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BeSocial

The social media Handbook for churches
Imagine this: It’s a weeknight and your family is going out to eat. Tristan wants a burger, Lily wants spaghetti, Dad wants a steak, and Mom wants a salad. Based on this information alone, you can begin to narrow down where to go to satisfy everyone in a single location. You will not find what you are looking for at the Mexican place or the pizza joint. However, there are still a lot of places in town where you can find burgers, pasta, steak, and salad. So how do you make your decision about where to go?

Place A is too noisy. Place B is too crowded. Place C is too expensive. The service is slow at Place D. And the food was nasty that time you went to Place E!

There are lots of restaurants with similar menus, but clearly they are not all created equal. Having the right items on the menu may be the defining choice, but things like environment, quality of service and value are also contributing factors. Two of the most important factors are the quality of the food and how it is presented.

You would not be reading this if your church was not at least considering using social media as part of its ministry. But in order to have a healthy social media strategy, you first need to have a very clear picture of your church’s identity.
Before you continue, think about the answers to these three questions below. The extra questions are not meant to be exclusive - your ministry can be any, all, or none of the options listed. These are simply springboard questions to help you dive in. Take these ideas as far as you can until you feel like you have a complete picture of your church’s identity and message.

1. What type of church are you?
Are you traditional, contemporary, or modern? Do you closely ally yourself with a denomination, or do you prefer to be seen as independent? Do you want to be seen as hip and fashionable, or homey and comfortable? (If you’re not sure, it’s time to call a meeting.)

2. What is your focus?
Do you focus on evangelism, discipleship, worship, prayer, or service? Are you trying to bring in nonbelievers or build the faith of believers? Is most of your energy given to Sunday morning worship, weekday small groups, or off-site ministries? (If you’re not sure, take a look at your budget and see where the biggest pieces of the pie are going.)

3. What is your vision, message, and values?
How do you want the community to see your church? What do you hope it looks like in 20 years? What is your basic statement of faith? What is your mission statement? Is it most important to you for people to see faith, grace, worship, truth, holiness, or love from your church and its members? Do you want people to feel comfortable being real in your church? Do things like clothing, politics, or income affect how comfortable a person will feel at your church?

It is essential for you to be crystal clear on the basics of your church’s identity and message, or else your church’s DNA will get lost in the tangle of new technology.

Back to your family and the restaurant dilemma. Actually, your way of thinking in deciding where to eat is not vastly different from a person’s way of deciding
whether or not to come to your church. They may know they want a Christian church, so that rules out any other religion. However, it is possible that there are a lot of other churches in your area offering the same “menu” of Christian faith that your church offers: forgiveness of sin through Jesus, hope through a relationship with God, Christian life through the Spirit, etc. So it will come down to the other factors that make your church different from all the other churches around you. Just like with the restaurant choices, environment, quality of service, and value (as far as attending being worth their time) are contributing factors. And two of the most important factors are the quality of the “food” and how it is presented.

Refer back to your answers to the previous questions about your church identity. That’s the “food” we’re talking about here. Are you offering something that is of the highest quality? If so, how do you present it? That is to say, how does your church display itself to the community and make its identity known? How does your church communicate and spread its message? And how does your church enable ministry and relationship?

This is where social media comes in, allowing you to reach more people, build more relationships, and advance your ministry goals.
Social media is actually not a very good name for the realm it is supposed to represent. The issue lies with the word “media,” which is defined as a way to communicate information to large amounts of people.

That definition calls to mind stacks of newspapers, blaring TVs, and babbling radios... vast amounts of information flowing out no matter who is (or isn’t!) paying attention. It is kind of like a shotgun blast, spewing out bits of information everywhere in the hopes that maybe one tiny piece will actually find its intended target. People do not interact with media; they just consume it. This is NOT what social media is supposed to be.

Instead, social media is SOCIAL. Personal. Intentional. Targeted. Relationship-building. Believe it or not, you cannot just blast your message out like a shotgun onto social media and expect it to make a difference. You have to view the online social services as an interactive means to making personal connections with individuals. Leveraging social media for your church’s mission and message will take effort, but it can make a huge difference in the people you are able to impact and the relationships you are able to build with them if you are willing to put in the work.

Although your goal is personal relationships, the fact is that a small percentage of the people who encounter your online presence will actually go that deep with you. There are three levels in the depth of relationships you will have with people in the social sphere. Even though you will be wanting to move people from a surface “acquaintance” level to a deep, rich, friendship level, each of the levels can be valuable as you build on each one, accruing and carrying over relational equity from one level to the next. Let’s take a quick look at the levels and how to move from one to the next.
Level 1: Arena of Influence

This is everyone in your network. The people who stay in this level without moving deeper are the people who follow you, but you do not know them and rarely interact with them in a personal way. They see your tweets but never reply, they read your Facebook wall but never “like,” they read your blog but never comment. The word “arena” applies here because just like in a sports arena, you have differing levels of commitment and involvement among the fans even though they are all watching the same game. So in your social arena, you may have a few rabid, face-painting, tailgating fans, but probably more of them will be indifferent fans that leave early because it got too cold or their team was losing.

Level 2: Connections

These are the mid-level depth of relationships. They are the ones who follow you AND interact with you regularly. They “like” your Facebook wall, they comment on your blog, they watch your YouTube videos. You know their name and follow their social accounts too.

Level 3: Real Relationships

It might seem confusing to use the word “real” here, because it IS possible for an individual to be actual friends with a person they have never met in real life (IRL). However, when it comes to the church, a relationship is not authentic until it leaves the confines of the internet and you actually interact face-to-face (FTF). These are people you know and who know you. You have met their families or friends. You have met them for coffee and gotten to know them. And they have gotten to know you as more than the quirky little avatar next to your screen name or your blog title. This is the ultimate goal of your social media presence - to move offline and become real with the people in your arena.
We’ve all heard the phrase “time is money.” When it comes to your church’s social media presence, you really need to view it that way. More specifically, what is most valuable is personal interaction. So think of interaction as the currency of social media; the time and effort you put into it is literally an investment that will have a return for your church and ministry. So, reply to comments. Thank people for their retweets. Answer questions. Like their pages and retweet (RT) their articles. Be caring and interested. Be present in the lives of people. Let them know you are praying for their issues and then follow up later. Like the shotgun analogy at the beginning of this chapter, it does not really matter how much information you are blasting out on your social media accounts. What matters is how you are interacting with the people in your relationship levels. Remember, your goal is to form real relationships with people, and the way to move them from level one to level three is by investing in them through personal interaction.

Here are three simple rules that will help you make the most of your time on social media:

1. Interact, Interact, Interact

It might feel backwards and impersonal to send information out to living, breathing people from behind a screen, but remember that the goal of social media is to invite personal interaction. And opening the door to welcome interaction is the most valuable asset/commodity in the social realm. If done thoughtfully, your online presence should provide you an avenue to easily deliver communication in a way that will ultimately allow you to better connect with people.

Your church and ministries need to have an online social presence greater than one person. It may not be fun to think about it, but the truth is that sometimes pastors or ministers leave churches. No matter what the reason, when leadership changes within churches and ministries you do not want your ministry’s social media presence to leave with a person! For this reason, it is important to have multiple people within each ministry participate in online interaction and who know how to access and run all of the accounts. If your church is small and there is no way to have another person doing it with you, make sure to leave written instructions about how to use each account for the person who comes after you.

On that same note, each church and ministry needs to have its own accounts, not just the minister’s personal accounts. For example, Grace Community
Church's Student Pastor, Bob, has his own personal Twitter account, but he also operates the GCCStudents Twitter account. This way, if Bob moves away, he can still maintain his own personal account, but he leaves the password for the GCCStudents account, and the new Student Pastor can pick right up using it.

2. Filter, Filter, Filter

In your haste for getting as much personal interaction and feedback as quickly as possible in the social sphere, do not forget to stop and think about each word you type before you post it. Filter everything through the lens of your church’s identity from chapter one. Does this comment fit with who you are and what you want your church to be? Since online interaction is not face-to-face, it is easy to misunderstand and take things the wrong way. You have to be very careful to not offend or hurt people, or give the wrong message. Once you have the wrong idea out there, it is very difficult to take it back, so FILTER your words before publishing them.

Matt Flannery, the CEO of micro-lending network Kiva.org, shares an example of how failing to filter negatively affected the work of his nonprofit. On a recent trip to a Latin American country, he tweeted that he was having dinner with a former finance minister, which he just thought was cool. Unfortunately, he later discovered that by tweeting that, he was unintentionally associating himself with a particular political party in the country. That one tweet alienated him from working with certain non-governmental organizations in the county, and severely limited the good his organization could do there. All because of one tweet! So learn the lesson from him and think carefully about ALL possible ramifications of the words you are considering putting out there.

3. Consistency, Consistency, Consistency

The idea of filtering your messages for consistency could easily fall under the previous point, but it is important enough that it deserves its own section. Make sure that everything you say is consistent with your identity and message. This is especially important if you have more than one person using your church accounts. Make sure that all people who will be publishing anything on your website, blog, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Google+, etc. are ALL on the same page with who your church wants to be in the community. Just one inconsistency could seriously damage your message and ministry.
Remember that what goes on the internet on all of your church’s social accounts is permanent. Once it is out there, you cannot take it back. Sure, you can delete it from the account, but you cannot erase it from the minds of everyone that has already read it. So be alert and mindful of all that you are sharing because your words are powerful and important, and your message is too valuable to risk it being distorted by careless words.

**Privacy**

Privacy is a concern for many people in today’s society, so you need to use caution when posting pictures and video of people, and especially of children. It is best to get written permission from people before posting pictures or video of them or their children on public sites. However, in the interest of getting event photos posted in a timely manner, that is not always possible at the time. You may consider having people sign a blanket approval when registering for events or even checking in at the church. Have some kind of form that says “I give *church name* my permission to post pictures and video of me/my children on their social media accounts.” You may even give them the option of “I ask that the church check with me first before posting our pictures or video on public sites.” Another idea is to post or publish some kind of written notice saying “*church name* will be posting pictures and video from this event on their social media accounts. If you do not want pictures or video of you or your family posted on our sites, please notify a staff member.” If someone chooses not to give their permission, it is essential that you are very careful NOT to post their pictures on your accounts and that they are not in the videos you post! You want people to know that you respect them and the things they care about, so it’s important to ask their permission regarding this and then honor their preference.
Now that you have a vision for why to use social media and an idea of what to do with social media, it is time to learn the details of how to use each type of social media to maximize your church’s effectiveness.

**BLOG**

**Purpose:**
Your ministry’s blog is your mainstay of your online personality. Since there is no character limit, your communications can be longer and express more complex ideas. Use your blog to express thoughts, feelings, truth, and reveal to the public who the individuals in your church’s leadership are. You can choose to have either one church leadership blog where all of your staff members post, or each pastor can have his/her own blog that is linked to the church’s website. The point is to be transparent and let people really know you through what you put on your blog. You want to model what authentic Christian life looks like in today’s culture: “I’m not perfect, but I love the Lord and with His help I’m doing my best.”

**Best Practices:**
- Be real. Use your ministry’s blog to express the true heart of who you are as an individual, and if there are more than one of you, as a group. If there are multiple people collaborating on your ministry’s blog, each blogger should have his/her own voice and allow their readers to know them on a personal level. Tell stories, share both struggles and victories, share how God is working in you right now.
  - Although it was made clear in chapter 2 that you need to filter everything posted on your social media accounts for consistency, it is possible that something posted on your blog might raise some eyebrows or be taken the wrong way. You want your bloggers to feel empowered to express their thoughts and opinions, but you don’t want it to harm the church’s name and ministry. For this reason, we suggest you place a disclaimer on the blog that says something like this: “The opinions expressed in this post do not necessarily represent the opinions of *Church Name*. If you have a question or issue, please speak directly to that person or someone in church leadership.” It may also be wise to have a blog administrator who filters all posts for potential problems before they are published, as long as this person can do it quickly so that the points are still relevant when it is published.
• Mix it up. Have a variety of things on your blog: personal stories (your own and things God is doing in the lives of church members), Scripture and Biblical truths, articles about current events or church life.

• Be consistent. Try to blog at least a couple of times a week so people do not lose interest and stop checking it for updates.

• Encourage interaction. With each blog you write, ask open-ended questions that encourage people to leave comments to share their own thoughts or stories as well. Remember, social media is not a one-way street. The point is to encourage interaction that will act as a catalyst to forging deeper relationships.

• Link your blog to your Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and any other online social accounts so that new posts on your blog are automatically announced on the other sites, and new videos, articles, or messages will be automatically posted to your blog. That will make it easy to let people know you have something new posted.

A Good Example: Orange (http://whatisorange.org) is an organization that helps provide vision, passion, and resources to family, children and student ministers. Each year Orange goes on a nationwide “Orange Tour” to meet with church leaders in smaller environments and help answer their questions while providing them with resources and a personal support network. The Orange Tour has a blog that serves as an online hub for all information relating to the tour. Using WordPress plugins, the blog is set up to automatically update whenever one of the Orange Leaders posts a new blog, video, or tweet, and the information is constantly being updated as the tour progresses. Check it out at http://blog.orangetour.org.

Facebook

Purpose:
The Facebook status prompt asks “What’s on your mind?” Let that guide you about what to do with Facebook. Facebook has so many diverse features that you can consider it to be an online hangout for your church community to share all about what is going on and what they are thinking about.

Best Practices:
• Create a Community Page for your church that all members of leadership can be administrators of in addition to their own individual pages. This way, staff members can use their individual pages for their personal lives and families, if desired, and the church community page
will be where church stuff is done.

• Once you have more than 25 followers, you can personalize your URL to make your page easier to find. When choosing your URL, though, make it the same as your church’s website URL if that name is available. For example, if your church’s name is Grace Community Church, there are any number of names you could shorten that into to make a Facebook URL. However, if your church’s website is www.gracecc.com, then the best choice for your Facebook URL is www.facebook.com/gracecc. That adds continuity to your online presence, and it will help people know that it’s definitely you and not some other Grace Church.

• Use the Status bar on your Page’s wall to share thoughts, ask questions, share links, and publicize events. Make sure at least one thing is posted on this every day.

• Make sure the Info page is up-to-date and links to all of your other online accounts.

• Use the Photos page to post images from all your events. Get them up quickly after the event (better yet--use a mobile device to post them as the event is taking place), so people can see what is happening at your church. Tag photos of church members so that people know their picture is up on your page, and then their friends will be able to see the photos too, even if they do not follow your church page.

• Use Discussions to get people talking about Scripture themes, current events, or anything else that is happening.
  • In the new Timeline setup, Discussions is no longer an automatic part of your page. You can choose to add the app, however, if you would like to hold discussions on your page. Search for the app called Forums For Pages, and add it to your page.

• Facebook gives you the ability to sort your friends/followers into groups, and then publish information only to certain groups. This allows you to choose a select group of people to send messages or updates to, so this could be very helpful for sending out information to only a specific group of people. Before you write your post, look at the audience selector at the bottom of the box. If you click “Custom,” you can choose any of your friend groups to publish only for them to see. (If you accidentally publish something to the wrong group, it is easy to go back and change later.) For example, you may have a group of Student Ministry Volunteers that you need to ask for help with a spontaneous event this weekend, but that post wouldn’t be of interest or be appropriate to share publicly with all your followers.
• Be active in following your community’s Facebook walls and “liking” their posts and sharing posts or information from others. If you are active in what they are doing, they are more likely to pay attention to you as well. It’s easy to put information out there and be frustrated that no one is interacting with it, so set the example and use “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” as your guide.

• You might consider purchasing a Facebook ad that will be targeted to people in your area. It is simple and inexpensive, and it is a good way to reach local people that might not see other advertising you put out. For example, Community Bible Church in San Antonio, TX saw explosive growth in their college ministry when they decided to start sending targeted Facebook ads to people in their city between the ages of 18 and 22. They saw such success with Facebook ads that they completely eliminated their budget for all other print and online advertising for college ministry, trimming their advertising budget from $500/month to $150/month.4

A Good Example: The ultimate example of a church using Facebook to absolutely rock ministry is Northland Church in Central Florida (http://www.northlandchurch.net/). Northland is already set up to livestream their services to their five different locations throughout Central Florida, so they thought it was a simple jump to take their worship to Facebook. They call themselves “A Church Distributed” because they believe that through online resources, their church can have a strong community regardless of how widespread their geographical locations. So they have vibrant interactions on their Facebook wall, good discussions on their discussion page, and they livestream each of their five weekly services, so that people can join in no matter where they are. Their interactive webstream allows people to not only watch, but also participate by having immediate access to an online pastor and the ability to chat instantly with other worshipers. Check out their Facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/northlandchurch.2

Twitter

Purpose:
The Twitter prompt says “What’s happening?” so let this be your guide. What are you thinking about? What are you working on? Is your church preparing for a big event? Are you working on a new sermon series? Did something great happen? Did God speak to you in a fresh way today? Use Twitter to share many short (140 characters or less) thoughts throughout the day.
**Best Practices:**

- Use Twitter as the place you post most often, as in several times a day. Your content doesn’t always have to be something brilliant or life-changing, it can be funny or simply a repost of someone else’s content. You just want to maintain a constant presence on Twitter because such a large amount of content gets posted throughout the day that your single post will get quickly lost in the stream of tweets that people can see. However, if you post several times throughout the day, it’s more likely that your followers will catch at least one of your tweets when they are online.
  - In order to minimize the amount of time you spend posting on various sites, it is convenient to use a service that will allow you to post multiple places at once. You can use Tweet Deck or HootSuite to select which account to post something to.
  - Alternatively, in Facebook, you can use the Twitter app to post all of your Tweets on your Facebook wall, or you can use the Selective Tweets app to choose which of your tweets will post to your Facebook wall.

- Twitter’s 140-character limit is pretty confining, but it is actually better to go even shorter than that. Try to leave enough room in your tweet for someone to be able to easily retweet it.
  - For example, “RT @roar_pro:” is 13 characters, so at my company, ROAR, we try to leave at least 13 extra spaces in our tweets so that someone can just click the RT button and post without having to cut anything out.

- Use hashtags (#) and mentions (@) to draw people’s attention to your tweets. If you are tweeting about any public person, theme, book, or anything, there is almost certainly a hashtag that will allow anyone following that topic to automatically see your tweet. Just do a search on Twitter for it, and you will be able to see what the hashtag or username is.
• If you begin a tweet with a mention (@), it will be semi-private so that only people who are following both you and the user mentioned will be able to see it. Unless that is your intention rephrase your sentence so it does not begin with the name, or just put a punctuation mark in front of the @ to allow it to be seen by the public. Find examples of this below:

• If you tweet “dm roar_pro I love your apps!,” this is a direct message, which can only be seen by @roar_pro.
• If you tweet “@roar_pro I love your apps!,” this is a semi-private tweet so only people who follow both you and @roar_pro will be able to see it.
• If you tweet “.@roar_pro I love your apps!” - notice the period in front of the @ - this is a public tweet that all your followers will be able to see.

• Use Twitter intentionally to augment your worship services by tweeting out the theme and some food for thought beforehand. Let people know what Scriptures to read and what to be thinking about before they come. Then follow up afterward with more discussion questions and things to think about. Some churches are even using it as a teaser “You’re not going to want to miss the opener today where we will announce...”

• For the more technologically-advanced, you can even incorporate Twitter into your worship services by allowing people to tweet their thoughts and questions during the service. Also, a pastor or church leader could tweet out discussion questions that people tweet their replies to. Read the example below to see how one church does this very well.
  • If you want to do something like this, make sure your church’s wireless internet connection has enough strength and band width to be able to handle that much traffic at one time. You do not want people to be distracted and frustrated at the failure of the technology.

A Good Example: Pastor John Voelz at Westwinds Church in Jackson, Michigan (http://westwinds.org/) began using Twitter in church long before it was used by the masses. He finds it is a great way to build a sense of community by letting the congregation share their thoughts all through a worship service. They have screens up around the auditorium with the church’s Twitter homepage set to autorefresh every few seconds. So whenever anyone tweets something and mentions the church’s username (@westwinds), it will automatically show up on the screen.
They get everything from silly comments about the pastor’s shirt to serious sharing of people’s struggles. Since this is uncensored, they do sometimes get offensive or unwanted tweets that come on the screen. When this happens, they have specific members of the congregation they have recruited to help redirect the conversation and tweet appropriate things that cause the unwanted one to move down the screen.

When they first began using Twitter in church, they held workshops on Sunday afternoons where members could bring their computers and learn how to use Twitter. Now it has caught on and they are not as programmatic about instructing people what to do. They have been thrilled with how this connects and engages the whole congregation, even those who are not Twittering themselves. This also provides the pastors with the ability to go back through the week and personally respond to each tweet, starting conversations and building relationships as well. To read more about this church and how their use of Twitter has evolved, read Pastor Voelz’ blogs on the subject at http://johnvoelzblog.blogspot.com/search/label/twitter.

YouTube

Purpose:
YouTube is the #3 search engine on the web. People are using YouTube to search for a LOT of different things, so why are churches not using this medium to get their message out there and to help people find what they are really searching for? YouTube is obviously a forum for videos, but there are a lot of things that can be recorded on video and placed on YouTube for people to see. One great thing about YouTube is that it is already mobile-friendly, so you do not have to worry about making your video content accessible on mobile devices; YouTube does the work for you.

Best Practices:

- Have your own YouTube channel that people can subscribe to. Just like with the personal Facebook URL, if possible, give your YouTube channel the same name as your church’s website.
- Put your entire worship service on YouTube every week. If you can, divide up the worship songs from the sermon and post those all individually too. That way, if someone does a search on a certain topic, they will be able to pull up and view your pastor’s sermon on that topic.
- To make things searchable, make sure to use tags and keywords so that people will find your content when doing searches.
- It’s a great idea for members of your church leadership to do video
blogs (vlogs) occasionally just to get their face and voice out there, and also to make them more accessible. Use YouTube to host them online, and then embed them in your blog as well.

- If you want to see an example, check out this video blog from Tim Gaydos of Mars Hill church: http://youtu.be/4bzeqtPecCs. He takes 2 minutes to share his heart about current events (at the time) and reference them back to thoughts from the previous week’s sermon in addition to personal stories from his own life and ministry.

- Upload video clips from church events - concerts, kids’ camps, mission trips, youth events, etc. People will be able to see with their own eyes what kind of community your church has and the relationships available to them if they participate.

- An example of this is one I made a few years ago after a kid’s camp at the church I was with at the time: http://youtu.be/vjGqcNf7oow. It just shows the kids having fun, how the adult volunteers interact with the kids, and what our stage presence looks like. People can get a good idea of what to expect from the church just by watching a video like this.

**A Good Example:** Westside Family Church in Lenexa, KS (http://westsidefamilychurch.com) has a stellar YouTube channel where they post everything from sermon clips to funny personal videos to messages from the pastors to event details to leadership training sessions. Check it out at http://www.youtube.com/user/westsidefamilychurch.

**SMS**

**Purpose:**
SMS, or text messaging, is interesting because it is an older technology, but it is very popular and effective for short and instant communication. Statistics show that 97% of all text messages are read by the recipient, which is an unbelievably high percentage. No other medium of personal communication even comes close to that. Because of this, the chance of your SMS actually being received is very high. That makes it very important to be selective about how you use this power; do not abuse it by sending too many texts for unimportant things.

**Best Practices:**
- Be brief and informational with what you send via text. You know that people will receive your message instantly, and they are
extremely likely to read it right away. Be careful to only send something they need to know and when they need to know it now.

• There are two different uses for text messaging. The first is to use a service like YapTap (www.yaptap.com) or SimplyText (www.simplytext.net) to deliver mass information via text. This is not interaction because you are not aiming for interaction here, you are just spreading important information. Use this for things like informing parents when the youth group is going to be late returning from their mission trip or when an event’s location has been changed.
  • YapTap is a cool new resource for managing your various social communications. You can use it to send not only text messages, but also Facebook, Twitter, and email messages, depending on who you are trying to reach and how.

• An exciting use for SMS is to give people the opportunity to interact with a speaker while he is speaking. People in the congregation can text in a question or comment that the pastor can receive instantly and choose whether or not to address from the stage. If the pastor chooses not to address it immediately, they can reply during the week, which will help the person who sent the text to keep thinking about the topic throughout the week. It will also give the person the opportunity to personally interact with the pastor.
  • If a speaker does not want to give people their personal cell phone number to receive texts during a sermon or session, they can set up a Google Voice number specifically for this purpose. An assistant can filter the received texts so that the speaker is not trying to juggle receiving texts while speaking.

A Good Example: The Student Ministry at Montgomery Community Church (http://www.mcc.us/) in Loveland, Ohio has a midweek gathering called United that uses texting to deeply impact Senior High Students. Daniel McKee (Senior High Director at MCC), Ivo Oliveira (Student Worship Pastor at MCC), and Mark Alliett (Student Venture staff in Loveland, OH) coordinate their time and resources for this weekly gathering. Early in the week, they text a message to their students letting them know what the topic of that week’s United will be, to allow them to begin thinking about it and inviting friends they think might be interested in that topic. They have a Google Voice number set up specifically for United-related texting, and that number is given to the students.
At United, the students are asked to text in questions or thoughts relating to the subject. All three ministers participate each week, so when one is speaking, the other two can be reading the texts and deciding how each needs to be responded to. Some students’ thoughts and questions are read and addressed from the stage right away. Others are replied to instantly via text, and the remaining texts are replied to during the week. Google Voice keeps a record of the conversation flow of each text, so it’s easy to see what has been read and what has been responded to. Daniel says that it is amazing what the students will share and ask since their anonymous texts make them feel free to speak more openly, and there are some really deep truths that are being shared with this amazing ministry tool. Google Voice is free, and texting is a fantastic way to reach students. For more information on this ministry, check out http://www.mcc.us/next-gen/epic/sr-high/united.

Apps

**Purpose:**

It is a great idea for a church to have an app as the mobile/social hub of all their various online activities. It takes everything a church does online and puts it all in one place in a person’s pocket on their mobile device. This way, they can access everything from your church easily on the go.

**Best Practices:**

- There are two different types of apps: HTML5 web apps that function like a mobile website and are accessible only online, and native apps for each platform (like iPhone or Android) that are downloaded and can function offline. The web app is a great place for a church to start in getting their content accessible on all mobile browsers, but the native apps are much more functional.
- In deciding what to put in your app, simply put in everything you do online, but in a mobile format. Put access to your church’s website, along with all blogs, social media accounts, streaming audio and video, online giving, volunteer and event sign-ups, etc.
- Make it social. Use sharable buttons for Twitter and Facebook so that everything in your app can be shared and/or commented on. Remember, your purpose is interaction leading to relationship, not just the spread of information.

**A Good Example:** Redeemer Church in New York (www.redeemer.tv) has two stellar apps, one for iPhone and one for Android. Visit http://www.redeemer.tv/connect/mobile-apps/ to learn all about their apps. The most unique social aspect of their apps is something called the “Prayer Request Feature.” In it,
church members can list their own requests for prayer, and they can also go in to find ways they can be praying for others. They leave comments to encourage and help each other. A very rich community has been created by the people's caring for and praying for each other resulting from their interactions within this app.

**Pinterest**

**Purpose:**
Pinterest is centered completely around images, so this is the place to show your church’s style, personality, message, people, and events. One interesting thing to note about Pinterest is that a huge percentage of its users are female, so you’re reaching a different demographic than many other social media sites. Many times, the woman in the house is the day-to-day decision-maker when it comes to where the family goes, what they do, and how their resources are spent. By using beautiful and inspirational images to appeal to Mama, you’re getting a foot in the door to reach the entire family.

**Best Practices:**
- Find the right balance between quantity and quality. You want to pin a lot of images consistently, but you want them to be of high enough quality to represent your church or ministry well. Be careful you’re not sending the wrong message by pinning old, ugly, or outdated material. You will want to up your game when it comes to creating beautiful graphics for everything, so that they have a large appeal on Pinterest.
- A fairly new aspect to Pinterest is that they allow pinning of videos, and they have a direct link with Vimeo. That makes it really easy for churches to pin videos along with images. This is a great idea, but make sure to keep them short. Most people won’t take the time to watch a video longer than a couple minutes.
- Have a board for everything. Some suggested boards a church could have:
  - Sermons
  - Worship
  - Special Events
  - One for each ministry: family, children, youth, women, men, seniors, music, etc.
  - Missions
  - Scripture Graphics
  - Book Recommendations
  - Discipleship
  - Products (like t-shirts, books, and worship CDs)
• Don’t be afraid to branch out. If there is something unrelated to church that a large percentage of your community is interested in, don’t be afraid to have a Pinboard for it! You want to show that you are relevant to people’s lives, and that means you are interested in all aspect of life, not just churchy things.
  • Home decor is a huge topic of interest on Pinterest. Consider having a Pinboard for beautiful, God-honoring home decorations.
  • Put a “Find me on Pinterest” button on your church website. (Find it at pinterest.com/about/goodies.)
  • As with all other social media networks, be interactive. Respond to comments, follow church members and like/repin their posts. The point is relationships, after all.

**A Good Example:** One nonprofit organization who is doing a good job on Pinterest is charity:water (http://www.pinterest.com/charitywater). They have eight Pinboards: Photo of the Day (showcasing a person who has received water from one of their wells), Creative Fundraising (creative ways people have raised money for water), Snapshots from Field Trips, charity:water Gear, Spotted! (showing people wearing c:w gear out and about), Products We Love, charity:water Videos, and World Water Day. By keeping these boards updated and interesting, charity:water is doing a great job of keeping people informed and interested in what they are doing.

**Instagram**

Purpose:
Instagram is a new social photo sharing site that has just recently exploded onto the social scene. It has become enormously popular in a short amount of time, even surpassing Twitter in daily active users and monthly time spent on the site per user! So, much like with the explosive popularity of Pinterest, we’re learning that people connect with images. It’s as simple as that. The old adage says, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” and we’re finding that to be true when it comes to sharing on social sites. And therein lies the power of Instagram: Story. Images are powerful and can convey thoughts and feelings that words often can’t. Use Instagram to powerfully connect you with your audience and help them to understand the personality, community, and goals of your church. One big difference between Instagram and Pinterest is that Pinterest is heavily biased toward women, whereas Instagram is more of a gender-free field that all feel welcome to come and play. Another interesting thing about Instagram is that it’s by-and-large a mobile-only social site.
Although they have just recently opened up personal pages on the web for people to view your Instagram collections, the apps are still where people are taking, editing, uploading, sharing, and interacting with photos. With people doing more and more on their mobile devices every day, this mobile-focused platform is an ideal way to share your story in the way modern culture receives it best.

**Best Practices:**

- Collect powerful, original images from all of your events. The more people can see your congregation in action, the better they will understand who you are and what you do. Consider posting photos from any or all of these types of events:
  - Worship services
  - Baptisms
  - Youth meetings
  - Bible studies
  - Small group meetings
  - Children’s camps
  - Mission trips
  - Volunteer services
  - Community ministries and outreach
  - Concerts
  - Conferences

- People like seeing behind-the-scenes images to get to better know the personality of people in leadership. Post pics of things like the pastor before he goes on stage on a Sunday or of the worship team during rehearsal.

- Go beyond church events to share things like the beauty of nature, inspiring quotes, and images from home or work. This helps people understand that faith, worship, and ministry go outside the walls of the church and not just on Sundays.

- Caption your pictures so the people can easily understand what they’re seeing.

- Use editing and filters to make your images beautiful and powerful, but don’t go overboard with the editing so much that you look fake.

- Make photo collages to better tell the story and thoughts you’re trying to convey.

- Use hashtags and mentions just like Twitter to call more attention to the themes and people you want to emphasize.

- Instagram is a social site, not just photo albums. Interact with people through comments and likes, remembering that it’s relationship you’re pursuing.
• Don’t limit your imagination with how you can use Instagram to create community and encourage collaboration. Newbreak Church in San Diego, CA has gone above and beyond with Instagram by commandeering the hashtag #newbreakchurch for their use. They have their website set to import every picture on Instagram that is published with that hashtag, so it is incredibly easy for their church community to share and view each others’ photos of any church-related activity. View their page at http://newbreak.org/resources/instagram/.

A Good Example: Elle Campbell and her husband, Kenny, do Middle School Ministry in New York, and they also run the youth ministry resources website, StuffYouCanUse.org. Elle’s Instagram page is jam-packed with a great mix of photos and computer-generated images. You’ll see ministry events, graphic design, personal projects, ministry tools, collages, and more in her Instagram feed. What is possibly the best thing about it, though, is she definitely gets the point of interaction. Just about every picture you’ll find in her feed has a descriptive caption with appropriate mentions or hashtags, AND she responds to comments. Almost all of them have a full conversation in the comment thread because she pursues the interaction with the people who are interested. Check it out at http://instagram.com/ellllllllllle. (That’s eleven l’s between two e’s.)

Google+

Purpose:
Many people wonder about the value of Google+, since it seems to duplicate the functionality of Facebook. However, there are some really unique aspects to Google+ that may mean it’s worthwhile for your church to spend some time on it. One of the biggest benefits to being active on Google+ is that it is directly connected to Google, the world’s biggest search engine. So the more information you put publicly on Google+, the more likely you are to show up in Google search results. That’s a big deal.

Best Practices:
• Have a church Page in addition to your own personal Google+ account. Make sure your Page is viewable publicly so that anyone searching for it can find it. You can choose which of your content is viewable by the public and what can only be seen by certain people - see Circles below.
• Take advantage of Circles. You can put people into groups called Circles, and then you can select which Circles you send communications to. This could be exceptionally valuable for sending information only to Women’s Ministry members or to Children’s Ministry Volunteers or to Youth Parents or to Church Leadership. No one else can see what Circles you have put people into, so there’s no risk of someone being offended by what Circle you put them in.

• Use Hangouts for collaboration and meetings when not everyone can be present at the same physical location. Hangouts is awesome because it’s a video chat like Skype, except it’s free to have up to 10 different participants from different computers.

• Make it easier to share your Google+ page by creating a personalized URL at http://gplus.to. As with all the other social media sites, if possible, I recommend you use the same name as your website in order to have continuity across your whole online presence.

**A Good Example:** Ron Edmondson is the pastor of Grace Community Church in Clarksville, TN, and a consultant for church leaders nationwide. He has a vibrant and active community on Google+: http://gplus.to/ronedmondson He says “I use Google+ because I see it as a unique audience to either Facebook or Twitter. It appears to be a group who want more information than is available on Twitter, but want more business-like information than some of the stuff on Facebook. They aren’t looking for social as much as they are an exchange of information and inspiration.” He posts at least once every day, and his posts are widely varying from Scripture and devotional thoughts, articles about leadership, marriage and family, church life, and personal stories. He also is interested in using the Hangouts feature to mentor young pastors.

**Emerging Technologies (GroupMe, Quora, etc.)**
In today’s technological age, there are always new social online services coming out, and you never know which ones will make it big. It is an excellent idea for at least one member of a church’s leadership to stay very current with all emerging technologies and to adopt them for personal use as soon as possible. If he/she finds that it is a useful site and can see how it would be good for communication with a small group of people such as ministry volunteers or other area ministers, then it is a great idea to use it for that. However, it is wise to wait until it has been adopted by mass audiences before trying to use it for ministry. Some sites show great promise for being valuable in ministry, but there just are not enough people using it yet to make it worth a minister’s time and energy. Focus instead on the above sites where your audience is larger and you can have personal interactions with a greater percentage of your congregation and community.
No matter where your church is on the journey of embracing technology and using social media in ministry, this handbook is meant to give you some ideas about what steps you can take to engage people online. In the words of Pastor Todd Hahn of Next Level Church near Charlotte, NC, “‘It’s a huge responsibility of a church to leverage whatever’s going on in the broader culture, to connect people to God and to each other.’” Since social media is what is going on in the broader culture, the church needs to embrace it and leverage its power to engage people for Christ.

With the extreme connectedness of the global world, the church is no longer confined to its own geographical neighborhood. Churches can use online resources to reach people all around the world, and the social tools listed in this handbook make it possible, if not exceptionally simple. While remembering that the church’s end goal is always real, offline relationships, it is still better for a person to hear the Gospel and receive loving care from a Christian online than not at all.

Remember to keep your church’s identity, mission, and message in mind when embarking in online social ministry, but do not be afraid to get out and do it. Enlist tech-savvy volunteers from your church body to help your church find its social niche. There may be someone in your church that has been longing for such a ministry that fits their gifts, just waiting for you to ask! Talk to your church about it, encourage them that it WILL make a difference in people’s lives and the church community, and then get out there are do it! These resources are yours for the taking.

Footnotes
1. From this article: http://mashable.com/2011/09/20/kiva-matt-flannery-social-media/
3. Quotes and information from this article: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1900265,00.html
4. Information from http://www.faithvillage.com/article/d45d5b4197f24e9e-b053715222f824fe/getting_started_with_facebook_ads_for_ministry
Find **Matt McKee** on these social sites:
Blog: http://www.mattmckee.me
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/mckeelive
Twitter: @mattmckee
YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/user/remixkids
SMS: Google Voice number: (678) 701-7047
Google+: http://gplus.to/mattmckee
Instagram: http://instagram.com/mattmckee

Find his social/mobile company **ROAR** on these social sites:
Blog: http://www.roar.pro/category/blog/
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/ROAR.pro
Twitter: @ROAR_pro
Vimeo: http://vimeo.com/roarpro
Google+: http://gplus.to/roarpro
Pinterest: http://www.pinterest.com/roarpro

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**A Note From the Author**

Thank you for reading my handbook! I hope it proves to be helpful for you and your ministry. I would love to hear from you about how you liked it and what practices you are putting into effect from it. If you tweet anything about the book, please use the hashtag #BeSocial so that I can follow and possibly join in any conversations surrounding it. If you have any questions, please tweet my social media team at @ROAR_pro, and we will help you out! If you start a new Twitter account because of reading this book, tweet us and we’ll retweet to give you a shout out! May you find the use of social media to be a blessing in your church and ministry. ~ **Matt McKee**