Whenever your church has baptisms, post a few photos of the baptisms. Everyone loves celebrating baptisms!
- It's more important to be clear than clever. Being funny is great for sharing, but it doesn't always translate well when you can't reflect tone with text. It can backfire so just be careful.
- Be discerning and be listening to the Spirit (yes, even on social media).
- Glean what you can from interactions with your followers.
- Go with your gut/conscience.
- Share what God has been teaching you and the church staff.
- Tell people you prayed for them.
- Encourage your congregation in imaging Jesus in community, mission, and worship.
- Be discerning when posting photos. Any picture you upload could have GPS data on it; people could figure out where you live (that is the default iPhone setting but you can turn it off for your whole phone or just the camera: on the iPhone: Privacy > Location Services > Off).
- Use discernment when "checking in" on Facebook. Avoid posting pictures that could identify a pastor's home, street, children's school, etc.
- Always point to Jesus. He's the hero, not your pastor, not your church, and not you.

THINGS TO AVOID:

- Do not argue or debate with followers. Pray for critics and remember Galatians 6:7. Only engage with antagonists out of love and to clarify or correct something that is wrong. Otherwise, use the rule "if you engage you will enrage" (from Gavin de Becker's book *The Gift of Fear*) and stay out of it [[see the section on haters](#)].
- Do not have Twitter automatically post to Facebook or vice versa. If you want to post to both, use [Hootsuite or another aggregate app](#). If at all possible, use each channel for different information. Facebook is more relational and personal (allows people to interact easily in comments) and Twitter is more informational (events, articles, etc.)
- Consider the Internet a permanent record. Every pastor and church not only influences the reputation of the church but, ultimately, Jesus.
- Don't post anything political. This can be a PR issue as well as a legal issue, but more importantly it can divide the church and turn people away from Jesus.
- Don't cuss. Not even a little bit. Not even WTF. While its use is debatable, don't use OMG either. Better to err on the side of caution.
- Use discretion when speaking of liberties (alcohol, tobacco, gambling, etc.)
- Be careful about who you link to, retweet, or follow. A link or follow is considered a quasi-endorsement.
- Don't post links or articles that are unrelated to your church unless you provide context for doing so.
- Verify all the info you post. If you're mentioning someone from your church, be sure of their title/status: pastor, deacon, member, attender, etc.
- Be careful when criticizing someone/something online; they can find it or someone can copy it.
- Don't post personal addresses / phone numbers / email.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE POSTING

Before sending every post, ask yourself these questions:

- How does this point to Jesus and the gospel and support the mission of the church?
- What are you trying to accomplish with this status/tweet?
- Do you want your enemies to know this? Are you giving rocks to your critics?
- Do you want this to be public record in thirty years?
- Could this be misrepresented, taken out of context, and used to malign your character or the church's reputation?
- Worst-case scenario: how could this information be used?
- Don't just seek to make a point. Ask, "Am I making a difference?"

WHAT CHURCHES SHOULD POST

LIFE AT YOUR CHURCH

The most important things for a church to post are the things that show the life of the people in your church. Photos of baptisms, baby dedications, parties, sermon series launches, potlucks, community outreach, picnics in the park, or even just Sunday worship services. All these things show the world that church is about loving Jesus and loving people. When you upload photos, caption them. If you don't know what's going on in the photos, your followers probably don't either.

Quotes from the sermon are also great to post, but please make sure the quote is correct. And of course post about upcoming events.

Retweet people and reply to them on Twitter and comment back on Facebook when you can and when appropriate. People love interacting with pages.

Try to always be giving your followers links to find more info (ie, if you post a quote from Sunday's sermon, include the link to the sermon, YouTube clip, and/or hashtag for the series so folks can find more content easily). Tag other pages when quotes or posts are from them.

WHEN TO POST

When you want to post and how often you post is up to you and your church leaders. A great tool for figuring out the best times and days is under the Facebook Insights [[see the section on insights](#)]. You can typically post a maximum of 4 to 5 times a day on Facebook and 7 to 8 times a day on Twitter without annoying your followers. Granted, the content needs to be good and useful, not just promotion and fluff. Find what works best for your audience, measure and analyze it, and make changes as necessary.

Not everything needs to be an urgent post—schedule your content out.

It's best to start slow, posting one or two times a day, and build up from there as you have relevant things to post, particularly if you don't have a lot of followers.

In Gary Vaynerchuk's book, *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook*, he talks about finding a good rhythm for your channels so that you earn the right to ask your audience to buy something, attend an event, or donate. Think of it as Give, Give, Give, Get. You have to find the rhythm that works well for you, but you will typically want to focus on providing useful content (quotes, sermons,

photos, ebooks, etc.), then only post an ask (donate, sign up for event, buy this book, etc.) when you think you've given enough content to earn the right to ask something from your audience. If you ask too much, they'll unfollow you or hide you from their feeds.

This can get tricky when you have multiple ministries and pastors asking you to promote their events, giving campaign, books, music, and more. You have to be the gatekeeper for your channels. This is why providing data to show what works for your channels is important.

In our experience, when we had a lot of things to promote we would operate with a 'one promotional post' per day rule. In general we tried to only post one to two per week. The result was that our audience saw our channels as something more for them, and they engaged more and shared more with their friends. When we had to ask for donations or sell them something, they were more than willing to purchase and help us spread the word.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO POST

Don't have anything to post? No problem!

Photos from just a regular Sunday service is a great way to show a "day in the life" of a church. Other things to post are events coming up, Bible verses, theologian quotes, and old blog posts or sermons (especially if it's timely: holiday, speaker, topic, verse, etc.)

Theologian quotes can be tricky, so make sure your pastor knows what quotes you are going to post, and understand the theology and context of whoever said the quote so you know it's someone you endorse.

If you have old or new stuff you want to get rid of, giveaways are a great way to do that and gain new followers. We prefer Twitter for giveaways (asking folks to RT a status to enter to win) but if you do giveaways on Facebook, just make sure you're following [Facebook's page policies](#), which change frequently.

PERMISSION, PLEASE

For any photos you post that feature a close up of someone specific, it's best to get a release form. If you don't have permission, you can't post it. People come to church to worship and hear a sermon, they don't expect to be pasted all over your Facebook page. Imagine being a new visitor, checking out a church for the first time, then you realize they used a photo of you on their Facebook page. Some people will find that cool, while others may find it offensive.

This goes doubly for kids. You **MUST** have a signed release form from their parent or guardian to post.

The best thing to do is take crowd shots where no one is specifically singled out or distinguishable. Then take your close up shots of people you know and trust, and who have given you permission.

If your church doesn't have a photography or likeness release form, you can find some generic ones online, or use ours for free.

[Download a sample Photography/Likeness Release Form](#)

FACEBOOK

Facebook is the most used social media site in the world and [if it were a country it would be the third largest country in the world](#), right behind China, so you probably have a pretty good grasp on how to use it. Even our moms are on Facebook now.

Facebook is great for creating personal relationships (by commenting, liking, and sharing) and it's particularly great for sharing images. Facebook is very visual so when you share links make sure the image associated with the link pops up in the post. And when you just have text to share, such as a quote from a sermon, consider turning it into an image instead. Even text on a solid color background will yield a lot more interaction on Facebook than if you just type out the text of the post without an image.

Most people are only going to see your content in their news feed, instead of going to your profile or page, so make each post memorable. Also, keep in mind that [your followers are not going to see all of your posts](#), but the more likes, comments, and shares your content gets, the more people will see it.

Facebook is constantly evolving and changing so pay attention to their press releases and tech sites such as Mashable and TechCrunch. A simple change to their algorithms or features can drastically affect how people engage with your posts.

If you're able, download the Facebook Pages app on your phone, it's a great way to manage your page on the go.

Since it's so easy to comment on Facebook posts, people will expect you to engage with them on Facebook, more so than Twitter or other networks. Every comment helps the post show up in more people's feeds, as the friends of each commenter will see the post in their feeds as well. Take the time to monitor the questions people ask, pointing them to resources and materials on your website. Thank people for sharing your content and for their kind comments and suggestions.

You might find that Facebook comments tend to be pretty negative, however, and at times it can become stressful having to moderate your posts. Having a clear comment policy written in your about section will help set the standards for what you will accept. Just be sure to follow through with deleting and blocking people as needed so they know you'll enforce the rules.

Some churches and pastors have found that Facebook is a necessary evil. People don't engage with them on Facebook in very meaningful ways, so they are hesitant to continue using it, however they also find that a lot of people check Facebook to find service times and other info on your church, as well as to see photos of what visiting your church will be like. While it may

not always be the best network to engage and participate with your audience, Facebook is in a lot of ways a necessary presence for your church that you can't avoid.

FACEBOOK MESSAGES

The rule of thumb for messages is the same for dealing with commenters [[see the section on haters](#)]. One good thing is usually antagonists don't engage through messages because it's less public. Ask your pastor how they want you to handle theological questions or people seeking prayer for serious issues. For Facebook Pages you have the option of hiding the Messages button if you'd rather people get a hold of you through other channels, such as your website or email address.

Tell folks who want prayer that you'll pray for them (and actually do), if they need a church and they aren't near your church, you can point them to your denomination's website or a church planting network. If they live in your area, point them to a small group or Bible study. One of the primary goals of social media should be to get people to come to church, so do what you can to help them.

FACEBOOK ADMIN PRIVILEGES

Facebook Page admins can assign roles of Admin, Editor, Moderator, Advertiser, and Analyst to different people. These are always subject to change as Facebook updates their site, but here is a breakdown of the current privileges for each role:

	Admin	Editor	Moderator	Advertiser	Analyst
Manage roles	✓				
Edit Page	✓	✓			
Publish Posts	✓	✓			
Comment as Page & Delete Comments	✓	✓	✓		
Send Messages as Page	✓	✓	✓		
Create Ads	✓	✓	✓	✓	
View Insights	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

If you have volunteers who monitor comments and messages, you can assign them the Moderator role and not have to worry that they will post something accidentally. Likewise, if someone needs access to run reports for you, you can make them an Analyst and not have to worry about them posting anything.

Unfortunately Facebook allows every role (except Analyst) the ability to create ads. To get around this, it's best to set up a separate account for running your Facebook advertising. You can do this under your personal profile, or if you contact Facebook they can create a Business account for you that only has access to advertising and isn't associated with any profiles.

TWITTER

The second most popular social media site in the world is great for short, news-like information such as quotes, events, and links. It's harder to have conversations with people on Twitter, but there's plenty of ways to engage through retweets, short answers, and links to other content. People will tag you in tweets from time to time, but there is less expectation to engage than there is on Facebook. It's a lot less work to moderate, since there aren't any comment threads - so you can focus on putting out great content.

GUIDE FOR WRITING BETTER TWEETS

Be sure to check out [Twitter's glossary](#) for Twitter etiquette and specifics.

- Do not begin a tweet with an @reply unless you are replying to someone specific. **If you are beginning a tweet with someone's Twitter name, put a period before it so that it will show up for your followers** (otherwise, Twitter thinks it's an @reply and only people who follow you AND the other person will see the tweet)
- Shorten links if at all possible. You can use bit.ly or Hootsuite's ow.ly.
- And again, avoid using WTF and OMG. Even LOL can be tacky from official accounts.

If you cannot abbreviate any more and are still over the character limit, you have four options:

1. Split the quote into no more than two tweets that you schedule to send simultaneously.
2. Post the quote to Facebook instead. Not everything has to go on both networks.
3. Don't post it.
4. Or use it in a blog post and post a link to the blog.

TIPS FOR TWITTER

- **Is the tweet about Jesus? Or does it proclaim some aspect of the gospel?**
- **Tweet like you talk.** No conversation, no engagement.
- In general, Twitter likes the **pithy and punchy**. If you can't read the tweet emphatically, other people can't either.
- **Would you retweet it yourself?** People forget this, but it's one of the best indicators.

Ideally, Twitter should not be the primarily realm of where the conversation itself exists. Tweets should always be hooking people into your deeper content, so link to content such as blog posts, or use a hashtag that points to other content [[see the section on hashtags](#)].

INSTAGRAM

Instagram has become a major social media network, based solely on sharing images and short 15 second videos.

It's best to make your Twitter and Instagram usernames the same, that way there is easier sharing and tagging between the two.

HOW TO LINK INSTAGRAM AND TWITTER WITH YOUR PHONE

- If you have an iPhone or an Android phone, you can download the Instagram app. Go to the Account section and Edit sharing settings.
- Select Twitter and it will come up with the Twitter accounts linked to your Twitter app. Select the church's account.
- Then select Facebook. It will go to the Facebook app and ask you to authorize Instagram to Facebook. Approve it and then select Facebook again. It will say the Photo destination is your Timeline. Select Post to and it will take you to the Facebook app again to select the pages you admin. Select the church's page and you're done.
- As you sign in and out of your personal account and church account, pay close attention to your sharing settings. They don't always sync up correctly, and you'll find that even if you are signed in as the church, you might be sharing to your personal Facebook or Twitter.
- Here are a couple ways to [schedule Instagram posts ahead of time](#) and how to [manage multiple Instagram accounts](#).

WHAT TO POST TO INSTAGRAM

- People love to see photos of the life of the church: worship bands, pastors preaching, people worshiping, baptisms, special occasions or events, and anything behind-the-scenes.
- Creating graphics and images and sharing them on Instagram has become very popular and is a great way to creatively share quotes and scripture. Add some text over a nice photo using any simple photo editing software or app.
- Create short 15 second videos of your church services, preaching, or your events. Upload them and give people a taste of what it's like at your church.
- Film quick testimonials of people, sharing what they are learning and how Jesus is working in their lives.
- Showcase photos of your volunteers as a way to acknowledge their hard work.

INSTAGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

- For the descriptions, just tell your audience what's going on. We suggest using only first names unless they're staff or pastors. You can include info of which service, who's in the photo, and what's going on if it's hard to tell or if you need to explain any background info.
- Instagram does not activate links in the descriptions of the photos and videos, so it's best not to link to websites or other content.

Also, don't feel like you have to post everything from Instagram to Twitter and Facebook. It's OK to keep some photos and videos on Instagram and only share the major posts to all three networks.

YOUTUBE & VIMEO

YouTube lives in a weird space between social media and video production. Some churches put their whole sermons on YouTube while some just have sermon clips to make it easy to share small chunks of the sermon on social media. There's additional content such as interviews, stories, trailers, previews, and music videos that you can post as well.

You can drive a lot of traffic to your church website by posting clips of sermons and linking over to the full sermon on your website. Most people are expecting short clips when visiting YouTube, particularly if they are on their phone.

YOUTUBE CHANNELS

YouTube [updated user profiles](#) to make them more personal. Use a banner image, intro video, playlists, and more to welcome your users.

As you gain subscribers, you can set YouTube to automatically email your subscribers every time you upload a public video. This is a great way to notify people of a new sermon.

VIMEO

Vimeo is a great alternative to YouTube if you need a place to host your videos. They have great features for sharing on social media, as well as a lot of advanced features that YouTube does not offer. For example, you could set a Vimeo video so that it can only be embedded on certain sites. This is useful if you want to use Vimeo as a video player in a blog post but you don't want users taking the video and embedding it on their own blogs.

Vimeo does not have a huge audience like YouTube does, so people are less likely to find your videos on their own if they only live on Vimeo. If you are looking to reach as many people as possible with your video, then YouTube is a better option.

TUMBLR

Tumblr is a simple and easy blogging site. Like Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram, it's more on the visual side, but also does well with stories, quotes, and reblogging (like retweeting).

If your church does not have a blog, Tumblr might be a great option to start one. It's also great to use for smaller individual ministries so that they can have their own blog or website if needed.

Since our church had an existing blog on our website, we used Tumblr to post quotes and clips that linked back to the full source on our website. It turned out to be a decent traffic driver to the site, and reached a new audience of Tumblr users that we didn't have before. Some people just really enjoyed getting the highlights via Tumblr, while not having to read every blog post on our site.

PINTEREST

Pinterest is basically a website that functions in place of the bazillion bookmarks you had or the folders you had on your desktop of images to keep. It's used mostly for recipes, wedding and baby decorations, and inspirational quotes. Of those three, you'll probably tend to stick to the inspirational quotes.

It's also a great place to share images of graphic design and artwork that your creative and production teams produce.

The audience on Pinterest is primarily women, and reaching men through this network will be very difficult. As you post content to Pinterest, keep this in mind and cater to what women at your church might find helpful.

GOOGLE

GOOGLE+

When we've used it, we have typically treated Google+ similar to Facebook as far as what content we post there. It's not a hugely used social media site so we have found that it's not worth the investment to post very much unique content there. If you have a Google+ page, it's easy to keep it updated by sharing the same things you share on Facebook. You can do this easily with a Buffer or Hootsuite account.

If the world ever decides to start using Google+ in the way it is using Facebook and Twitter than perhaps churches can become more intentional there. Until then, we find it would take away a lot of time and resources to effectively manage it, monitor it, and maintain it for very little return in engagement and reach. Posts to Google+ tend to rank higher in Google search results, so that's at least something to keep in mind.

That being said, if you find your church has a large audience on Google+ (maybe your church has a location in Mountain View) then it might make sense for you to concentrate your efforts there.

Like anything, try it out, measure the engagement, and decide if it's worth the effort at this time. We tried it out and eventually shut ours down.

Also check out [Google+ Local](#) and [Google+ Brands](#) to see if they work for your church. Local allows people to search across the Google properties (search, Maps, mobile, etc) in a few different ways—Zagat reviews and scores are now automatically integrated into search results, there is the integration of a circles filter to find reviews/recommendations from friends/family/colleagues, and within Google+, there is now a “local” tab to allow for searching and sharing. Make sure the pin for your church on Google Maps is in the right place or else new people might end up in the wrong location.

GOOGLE HANGOUTS ON AIR

[Hangouts on Air](#) are a great way to have a live video conversation with someone in your church and your followers or congregants. You can interview a pastor or leader, have Q&A with your audience, or both! To start a Hangout on Air, click the [Start a Hangout button](#). Make sure you're signed in as the account you want to host the video when you're done because that's where the video will stay. You can also choose for the video to be shared to your YouTube account, so people can go back and watch the recorded version later.

YELP

Since Yelp is user-generated reviews you may not have much to monitor daily, but it's good to be aware of what your community perceives about your church and your ministries. Folks nowadays use Yelp to pick their mechanic, where they'll eat for lunch, and every other aspect of their lives. When they move to your town or are looking for a new church, the first instinct for many people will be to check Yelp for churches as well.

[Claim your page](#) or create a new one. Be sure location information is accurate, post photos from your church, respond to reviews, measure activity on your page, and [more](#) with their free tools.

MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

For those who don't want to post every status, photo, and video in real time and would rather schedule ahead of time, you can use a social media management system like [Hootsuite](#) or [Buffer](#). Both allow you to schedule posts ahead of time, have integrated link shorteners, and both have browser apps that allow you to post whatever page you're on in your browser to social media, and mobile phone apps to help you manage your accounts on the go.

These tools are incredibly useful if you have multiple people posting to your accounts for you. You can set them up so that staff or volunteers load up your accounts with posts, which you can then go in and approve or change as needed before they are posted live.

HOOTSUITE

Hootsuite lets you have columns of tweets of lists or searches, which is great for retweeting and seeing mentions. If you get a paid account, you can hook up multiple accounts and social media channels. You can see who follows you and how many followers they have and how many people they follow to gauge influence. It also has custom analytics [[see our section on Insights](#)].

Hootsuite is great for monitoring your social media networks during a live event or on Sundays as you can view multiple searches for hashtags and phrases, as well as see what you have scheduled, all on one screen.

BUFFER

Buffer is similar to Hootsuite in a lot of ways. One thing that Buffer does better is let you "load" up posts that it distributes throughout the day as per your pre-set "best times to post" and you are able to tag people and pages from Facebook from Buffer, which you can't do in Hootsuite. Buffer also lets you plug in your bit.ly account into their link shortener and can add Google Analytics. It's mainly used as a scheduler, and does not have any options to view or search your social networks.

Both apps allow you to have multiple users and schedule and approve posts as you see fit. These tools are also great for gathering analytics and data on your posts.

#HASHTAGS

There are three reasons to use a [hashtag](#): to group things together with a unique identifier (so that clicking on a hashtag will bring up all the other tweets about that topic, examples: #loveoneanother, #changedlives), to insert a tweet into a conversation (examples: #sermon, #proverbs, #love), or to hop onto a trending topic. You can now use hashtags on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

While hashtags have a lot of potential, people are still trying to figure out how useful they are. Don't overload your posts with a lot of hashtags, or use them just for the sake of using them. You can probably save the characters to provide a better post, and only use a hashtag when you think it will add value or context.

If you're posting a quote from a sermon, it makes sense to create a hashtag that relates to that specific sermon series. Users can click on the hashtag and instantly see other quotes and links related to that sermon (if the hashtag is unique enough.)

Here are a couple examples of a Twitter giveaway that uses a hashtag:

We have 5 copies of @pastoremase' new book #manhoodrestored to give away. RT to enter to win a copy. [link to the book]

We have 5 copies of our new worship album to give away. Tweet your favorite song with #ChurchSongs to enter to win.

To pick a winner, you would do a search for the hashtag to see everyone who tweeted for the contest or search for a specific phrase they are retweeting. We usually count up the number of tweets and enter it into random.org to randomly choose a winner.

You can then @reply that person or DM them to notify them that they won. From there you can ask for their address to ship the item, or if they are local arrange for them to pick it up at church.

HOW TO AVOID BURNOUT

It happens. The constant dripping of social media and comments from people who are less than polite.

So what do you do?

There are two things we have found that help with burnout in general but social media in particular.

The first is that whenever you pour yourself out in ministry, you need to take time to be poured back into by Jesus. This means rest and sabbath, whatever that looks like for you.

The second is to have your eyes and heart down on the ground. In social media, it can be really easy to view people online as just names, but they're real people who need Jesus. Be active in biblical counseling or prayer ministry if you can, and at least be active in your small group.

And lastly, for every hater out there, there's a lost and hurt person who saw a tweet, came to church and met Jesus for the first time. Find and focus on the good stories (Philippians 4:8).

HOW TO HANDLE HATERS

DEALING WITH SPAMMERS AND ANTAGONISTIC COMMENTERS

Comments typically happen on Facebook and YouTube. You can't avoid them on Facebook, but on YouTube you have the option to turn comments off for your whole account, or per video.

In our experience, you'll get four types of commenters:

1. those who leave a compliment or express excitement
2. those with genuine and earnest questions
3. those with antagonistic or accusatory questions or statements
4. spammers

In rare circumstances you may even encounter a 5th group of malicious people who actually want to harm your church.

For those who leave a compliment, thank them. Followers love interacting with the pages they follow.

For those with genuine questions, answer them. Feel free to engage to help them with practical questions or theological questions. Usually with theological questions you can point them to resources online (sermons and blogs) or tell them to talk to a pastor or deacon after a service.

For spammers, go ahead and delete if you can tell it's spam, if they're asking for money, or if it's telling others to check out another website. You can also block that person from posting again in the future if they continue to abuse your page.

For those who are antagonistic commenters, we have a saying that we borrowed from Gavin de Becker: *If you engage, you will enrage.*

People like that usually aren't looking to learn or get answers to questions, they just want to attack someone or they just want to promote their position. It's usually best to nip antagonistic comments in the bud before they engage debates with your other followers or distract them from the mission of Jesus. If those people honestly want to have a loving conversation then the best place to do that is in person or via email where it isn't public. You don't have to tell them that - it's common sense.

If you need to apologize or retract something, go ahead and do it. Sometimes it's better to apologize publicly than to delete something and pretend it never happened because antagonistic followers will comment on other threads saying that you're hiding something.

Remember that your social media channels are yours, and they exist to engage with others in a positive and helpful manner. There's nothing wrong with policing your channels and choosing how you want people to use them.

On Twitter you may see people tagging you in mean tweets or harassing your other followers. There's less you can do on Twitter to manage this. The best thing is to ignore anyone who's being antagonistic. Most people following your Twitter account won't even see those tweets unless they do a search.

CREATE A COMMENT POLICY

It's also a great idea to create a comment policy and post it in the about section of your Facebook page.

Below is a sample comment policy that we have used in the past. Feel free to use the same policy or adapt it.

Church Facebook Page Comment Policy

Thank you for being a part of the community here on our church's Facebook Page.

This page is meant to be a way to keep you informed on various church events and content. It's also an opportunity for us to engage with people who have benefited from our ministry.

The page does have administrators who will do their best to answer reasonable questions by posting links to existing content. The administrators also moderate comments and reserve the right to delete any comments.

In general, the following types of comments are prohibited and will be deleted:

- Hate speech of any kind
- Inappropriate content, including excessively foul language, pornography, etc.
- Self-promotion such as links to personal blogs, websites, etc.
- Requests for donations or money
- Spam of any kind, including reposts of the same comment and/or repeating the same sentiment over and over again
- Promotion of political candidates and policy

- Insults of other commenters or egging other commenters on
- Malicious attacks against church members and leaders
- Anything strange, demanding, obsessive, threatening, etc.
- Anything that infringes on a copyright

If a comment is deleted, consider the deletion a warning. Those who persist in posting comments that are in violation of this policy will be banned from the page.

Things like Facebook are 24/7. However, our administrators are not. Therefore, we ask that, as community members who care about this page, that you do not reply to obvious attempts to bait you into arguments. Please ignore comments in violation of this policy until they can be properly moderated.

Please note that the comments expressed on this page do not necessarily reflect the opinions and position of our church.

MODERATING COMMENTS

As you see comments that violate your policy, explain to them your policy through a Facebook message, then delete or hide the comment. If the commenter keeps posting, go ahead and ban them. And of course, use your judgment and discernment. Weigh out the good vs the bad of possible outcomes and just try to be wise. When it comes down to it, comment threads on Facebook hardly ever provide any significant value, so tread lightly and don't stress about moderating.

PRAY FOR YOUR ENEMIES

It can be hard, but don't take hateful comments personally. If your church is preaching the Bible and you're sharing it online, hateful comments can sometimes be spiritual attack, so pray for them and pray for you and your church.

Matthew 5:44 instructs us to love and pray for those who persecute you. Praying for them gives us the perspective we need to be long suffering and patient before responding or acting out of anger or retaliation. God has the power to change their heart and yours, so you never know what the outcome will be if you stop and pray for people who may not like you.

TIPS ON WHO TO FOLLOW

Also be careful who you follow on social networks. You may think it's wise to follow a critic on Twitter so you can monitor what they are saying about the church, but following someone is perceived as an endorsement. People just browsing your profile, who may not realize who the person is, will think they are OK because you follow them. Sites like Facebook and Twitter will even use your name and likeness in marketing to show that you follow the person.

If you want to stay on top of your critics, add them to private lists on Twitter (you can do this without following them) or bookmark their pages in your browser.

Some churches choose to only follow official accounts of their ministries and pastors. This is a great way to promote those accounts, as people will see that you only follow a handful of accounts, and then they'll follow as well.

Although, one of the best ways to increase your followers and reach is to follow other people. It's really hard for people to find your account unless they know specifically that you are there. By following others, particularly like-minded people who you think would be interested in your church, they will typically follow you back if they are interested. Their friends will then see that they follow you and your followers will continue to increase. On Twitter you can search for hashtags or different phrases that will turn up results of people that may be good people to follow. Just be careful not to follow anyone who may give the wrong impression to your followers.

INSIGHTS & ANALYTICS

Insights and analytics are a great way to measure what's working and what's not working. Every church has a different audience, and every social network has a different audience as well. It's a good idea to keep a running doc each week that has stats like your current Facebook and Twitter followers, the five most clicked posts that week, and the five most and least retweets, favorites, and Facebook reach and engagement. You can review this information to see what your followers are engaging with, and what you are spending your time posting.

To get all that info, you can use [Facebook Insights](#), [Twitter Ads](#), and [Hootsuite Analytics](#). Buffer has analytic reports as well, and there are dozens of third party social media apps and tools you can subscribe to. Many are free, while others cost monthly.

When posting links to content and websites, use bit.ly or other link shorteners, so you can track how many people clicked on the link. Sometimes its best to use a different link per network, so you can track how many people click from Facebook vs Twitter, etc. If your website uses Google Analytics to track traffic and other reporting features, then you can also use the [Google Analytics Link Builder](#) to build links that will help you see data in Google Analytics better.

However you decide to measure your posts, do it consistently and try to make both the good and the bad better. There are a ton of tools and apps that can help you gather all sorts of info and charts. Try them out and find what works best for you.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Some great websites on social media and communications:

- [Mashable](#)
- [TechCrunch](#)
- [UnSeminary](#)
- [Social Media Church](#)
- [Social Church](#)
- [Maximize Technology for Ministry](#)
- [Innovate for Jesus](#)
- [Fast Company](#)
- [Church Media Magazine](#)
- [Church Tech Today](#)
- [Church Mag](#)
- [Church Marketing Sucks](#)

Some specific articles that may be helpful:

- [7 Things Every Pastor Should Do Every Week on Social Media](#)
- [Social Media and the Church](#)
- [The Seven Deadly Sins of Social Media](#)
- [4 Big Mistakes Churches Make on Social Media](#)
- [The 10 Commandments of Social Media for Brands](#)
- [List of most popular Facebook pages of churches and ministries](#)
- [22 Common Mistakes Most Churches & Non-Profits Make On Social Media](#)
- [Free Ebook: "Social Media and the Church"](#)
- [Social Media Sizing Cheat Sheet](#)
- [16 Social Media Marketing Tips From the Pros](#)
- [35 Social Media Questions for Every Church](#)
- [Top 5 Apps for Social Media Success](#)
- [6 Clever Tricks for Social Media Managers](#)

CONTACT US

We hope this guide has been helpful for you and your church. If you have any questions or comments please reach out to us and we'd love to serve you.

Thank you and God bless!

Justin Dean
Corrin Bauer

