

MISTAKES ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

A discussion about social media for ministry
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GETTING STARTED

Never get started. If you're too afraid of social media, too credulous of what you've heard from critics (who usually haven't really participated themselves), then you can't feel free to experiment. And that's what social media takes: experimentation.

Don't have a purpose. The technology is not an end in itself. You have to think ahead and ponder the big picture. You and your ministry probably have mission and vision statements, right? Keep those dimensions in mind as you plunge in, and use them to tune up as you get farther along. It's not enough that "the cool kids are doing it."

Confuse personal and ministry accounts. Lots of people hack a Facebook "personal profile" for their organization. If your church has a sex and a birthday on Facebook, this is what you've done. What you need is a "Fan Page" or "Group." You probably also want a separate Twitter account for your ministry.

Don't let people see you. If you protect your tweets, people can't learn anything about you, and most won't ask. If you lock down your Facebook page all the way, you're hanging up a big "No Admittance" sign. There are times for privacy and security, but only sometimes. And don't be too shy to inform people where to find you online.

Use only twitter.com. This is a biggie. Twitter doesn't make a lot sense without the help of an application like Seismic, TweetDeck, or Tweetie. Twitter is much bigger than Twitter.com.

IN THE CONVERSATION

Never check in or say anything. Just having a Facebook or Twitter presence is not good enough. Imagine being at a party and just standing there, not saying anything while the room fills with conversation — it's worse than not attending at all. Social media is social, and you've got to engage with others.

Have a monologue. Again, imagine being at that party. Don't be the jerk who wants to control the conversation. Make it easy for others to contribute. Don't delete all criticism that gets posted, and don't answer it defensively and insist on the last word. Dialogue is what social media is best at, and that means giving up control.

Never listen, share, give credit, or say thanks. Unless you want to be a junior-higher, that is. But if you let other people talk, pass along tidbits they'd find interesting, name them when they've helped you, and show gratitude, you'll learn a lot about your community — and become a valuable part of it, too.

Always be making a sales pitch. You do need to speak up for yourself, but you should always wonder what would be interesting to your readers. You demean them if all you do is badger people about what you want them to do to serve your purposes. Social media is not a bulletin board to cover with flyers for your programs.

Be a robot. It's possible to automate your Facebook and Twitter posts so you never have to give them any thought. Don't do it. Talk like a human.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Don't learn from others. There are lots of cool people doing creative and effective things with social media. Steal the good ideas, remember the bad ones, and thank everyone who helps you.

Never try anything new. It was Facebook in 2008, Twitter in 2009. It might be Foursquare in 2010 — but who knows? This is a space that has a huge amount of innovation. Don't just ignore it. New things that you've never heard of can emerge to become really useful to your community and mission.

Always try everything new. On the other hand, it's exhausting to chase every new fad. Don't fear being left behind so much that you jump blindly onto every new social-media platform. You can spread yourself too thin and get over-extended, so pick and choose only ones useful to your community.

Don't have any fun. Like it or not, humans love to play. (And seriously, how could you not like that?) This doesn't mean you should be frivolous, but nobody hangs around long with a stick-in-the-mud. Use social media as an opportunity to find and share the delights of God's world along with the serious stuff.