# Social Media 101

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Introduction

Perhaps the best place to start the discussion about social media is to realize that all media is social. Whether we are using the printed word, radio, television, or the latest app, social media refers to the communication tools we use to connect with an audience. Just as the ancient church employed letters to share news, truth, and encouragement, the contemporary church has made use of the latest communication technology to share its message with others.

The landscape of communication options is vast and can feel intimidating. Which ones do you choose? How do you use them well? What are the rules of etiquette? This guide outlines helpful principles to improve your online presence as you seek to build connections for your church or ministry.

One thing to keep in mind is that you don't need to use all available tools to be effective. Just a few well-chosen tools and curated content can enhance your work. However, it doesn't have to take a massive amount of time. While it's true that putting more energy into social media will yield better results, that does not mean you have to sit in front of your screen eight hours each day. Careful planning and consistency are key.

Finally, as with learning a language, the more you use social media tools the more you will be able to pick up on the best practices, nuances, and subtleties of each one. The most important thing is to get started. So, let's begin!
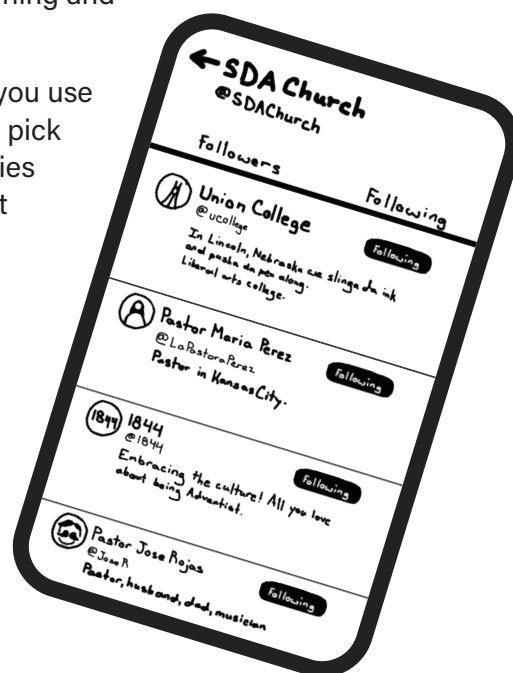
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Something Else?

The emerging media world is constantly changing and expanding, making it hard for some people to know where to start. However, the most well-established platforms are the best place to begin. As of this writing, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the biggest players and where focus should be given. Snapchat, Pinterest, and TikTok also have large followings and may be helpful to try, but for now Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are great starting points.

Facebook began in 2004 on the campus of Harvard University. When it went public it grew exponentially, created privacy issues, and became a staple for people wanting to connect socially in the 21st century. Facebook has more ads than it did when it started, and many people practice peer-to peer marketing on Facebook, using their friends as potential customers. Because it is one of the older platforms the age of users has somewhat increased. Baby Boomers joined as they became social media savvy—which led many of their children and grandchildren to look for other platforms. This has led some to speculate Facebook is "dying," but the number of users still increases by the millions each day, even if younger generations' use is declining.

Twitter began in 2006 and provided a way for people attending conferences to connect over topics using a hashtag (#) which acts as a virtual file tab. Twitter brings all content with the same hashtags together. For example, search #Adventist to see all tweets from people using that hashtag to talk about Adventists. As a platform for microblogging, Twitter initially limited users to 140 characters per tweet but expanded to 280 characters in 2018. With public figures such as politicians, celebrities, and reporters tweeting on a daily basis, Twitter provides an opportunity to directly engage with them. Twitter has become a major platform with most of its users between the ages of 18–40,

though older generations use it as well. Today many people use Twitter for social activism and real-time news since people "live tweet" events faster than news networks (which are also on Twitter) can broadcast it.

Instagram launched in 2010 as a photo sharing and microblogging platform. By allowing users to play with various filters within the app, even poor-quality photos could be changed into something a user felt proud to share. It became so popular that Facebook purchased Instagram in 2012. (You can set your Instagram account to also post on your Facebook account, thought that isn't recommended since people who follow you on multiple platforms want different content.)

How do you know which social media apps are best for your church or ministry? While each has their strengths, Facebook is the standard place to find churches.
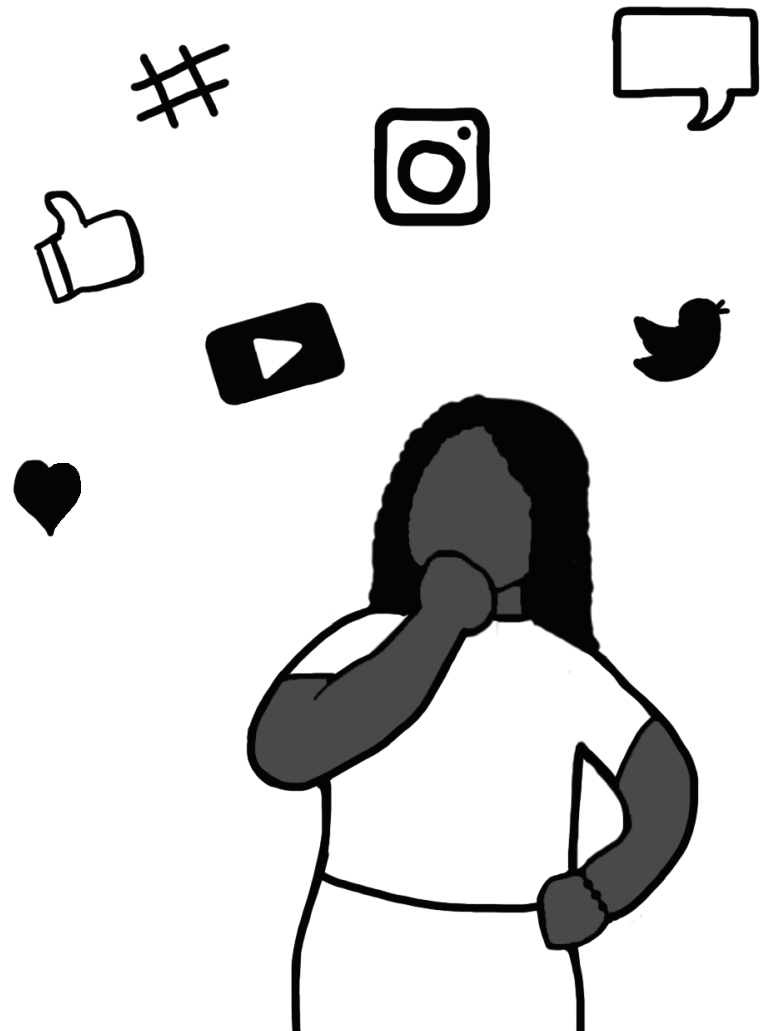
Facebook Tips

Begin by creating a public page on Facebook and titling it with your church's name. Make sure you create a page and not a group. Some churches create private groups, but this only serves members and does not have the potential to create connections in the community.

Once the page is set up, follow these helpful tips:

- Place a high-quality image of your church building, congregation at worship, or graphic with your church motto as the header. Make sure the image still looks crisp—and not blurry—when you click to enlarge it. An image with poor resolution will communicate more negatively than just about anything on your page. Invest in quality photography.

- For the profile picture, the official church logo is best. Download the Seventh-day Adventist Church logo at NADAdventist.org/brand-guidelines.

- Invite all church members (both online with the "invite" button and in person) to like the page. A page with only a few likes tells people your church isn't where people like to gather.

- As part of your visitor welcome kit or announcements encourage people to like and follow your church page as it can become a clearinghouse for church information and announcements.

- Make sure you have church service times in the "Our Story" section. In the "About" section make sure all relevant contact details (address, phone numbers, website, etc.) are visible.

- Make sure you have someone designated in the church to monitor posts as people will ask questions, ask for prayer, and give feedback on posts. You don't want any communications to go unattended.

Content for a church Facebook page should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Links to each week's bulletin. You can also upload the bulletin as a document or a picture if your website is not updated or if you find this option easier.

- Livestreams of services or devotional messages in real time using the Facebook Live option.

- Links to your church's worship service videos.

- Calendar events. You also have the option to invite people and ask them to share your event.

- Inspirational quotes. Use these sparingly as overuse can appear lazy and a cover for a lack of real content/events happening at the church.

- Video announcements (even just ones taken with a smart device).

- Special announcements and church news. You can share church news from official sources, but again, do this sparingly as a page with only shared content lets users know you have nothing of your own to say and they will just follow the accounts whose content you are sharing. Make sure the news is relevant and not just filler content. You should also make sure the sources are credible and non-partisan. Ask yourself: Does this practically affect our members?

- Church closings or cancellations.

- Humorous or light content featuring the day to day lives of members.

- Testimonies from your pastor or church members.