

# Social Media and the Church



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## About faithHighway

faithHighway is an evangelistic organization with a primary purpose of spreading the gospel of the Lord and Savior Jesus. faithHighway's internet technologies empower over 4500 churches who combined receive millions of web hits; a number that is growing daily. faithHighway is the largest provider of custom websites to churches and ministries in the world and is continuing to expand rapidly. Recently, faithHighway launched its new product, SermonConnect.com. This is an online media and communications center that enables pastors and ministry leaders to manage their media anytime, anywhere with excellence. With over 100,000 sermons online, faithHighway has built up one of the largest repositories of audio and video messages in the world. A few of the many features of Sermon Connect include pod casting, blogging, sermon sharing, and unlimited audio/video streaming.

In addition to custom website design, televisions commercials, and robust online media center, faithHighway offers an array of design services. From logos and identity packages to marketing campaign design and print fulfillment, faithHighway is prepared to assist churches and ministries in an array of branding and marketing arenas.

faithHighway has additional services to offer, as well. Through faithHighway's 25 points of best practices to excellent content management, churches now have access to a content service solution that takes the message that they want to give to their audience and packages it in a way that matches the rest of their online presence. IgniteCRM is a 100% web based church software that manages all of a church's activity: Volunteer, Members, New Visitors, Donations, Attendance Tracking, Groups, Events, Calendar System, Email Systems, File Storage, and more.

By utilizing a variety of medium, faithHighway hopes to partner with Christian organizations as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

# Intro to Social Media

"Any sociologist will tell you that the best way to truly 'go native' in a new culture or society is through immersion."<sup>i</sup> With 250 million Americans being online today, there is no question that the Internet and social media are essential channels of connection for the church.

According to Dictionary.com, social networking is “the use of a website to connect with people who share personal or professional interests, place of origin, education at a particular school, etc.” Connection through social media is becoming more than just a means to connect old friends. Customer Service, The Art of Listening explains that “Participation is no longer an option as Social Media isn’t a spectator sport... companies must engage or they place themselves on the long road to inevitable obsolescence. It’s like the old adage, out of sight, out of mind. Or, quite simply, engage or die.”<sup>ii</sup>

Through strategy, intentionality and persistence, social networking can be an outstanding outreach tool, bridging the gap between culture and the church. The Body of Christ is made up of billions of people across the globe, with the adhering agents being the Holy Spirit and human relationships. As the Church continues to reach out to those outside the walls, we can never underestimate the power and necessity of relationships in the process of salvation. Stretching from the basics to extensive usage, learn how to utilize Social Media to engage and interact with the un-churched.

## Social Networking Options

Social Networks are popping up all over the world. Hundreds of millions of people engage in social media everyday. To decide which networks fit your organization the best, review the statistics, demographics and trends of these major social networks. Don't feel as though you should be on every network; it is important that you are heavily devoted to whichever mediums you participate in, so be careful not to over commit. Based on your target audience and organization mission, you will find networks that your team will fit perfectly into.

## Facebook



Facebook is a social networking website that allows users to connect with friends, send online messages, and update personal profiles to keep friends and family informed about their lives. Users can join groups based on organizational participation, religion, political view, and much more. Now with the ability to create a quiz for friends to take, play social networking games, and upload short videos, Facebook has come to offer a promising place for connecting people.





**If Facebook were a country,  
it would be the 3rd largest  
in the world.**

If Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest in the world. According to Facebook.com, there are over 750 million active users, 50% of which can be logged on to Facebook in any given day. Statistics show that “more than 700 billion minutes are spent on Facebook each month” and that there are more than “900 million objects that people interact with daily. (pages, groups, events and community pages.”<sup>iii</sup> With numbers like these, how quickly could an organization gain targeted fans (or followers) if it is employing relevant means to reach its community?

The average user is connected to over 80 community pages, groups and events, which means that having a place on this social network is important. There are over 70 translations of the site and 70 percent of Facebook users are outside the United States. That gives you a huge audience to reach.<sup>iii</sup>

**MySpace**



MySpace is another social networking website. In June 2006, it was deemed the most popular social networking site in the United States. With the ability to upload pictures onto a customized personal profile, MySpace took the world by storm, boasting over 125 million users. Connecting people through music, media, photos, personal bios and more, MySpace hit its peak at over 110 million active users in 2008.<sup>vi</sup>

#### Quick stats about MySpace:

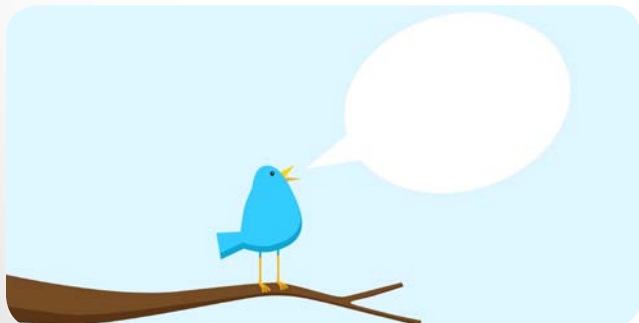
- 100 Billion rows of data
- 14 Billion comments on the site
- 20 Billion mails on the site total
- 50 Million mails per day (more than Yahoo, Hotmail, or Google)
- 10 Billion friend relationships
- 1.5 Billion images
- 8 Million images being uploaded per day
- 60,000 new videos being upload to MySpaceTV each day
- More than 8 million artists and bands on MySpace Music

With more than 56% of participants being women, the highest demographic is young adults, from 18 – 34, comprising 44% of MySpace users. Teenagers between 13-18, fall into second making up 27% of the audience as of July 2011.<sup>vii</sup>

According to Compete.com, MySpace was put into second position amongst social networking applications, based on unique visitors, by Facebook in 2008. As of July 2011, MySpace currently has 30 million unique visitors per month from the US alone. The activity has been declining according to statistics released by Compete.com. Ben Parr, of Mashable.com, reports that “It has nearly shed off 20% of its U.S. traffic since June [2009].”<sup>ix</sup> Although the numbers have been declining over the past several year, MySpace continues to be a popular place to promote musicians and talent.

## Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging service allowing users to update their followers with short messages, known as tweets. With only 140 characters or less per post, Twitter is known for the mini-updates, keeping people connected all throughout the day. These tweets are placed on the user’s page and displayed on the followers, or subscribers, page. From news updates to gossip, blog post updates to the daily grind, Twitter



users can update their status whenever and wherever via a multitude of applications through their mobile devices.

Currently the talk of many social network gurus, Twitter reached over 200 million tweets per day in July 2011, which is equivalent to a 10 million-page book!<sup>xiv</sup> With 43% of the audience being 18 to 34 years of age, the 35-44 crowd is not far behind with 27% of the demographic makeup. The demographics of Twitter are similar to Facebook in terms of affluence (majority earning at \$26-50k per year), the education level weighs heavily with college students and post graduates.<sup>xv</sup> As smart phones and Blackberries continue to rise in consumer recognition, networking applications with the fast-paced, minute-to-minute updates will be in full force.

## YouTube



YouTube is a website that enables the public to share videos with one another. Started in February 2005, YouTube has reached over 100 million viewers in one month. In July, 2011, 3 billion videos are viewed per day. With over 79 million visits on average per month, there is no question that the service YouTube provides is one in high demand.<sup>xviii</sup> Video content ranges from baby’s first steps to pirated movies and TV shows, how-to videos to interviews. YouTube is a frequent for the 18 to 34 year-old audience (36%), followed closely by the 13-17 group (21%).<sup>xix</sup>

Users can not only make text comments on posted videos, they can also respond via video, closing the physical barrier between users all over the world. Searching for a specific video can link one to a plethora of other videos in the same keyword or title. The ability to embed YouTube videos into a personal blog

has helped drive the pivotal growth to this popular social network.



LinkedIn is a networking site specifically crafted for business professionals to network. From its inception in May 2003, it has grown to more than 100 million registered users (July, 2011). According to Wikipedia, the users span over “170 industries” in the business place.<sup>xxii</sup> Profiles include the ability to see their professional history and educational affiliations, post updates, or even offer someone a reference.

Statistics, driven by Quantcast, say that the majority demographic is males, with an eight percent lead over females. It is no surprise that 70% of the audience is comprised of those 35 and older or that 73% have a college education or higher.<sup>xxiii</sup> Referenced by Guy Kawasaki as an integral part of the job-hunting process, attention and online users have continued to climb throughout the past five years as unemployment spikes. Posted in a blog by Kawasaki, “In these kinds of times, you need to use all the weapons that you can, and one that many people don’t—or at least

don’t use to the fullest extent, is LinkedIn.”<sup>xxiv</sup>



Flickr is an online community joined by users that share images and videos on a single platform. As a point of connection for bloggers and aspiring photographers, Flickr is also a place for people to upload their family photos to share them with one another. Aside from connecting with family, one can search through the millions of photos and comment on images. One valuable part of Flickr is the ability to utilize photos from other users for personal print or digital usage without paying a fee as with the majority of stockpiled photos. This part of Flickr is called the Creative Commons.

A near split for audience attention, 38% fall between ages 18 to 34, while 27% are 35 to 49. The majority of users make between \$60K to \$100K per year which indicates young professionals and families are the prime followers for this network. While more than 21 million people visit this site each month, attendance has seen a slight decline as more and more photo sharing networks arise.<sup>xxviii</sup>





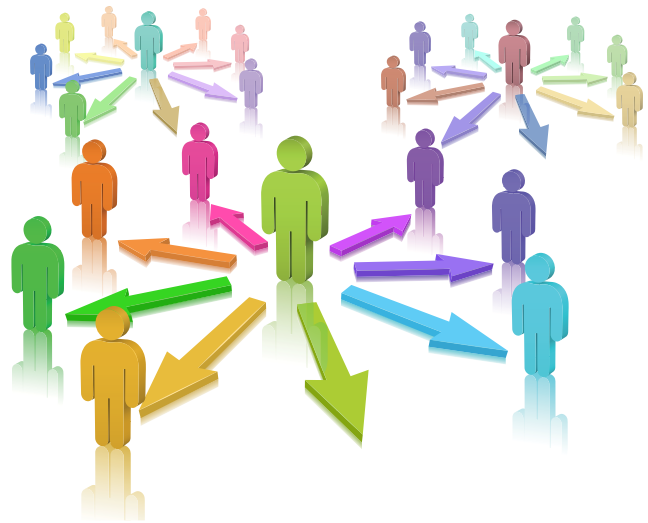
## Why to Engage

Engaging in social media is easy, whether you're on Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, or another social network. However, it's important to understand why engaging in social networks will help your church. In fact, it's probably a good thing to sit down and outline your goals for jumping on the bandwagon and decide now how you're going to use it. Of course, as technology continues to develop, you will have to make changes to your original strategy, but it's important to setup a plan of action before diving in.

Jay Baer at Convince & Convert has created some free social media strategy worksheets to help guide you as you decide on your strategy. You can find them [HERE](http://www.convinceandconvert.com/convince-convert-news/free-social-media-worksheets). (<http://www.convinceandconvert.com/convince-convert-news/free-social-media-worksheets>)

Bill Reichart, a pastor, writer, speaker and digital entrepreneur, wrote some key points in his blog post, "Why Should Your Church Invest in Social Media?" In it, he explains that businesses use the ROI (Return On Investment) approach and churches can too. He gives three reasons why it's important for the church to engage in social media.

1. Communicating with your congregation can sometimes be difficult, especially if your congregation is multi-generational. In an interview with MediaOutreach, Reichart explains that Baby Boomers prefer to be communicated with via telephone, while the younger generations preferred social media platforms, like Facebook. As a ministry leader, it's important to meet your congregation where they are. Go to them. Don't make them come to you.



### 3 Reasons to Engage in Social Media:

1. Communication
2. Connecting
3. Call to Action

2. Connecting with your congregation is a must. Whether it's a short message sent via Twitter or a lengthy email or blog post, your congregation wants to hear from their leader. However, keep in mind that social media helps personify a leader's role and makes them more approachable. It gives the people around you a personal look into your life and allows them to communicate in creative ways. By engaging in social media, you will be displaying your humanity to the people around you. Don't be afraid to be honest, it will help people relate to you and vice versa.

Most social media platforms offer event invitations that can be sent to everyone who is connected to you through a particular social network. This is a very



useful tool for small groups within a larger church. By posting announcement and event invites, people within a small group feel more connected because they know what is going on in the church, even if they missed the Sunday morning announcements.

3. By engaging in social media, you are giving yourself another avenue of calling people to action. If there is an urgent prayer need in the church, you can send out a message to your “followers,” which will give them immediate knowledge of the situation. If there is a need for a volunteer, you can quickly communicate to a wide audience with a few clicks of your mouse.

## Develop Relationships

“Social marketing eliminates the middlemen, providing brands with the unique opportunity to have a direct relationship with their customers.”<sup>xxx</sup> Bryan Wiener, CEO of 360i Social Marketing Playbook Social media, is breaking down the walls of communication with people with whom you might not normally communicate. While many corporate executives still see social media as a time waster and distraction, many social media users would argue that it gives them a channel to voice their opinions and ideas. This in turn allows the organization to listen and communicate with customers in an avenue familiar to them (Forbes 2009).

It puts personality into the distant and unreachable leader of an organization, which gives customers an overall sense of feeling connected, which in turn leads to loyalty.

A recent study by uberceo.com showed that out of the top 100 Company list in Fortune Magazine, only two of

the CEOs had Twitter accounts and only 81 percent of them have Facebook accounts. However, they are in the list of top 100 companies, so while they aren’t active in the social media world, they are doing something right.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Depending on what your goal is and what you’re trying to achieve will direct the way you interact with the public. If building personal relationships and listening to what others have to say is not something that will help you achieve your goal, then stay far away from it as it can become a time thief.

Daniel Mosley, the young adult’s pastor at The Church on Chapel Hill in Douglasville, GA, said that his ultimate goal in using Twitter with his church is to connect with people in the community on a personal level and to drive traffic to the website.

“One thing Twitter does for us is reveal the human side of us to our congregation,” he says. “It allows people to see us and what we’re like beyond our ministry platform.”



## Speak the Language

“Nowadays participation [in social media] is marketing. Companies first need to listen in order to accurately analyze how, where, and when to participate.”<sup>ii</sup>

Corporations like Starbucks are using Twitter to see what the public has to say about their products and services. It gives an open forum to whomever wishes to say something about the Starbucks brand. It’s a useful way for the corporation to engage their fans and really understand what they want.

By Starbucks engaging their “fans,” they are building loyalty to their brand. It personifies the brand and makes it come alive to the public.

With new technology always on the horizon, organizations have to create new ways to engage themselves and their audience in this culture. It’s a new form of marketing that really has yet to be defined as companies swim around trying to figure out what the best approach is in using all these avenues.

You have to go where the people are and meet them where they are at if you want to make progress.

As a church, it’s important to know your congregation and how they engage in social media, if at all. Bill Reichart suggests that a pastor should evaluate his congregation to see if they are ready to get on board with social mediums like Twitter.

“When I was a pastor, I had to tailor my communication style based on the way my congregation preferred to be communicated with,” he says.

Baby Boomers tended to prefer to be communicated with via telephone, while Gen X preferred email, Reichart said. He also said that the younger generations were more apt to using Facebook and texting as a means of communication than email or telephone.



## How to Participate

### Strategy

As with any other marketing or ministry endeavor, a strategy will be the ultimate deciding factor of failure versus success. Answer these paramount questions before attempting to enter the social networking realm. If you and your team have already gotten started, there is no harm in re-evaluating your current status and comparing yourself to the goals you had set. In the case that you never sat down to make a list of tangible goals and strategies, what better a time to execute than right now?

What is your purpose in using Social Media?

Well put by the team at Church Marketing Sucks, "Your church will never be great because you figure out how to use Facebook and Evites. Your church will be great because you commit yourself to living the gospel in a radical way, and you can use social media as a balanced part of that gospel-centered diet."<sup>xxxii</sup> While most ministries will answer "to convert unbelievers to Christ" as their lofty purpose, specific, definable goals can help you track the effectiveness of social media and your organization.

What do you want your readers to gain or not gain from your posts/pictures/comments?

Do you aim to encourage, entertain, challenge or inspire your audience? Maybe all of the above? Intentionality in the content of your tweets, video uploads and events is essential. Knowing how you want to affect your audience will help determine what you say and how you say it. Do you want to be extremely transparent or be above reproach with word-usage and updates?

Who is your target audience?

You must understand that the term "networking" is no coincidence. Who you follow helps determine who will follow you. So, what is that desirable audience for you? Who are those "right people"? Find tweeters, followers, friends, etc. with your interests and start up a conversation. All of your actions should keep that demographic in mind. For instance, do young teens want to read about the economic climate or are they more concerned with technology, social and media trends? Before you post anything on your social



network mediums, ask yourself, “Does my audience care about this photo/comment/video/tweet?”

What topics will help you to engage in conversation?

Keep in mind that there are plenty of social networking group options for your audience. If you don’t keep it interesting, you may not see the response you are hoping for. It is imperative that you don’t just talk about yourself or your organization. Talk about your followers and fellow facebook/Twitter/YouTube users too. It is a known fact that those who bring others into their conversation will be more likely to grow and attract a larger crowd. Intentionally spend time on the different profiles to engage in conversation. People will likely create a loyalty to people who are more “like” them. Decide ahead of time the broad range of conversations you plan to take part in, ensuring that your tweets and posts are balanced and dynamic.

Which networks do you select for your organization?

So now the tough part is deciding which communities you should engage. “You have to start by surveying

the landscapes and listening. The results will tell you where to engage. Monitoring the culture of each community and the sociology of the interactions, will guide you in how to participate.”<sup>ii</sup> It is just like selecting a neighborhood for your new home. You want to scope out a place to be close to all the activities in which you participate, as well as people you desire to be in close proximity with.

How much time do you want to spend each day on social networking?

Many people can be swept away in endless hours a day of online networking. Others have to force themselves to login once a week. Regardless of which category one falls under, it is imperative to set a standard for the amount of time spent mingling in the cyber-community. A defined minimum number of tweets, comments or status updates can help an organization stay focused in regard to social media activity. Setting monthly goals for the amount of video uploads and images you submit will keep your profile fresh and dynamic. If you are extremely busy and cannot find the time to tweet, simply find an application, like Co-Tweet ([www.cotweet.com](http://www.cotweet.com)) that allows you to schedule your updates. In the case that you are concerned you will fall into the networking vortex during your productive hours, place time on your schedule, and remain committed to abide between the allotted times.

**“As with any other marketing or ministry endeavor, a *strategy* will be the ultimate deciding factor of failure versus success.”**

## How to use it for Outreach

### Build Relationships

The main focus of all social networks is people and connectedness. As one of the church's main focuses as well, participation in this growing trend is vital. Social networks offer the unique opportunity to build quality relationships with the un-churched, without the boundaries or stigmas of a face to face encounter within the church walls. "Social media is not about the technology...it's about the relationships. This is why the church is in such a good position to use social media."<sup>xxxiii</sup> While these are not nearly all the ways to build new relationships through the different social networks, a few examples should help get the creative juices flowing. One important key is that practice makes perfect.

- Facebook is well known for the number of groups each user is enabled to join. Ministries can use groups as a chance to connect with people they would not normally cross paths with. Whether choosing to engage with a liberal group, a book group or a community-wide group, being intentional with your relationships will always be the first and most important step. Tagging new photos as you upload them onto your account ties that image to the specified user, in which case all of their friends may now all view the image, connecting them directly to your album. This networking step can introduce you to many new friends of Facebook, if used deliberately.
- Flickr also enables one to instantly connect with photographers and bloggers. By search-

ing specific topics on Flickr and commenting on a photo, you can engage a total stranger into a conversation. Placing links to your account from Facebook, Twitter, your blog or website will increase traffic to your page, increasing the likelihood of new interactions. In the case that you are comfortable having your photographs used for distribution by others, the Creative Commons are another way to get your images viewed more often and by a larger audience.

- Utilizing hashtags, or the "#" in front of a word in a Twitter post, you can connect to all the followers of one specific event or group. For instance, if you wanted to meet other pastors connected to the Catalyst conference, you would tweet. "Hey Catalyst friends! Can't wait to hear Francis Chan in the next session! #Cat09". Now, if





someone clicks on the link created by the hashtag (#phrase), your post will show up in that thread of tweets. You are now connected to all the followers of the event regardless of if you are followers of each other or not. Remember that building your Twitter following can also help you to build new relationships. Following friends of friends can open the door to new followers, hence new relationships.

- Being that MySpace is so heavily populated with music groups and teenagers, this tool would be highly effective in reaching younger audiences. Placing music on your profile, with links back to your chosen bands, will open the door to conversations with band followers. The personalization of your MySpace page is unlike any other social networking application. With an abundance of add-ons, template backgrounds and layouts, expressing you or your organization will allow people to understand who you are outside of being a pastor or Christian. Embedding your YouTube feed and Twitter feed into your MySpace profile can boost overall interaction with your social networking.
- As your church seeks to grow, you'll notice all sorts of issues that arise, calling for a specific industry professional. LinkedIn is one way to successfully prepare yourself for the strains of ministry stretching and growth. By networking with members, visitors and "friends-of-friends," you now have the opportunity to petition skills and services from willing, capable volunteers. As

mentioned before, you may also use your profile as another source of link-backs to your church website, boosting necessary traffic to your site and possibly even increasing your search engine optimization. Don't be afraid to "Request a Recommendation" from members of the church. If members, who were once unbelievers or are new attendees, can attest to the comfortable environment of the church or of your amiable personality, LinkedIn could be one more way to alleviate the well-known apprehension to take one's first steps into a church building.

The more time you immerse yourself into the social mediums, the more you will understand the ins-and-outs of how to utilize social networking fully. One great resource for helpful hints is found in the Social Media section of MediaOutreach.com.



## Promote Church Activities

It is widely known that the greatest form of marketing is word-of-mouth. Well, social networking provides many outlets to billions of consumers and church-goers and their "mouths." One great way to push the



news of your next church or community-wide event is through social media.

Check out the benefits (posted by MinistryBestPractices.com) of employing your social networks for marketing and promotion:

- **It's easy and effortless**, it doesn't take much money or manpower to implement or use it.
- **It's ubiquitous**, since it is so available and pervasive, it is hard for people to miss the message.
- **It's variety**, social media takes many different forms, words, audio and image.
- **It's viral**, the beauty of social media is that your message can expand well beyond its intended audience - therefore exposing and introducing new people to your cause and community.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

A few things to keep in mind, though. First of all, be prepared for a large turnout. One of the greatest strengths of networking can also be its greatest pitfall. In the case that your event is a wild hit, you may not be able to control the attendance. Be sure to utilize the event features on your social network to track and control attendance.

- Facebook has one of the most robust event systems, allowing people to RSVP, and post comments, images and videos for every electronic event invitation. It also has the feature to attempt to control attendance in the case you want attendees to be invite-only.
- If you decide to tweet your event, don't hesitate to request a retweet. In fact, some of the most

tweeted terms are "please" and "retweet". According to Dan Zarella, author of "The Science of ReTweets," you should tweet between 9 am and 2pm, during the highest retweet traffic. Don't forget to use the hashtag (#eventname) to create a buzz and track the event following.

- Petition your members to use their talents. If you have any creative, funny or artistic team members, utilize YouTube as the means for a great viral marketing campaign. Remember, people will tell others about a video if they like it or believe in it, but will spread the news like wildfire if they are actually in it. Let your members get involved and proudly share their masterpiece with friends and co-workers. Make sure to post the video anywhere and everywhere: Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter (link to YouTube), at church, and on the community TV channel.

The more people that know of the event, the larger the turn out! Utilize social networking at every chance for a free boost in public awareness.

## Advertise Sermon Series

You could spend months developing a sermon series brand: finalize (or delegate) the killer design for power point, prepare an amazing video, create an emotional, spiritual sermon and even put it on your website and still not have a single new visitor show up.

Why? According to Ben Parr of Mashable, "Promotion is the key to any successful gathering. Without it, you will not attract the interesting people that you're

looking to bring in.”<sup>viii</sup> Reaching the crowd outside of the church walls will continue to be a heavy goal for the Church, now and forever. Here are some helpful hints to utilize your social networking options for sermon series promotion.

- Setup a graphic teaser on your Flickr account. From your blog, Twitter, Facebook or MySpace account, link to the series graphic on your Flickr page and ask viewers for feedback on the look and feel. Interactivity will continue to play an important role in all aspects of social networking, so never overlook it as a key element in keeping your audience engaged.
- Start a Twitter buzz. As churches continue to create relevant sermon series, Twitter is a perfect medium to get the news flowing. Much like a subject line to an email, your tweet’s contents are imperative to your click-throughs. Make sure your tweets initiate curiosity so that your followers feel inclined to actually find out more. Relevant statistics and intriguing questions, with a link to your series page serve as a great introduction to your campaign. Including a hashtag of the key terms that are trending on Twitter each day, you will increase the views of your tweet.
- Create a personal invitation. Did you know that one of the number one reasons someone attends a church is because of a connection felt with the pastor? If you can get in front of a camera for 30

seconds and personally invite the public to check out your message this week, you will create one more connection point for the un-churched. Remember to leave out church-y words that unbelievers won’t understand. Upload it to YouTube and embed this on your website and blog. Update all of your account statuses with this video and watch people flock to your sermon series.

- As with any event, always inform people of your promotion and then remind them over and over.



- Create a tweet, series image, promo video or event on your networks two to three weeks ahead of the series, giving a preview of the entire series.
- Blog, tweet and update your status about it once a week until the week of the event, releasing different “pieces” of information to keep people interested. Keep in mind, the more platforms employed, the larger and more diverse the audience.
- Throughout the sermon series, update questions into your different networking accounts that pertain to your message. Prompting answers for your future series will keep people engaged and open conversation with your followers.
- After the series is complete, set up a page on either your website or blog to request feedback from your audience.

It is suggested that one central “landing page” be designated for all of your promotions. Not only does this give you a unified, branded page to draw all of your channels and promotions together, it also helps you “funnel” your users to a “call to action”. It should be very clear what your ultimate goal is for each event. What expectation are you setting for your users? Do you want your members to bring a friend? Using Google Analytics or a similar traffic-tracking plug-in application, you can monitor the source of your traffic and decipher which network is most beneficial for your specific audience.

## Promote Community Activities

It is important that each social networking account speak, not only of the ministry, but also the community events. If you provide relevant content, via announcements and updates, regarding the community, the un-churched will turn to you as a communicator. This will open the door to new conversations and, ultimately, relationships.

*“Think of it as the difference between a church having a billboard and a church that attends community meetings for their neighborhood. Unlike the billboard, the church that attends community meetings meets people, talks with them, and enters their lives. While the billboard allows a church to project a certain image, social media allows a church to tell its story to the world by simply being itself.”<sup>xx</sup>*

To make an impact in each city, many ministries take part in community-wide events. Volunteering, participating and promoting these activities are simple ways to bridge the large cultural gap between followers of

Christ and the world.

- Connect to local leaders of the community on LinkedIn. You can’t engage in these activities if you aren’t aware of their happenings. Whether networking with city officials, local chambers or other influential businesspeople, turn to this professional networking app to stay in touch with those that are “in the know”.
- Keep your members posted of these volunteer opportunities via Twitter. If you follow the simple steps here: <http://www.twitip.com/how-to-track-twitter-clicks-and-get-conversion-data/>, you can actually create “campaigns” for each of your Twitter promotions and track how many people view your page and click around on it after you tweet it (via Google Analytics). In this case, you can gauge your church’s desire to help with an event.
- Make sure to promote these events across your different platforms. Try to get your hands on the electronic version of the marketing design so you can push a unified campaign on your networks for the event. Point to all of the social networking pieces the event coordinator is currently using (whether a #hashtag, event page on MySpace/Facebook, or viral video on YouTube), as opposed



to creating a new one whenever possible. In the case that the event is not being promoted across any channels, offer to create an event page on MySpace or Facebook.

Remember to keep in mind that social networking is about “*formalizing outbound communications and community participation*” so that your audience is “*not overlooked, but engaged*”.<sup>i</sup> As we step into the frequented portals of communication with those we pursue, a conversation is only the beginning of an interaction that leads, to what we hope, an inevitable opportunity to share His truth.

## Gauge Your Community

The sales industry has gotten one thing right. Listen to your customers. How can you truly offer a solution if you do not understand the problem? Do you truly know the needs of people in your area? Are you preaching a significant message to the lost and broken around you? How can you really know without asking?

*“Someone needs to realize that [social media] just can’t be an inbound process. Those who sit on the sidelines will inevitably fall off the radar screens of their custom-*

*ers, giving way for competition to satisfy their needs.”<sup>ii</sup>*

While we as the Church are not in competition with one another (or should not be), we are in competition for the time and attention of our audience. As we send our information out for the un-churched to view, we should continue to seek constructive feedback.

- Creating a simple video and posting on YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, etc will allow you to ask for feedback “face-to-face” through comments or video response. This begins the next step of interactivity, taking your new relationship from one-way (static) to two-way (dynamic). As you launch campaigns, whether for events, series or general branding, make sure to give yourself plenty of time from start to finish, ensuring that you are thorough in every area of promotion. Remember to give the video itself exposure to your congregation and visitors. Print small cards with the web address for your video or website to point your audience to the feedback page at the conclusion of your series.
- One easy way to gauge your viewers is to use a simple poll plug-in on your Twitter or Facebook account. Following the links mentioned above, a poll is a quick, noninvasive way to gather an hon-

The screenshot shows the twtpoll website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for home, features & pricing, contact us, and questions. There are also buttons for support offline and sign in. Below the navigation bar, there are two main buttons: 'Create a Poll' and 'Create a Survey'. The 'Create a Poll' section is highlighted, showing a form with the following fields:

- Twitter account?** A text input field with the placeholder '@your\_twitter\_name'. A link 'Not on Twitter? Create an account!' is next to it.
- Type of question?** A dropdown menu set to 'Multiple Choice (select only one answer)'. A link 'See examples' is next to it.
- Question?** A large text area for the question.
- Answer type:** Radio buttons for Text (selected), Images/Videos, Twitter handlers, and Addresses (Maps). A note 'One answer per line' is below the radio buttons.

At the bottom right of the form, there is a character count '140'.

facebook

Search

Poll Like 231K

Create a Poll

Like this app? Rate it 5!

**Create a Poll**

Post to page: Personal profile Page missing?

Question:

Options:  
(one per line)

Yes  
No

Vote button caption: Vote

est response. While this process is less personal than a video, the greatest benefit to employing a poll is the organized data report available after the poll is completed.

- A more direct route to gather information from your community is through the Facebook events system. If you have utilized the event application and the activity or series has transpired, you will have a list of all those that RSVP'd and can send a message to all participants. Whether you link to a YouTube video, ask questions within the body of the message, or send them to a poll, be sure to specify to your readers that if they want to message you directly on Facebook, to hit "Reply" as oppose to "Reply All".

## Direct Traffic to Your Website

Once established in the Social Media world, a pastor should think about incorporating it into the church's website. By placing icons that link to your Twitter account or to your Facebook account, visitors will be able to easily find out more about you and feel connected. It avoids the, what could be, drawn out search

in trying to find you in the Social Media maze.

There are other applications that allow you to have a live feed of your Twitter updates directly integrated into your website. Some of these applications can be frustrating to figure out, which is why faithHighway has experts on Social Media and Social Media packages that can help you smoothly integrate these into your website.

Using Social Media avenues like Twitter can also boost direct traffic to your website or blog. By tweeting about your blog, it allows your followers to know that you've posted something that you think is worthwhile for them to read. It also allows them to re-tweet the information and share it with their followers, thus creating a domino effect.

One thing to consider in determining if you should sign up for Twitter and/or Facebook is that some of your congregation might be more inclined to following you on Twitter than they would be to go to your personal blog and read it. They might not remember to check to see if you've posted anything new, but if they receive a tweet from Twitter, they'll know you've posted something new.



If you're not exactly sure how to integrate the different social media platforms into your website, faithHighway has a group of experts who can walk along side you and help you get your church's brand incorporated into your social media networks. Just ask about our SNAP package for churches.

Promoting your church's social media accounts on the website will help your congregation stay more connected. They'll have one place they can go where they can find all the different avenues of social media.

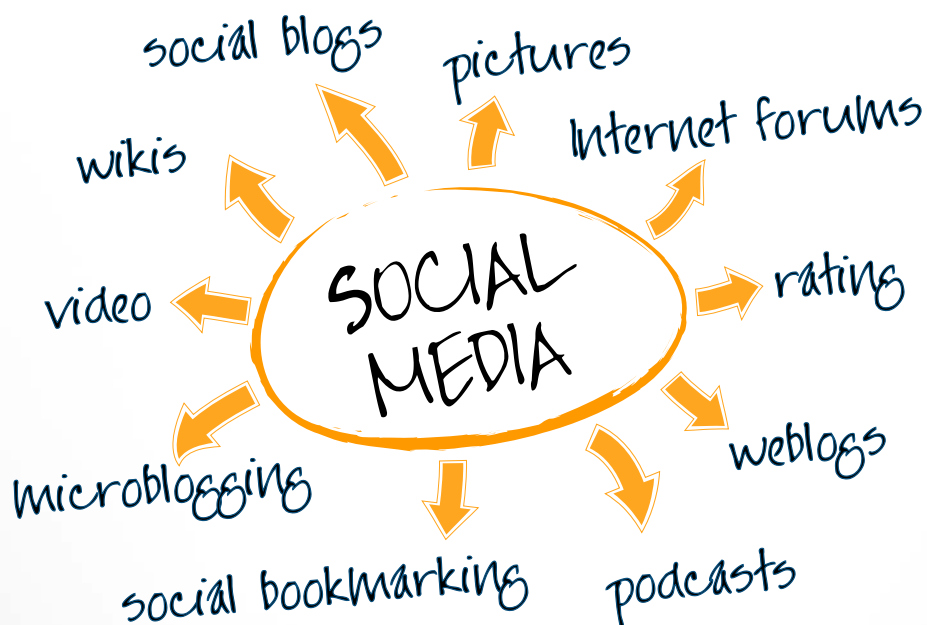
## Applications

Considering how many social networks are available for your organization to get involved in, the good news is that there are a lots of ways to update your different platforms, many simultaneously. In the event you do sign up for more than one social network, save yourself time and energy by plugging in any of these quick, intuitive applications.

## Twitter

- [www.cotweet.com](http://www.cotweet.com) – This application allows you to manage multiple accounts on Twitter. Allowing you to schedule tweets, shorten URLs and perform all of the typical Twitter activities, Co-Tweet is actually used by the creators of Twitter.
- [www.twitpic.com](http://www.twitpic.com) – Take pictures, send them to Twitpic, and they will put them in your Twitter time line. This feature allows users to comment on images as well.
- <http://paratweet.com> - If you want to have a live Twitter feed that you can moderate, there is a tool that offers live feedback and questions while you present your message. It can also be helpful during classes and getting connected events.

**"Twitter can boost direct traffic to your website."**





## Facebook

- [www.facebook.com/mobile](http://www.facebook.com/mobile) - Using Facebook's application, you can upload a new status and even chat with friends. SMS texts will alert users with profile activities as well.
- <http://appworld.blackberry.com/webstore> - Blackberry has released free software to enable smart phone users for wall posts, friend invitations and picture uploads.

## YouTube

- <http://www.youtube.com/mobile> - YouTube has created a mobile download for its users to access, upload and create videos from their cellular devices.
- <http://thedesktube.com> - DeskTube empowers users with the ability to toggle through a "desktop" view of videos, as well as video chat with friends and record video. This is also compatible with Facebook and Twitter accounts.

## Multiple Platform Applications

- [www.ping.fm](http://www.ping.fm) - A tool that will allow you to update all your networks at once. As one of the most robust update applications, you may update Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace and Flickr (and many other networks) from one place.
- [www.twitterfeed.com](http://www.twitterfeed.com) - To notify followers of a new blog post, TwitterFeed will post on both Twitter and Facebook at the same time. For those ministries that rely on blogging as an engagement tool, this app is a must-have.
- [www.atomkeep.com](http://www.atomkeep.com) - Not only allowing status updates, AtomKeep actually allows image and video uploads to each of the participating networks: LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, MySpace and many more.
- <http://appworld.blackberry.com/webstore> - Blackberry has also released free software to enable users of MySpace and Twitter for wall posts, friend invitations and picture uploads.



One of the greatest parts about so many of these options is that they are all extremely easy to employ. Simple steps will take you from a "copy-and-paste" routine for networking updates, to a stream-lined, one-size-fits-all approach.

## Conclusion

The Essential Guide to Social Media states that “once you’ve outlined the targeted conversations and who should engage, the process of participation craves a very human approach.”<sup>i</sup> There is an art and a science to social networking. While neither is mastered, or scaled to a formula, there are many notable approaches to gain traction with your community. Earn the trust and respect of your market by “participating as a person” and bringing “helpful” and “valuable” information to the conversation. These hints and others, were put together by Brian Solis, and are listed below for a quick guide to gauge your overall social network experience.

- It starts with respect. Take the time to truly engage and know your community. These days, respect comes over time, so understand that the two-way conversations may take a while to develop.
- *Participate as a person, not as a marketer, sales person or message factory.* While a church or ministry may not come across as “sales-y,” there is a stigma of perfection and judgment. Approaching social media with transparency will build trust and interaction.
- *Be helpful and bring value to the conversation.* If the content uploaded is always about your organization or your daily activities, you may notice a decline in overall followers. By bringing valued content, with an even mix of general updates and educational ones, the chances of a retweet or Facebook fan follower will greatly increase.
- *During this entire process, you’re contributing to the personality and the perception of the brand you represent.* Remember that whoever is leading your networking applications is directly shaping the way your community views your church or organization. Decide early on “who” you want to be in the eyes of your followers. Are you an advocate for anything in particular? Do you just want to be a source of inspiration and humor?
- *Remember, to ensure that you engage on their terms according to the rules, and culture, across each community.* Just as you would approach an overseas trip, learn the social cues of your targeted community. Some communities are very open to following a total stranger on MySpace or Facebook. Others keep a very private profile, only allowing close friends and families into their network.<sup>i</sup>

Buzz words often clutter the church realm. Terms like “relevant” and “connect”. The great thing about social networking is that it offers a place to relevantly connect with people, regardless of ethnicity, age, socio-economic standing or religion. Surpassing the walls that differing cultures have spent their lives building between one another, these networking groups offer the unique opportunity to defy societal barriers and embrace the union of humanity. *Disciples World* sums it all up with this truth, “Social media is nothing more than a place where people are gathering to share their lives with each other. I for one, can think of no better place for a church to be than where people are gathering.”<sup>xx</sup>

## Resources

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