



SOCIAL MEDIA

INFORMATION
FOR CHURCHES

Understanding social media,
developing a strategy and
creating engaging content
for your church



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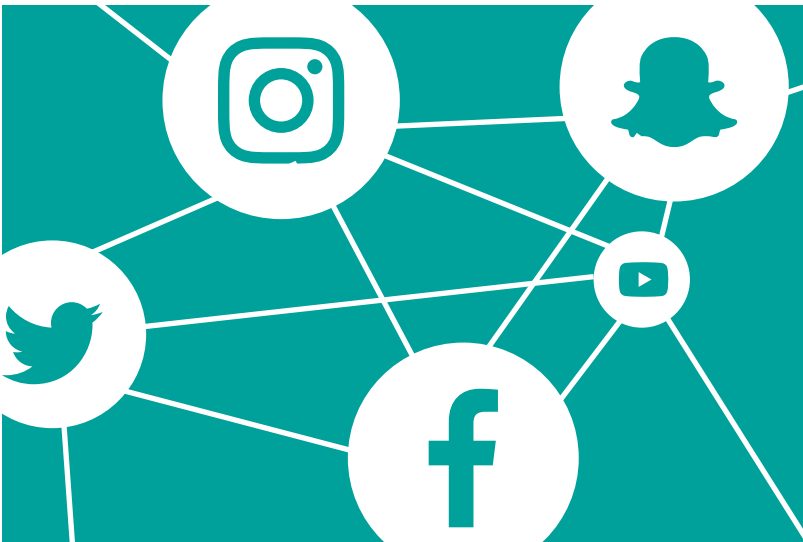
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01

Understanding Social Media Platforms



Maybe what makes social media so challenging for Churches and Ministry agents to navigate is the plethora of options to choose from—and new ones seem to spring up regularly. Finding the right platform for your church may seem daunting.

Here is a quick survey of the options out there. Each contains both strengths and weaknesses.

Facebook

With more than 2.8 billion daily active users (as of 17 Feb 2021), Facebook has the largest and most diverse reach of any social media platform available today. It's the third most visited website in the world (behind only Google and YouTube).

Its stated mission is to “give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.” It really doesn't matter who you are trying to reach—from teenagers to families to grandparents—Facebook can help. It can enhance your communication with your church family and those not-yet attendees you want to reach.

For nearly every Church, Facebook should be the first social media platform you engage.

Possible Ministry Uses:

- † Share video clips from your weekend worship service.
- † Build a Facebook group for various small groups, ministries, or Bible study classes to help members stay connected.
- † Promote your upcoming outreach event to a specific demographic in your community through paid advertising.
- † Schedule a weekly “Facebook Live” chat with your pastor where he can answer questions based on the sermon.

Twitter

Every day Twitter's 187 million users send out more than 500 million tweets. The platform has played a huge role in amplifying social movements around the globe, including #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, which have bought about movements that have real advocacy power.

It tends to skew both younger (those 18-29 are three times more likely to be on it than those above the age of 65) and more educated (29 per cent of people with a college degree use it compared to 20 per cent with a high school degree or less). Twitter's insistence on keeping its messages under 140 characters has fundamentally changed how people communicate.

Possible Ministry Uses:

- † Distribute encouraging quotes from your weekend sermon.
- † Discover and engage in conversation about important topics in your community.
- † Give people in your community a glimpse of what's important to your church.
- † Tell people about upcoming opportunities in your church.

01 Understanding Social Media Platforms



Instagram

It's the second most popular social media platform. A third of online users participate in Instagram (which, by the way, is owned by Facebook). More than 1.16 billion use it monthly. Though it works like most social networking sites, it specialises in visual curation (photography and video) for media and mobile distribution.

Instagram has been one of the hotter networks of recent years. Since 2016, Instagram had more than doubled its monthly active user base in the previous two years. Women are more likely than men to use Instagram. The platform is also particularly used by the young (90 per cent of its users are under the age of 35).

Possible Ministry Uses:

- † Post an invite to your weekly worship service (with the time and your address).
- † Use the stories to share videos on IGTV
- † Give people a feel of what your worship services are like with photos of the experience.
- † Share encouraging photos/quotes from your service.
- † Use a volunteer of the week post to introduce your community to what God is doing at your church.
- † Intentionally show your church's diversity in the photos you post.

Snapchat

Snapchat users engage one another by posting photos and short videos (10 seconds or less). It's a unique platform because posts disappear a few seconds after they've been viewed. Snapchat has been the most controversial in recent years, particularly in youth ministry circles.

The frequency of youth using the platform to send sexually explicit content has made some churches question whether they should participate. 265 million daily active Snapchat users worldwide, sharing over 210 million snaps every day.

It skews younger (71 per cent under the age of 34), female (70 per cent), and middle to upper class.

Possible Ministry Uses:

- † Pastors can give people a behind-the-scenes look at their lives.
- † Share stories about what God is doing in your congregation.
- † Share young peoples' testimonies
- † Share youth group activities

YouTube

YouTube is the third most popular website globally (and surely one of the most well-known). It's best known as a place to post streaming videos. Although many people don't think about it as social media, it has similar dynamics as Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms.

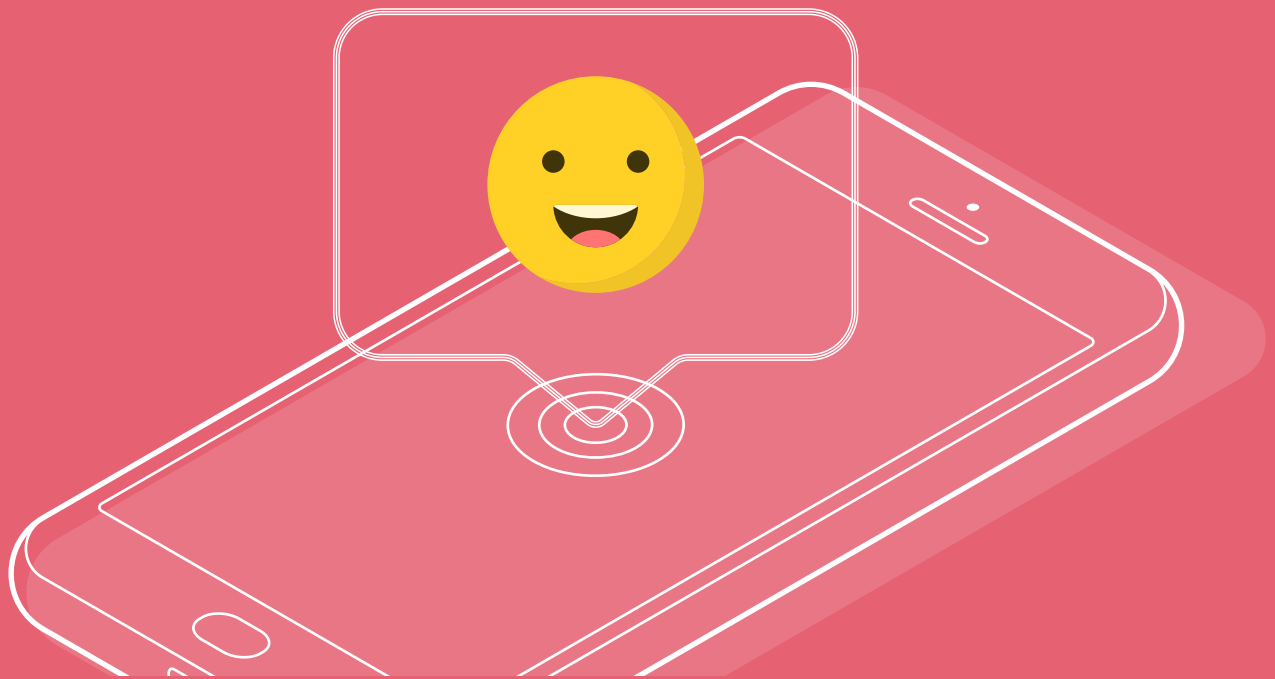
Being successful on YouTube means gaining subscribers, comments, likes, and friends. YouTube has a staggering 2.3 billion users worldwide. 79 per cent of Internet users have their own YouTube account.

An algorithm helps to organise YouTube's search feed. It's a platform with tremendous reach into the lives of young people. A startling number of consumers on YouTube between the ages of 13-24 watch on average 12.1 hours of video a week on YouTube, social media, and other free sites. They watch 8.2 hours of television a week. Unlike the television shows, YouTube provides opportunities for anyone with a smartphone video camera to produce their own shows that can be distributed to millions.

Possible Ministry Uses:

- † Livestream weekend worship services.
- † Encourage your Church's youth to start YouTube channels on topics of interest to their peers (and with ministry components in them).
- † Start a weekly or daily video devotional.

02 Social Media Strategy For Churches



Churches that thrive in the social media arena don't do so by accident. You might imagine some high school kid randomly and feverishly pecking away at his smartphone about whatever church-related topic that pops into his mind, but that's not the making of a strong social media ministry.

Social media and, in fact, your digital ministry strategy should be more planned than other ministries in your church—not less. The competition for the minds and hearts of your community is too intense to leave to chance. But just because it's important to plan your social media expression doesn't mean it has to be complicated.

This is a complete guide to social media strategy for churches. A set of seven principles that will define and direct your church's efforts on social.

Because here's the thing...even though platforms like Facebook have been around for more than ten years, social media as a cultural force is still very new.

And the rhythms of social media are constantly changing. This is why it often feels like it's impossible to keep up online.

But here's the good news...what you're about to learn is not reliant on the latest trends or the newest social platforms.

On the contrary, the principles you're about to learn will serve you for years to come - while also helping you navigate the ongoing evolution of social media.

#1 Our efforts on social must be informed by Christ

This is where everything begins and from where all things flow. Jesus said to "go and make disciples of all nations" - giving us the mandate to **be where the people are**. In 2005, just 5% of adults were using at least one social platform. By 2011, that rate had risen to 50%. Pre-pandemic, almost 3 out of every adult were using at least one social media site [Source: Google].

It's clear that churches need to be present on social media, but the logical question is, how should churches use social media?

Again, looking to Jesus, we see that He often used worldly ideas accessible to the average person as springboards when He communicated the most profound truths. Agriculture, baking, economics, to name a few.

The goal is to **find the intersections between faith and culture**. Where can The Good News cross paths with the lived experiences of the person you're trying to reach? Use Jesus as your example and then go and do likewise.

#5 Stop the scroll

We're sharing the greatest story of all time. But it doesn't matter how amazing our message is if no one is listening! This is why every smart social media strategy needs these three words: Stop The Scroll.

If you want to get someone's attention - **you first need them to stop scrolling**. One of the best ways to stop the scroll is to use photos of people in your social posts. This is a timeless technique that makes a huge difference because we as humans are a social species - we connect with other humans on an instinctual level.

Once you've stopped the scroll, you have the opportunity to share The Good News with someone, but you have to get them to stop scrolling first.

#2 Use social media to do ministry - not just promote ministry

Social media is a ministry. It's not a vehicle to promote ministry. Unfortunately, the majority of our posts are promotional in nature. Your first impulse should be to do ministry on social, rather than promote ministry to manage social media correctly. So instead of inviting people in your church to pray soon, why not invite them to pray now?

An example of this would be two contrasting posts - one that advertises your next in-person prayer meeting and the other that invites your followers to pray wherever they are whenever they see your post.

This is what it looks like to **use social to do ministry - rather than promote ministry**. And while it might feel a bit foreign at first, once you've established it as a pillar in your church's social policy, I'm confident you'll start thinking creatively here.

#6 Repeat the best; forget the rest

When you stumble upon a post type that resonates with your audience, use it again. And again. And again! And keep pulling from that well until it runs dry. For example, if you see great engagement on quote posts - give them a permanent spot in your social calendar. On the other hand, if you keep posting quotes and don't see them resonating, don't keep forcing it.

To find out what kind of posts are working, you should be comparing your posts to your posts, not one of your posts, to a similar post from a different church. Here's a simple equation you can use to give each of your social posts a score: **engagement divided by reach**.

So count up all your likes, comments, shares, saves, etc. and divide that total number by reach - the number of people who actually saw that post. Do that for each of the posts you've published on social for a given platform in the last 90 days and see what your top performers are.

#3 Find a sustainable pace for your church

Social media is like exercise. One amazing post won't accomplish much – nor will one workout. The key to progress is sustained effort over the long term. Don't get distracted by the specifics (especially at the start). Instead, find your sustainable pace and stick to it. The key is to post content that is valuable to your church for the next ten years. Yes, that long!

This rule should also inform how many platforms your church is active on, along with how frequently you publish to those platforms. Just because a platform exists doesn't mean you need to be on it.

You also don't need to post every day on social. Platforms are too saturated nowadays to give anything less than your best. Throwaway posts may fill a quota, but they'll punish your long-term effectiveness. Find a posting frequency that is **sustainable for you and your church** for the next ten years. And then just keep showing up every single week.

#7 Offline and online ministry must work together as allies, not adversaries

You may be thinking to yourself, "Social cannot replace in-person gatherings." We totally agree.

But here's the thing: what we do offline can never replace what we do online. Your week has 168 hours. For most churches, on average, one of those hours is dedicated to an in-person service, but that still leaves 167 hours beyond that where you won't be meeting in-person with your church.

But you can still connect with them online! This is why online ministry and offline ministry need to work together. The mission of our churches is not to host a service, nor is it to post on social media. The mission of our churches is to affect life change. Both offline and online ministry play a unique role in making that happen.

#4 Reach publicly; connect personally

Your two responsibilities with social media at your church are to **reach publicly and connect personally**.

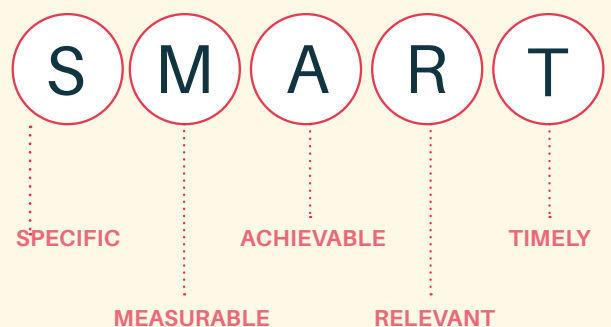
If you aren't doing both of these things, your church's social presence will always be incomplete.

Most of our churches understand the **reach publicly** element of social - that's publishing posts on your pages and profiles that the world can see. That's the part of social that is visible, so we can simply follow the cues of what others are doing.

The **connect personally** element is where we often struggle, but the organisations and individuals that are building vibrant communities online are doing so by connecting personally behind the scenes – that means direct messages, emails, chats, etc.

#8 Write SMART objectives to reach your goals

Goals tell you where you want to go. Objectives describe how you'll get there. Create SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely). You'll find further explanation of the SMART acronym numerous places online. Google it to get a better idea of what each of those elements means.



CREATING GOOD CONTENT

Social media runs on content. Good content. Nothing will save your social media presence if you can't distribute quality content consistently.

So, where do you get great content? Here is the good news. Your church is already a content machine. Churches, by their very nature, produce streams of content every single week. Your church's pastor likely spends 20-plus hours weekly studying scripture to create great sermons. A typical 30-minute sermon can produce multiple weeks worth of social content.

Using your weekly sermons for social content isn't just helpful for filling up your social calendar. It makes good ministry sense, too. Many people consume content differently. Some people will be all ears during the weekend message. Others will catch the truth better in bite-sized pieces throughout the week in your social media feeds.

Here are a few ideas:

- † Pull out engaging video clips of the sermon.
- † Post quotes from the sermon throughout the week.
- † Do a follow-up Facebook Live chat-based on last week's sermon. Of course, your sermon isn't your church's only source of social content, but it's a great place to start.

What makes good social media content? It's not all about you.

Smart social content producers realize that always talking about yourself on social media is a major turnoff.

It's not that they will unfriend you or unfollow you. The real risk is that they'll simply ignore you. This is particularly true if you're tweeting from your church's branded account. Never, ever forget social media isn't really about the brands (even though there are tons of them on social platforms). It's about people. You are a guest at someone else's table. Have you ever sat at a table when someone constantly talked about themselves? You didn't want to stay. Remember that feeling. Keep the 80/20 rule in mind.

Keep your content short

Twitter limits you to 140 characters, but all social platforms value concise communication. Facebook posts work best when under 50 words (no one wants to click the "read more"). Turn anything more than 50 words into a blog post.

Be clear, not cute.

There's a place in social media for a clever post or two to cut through the social media noise. Just don't overthink your posts. When you're trying to fit a message into 140 characters, never sacrifice clarity for cuteness. When all else fails, just write the message that needs to be communicated in the clearest way possible.

Answer the question:

What's in it for me? Most people's social media streams are overrun with posts these days. You don't stand out in that crowd by being crazy (unless crazy is your thing). You stand out by providing content that informs, educates, and entertains your audience. That's how you get likes. That's how you get shares. That's how you get people to stick around on your feed.

Write. Rewrite. Write. Rewrite.

When you consider the spatial limitations and massive competition in the social space, few writing genres are as challenging as social media. Don't let your first draft be your only draft. Take three or four cracks at each post. Quantity will likely lead to quality.

CASE STUDY INSIDE SADDLEBACK CHURCH'S SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Few churches in the world have embraced social media more effectively than Southern California-based Saddleback Church.

With close to 60,000 Twitter followers and more than 150,000 Facebook page likes, you'd be tempted to think the megachurch has a large team and extensive budget devoted to its social media presence. But you'd be wrong.



CONNECT



TEACH



SHARE

One full-time staff member and one part-time staffer (and a growing team of volunteers) lead Saddleback's massive efforts. To make the most of Saddleback's social media efforts, Haley Veturis (@HaleyVeturis), who oversees the church's social media efforts, developed an innovative three-part strategy to reach and grow their community.

When Haley got to the story of Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in the Gospel of John, she noticed a pattern that would become the basis of the social media strategy she now uses at Saddleback.

As Jesus engaged the woman, He did three things, she says:

- † He **connected** with her. *He asked her for some water.*
- † He **taught** her. *He told her that He was the Living Water.*
- † He **shared** a ministry opportunity. *She then went out and shared what she learned with others.*

Those three components (connect, teach, and share) form the backbone of Saddleback's strategy.

Connect

Veturis calls this the most important part of the strategy. She wants Saddleback to be more than just a logo on social media. She wants it to be personal. The church does this by responding to comments, mentions, and retweets.

They try to engage with every single person who interacts with the church via social media. When someone posts a photo of the church and tags it, Saddleback recognizes that. Connecting isn't just responding to people, though. It's also about posting compelling content that would interest their community.

Teach

Next, Saddleback shares practical, transformative, and hopeful content from scripture and the weekend message. "This content does a good

job of standing alone, but they also make people want to dive back in and re-watch the message," Veturis says. Sometimes, they're "zingers" that make you see truth in a new way, but usually, they're simply sources of hope.

Share

Through this part of the strategy, Saddleback exposes the community to ministry opportunities. The church emphasizes this part of the strategy least. Not because it isn't important, Veturis says, "But we know at Saddleback that our social media channels' primary purpose is to reach into the community. Those are people who may not go to church yet. We want to focus on opportunities that will attract our community. We want to come and invite them to be a part of our crowd."



When social media first burst onto the scene in the mid-2000s, only the young and the early adopters were on it. Facebook problematically started out as a platform to connect college students. Twitter had a total of 20,000 tweets per day before it tripled during the 2007.



In the early days, when a person posted on a social media platform of their choice, many of their friends or followers were guaranteed to see it. But as the traffic grew, that becomes nearly impossible. The sheer volume now means that social networks have to do something to organise the posts you see, so you're more likely to see what interests you. Facebook, for example, figures every time you open up the app, you may scroll through a few dozen posts.

Facebook's stated goal is to give you "the right content at the right time." In an ideal world, they'd give you all the potential posts that could be on your feed and ask you to order them. But that's impossible. You don't have the time nor the inclination to do this.

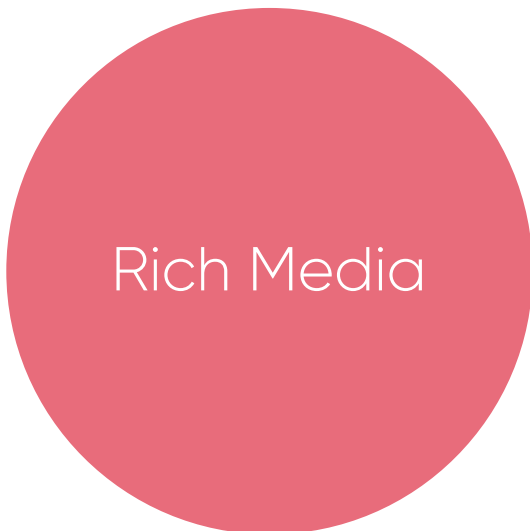
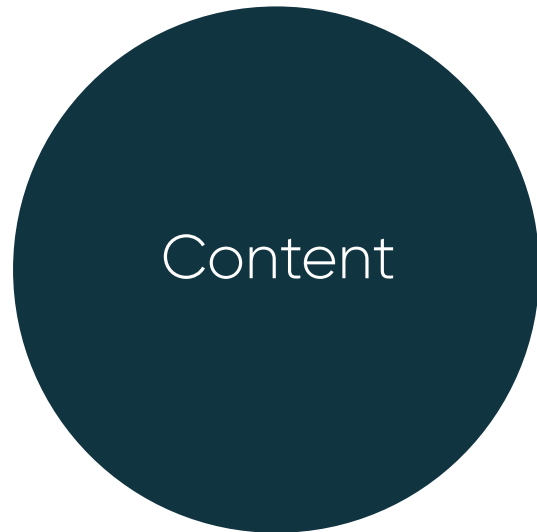
So Facebook has done the next best thing. They've come up with a system that ranks the posts for you, using a mix of human and artificial intelligence.

The exact formula for how it does this (called an algorithm) is something

Facebook keeps close to the vest. But if they shared their precise recipe for their secret sauce, marketers would have a field day (and likely flood your news feed with their content).

Why does this matter for your church? If you want a place on the news feeds of people in your church and the broader community, you need to know more about how Facebook prioritises content.

Here is some of what we do know about its algorithm.



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**Why does this matter for your church?
If you want a place on the news feeds of people in your church and the broader community, you need to know more about how Facebook prioritises content**

Engagement matters

Facebook rewards when people engage your posts. It's not just as simple as saying the posts with the most likes and shares get seen, though.

Quality content is king

Because engagement matters so much, you must share strong enough content that people will share it. The converse is most definitely true—absolutely never ever share “spammy content.” Your followers won't like it.

They won't engage with it. Facebook's algorithm will ding you for it. Never ask for a share or a like. Headlines are particularly important. Share content (from your site and others) where the headline matches the rest of the page.

You'll be rewarded for posting about timely and trending topics (particularly if you can do it early)

You'll likely get a bump if you are one of the first ones to comment on a topic of growing interest.

Facebook loves rich media experiences

In other words, Facebook prioritises posts with photos and videos. Try not to post text-only updates.

Facebook prioritises native content

The company's business model relies on keeping people engaged with the platform (and the ads that are on it). They'll give your content an edge if you keep it on Facebook. That means if you post videos, don't just link to YouTube or Vimeo. Upload it to Facebook.

Live video is the flavour of the month

Currently, Facebook gives a huge boost to live video in its algorithm. Facebook is always adjusting this system, so it's unclear how long this will last.

Brand pages (which churches use) need to invest in boosting and advertising posts

All branded content has gotten hit hard in the Facebook algorithm over the past few years. Most social media

managers (inside the church and outside of it) has seen a decline in Facebook reach. The only real way to counteract the trend is by putting money into your Facebook effort through either advertising or boosting your posts. The reality is Facebook advertising may be one of the most cost-effective communications strategies you can employ. It's hard to find any other communications vehicles that'll reach as many people for the cost of advertising on Facebook.

How about Twitter?



Twitter came to algorithms relatively late in the process. In early 2016 Twitter made their algorithm-based news feed the default when users interact with their platform. Twitter, too, wants to provide users with the tweets they want with little effort on the part of its users. Twitter's solution was to create a “In case you missed it” section at the top of each news feed where it puts some of the tweets with which users are most likely to engage. In just more than a year, the effort seems to be working. According to a recent Slate article, users are spending more time on the platform and engaging it more thoroughly in the process.

Thousands of small factors play a part in Twitter's algorithm.

Like Facebook, they won't divulge the math behind it. But we know this:

Engagement matters

Twitter rewards likes and shares. If you like and share content from a particular account, you'll likely see more posts from that account in the future. It also matters how much you engage a particular account versus other accounts.

The attachment matters

If you generally engage photos, you'll see more photos in your feed. If you engage videos, you'll see those, too.

Time spent matters

Even if you don't engage with a tweet, Twitter knows how much time you've spent looking at a specific tweet. It'll factor that in as well.

03 RESOURCES & TIPS

TO BOOST YOUR
ENGAGEMENT



Copy-N-Paste Question Posts for Churches on Social Media

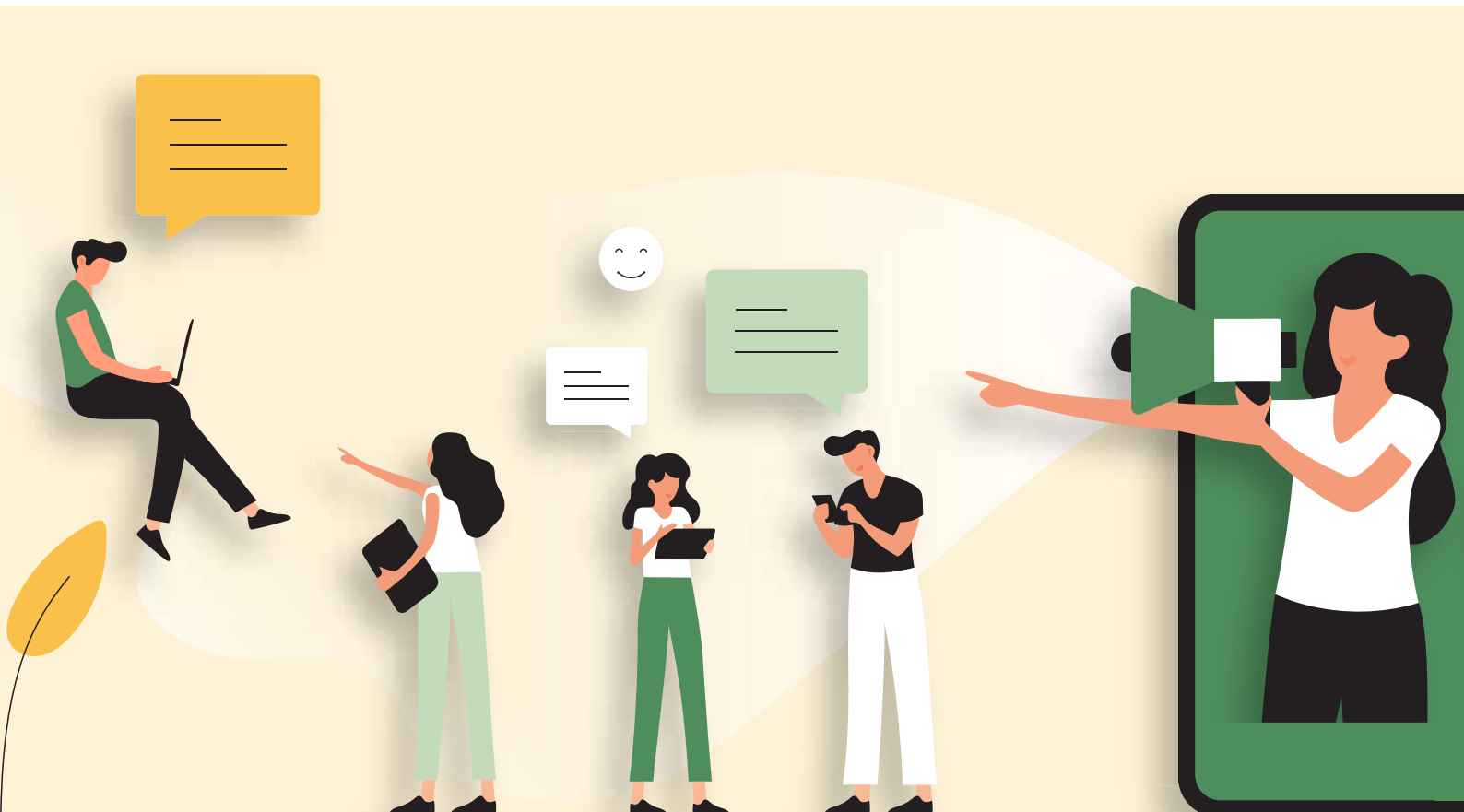
Engagement is your ultimate objective on social media platforms. Building a healthy online digital ministry begins with getting people involved in the conversation. It connects them to your ministry and your church. Here are some question posts that will get people talking on your social platform of choice.

- 1| What's a worship song that has helped you feel closer to God?
- 2| What worship songs move your heart closer to Jesus?
- 3| What's a favorite faith memory you have from your childhood?
- 4| What's a familiar Bible verse you returned to in times when you need it most?
- 5| What's the best thing about being your current age?
- 6| What's your favorite video game of all time?
- 7| What was your favorite childhood show growing up?
- 8| You went to the year 2050 for a period of three minutes you have access to an internet search engine. What do you lookup?
- 9| What name did your parents almost call you?
- 10| What sport or game can you do better than almost anyone?
- 11| What's the best marriage advice you've ever gotten?
- 12| What is something you've done that you are fairly confident you're the only person at our church to have ever done?
- 13| What's one piece of advice you'd give to your younger self?
- 14| What is the best breed of dog and why?
- 15| Name the one thing you don't like on your burger.
- 16| What was your favourite thing to do during recess as a kid?
- 17| How did you first hear about our church?
- 18| Describe your Church only using emojis.
- 19| What was your favorite subject in school?
- 20| Name the one thing you don't like on your pizza.
- 21| What's one of the most significant life changes you've experienced in the last five years?
- 22| What's the best flavour of pie?
- 23| What's your favorite summer activity?
- 24| Which scripture has been your greatest comfort?
- 25| Describe your youth pastor using only emojis.
- 26| When did Jesus first become real to you?
- 27| What's one book that you would recommend every person read, other than the Bible?
- 28| What do your kids love most about church?
- 29| Name a book from the Bible that has changed your life.
- 30| Do you have a good dog or any good pet? Take a picture. Tell us your pet's name, share it in the comments.
- 31| Share a scripture verse that is meaningful to you.
- 32| What's your favorite old worship song?
- 33| How old were you when you first started attending church?
- 34| What's your favorite memory from the day you got baptised?
- 35| What's your favorite worship song that we currently sing at church?
- 36| Why did you start attending our church?
- 37| If you could have coffee with one person from the Bible, of course, other than Jesus, who would you choose and why?
- 38| How many hours of sleep do you get each night?



Pro Church
Founder **Brady
Shearer** Useful
Clips (Post
Pandemic) for
Churches on
how to use
social media

- Watch Brady Shearer's **Pro Church Tips for Churches Webinar: Social Media Crash Course For Smaller Churches** (*New Workshop*):
<https://tinyurl.com/socialmediatipsforchurches>
- Watch Brady Shearer's **44 Social Media Post Ideas For Churches That Don't Get Ignored**:
<https://tinyurl.com/44ideasforchurches>
- Watch Brady Shearers' **Social Tips for Youth Ministry**:
<https://tinyurl.com/youthministrytips>





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