



THREE KEYS TO SOCIAL MEDIA FOR MINISTRIES



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We can't deny it – social media is here to stay. While technology changes daily, the underlying trend of how our society communicates is steady. We want constant connection, instant information, endorsements from our friends, and transparency from brands. And it's no different for nonprofits and ministries.

Whether you realize it or not, the people who care about your mission are on social media – and they're on it a lot. Unfortunately, many ministries shy away from social media, and in doing so miss the opportunity to join an important conversation. Some are unfamiliar with the tools available and some don't believe their audience is using these outlets. Other ministry leaders worry that social media is too narcissistic and will turn off followers of their ministry. In reality though, your fans and followers are looking for updates from you and looking for them in the way information is processed today– socially, in bite-sized chunks and on-the-go.



Social media is all about storytelling, making it the perfect tool for ministries with a larger story, vision and mission to share than simply selling product or increasing profit. So, how do you share that story, build and engage an audience, and maintain a positive image in the process? By following our three keys to social media for ministries, you can build a successful and active community of supporters that fits your mission and brand:

- Fundraise less
- Create great content
- Build relationships



LESS FUNDRAISING, MORE FRIENDRAISING.

The first thing you need to know about social media is that it won't meet your fundraising goals.

This might seem counterintuitive to nonprofits in constant need of funding, but focusing too much on marketing messages online can actually leave a negative impression in the highly conversational environment of social media. So is it still worth the time? While social media isn't a direct marketing, advertising or fundraising tool, it's a powerful relationship-building tool that lets you update followers frequently and share a different side of your story. Engaging in two-way conversation and offering consistent updates through thoughtful, content-centered posts will connect and inform your audience members and help you grow a supporter base that believes in your brand.

As you plan your social media strategy, shift your expectations and approach. Instead of checking the bottom line with each new follower or fan, see these people as new friends. They are groups to engage with, people to share stories with and partners in your mission.

As people feel invested and like they are a part of your work through interaction and relationship online, this will translate to deep-seeded support – and ultimately an increase in donations.

Define your goals

What do you hope to get out of your social media efforts? If you're only on social media because "everybody's doing it", then your strategy needs more clearly defined goals. While being active on social media is critical, understanding what you can uniquely contribute and get out of these platforms will guide your content and increase results.

While every organization ultimately hopes to increase its supporter base and donations, social media should not be the backbone of these strategies. Instead, social media is most effective when you:

- Start conversation to establish availability and relevance.
- Demonstrate transparency that leads to trust.
- Showcase your unique personality – your voice, story and even quirks.
- Reinforce your message and tell your story among existing audiences.
- Create a discovery point for new audiences.
- Find people who are deeply passionate about your type of work.

Stop, conversate and listen

Conversation is what drives social media. Your audience doesn't want to be talked to; they want to interact with you and with each other. Start by asking questions or posting open-ended content that sparks discussion. Be present on your page, let your voice be heard and respond to questions. Positioning yourself as accessible makes your brand more relatable and makes people feel part of your mission.

HINT

Use a service like Topsy.com to monitor conversation about your brand.

And while your social media team will spend the majority of their time creating content, don't forget the power of listening. Your audience is out there, talking to you on your page or talking about you on theirs.

Monitoring conversation lets you gauge perceptions, catch any negative feedback, and correct mistakes or misconceptions as they arise.

Strive for authenticity over perfection

Many shy away from social media because it requires a level of vulnerability that is counterintuitive in the marketing and public relations world of the past where messages and company image were kept under tight control. But in today's world, where consumers are bombarded with marketing messages and skeptical of spin, the most attractive quality in a brand is transparency. Show your personality, own your mistakes and tell your story. Audiences are more likely to offer grace for imperfections than to accept a packaged image.



KING CONTENT

Social media is no longer just about sharing pictures of food or keeping tabs on your high school sweetheart; it's a curated content resource, tailored to the specific interests of each user who builds their feeds by liking and following. Not only is social media often the first place people look for news, but more and more, audiences turn to their smart phones and Facebook feeds for tips, articles, resources and inspiration for their daily lives. Great content is what makes the difference between an active and engaged audience or followers who skim over your updates.

If someone is following you, they're already interested in what you do. Now, they want you to engage them with both substantial updates on your organization and resources for their daily lives. Take an editorial approach to your social media strategy and develop content that is meaningful, useful, on brand and on message – and sometimes fun. As you become a voice in a larger conversation, your audience will trust you and turn to you – and in turn, support you.

Plan ahead

Social media messages can be divided into four main areas of content:

- News/Organizational Updates
- Marketing/Promotional
- Messaging
- Engagement

Be sure to post a mix of these content types throughout the day and week, and avoid posting the same type of content back to back. Developing an editorial calendar that lets you view the week in advance and categorize content will help ensure you're posting different types of engaging messages. For example, asking an engagement question will get your audience participating on your page, which will in-turn make a follow up marketing message more effective.

EXAMPLES OF **CONTENT TYPES**

NEWS/UPDATES

We're just one week away from our annual conference. Can't wait to see you there!

MARKETING

Help us reach our year-end goal and help us reach more people! Donate by December 31 to continue our mission next year.

MESSAGING

We reach more than 100,000 children in six different countries through our programs. Read Jesse's story here.

ENGAGEMENT

What is one way you've seen God work in your life this week?

Tell a story

Stories captivate us. They drive and define our society, they capture our attention and they make a message take hold in a way no other form of communication can. As a ministry, you have incredible stories to tell – stories of lives changed and eternal impact. Simply posting stories of real people who have been impacted by your work will compel readers and tell the larger story of your mission. When people see an organization making a tangible difference, they want to be a part of the movement.

Post eye candy

Visual content is significantly more likely to be shared or liked by users than text-only updates. And as outlets such as Instagram and Pinterest that focus solely on visuals become more prominent, creating great artwork for social media is no longer optional.

- **Photography**

Status updates with photos instead of just text are 53 percent more likely to generate Likes and shares than the average post. Especially for mission-based organizations, photos can build an emotional connection that a simple text update could not. Consider investing in professional photography of your work, and always include your URL or branding on a photo, so that these can be traced back to you when shared.

HINT

The advised size for a Facebook feed photo is 600 x 600 pixels. Avoid photos smaller than 200 x 200 pixels.

- **Shareable graphics**

The content that gets shared the most will not be the content about your organization; it will be the content that speaks into people's lives. Find inspirational quotes and use photo editors like PicMonkey to design these quotes over top of photography that represents

your organization. If you have a creative team, create your own artwork with quotes or messages. As with photos, always include your URL or branding and use consistent fonts across all graphics. Be sure to cross post graphics to blogs, Pinterest, and Instagram.



- Video

Video is proven to be the most engaging of all content types. It gets more clicks, likes, views and shares than any other content, and it also tells a story in a way that no other medium can. You don't have to invest thousands of dollars or create long videos to incorporate it into social media. A quick interview with the founder, footage from a ministry event or even a funny staff happening on a Friday can be a great way to keep people interested.

Be the expert

Great social media strategy begins with a larger content marketing strategy. Not only do you want your Facebook page or Twitter feed to be a reliable source of high-quality, relevant content from others, but you should also use your social media outlets as a platform for your expert voice. By writing white papers and articles, creating instructional videos or developing quotes and messaging around your mission, you position yourself as a trusted resource and expert in the area where you work.



HAVE A SOCIAL LIFE

The whole point of social media is to, well, be social – right? However, too many organizations only post about themselves, or simply overlook the opportunity to interact with potential audience members and influencers in their space.

Social media opens doors for relationships that you would never have access to otherwise. Sometimes one simple mention, retweet or follow can lead to a long-lasting and mutually beneficial connection. While it seems effortless and natural when it happens, you can strategically set yourself up to be noticed and meet the right people with just a little bit of effort.

Follow and like

If you owned a brick-and-mortar store, you wouldn't sit inside your store and yell, "Come to my store." You'd go outside, find new customers, and pull them inside the store.

The same rings true for social media. Building an audience starts with reaching out to those you would be interested in your work. First, identify groups who make up your key audience. Moms? College students? Local businesses? Find these groups and key influencers within them, and start following them on Twitter or liking their pages on Facebook. You can also broaden your reach by investing

in Facebook or Twitter ads, which will feature your page among targeted groups based on demographics, networks and preferences. Don't underestimate the power a simple follow can have in beginning a conversation with a key person or organization in your space.

Share and retweet

The best way to get someone to pay attention to you is to pay attention to them! As influencers in your space post great content, share this with your followers. Not only will this interject another voice into your feed and convey a collaborative attitude, but this gets your brand in front of those influencers. It also validates what they have to say, which opens the door for you to make requests of them down the road without appearing only self-interested.

HINT

Make Twitter lists. Once you've identified and followed key influencers, you can create a list on Twitter and add them to that list, making it easy to sort through posts that might be helpful or shareable. These people are also notified when you add them to a list – one more way your brand shows up on their radar!

Don't be afraid to ask

Is there someone – an author, influencer, speaker or fellow leader – who you think your organization would benefit from knowing? Don't be afraid to ask! Social media can be a great, informal way to reach out to someone you might not contact otherwise. However, be sure to make the right ask – one that maintains the conversational and friendly tone of social networking. Don't have a self-promoting attitude or ask for endorsements; instead, show respect for the person or organization and ask for mentorship or partnership. Everyone is flattered when you want to learn from them, and that connection could lead to larger opportunities down the road.



Social media can be a powerful tool for your ministry to share your story and invite others into your mission. By understanding these communications tools – what social media is AND what it isn't – and harnessing them for the unique interests of the ministry audience, you can build a successful online presence and conversational and engaging social media community.

50 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE SOCIAL MEDIA TODAY

1. Consistently brand all social media outlets.
2. Set goals.
3. Post at least once a day.
4. Showcase visuals.
5. Invest in professional photography.
6. Get on Pinterest.
7. Get on Instagram.
8. Post photos that create emotional impact.



9. Share videos that tell your story.

10. Design and share inspirational quotes Include your URL on photos and graphics.
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11. Let your personality show.
12. Don't take yourself too seriously.
13. Ask open-ended questions.
14. Ask for feedback.
15. Respond to your fans and followers.
16. Be present. Let fans hear the owner's voice.
17. Thank fans and followers for their support.
18. Tell stories.
19. Ask people to share their story.
20. Hold a contest.
21. Keep content only 25% marketing content. Make the rest conversational.



Listen. Social media is free market research.

23. Share or retweet valuable content from others.
24. Write your own articles or white papers.
25. Create exclusive content that users must “Like” to access.
26. Post something that's purely fun.

27. Keep it short: 2-3 lines for Facebook, 100-120 characters for Twitter.
28. Include links in posts.
29. Include calls-to-action. Ask people to do something.
30. Identify your audience.
31. Follow key influencers.
32. Make Twitter lists.
33. Follow back those who follow you.
34. Reach out and build relationships.

35.

Ask to learn from others.

36. Tag others in posts or comments where they are mentioned.
 37. Use hashtags.
 38. Advertise.
 39. Invest time. Have someone on your team dedicate 1-3 hours a day to online activity.
 40. Use scheduling tool such as Hootsuite or Buffer to queue posts and reduce day-to-day management time.
 41. Don't forget to check on the day's scheduled content each morning to make sure it's still appropriate in light of any organizational, community or national events.
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42. Post at the times when most people are active online. Avoid sharing major news during late nights and weekends.

43.

Be authentic.

44. Don't censor.
45. Use critical moments as an opportunity for growth or to position your organization as helpful and responsive.
46. Respond humbly and rectify issues.
47. Be patient. Building a following and engaged community takes time.
48. Measure engagement. Look at what content got the most response and post more like it.
49. Don't put too much emphasis on numbers.

50.

Disconnect at the end of the day. We need all need face time after a day of Facebook.

ABOUT THE A GROUP

The A Group is a full-service marketing and technology firm focused on helping nonprofits, churches, and Christian resource organizations tell their stories and build influence.

We are a strategic solutions company. Our vision is to offer our clients creative and effective solutions to their branding, technology and communications needs. We work hard to understand their challenges and opportunities and navigate the marketplace, which has been radically transformed by new technologies.

For case studies of how organizations like Metro World Child, Soles4Souls, TWR (Trans World Radio), and the Christian Leadership Alliance are using social media and technology to expand their reach, raise money, and minister online, go to www.AGroup.com.

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