

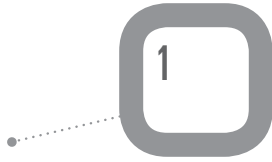
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NILS SMITH

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WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR MINISTRY

So what is social media, anyway? It is just what its name suggests: media that is social. Social media is an ongoing conversation on the Internet, with new conversations beginning every time someone makes a new post. People share content (status updates, video uploads, photos, and so on), and the social interaction begins.

When you post a video, article, church event, or any type of content on a social network, you are initiating a conversation. People can then Like, Comment, Share, or ignore your post. This interactive element completely changes the game when it comes to church communication.

The impact of technology is nothing new to the church. The ministry of the church has been transformed many times over in the past 2,000 years, due to technological advancements. Think about the printing press with the Bible or television and radio broadcasts

for church services, sermons, and worship music. These were revolutionary in their time, just as social media is today.

Social media, like these previous technological advancements, allows the messages we communicate to go farther faster. It also allows everyone to interact with those messages. In the past, people might discuss a sermon over lunch, but today it's tweeted about as it's happening. The impact of this interaction is more powerful than we can imagine. So why should you use social media?

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

We are called to share the love of Christ with all the world. Throughout history, I don't know if there has ever been a greater tool to do this than the Internet and, specifically, social media. We cannot take this opportunity lightly. While reaching people face-to-face can make a significant impact, that's simply not an option for everyone, and your reach can be very limited. What's important is that we reach out as much as possible, as often as possible, utilizing all means possible.

Take a minute to digest these statistics and points from Socialnomics.net* in 2012:

- If Facebook were a country, it would be the world's third largest and two times the size of the U.S. population.
- Over 50% of the world's population is under 30 years old.
- Social media has overtaken pornography as the number one activity on the Web.
- Facebook tops Google for weekly traffic in the U.S.
- Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, and Britney Spears have more Twitter followers than the entire populations of North Korea, Australia, Chile, Israel, Sweden and Greece combined.
- A new member joins LinkedIn every second.
- The second-largest search engine in the world is YouTube.
- Because of the speed in which social media enables communication, word of mouth now becomes world of mouth.
- We don't have a choice on whether we *do* social media; the question is how *well* we do it.
- Social media isn't a fad; it's a fundamental shift in the way we communicate.

*socialnomics.net/2012/01/04/39-social-media-statistics-to-start-2012/

Before we get started, I want to discuss two *big* misunderstandings about social media that I often hear.

Social media will make you relevant! This is wrong. Through the power of social networks, we are seeing the impact of many churches growing rapidly, while others are declining just as rapidly. Many ministry leaders have come to me asking for help using social media so their church might become relevant. The reality is that if you are not relevant in your local context, it is doubtful that you will be relevant online. The technology does not make you relevant, but it can make relevant messages more effective in reaching a greater potential audience.

Social media is free! This is also incorrect. While Facebook, Twitter, and many of these other social networks do not have a financial cost, they still come with a cost—our time. It is impossible to effectively utilize social media without a great time investment. We don't simply communicate a message; we are joining a conversation and building relationships. These relationships require an investment of time and consistency. Trust me when I tell you that it's worth it!

When it comes to ministry, doesn't it all come down to relationships anyway? Our relationship with God and our relationships with others. Social media empowers us to build new relationships, even if they do look a little different than what we're used to.