

21 Effective Ways Churches are Using Social Media ~ Where do you fit in?

By Cathy Hutchison

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Social media platforms including blogs, Twitter, YouTube and others have fundamentally changed the way we connect. While most of us use them on a personal level, advertising agencies, corporations, universities and churches are still in a trial and error phase of discovering the strategies that build momentum for organizations.

You may be curious what churches are doing with their social media that is producing results. In talking with churches around the country, *Worship Facilities Magazine* found 21 different ways social media is helping churches fulfill their mission.

1 YOUTUBE

Carterville Christian Church in Carterville, Mo., uses their YouTube channel to upload all media content that is played on Sunday morning. This not only provides the congregation a place to watch videos again, but also facilitates sending to friends or family. It also gives the staff a place to point people toward, instead of making copies via CD/DVD of the video for distribution. And while CDs/DVDs are often passed on, the digital format has the potential to travel exponentially.

2 Windsor Crossing in Chesterfield, Mo., teamed with Ecclesia in Houston and Imago Dei in Portland, Ore., to start the Advent Conspiracy—an initiative designed to inspire people to take Christmas from stressful back to its original intent as a holy season. Instead of launching a promotional campaign to try to get people involved, they created a simple video with the message and posted it on YouTube in October of 2008. The video was picked up by a few bloggers and then went worldwide. It was the fastest growing video in November and December of 2008 as people caught the vision.

3 When Southern Hills Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, uploaded their video, “Stethoscope,” it is unlikely that they expected 3.2 million views. The 2:20 minute video is simple, fun and tells a story that is easy to understand and share.

4 SOCIAL NETWORKS

Victory Worship Center in Tucson, Ariz., has an active Facebook fan page that has generated a large audience (over 700 fans). One of the keys to its success is a continual flow of fresh content. Each Sunday a dedicated person listens to the

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message and posts key scripture, quotes and discussion points live. The church posts current events and gatherings under the events tab then posts the photos. Pastor Zane Anderson's blog is connected to post the link each week via Really Simple Syndication (RSS). In addition, the Facebook fan page receives content from Victory's devotional outlet (an "opt-in" service) that goes out Monday-Friday and currently has 3,500 subscribers.

5 Northland—a Church Distributed, with a home base in Longwood, Fla., took their multi-site strategy to the digital world by developing the first-ever live church Facebook application in March of this year. Now the church can be located on a users' profile with live streaming and access to the worship experience 24/7.

6 The Life Groups (small groups) at The Bible Chapel in McMurray, Pa., use Facebook's group pages as their means for staying connected to one another. This includes sharing prayer requests, posting photos, updating progress during mission trips, and publicizing events. Because Facebook enables people to be connected to each other's "lifestreams" it creates closeness as people get to know each other in the events of daily life outside of weekly meetings.

7 While posting photos on a group page isn't unique, Prestonridge Baptist Church in Frisco, Texas, is intentional about tagging the photos. As the images show up in each member's news stream, their friends see glimpses into church life.

8 LifeChurch.tv of Edmond, Okla., runs ads on Facebook during their online services with "trigger" keywords hurting people maybe searching for during those times [e.g., pornography, divorce, addiction, etc.]. People who click on the ads have the option of continuing to a church service that's in progress.

9 Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston's leadership team is using delicio.us (a social media platform based on tagging information and sharing bookmarks) to pass information and inspirational content to members on their staff. Delicio.us allows you to share your list of bookmarks or subscribe to different tags (topics) making it easy to create and share reference lists of useful content.

10 First Baptist Church of Lewisville, Texas, began a LinkedIn group to create economic opportunities within the congregation. The business-oriented social networking site centers on resumes and company information connecting potential employers with potential employees. The group can be used to find needed services (plumbing, electrical, real estate, etc.) through members in the church and supports a networking group that meets on Mondays. The church further supports the group by featuring the link from their main website and through announcements from the pulpit.

11 At Easter, The Crossing in Costa Mesa, Calif., posted an ad on Facebook and saw a 20% jump in traffic to their website.

12 When faced with a budget crunch for printing invitations, Morning Star Church in O'Fallon, Mo., began taking advantage of the invitational nature of Facebook. The church posts using the "event" feature, which gives the opportunity to plug in graphics, details and fun descriptions of what it is all about. By encouraging their congregation to use the "share" button, they've provided an easy way for members to invite their friends.

13 BLOGS & MICRO BLOGGING

Watermark Church in Dallas has a blog called Join the Journey (wmcc.jointhejourney.com)—a daily devotional where each post shares the story of a different person in their faith community rather than pastors or other leaders. This stream of stories by everyday people is drawing an RSS subscriber base beyond the congregation at Watermark because of fresh, accessible content and a simple format that makes it easy to share.

14 The First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Koolau is using a blogging platform, Posterous, to post sermons, devotionals and other inspirational content. One of the advantages Posterous offers is the ability for a number of different people to post content in a "group blog" style by simply using e-mail. Another feature of Posterous is that by simply attaching an MP3 file and a photo to your e-mail containing the content of the post, Posterous formats the photo and adds the MP3 player without any effort other than hitting "send."

15 North Coast Church's Training Center (@ChurchTraining) is building a following on Twitter by becoming an aggregator. By retweeting content that matches their mission, they are both capturing the attention of the people they "retweet" and creating a stream of content worth following.

16 Oasis Church in Los Angeles has five services each Sunday. They let people know which services are streaming via Twitter (@OasisLA) the day of services. Taking that a step further, after the service is over, they ask where people are watching from and people tweet back. Some of what they have received has been, "Hey, I'm watching with my son and husband in Central Park." "Watching from Denmark," or "I'm on set." It creates a real-time sense of community, virtually.

17 When Pastor Matt Chandler of The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, was diagnosed with cancer, everyone wanted to know what was happening. Chandler and his staff began a steady stream of live updates via Twitter, weekly blog updates and video updates throughout each phase of the process. Not only was it an easy way for people to stay connected to the

“news” but it gave a window into the human emotions of suffering, occasional bursts of humor and the depth and beauty of faith in Jesus that spread way beyond the lives of the congregation.

18 OTHER PLATFORMS

Church of the Beloved in Seattle, Wash., is using iLike to share original music written, performed and recorded by their community. The church’s website links to iLike from the front page at belovedchurch.org. The concept is that the church shares the music as a gift because they have received God’s gift and are discovering their community’s gifts. Over 7,000 people have downloaded the “Hope for a Tree Cut Down” album in the past year.

19 Grace Chapel in Englewood, Colo., is using Ning—a free platform that lets people establish their own social networks—to create a culture of serving that is more member-driven than staff-driven. The church began the initiative by using surveymonkey.com to canvas the church to find who the early adopters would be, then engaged those people to begin to populate the site before opening to the church at large. As people have engaged, more and more are beginning to gather around common interests and service projects. It has been especially effective in facilitating connection between small groups. The [church’s] Shepherds love it because contact information is always up to date.

20 Elevation Church in Matthews, N.C., recently launched “Love Week,” encouraging service in the community. Volunteers were able to sign up for service opportunities by RSVPing via the text messaging service Jarbyco.

21 Fellowship Bible Church of Topeka, Kan., has discontinued paper event inserts and signup sheets in favor of electronic media. Fbctopeka.com features an events page complete with full details for events with online registration and payments. The site is fluid and updated daily. Social media outlets and a bulk e-newsletter drive traffic through that channel with unified branding and messaging.

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