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Using Social Media in Women's Ministry

This download offers practical ways to use social media to enhance your ministry.



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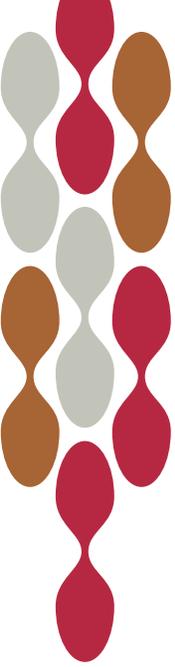
Changes in Women's Ministry

By JoHannah Reardon



When I lead our church's women's ministry 20 years ago, it involved many, many hours on the phone. In fact, that was one of the reasons I stepped out of that position after a couple of years. I was so weary of spending my evenings making phone calls. As I put together this download and read about all the advantages of using social media in a women's ministry, I wondered if I would have lasted longer in that position if that had been available to me.

Today, I happily use social media to interact with the women in my church. I love that I can be involved in the lives of people I don't even know that well by encouraging



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them in their endeavors. And when I see them face to face at an event, I already have a starting point for a conversation.

We hope that this download will help you find practical and easy ways to improve communication in your women's ministry. Peri Gilbert gives you tips for getting started in using social media in your women's ministry. Nicole Unice and Jenny Catron share how you can maximize your ministry through social media. Amy Jackson offers ideas for how your women's small groups can use Facebook. Leslie Miller warns of topics to avoid in social media. Natasha Robinson suggests that Facebook is too big a mission field for the church to ignore. And Tyler Charles gives basic safety guidelines for the most popular types of social media.

Blessings,

JoHannah Reardon

Contributing Editor for GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM

Leader's Guide

How to use this download for a group study



This download can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**

Using Social Media Well

Three keys to success

By Peri Gilbert



We crave connection. According to TheSocialSkinny.com, iPhones are sold at a faster rate than people are born. Their popularity stems from allowing people to connect with a single touch. The same site reported there are 175 million tweets a day and 850 million Facebook users. With 66 percent of adults connected to some type of social media, it seems only reasonable to utilize these platforms to mobilize our women's ministry.

As women's ministry leaders, we desire to see people connect and build relationships. Therefore, it makes sense to jump in and take advantage of these already popular media.

Know Your Audience

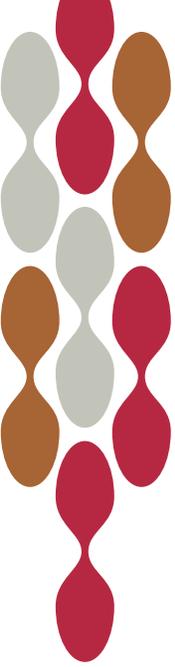
I've embraced social media as I've come to understand the people involved in our ministry. While e-mail was effective years ago, now more of our people simply delete e-mails before even opening them. However, I've found that they're willing to spend 10 to 20 seconds reading a quick social media post. So I keep my posts short, to the point, and engaging. I also try to use the different tools offered by Facebook and Twitter.

For instance, our ministry decided to have a funny picture day. Through Facebook, I created an event and invited guests. They were prompted to respond about whether they would be attending. Immediately I was able to see who would be there and answer any questions people had about the event.

I have also posted information about mission opportunities and encouraging thoughts or Scripture passages. Group members can "like" the posts, share them, and leave comments for others to see. This actually increases our reach to people outside our ministry as our members' friends see their activities on Facebook.

When using social media, I try to keep the outsider in mind—those people who read about our ministry through their friends' posts and activities. Even if they're my secondary audience, they're still my audience. I realize that church activities may seem scary to people unfamiliar with them, so I try to present our activities in a way that appeals to the broken, the hurting, and the lonely. I want them to know that our ministry has safe and authentic gatherings—even for them.

For instance, when I post pictures or comments, others have an opportunity to retweet or share the posts, which allows members and outsiders to see the latest happenings in our ministry. I have been amazed by how many people not connected with our church have retweeted or shared our posts simply because they like what



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we're doing. Our posts create awareness and inspire curiosity, and I try to keep that in mind when posting.

Stay Consistent

I update information frequently so the women in our church stay informed. Toward that end, I created a Facebook page for our ministry that showcases what we're doing. I've used the cover picture in Facebook's timeline to display upcoming events like game nights, dinner events, and mission projects. Frequent posts keep people aware of what's happening in our ministry and how they can get involved. It also reminds them to visit our page often to stay up to date. If you post only once a month, or if you post several times one week and not again for two months, people will be less apt to view your page frequently. So make a plan to update your page frequently.

Hold Yourself Accountable

It's important that I post carefully and wisely regardless of whether I post through my personal accounts or through the church's accounts. As James 3:9-10 reminds us, we cannot use our words, whether spoken or typed, to praise our Father yet bring discouragement to others. I want my posts to be uplifting and encouraging so that I praise my Father as well as encourage others. In doing so, I have earned the trust of others.

You'll be held accountable by the "real time" nature of social media. For instance, if I post something that is incorrect, offensive, or taken wrong, people's responses let me know. I can quickly delete the tweet or post and make necessary corrections. But the better idea is to think through what you're posting before you post. Even if you quickly delete your post, chances are that someone saw it.

For the purpose of accountability, it's a good idea to have a



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friend or colleague view your posts regularly. Your friend can let you know how your posts are being received and how you might be able to post in a way that is more sensitive, encouraging, or helpful.

The End Result

Because I have been intentional about my social media use, I have seen success in mobilizing our ministry. I recently had someone contact me requesting devotionals and Bibles for a local prison ministry. I posted the need on Facebook and Twitter and told leaders to share the need at their next meetings. Our church rallied and collected all the needed Bibles and devotionals. It was incredible to see the quick response.

In another instance, we used Twitter to help finish a service project of making picnic tables for the homeless in our downtown area. Not having enough electric drills, we started tweeting about their need using the hashtag #drills. Within an hour, we had several drills delivered from friends and neighbors. The side effect of tweeting was an increased awareness of what our church was doing that day.

We have an incredible opportunity to leverage social media for God's purposes. By posting about what our ministry is doing, rallying people around a cause, and sharing inspirational messages, we can truly impact the world for Christ. With that opportunity, though, comes responsibility. Don't forget to get to know your audience and post consistently and intentionally.

Peri Gilbert is the Small-Group Coordinator at The Simple Church in Bossier City, Louisiana. This article was adapted from one that first appeared on SMALLGROUPS.COM.

Reflect

- *How well do you know your audience? How can you get to know your audience better to understand how you can connect through social media?*
- *Make a plan to stay consistent with social media. When and how often will you post? What kinds of things will you post on a regular basis?*
- *The instantaneous nature of social media requires that you are very intentional about what you're posting, thinking it through ahead of time. Who can help hold you accountable?*

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Maximize your ministry through social media.

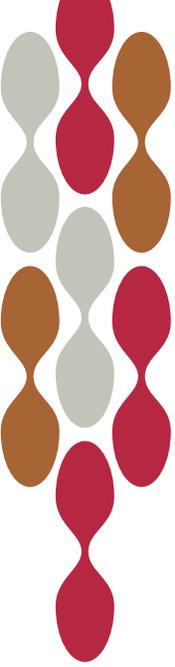
By Nicole Unice and Jenny Catron

It's 2 p.m. on a Thursday, and several people are sharing words of encouragement during our ministry's five-day challenge to raise funds for hunger relief.

A young professional asks, "Anyone feeling more satisfied and optimistic today?" A stay-at-home mom talks about her children's "beans and rice" song. Another person feels "humbled" and has a new perspective on materialism. It's the kind of interaction that every leader hopes for—a community that transcends age and stage, with the work of the gospel at the center.

And it's all happening on Twitter.

The five-day challenge was our ministry's first "full-court press" experience using Facebook, Twitter, and blogging to



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unite a diverse community throughout the week. And the impact convinced us that our ministry's relationship with social media must be taken seriously.

Many church leaders are waking up to the fact that social media is a force to be reckoned with. The numbers don't lie: there are 500 million Facebook users—and 50 percent use it every day. Twitter, a micro-blogging tool that allows users to post 140 character messages, also boasts millions of active users with thousands joining daily. With numbers like these, it's only natural to wonder how you might use social media to help your ministry.

Let's explore three significant ways to leverage social media to multiply a ministry's effectiveness. We'll weave in lessons we've learned by experimenting with blogging, texting, Facebook, and Twitter in our own ministries. We'll also glean insights from the examples of other ministry leaders navigating these new media. We've chosen three specific ways social media multiplies the effectiveness of ministry: for information, innovation, and mobilization.

Inform

Nothing is more frustrating than devoting weeks or even months of planning to a women's event only to have it fail because you didn't get the word out. We can't force people come to our events, but we can make sure they know about them. Using Facebook and Twitter is a quick way to reach people, with the added bonus of enabling them to easily pass along invites and information to family and friends.

Some women's ministries have even put out a newsletter in an electronic format and posted it on the church's Facebook page. On an average month, there are as many people accessing the church's Facebook page as there are attending church.



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When transitioning to electronic communication, more work upfront pays off in the end. For instance, when we started a blog to post announcements for our women's ministry at Hope, we let women consent to receiving blog updates via e-mail on a pen-and-paper signup sheet. A volunteer then entered all the e-mails into the blog so that the women in the group could receive announcements quickly and easily.

Innovate

A while back, I (Nicole) wrote a blog post asking readers to write a definition of idolatry. Using Facebook and Twitter, I asked for specific help from other ministry leaders. The end result was a much richer definition of modern-day idolatry than what I would have found using only my circle of friends and commentaries. Dozens of responses helped me shape an excellent talk, one that wasn't limited to my own experiences. Defining and exposing modern-day idols became a community effort. The blog post took me 30 minutes to write, but the resulting information highlights one of the strengths of social media: the ability to innovate in ministry.

Jesus was masterful at communicating spiritual truths in settings and with language that connected with listeners. Likewise, Paul strived to be fluent in the language of his culture (1 Cor. 9:22). When used wisely, social media is a powerful tool for women's ministry leaders serious about this rich legacy of contextualized communication.

Here are just a few examples of how social media can generate new ministry methods and ideas:

- Use Facebook/Twitter to ask questions or generate conversation around relevant women's topics.
- Connect with other women's ministry leaders and get quick



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access to quality resources that they share through their own tweets, blog, or Facebook.

- Use Twitter or text messages during talks to answer some (screened) questions at the end of the lesson. This gives women a chance to interact with the talk.

Mobilize

One of the greatest strengths of social media is its instantaneous impact. Sunday, May 2, 2010, is a day etched in my (Jenni) memory. I'd never seen so much water in my life, and the downpour continued. My neighborhood and several of those around it were completely surrounded by water. Since going home was not an option, I found my way to a friend's house and camped out in front of the TV, paralyzed by the continuous news footage. Soon I received word that three of my staff members' homes were submerged. One of my staff members texted me a picture of her house. All you could see was the roof—everything else was under water.

Nashville was devastated and we needed to respond. That evening, we brainstormed ways to bring the love and hope of Christ to our flooded city. We had no idea what we could do, but we knew we needed to rally Cross Point volunteers and begin to help. Sunday evening we began tweeting our plans to our followers and Facebook friends, asking them to meet Monday morning to help with flood relief.

Pulling into our Bellevue Campus on Monday, we had no idea what to expect. We had put the word out, but who would show up? People from around the world had responded to our tweets with prayers and encouragement. But would enough volunteers come out to help?



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At 10 a.m., people began to stream into the parking lot. They arrived ready to work with chainsaws, gloves, boats, and generators—all the supplies we had requested in our tweets. For nearly two weeks we sent teams out every day to do flood relief. They sorted peoples' valuables, cleared out homes, pulled out drywall and flooring, prayed with people, cried with people, served and loved people.

More than 2,200 volunteers responded to our call for help—a call for help that began with some simple Twitter messages and grew to include a fully interactive website, updates on our personal blogs, and frequent e-mail blasts.

In the weeks that followed, our social media efforts helped avert the "out of sight, out of mind" syndrome that happened when national media attention waned and the city itself got back to business as usual. There were still thousands of families who needed to know they weren't forgotten. Social media became the platform for us to keep the need alive and to rally volunteers as opportunities to serve continued to surface.

Additionally, we received tens of thousands of dollars in donations for flood relief from churches and individuals across the country that knew of the flood need only because of our social media efforts.

I'm convinced it was no accident that we had been active social media users for the last several years. I believe that God gave us influence in this area "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). The expedient and viral nature of social media allowed us to engage people for this specific moment.

The flood changed my perspective on just how powerful social media can be. I tweet and blog with more sensitivity now. I watch for needs and identify ways that I can pray for others. I look for opportunities to serve and for opportunities to encourage others to serve. I'm reminded that God will use



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whatever he wants to use to accomplish his purposes, and I pray I'll always be receptive to how I can be a part of his plan.

Leader Objections

There is little argument anymore that social media has tremendous power. From charity organizations raising money for humanitarian aid to politicians campaigning for support, social media has become a powerhouse for getting attention and getting it fast.

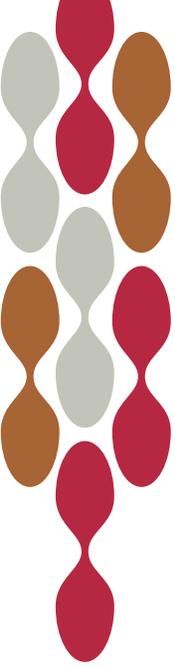
But social media doesn't come without its host of challenges, especially for leaders. The three main obstacles we've encountered from leaders in using social media involve concerns regarding privacy, time, and managing other leaders' usage.

Challenge #1: "I don't want my life on display."

Ministry leaders already live very public lives. The idea of opening up another avenue, by which every move they make is exposed, can seem overwhelming.

But in today's culture, choosing to ignore social media comes with its own risks. You're choosing to close a potentially important line of communication between yourself and those you lead. And you might be sending the message that you're not really interested in hearing from your followers. You could liken this to a leader who works in an office with an entire team but stays behind a closed door the majority of the time. You may be present, but you're not accessible and engaged.

Using social media as a leader is a delicate balancing act. You want to be transparent and available while also protecting yourself and your family from over-exposure. And remember: you are still in control of what you share. You make the choice about personal information you put on Facebook, Twitter, or a blog.



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When I (Jenni) first started blogging and tweeting, I made a choice to use these avenues to help our congregation get to know me better. Being part of a fast-growing church, I realized that people saw my face, knew that I was a leader, but really didn't have many opportunities to get to know me and learn what I'm most passionate about. My blog became a vehicle for me to share the things on my mind and interesting happenings from my everyday life.

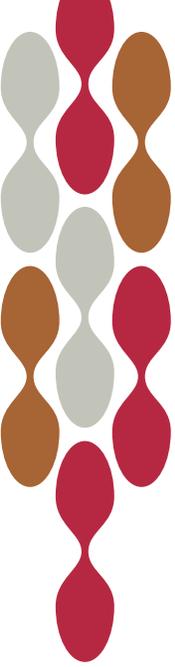
Challenge #2: "I don't have time to add another thing that I have to keep up with."

"Ah, the precious commodity of time! You never have enough of it and you're pretty sure you never will. We get it. The idea of adding another medium to your arsenal of communication tools is exhausting. There's your home, work and cell phones (and messages), work and personal e-mail. Should you really add a blog, Twitter, and Facebook to all of that?

Call us crazy, but we say, "Yes." Our world is changing rapidly, arguably faster than at any point in history. Keeping up with changing technology is simply a part of our world. And if your leadership involves influencing a younger generation, you will have to embrace these new media. Not necessarily all of them, but the ones that have the most impact for the people you feel called to reach.

Make your decision on which media to use based on the demographics, geography, and lifestyle of your community. For example, one of Crosspoint's campuses is in a smaller, more rural community. The large majority of our congregation at that campus doesn't use Twitter. However the vast majority is on Facebook. As a leader in that community, Facebook makes sense.

Time constraints are real, but often they arise because of



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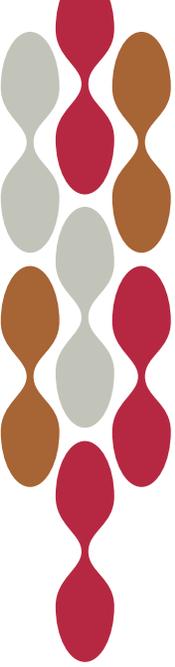
ineffectiveness. This is especially true when it comes to using social media. It may be that adopting a new mode of communicating with your followers will save you time in the long run. By trading the time I used to spend in meetings or e-mail for time spend replying to Twitter responses or direct messages, I wasn't spending more time and expending more energy, I was merely using both in more effective ways.

Challenge #3: "How do I manage a team that is using social media?"

There is no shortage of social media stories gone wrong. We put our feet in our mouths more often than we'd care to confess in the first place. With social media, the opportunity for missteps multiplies. That one misspoken word is quickly broadcast to hundreds and possibly thousands. The messages are immediate and unmediated. Instead of some minor damage control with one or two people, you now have an entire tribe of followers to whom you are accountable for what you say.

At the Catalyst conference in 2010, Bible teacher Beth Moore spoke to 11,000 young leaders, reminding them that they are "all authors." Once you enter the world of social media, every word you say is "published." But unfortunately, no one has a social media "editor" on their team. You must serve as your own filter.

There are other possible pitfalls as well. David Dwight cautions against the temptation social media provides to fabricate an attractive persona rather than seeking integrity in every aspect of our lives: "Jesus had strong words for people who manage their lives for appearances. Social media as an entity tempts us to do so," he said. Mark Driscoll, after a Facebook comment that generated truckloads of criticism, addressed his



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gaffe by deciding that there are issues that are "too big, tough and far-reaching for things like Facebook and Twitter."

While many churches and organizations will create social media guidelines for their staff, it is nearly impossible to write policy that heads off every conceivable problem that may arise. It may be the employee who shared an inappropriate picture on Facebook or a direct message that inadvertently went public. It could be an internal staff announcement that was mistakenly shared before the proper time. It could be any number of things that call for follow-up conversation. And having these conversations is the key.

We have found that some of the most honest, life-changing, relationship-deepening conversations come from social media moments gone wrong. As a leader, you can use these moments with your staff to speak into their lives and help them grow spiritually, personally, and professionally. These conversations can be times for you to teach your teams to use greater discernment and wisdom.

The best thing we've learned from leading staff in the area of social media is not to be annoyed by the perceived problems that it may create, but to be motivated by the leadership development moments that can be birthed from it.

Leadership is messy and complicated without the addition of constantly changing methods and media, but the best thing we can do as leaders is to step into the mess and help direct the use of these culturally dominant tools for propelling forward the hope of the gospel.

Fostering Spiritual Growth

One evening after a teaching on the importance of ordering our lives around God's Word, a listener created a Facebook group



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challenging members to read a chapter from Proverbs each day and post their reflections on their own blogs or through a note on Facebook.

Over the next month, I watched as people shared community and encouragement through the "Proverbs Project" Facebook group. The accountability gave them motivation to stay the course and complete the Book of Proverbs in one month. As a leader, I was able to provide encouragement as well as read their own reflections and interpretations of Scripture. The best part was that this experience was lay-created and led—with no extra burden on staff. I was learning as much as they were as I watched the passion and initiative of one person multiply into a month-long experience in spiritual growth.

Nicole Unice is a ministry leader at Hope Church in Richmond, Virginia, and Jenni Catron serves as executive pastor of Cross Point Church, a multi-site ministry in Nashville, Tennessee. This article was adapted from one that first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

Reflect

- *How might social media help improve communication in your women's ministry?*
- *Name practical ways it might encourage innovation and mobilization in your ministry.*
- *What objections do you anticipate from your members? How will you address those?*
- *How could social media contribute to the spiritual growth of the women involved in your ministry?*

Make a Facebook Group for Your Women's Ministry



These are the benefits of forming private Facebook groups for women.

By Amy Jackson

For the first time, I'm using a private Facebook group to foster connections within my small group—and it's been an extremely useful tool. If your group members have Facebook accounts, consider using this free tool that will allow you to connect in new ways throughout the week. These are the reasons I find it so valuable:

Confidential Sharing

When setting up a Facebook group, be sure to make it a "secret" group. This will ensure that only the members of the group will be able to see posts. This means they will not show up on newsfeeds or on individual members' profiles. A secret group will allow your group members to share with confidence.



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Make a Facebook Group for Your Women's Ministry

Smart Phone Ready

If you're looking for a way to instantly contact all your members at once, look no further—especially if your group members have smart phones. Group members' phones will alert them that there's a new message for them on Facebook.

Easily Add and Remove Members

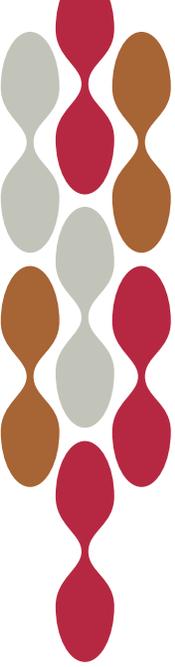
When someone new joins, it's easy to add her to the group. I was once part of an e-mail chain that constantly added and removed people. They were always sending out e-mails with the updated information so that all the members could update their e-mail address books. With Facebook groups, there's no need to do this. Simply add a new member and all messages are sent to her. In the same way, if people leave the group, you can easily remove them.

Connect Throughout the Week

Set posting permissions to allow all group members to post on the group's page. This allows all group members to like comments, post comments, and share photos and documents. Let everyone contribute to the online discussion just like in your actual meetings. Group members can share prayer requests or other needs throughout the week. On a practical note, you may want to set up some guidelines for what to share—for instance, you may want to make it clear that posts about personal businesses are not welcome.

Comment Strings

No long reply-all threads to read through on Facebook. Simply scroll through the comments posted. It's a lot cleaner and easier to look through than a reply-all e-mail. Even better—you won't "lose" comments by accidentally deleting your e-mail.



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Make a Facebook Group for Your Women's Ministry

Simply scroll down the page until you find the information you're looking for.

See Who Has Read Posts

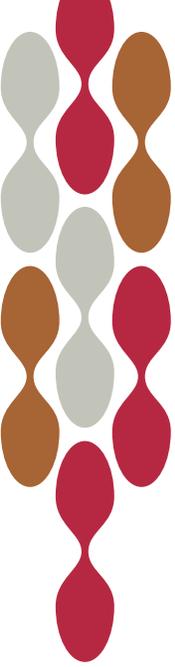
Have you ever sent out an e-mail and wondered if anyone actually read it? With Facebook groups, you'll never wonder again. The page will show you exactly who has seen your post. I once had to cancel our meeting last minute. I posted the information to our page and could check to see who had seen the post. Everyone quickly saw the message, and I could rest assured that no one would show up accidentally.

Keep the Conversation Going

I love being able to write a quick post about the chapter we'll be discussing at our next meeting. Something like "I loved her description of grace on page 45" can spark discussion before you even get together. One week I came across a YouTube video that was on the topic of our study and posted it. It came out in our discussion that week.

Post Links to Resources

I've found myself frequently saying, "Let me get back to you on that" in meetings. One of the great things about Facebook groups is they allow you to get back to people sooner. For instance, one woman asked me how to access the podcasts our church offers. The next day I posted a link to the podcasts on our group page. Or perhaps your women's ministry is putting on a special event and has a webpage with more information. You can link to the page so everyone in your group can check it out.



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Make a Facebook Group for Your Women's Ministry

Poll Feature

This is one of my favorites. Instead of talking about when to have our Christmas party in a meeting when no one had calendars to look at, I asked a poll question on our Facebook page. The poll feature allows you to ask a question, offer several possible choices, and allow group members to add their own choices. So I asked when we should meet. Within a few hours, all my group members had seen the post, checked the box for when they were available, and even left comments with other ideas.

Share Videos, Photos, and Files

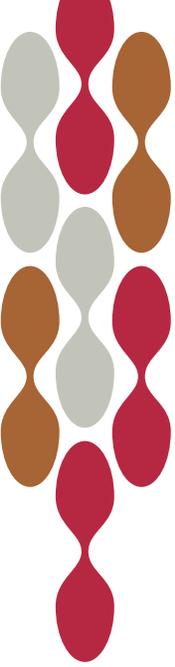
Whether it's a group picture, a video from a recent service activity, or the PDF of your next study, you can share it through your Facebook group. No need to send it over e-mail and worry about file sizes. Plus, how often do we say we'll share our photos from an event but never get around to sending them out? Now you can each upload them to the page and let other group members use them as they'd like.

Create Events

Have an event coming up: a party, service day, or prayer walk? Create an event on your page that allows members to RSVP, comment, and see all the details in one place.

Empower Connections between Group Members

Sometimes leaders can serve as a bottleneck for relationships between group members. When you're all connected through the Facebook group, members can contact one another directly and deepen relationships. In fact, the page has everyone's profile pictures across the top so group members can simply click on the face of the person they want to connect with.



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Make a Facebook Group for Your Women's Ministry

Information in One Place

If your group members are already using Facebook, their birthdays, interests, and work information are already entered. Learn more about your group members and their interests and passions. And let group members get to know one another too.

Share Ownership

Too often leaders do all the work. Facebook groups send the message that everyone has something to contribute. If one person has an idea for a service project, he or she can post about it. When someone shares a prayer request, group members can respond themselves through a comment or private message.

Amy Jackson is the Managing Editor of SMALLGROUPS.COM. This article is adapted from one that first appeared on that site.

Reflect

- *How might you incorporate Amy's ideas into the small groups of your women's ministry?*
- *If you don't have small groups as part of your women's ministry, which of her ideas would still be useful to your ministry?*
- *Which of her ideas did you like the most? Why?*

Topics to Avoid in Social Media



How to avoid the Christian "humble brag"

By Lesley Sebek Miller

I woke up before sunrise this past Mother's Day. The baby and I ate breakfast together while my husband tried to sleep off his latest chemotherapy treatment. There were no perfectly wrapped gifts, nor were there any fun plans to celebrate my first year as a mom. The only person who ate breakfast in bed was my husband, if Gatorade counts as breakfast. I was fine with this—at least until logging onto Facebook.

My newsfeed spilled forth updates and photos from excited mom friends. "Thankful for breakfast in bed!" they said. "I'm so blessed! Hubby got me an adorable necklace for Mother's Day!" Suddenly I felt sorry for myself. I'm certain there were many women—those who have lost mothers, those who have lost children—who felt the sting even more strongly.



Using Social Media in Women's Ministry

Topics to Avoid in Social Media

I am, of course, the first to blame for these feelings of inadequacy. I am a sinner, so I struggle with comparing my life to others'. The obvious cure for my tendency to compare is to turn off Facebook and turn to Jesus.

But while I acknowledge it is my responsibility to check my attitude, every Christian needs to consider that what they share and how they share can affect people in their online communities.

One way Christians might rethink our posting habits is by evaluating our words. It has become socially acceptable to use online spaces to present the good, happy, and tidy sides of our life. Sometimes we are upfront with our boasting, and other times we mask self-congratulatory sharing with a "humble brag."

Coined by Harris Wittels, author of *Humblebrag: The Art of False Modesty*, the "humble brag" is when someone brags about herself but avoids the social stigma against bragging by couching the announcement in false humility. Though making an appearance in face-to-face conversations, the humble brag is most commonly seen in online spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and blogs, all of which breed announcements about the self.

We American Christians have our own version of the humble brag. Instead of prefacing our brag with phony humility, we sometimes soften it with expressions of blessing and gratitude. We want, like everyone else, to show that our life is good, happy, and exciting, but we also don't want to seem self-important. So we append our posts with praise to God. This is not to say that all online praise is unauthentic—some is, absolutely. But I suspect that some of our expressions of praise are also motivated by a desire to display our life in only a positive light.

Guilty as charged. On a recent vacation, I uploaded a sunset photo with the caption, "Grateful for God's creation." I certainly was grateful, and our Creator deserves such praise. But one primary reason for posting the photo was to show everyone in



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my Instagram feed that I was having a great time in Hawaii. A lot of Christians in my online communities use this kind of language when sharing exciting moments in their lives, whether it's announcing a new baby, a new car, an engagement, or an exotic vacation.

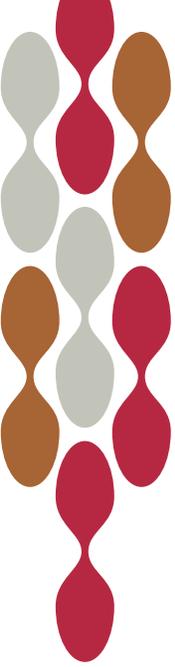
The question I ask of myself and other Christian social media users is a question of motive: Am I sharing this news/photo/announcement because I am truly grateful, or because I feel more accepted, loved, and important when I talk about it?

"So it comes to motive . . . In our humility, the Christian motive compels us to be hidden—in Christ. When we attempt to communicate like the world, be cool like the world, use the same devices to become popular, are we being extraordinary? Or are we merely rising to the world's standard, which goes no farther than self-glorification?" (*Veneer: Living Deeply in a Surface Society*, page 47)

As Christians we have a responsibility to each other to understand how our actions—including our online sharing—shape those around us.

Our responsibilities as Christian online content creators should include the following:

- Thou will question your own motives before publishing content. Ask yourself if the content you're posting is God-glorifying or self-glorifying.
- Thou will praise God privately before praising publicly. If you witness a beautiful sunset, sit in the moment before turning to your phone. Sometimes you might realize there's no one better to share it with than the Creator himself.



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- Thou will post the good and the bad, within reason. There are natural boundaries for what to share on Facebook and trying to articulate pain, grief, sadness, or simply boredom to an online audience is trickier than uploading photos from a trip to Barbados. Give thought to how your pictures and words might contribute to healthy community building.

Our responsibility as Christian consumers of online content:

- Thou will know when to not log in. When I'm going through a particularly hard time, I usually find it better to connect in person with those people who know my heart, rather than hundreds of acquaintances who don't. Sometimes it's best to not login to online networks in the first place.
- Thou will know when to hide users. Most social networks allow users to hide people from their news stream. If a particular person continually posts items that incite anger or jealousy, perhaps it would be best to not view the content in the first place. (The other person won't know you've hidden them.)
- Thou will check thy attitude. Ask God to help reveal your own heart issues. "Are you envious because I am generous?" (Matt. 20:15).

So as you begin using social media in your women's ministry, think through ways Christians can better support one another in online spaces.



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Lesley Sebek Miller, a Westmont College graduate, lives in Sacramento, California. She blogs at <http://barefooton45th.com>. This article is adapted from one that first appeared on HER.MENEUTICS.

Reflect

- *How might it be tempting to fall into the "humble brag" when you are posting things for your women's ministry?*
- *What balance is there between thankfully sharing the good things God has provided and turning postings into a way to show superiority? How can we check our motives?*
- *When you launch a Facebook aspect to your women's ministry, consider handing this article to those involved or posting it somewhere on your women's ministry Facebook page.*

A Facebook Skeptic? News Flash: You Are in Control



Facebook is too big a mission field for the church to ignore.

By Natasha S. Robinson

Okay, I get it: Facebook is not for everybody. I hear complaints all the time about privacy settings. I also frequently hear the groans from people who have never tried Facebook or get pushback from church leaders, older folks, and parents who are concerned that social media are killing the brain cells of our young people and not allowing them to connect intimately.

The *New York Times* recently ran an article highlighting Facebook's plans to expand its membership beyond its current 800 million active users. "Shunning Facebook, and Living to Tell About It" quotes Facebook resisters saying things like "I



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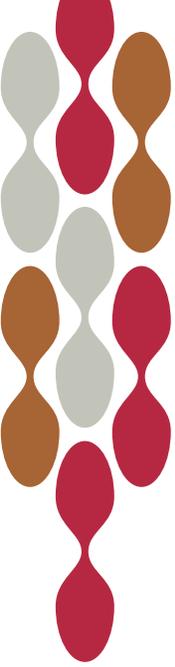
wasn't calling my friends anymore" and my personal favorite, "I don't want all of my information out there."

My response: Call your friends, and don't put all of your information out there. The article presents several of the concerns addressed in this article. At the core, however, it also reveals some "shunners" want the benefits but are paralyzed from taking the plunge to join Facebook. One resister actually said, "If I have a crush on a guy, I'll make my friends look him up for me [on Facebook]." Clearly, she understands at least one benefit of using the site.

After responsibly using Facebook for several years, I don't quite understand the resistance. (I should probably add that I do not play any of the Facebook games or participate in third-party features.) It's as if some think of Facebook as a thief that comes in to steal all of your personal information and then sell it to the highest bidder. Facebook can "see" only the information that you provide, and you can set your own privacy settings to determine what to share and with whom you share it. Remember, you are in control.

There are other challenges, of course. Some people find themselves on Facebook all the time. Others get frustrated with their friends' updates and feel compelled to respond. If you blow up on Facebook, chances are you blow up during face-to-face encounters as well. The only difference is, now all of your friends know about it. These challenges are really a matter of self-discipline. It's quite simple, I believe: share what you want, with whom you want, when you want; manage your time, and discern what you "put out there" for others to see.

Facebook is not supposed to be the heartbeat of any true relationship. Face-to-face encounters are preferred; phone calls are still appropriate; handwritten notes should not become a lost art, and e-mails still come in quite handy.



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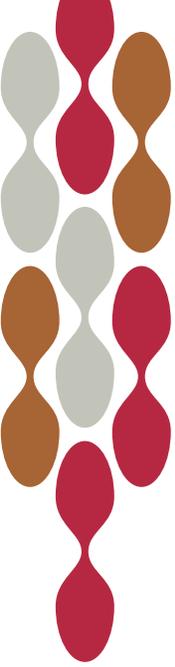
A Facebook Skeptic? News Flash: You Are in Control

Therefore, Facebook is only one of many means for people to get and stay connected. As a former military officer, I have family members and friends who live literally all over the world. There is no possible way for me to visit each of them in any given year. The only reason I joined Facebook was because my former beautician, who is also a military wife, sent me a friend request. When we last saw each other, she was five months pregnant and her family received orders to Okinawa, Japan. I wanted to see pictures of her new baby and there was no way I was flying to Japan to do it.

Additionally, from a professional standpoint, I have connected with several Christian writers, publishers, speakers, leaders of nonprofits, and advocates through Facebook. My most intimate relationships have been formed through the Synergy Women's Network and Redbud Writers Guild. Not only do we share pictures and life updates, we also explore ideas together, encourage one another, support each other's work, and pray for each other. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with any of this, and believe it or not, there are times when we actually meet face-to-face. For growing relationships in situations like these, Facebook works.

We can't throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is a lot of good, and dare I say ministry, going on in the Facebook world. Like working or leading in any other arena, Christian leaders need to understand the importance of communicating with those they are called to lead. Intentionally closing a line of communication like social media could communicate a very clear and wrong message that you are not interested.

The bottom line is: We are not a peculiar people by rejecting everything the world has to offer. We are a peculiar people when we show up where others are and are different in that environment. This is the foundation of Paul's argument when



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he states, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:22b-23). Therefore, if Facebook has 800 million active users, for the sake of the gospel, Christians need to show up there. Shine the light and share the blessings.

Natasha S. Robinson serves as Co-Director of the Women's Mentoring Ministry at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. Connect with Natasha through her blog, A Sista's Journey or Twitter @asistasjourney. This article is adapted from one that first appeared on HER.MENEUTICS.

Reflect

- *How might this article be useful for anyone in your ministry who is wary of social media?*
- *How do the benefits of using social media to "share pictures and life updates . . . explore ideas together, encourage one another, support each other's work, and pray for each other" outweigh the risks?*
- *How is this statement true and what could it mean for your women's ministry?: "We are not a peculiar people by rejecting everything the world has to offer. We are a peculiar people when we show up where others are and are different in that environment."*

Simple Guide to Safe Social Media Use



Basic safety guidelines for the most popular types of social media

by Tyler Charles

The amount of information available online continues to expand. While most online communication once took place through e-mail or instant messaging services—which were visible only to those to whom the messages were sent—now more and more content is being shared publicly, visible to all.

Facebook, Twitter, and blogs are among the most frequented sites online. Which means these sites can provide considerable benefits for churches. These social networking services do come with certain risks—for individuals, businesses, and churches. Understanding how these websites work—and how they should be used—is the key to avoiding the pitfalls of social media.



Using Social Media in Women's Ministry

Simple Guide to Safe Social Media Use

Facebook

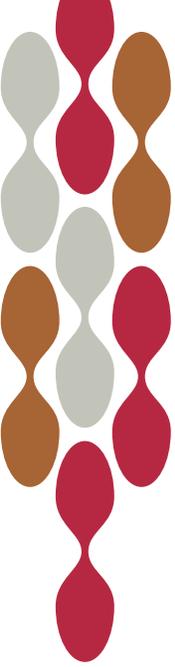
Don't provide too much information. Facebook might seem like a place to interact with friends (and it is), but Facebook also attracts deviants, predators, and those hoping to steal the identities of others. Some information is necessary, but revealing too much is dangerous.

Understand the privacy settings. Facebook's default privacy settings are not private. As a ministry, there is some information you will want to make available to all (who you are, what you believe in, where you are located, etc.), and other information you will want to keep private. Customize the privacy settings to get the right balance.

Protect your photos. Sharing photo albums is one of the features that attracts many users to Facebook. But as a ministry, you should be extremely careful what pictures you post—and who you allow to view them. If minors are pictured, do not include their names in the captions. And do not make these photo albums available to everyone. Doing so could open up your church family to potential predators.

Twitter

Be leery of shortened URLs. Because of the 140-character limit for tweets, Twitter sparked the popularity of url-shortening services like bit.ly and TinyURL which reduce the number of characters in lengthy web addresses—making it possible to include these links in tweets. The problem with these shortened urls, however, is that they're ambiguous, and you can't be certain where the link will take you when you click on it. Never click one of these links unless you know and trust the person providing it. And do not "re-tweet" someone else's link unless you have verified that it indeed directs users to the destination the tweeter claims. The last thing you want to do is



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accidentally link to scandalous content from the church's Twitter feed.

Use common sense. Those tweeting from a church Twitter account need to remember that they are representing the church, not themselves. The best piece of advice for safe use of Twitter is this: think before you tweet. A little common sense can go a long way. For example, don't tweet the location where the group is going for a retreat. If you want to tweet something about the event after the group has returned, then do that, but never broadcast the location of your members in advance of an event.

Blogs and Websites

Be careful to avoid copyright violations. On both church blogs and church websites, churches will want to be careful about violating copyright law. Make sure you have permission to reprint something.

This article was adapted from one that first published on CHURCHSAFETY.COM.

Reflect

- *How might you become more familiar with the dangers of Facebook and Twitter without letting those fears stop you from using their services?*
- *How can you alert those in your women's ministry of possible dangers?*
- *Look further into copyright laws to make sure you aren't violating them when posting things on a website.*

Additional Resources

Articles, books, and Bible studies to help you further



Articles

Using Social Media During Disaster Relief—*How one church leader became a believer in Twitter. By Jenni Catron, available on ManagingYourChurch.com*

Digital Disciple: Interview with Adam Thomas—*What does it mean to use technology well? Available on BuildingChurchLeaders.com*

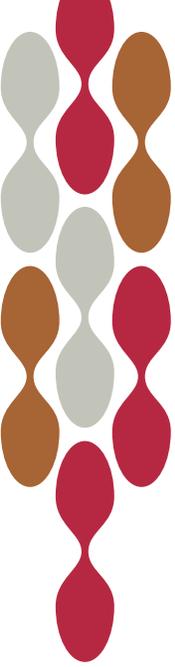
Social Media Agreements: A New Normal?—*One conference's policy shows how seriously some churches view Twitter, Facebook, and other sites. By Lindsey Learn, available on ManagingYourChurch.com*

Books

Going Social: A Practical Guide on Social Media for Church Leaders by Terrace Crawford (Beacon Hill, 2012). With corporations leveraging social media to reach new customers, why shouldn't churches use similar strategies to save souls? Revealing reasons for resisting new outreach tools, Crawford dispels their myths and offers a step-by-step guide to help you get an outreach program started and keep it going. Includes real-life examples and ideas.

Social Media Guide for Ministry by Nils Smith (Group, 2013). Social media can feel a little overwhelming to a busy ministry leader. Many of them don't know where to start. This compact guide can help! Christians will learn about the most popular social media platforms, how to utilize them, and the difference social media can make in their ministry. Topics include: Descriptions of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and how to practically use these platforms in a church setting.

Web-Empowered Ministry: Connecting with People Through Websites, Social Media, and More by Mark M. Stephenson (Abingdon, 2011). You will learn the practical steps, techniques, and ideas needed to develop an excellent and effective web ministry. You will also learn how to apply the many tools the internet has to offer including websites, smart phones, social networking, media, instant messaging, and more to extend and multiply your ministry impact. Mark's engaging style makes technology accessible as he offers firsthand advice on every aspect of building an internet ministry: from assembling a team to designing and maintaining your website to developing a presence on Facebook, Twitter, and more.



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Additional Resources

Downloadable Resources

Social Media for Small Group Ministry—This resource gives you practical tips on using social media. Learn from others' successes, consider how to use social media in a God-honoring way, and gain step-by-step instructions on basic functions of Facebook and Twitter. You'll be inspired to use social media to enhance your ministry and make it stronger. Available from **SmallGroups.com**.

Using Technology and Social Media in Your Ministry—This 23-page resource will help you develop your ministry's approach to and use of technology and social media as you consider how to more effectively reach people where they already are. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.

Leveraging Social Media for Ministry—This download features ministry leaders sharing the pros and cons of using social media for ministry. Churches are finding a multitude of creative uses for these online platforms. Available from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**.

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