

Guide to: using church Facebook pages for evangelism

WHY FACEBOOK IS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR EVANGELISM

Facebook is a widely used platform, with over 73% of internet users in the UK using it in 2020¹. Facebook also has a very diverse user base, so provides a great opportunity for reaching people in your local area.

This guide is to provide tips on using this communication tool effectively for evangelism for those who already have, or help run, a church Facebook page.

Note: Facebook changes at a rapid rate and this information is only accurate at the time of writing (summer 2020).

¹www.wearesocial.com/uk/digital-2020-uk





PROFILES, PAGES AND GROUPS: WHICH SHOULD YOU USE FOR EVANGELISM?

It is easy to get confused between the three different options available to you on Facebook. In simple terms, a 'profile' is for individuals, a 'page' is a public profile for businesses, charities or churches, and a 'group' is a community-based feature where many people can communicate together.

Facebook profiles – for personal evangelism

A Facebook profile is created when you set up an account on Facebook as an individual. In the words of Facebook: "A profile is a place on Facebook where you can share information about yourself, such as your interests, photos, videos, current city and hometown." It is designed for individuals in mind – it's for one person, where you can add other people as friends, and can choose to share personal information such as gender, age, relationship status and more. Facebook accounts can be used by individuals and members of your church to share faith with their friends. If you're interested in this, please see our Guide to Using your Facebook Profile for Personal Evangelism, available on www.methodist.org.uk

Facebook pages – for churches and public evangelism

Facebook pages are a public space similar to that of a church website. In the words of Facebook: "Pages are places on Facebook where artists, public figures, businesses, brands, organizations and non-profits can connect with their fans or customers. When someone likes or follows a page on Facebook, they can start seeing updates from that page in their News Feed." Facebook pages are great for churches that want to connect with their communities as this is what Facebook pages are designed to facilitate. Facebook pages give you many additional features you don't get with a personal profile. Multiple people can be given access to the page and can be assigned 'roles' depending what they need to do. Think of your Facebook page as the front porch of your church, it is the public face of your church and can be a useful addition (or alternative) to your website. They are great for both reaching people with evangelism in your community, but also for encouraging and equipping evangelism in your congregation.

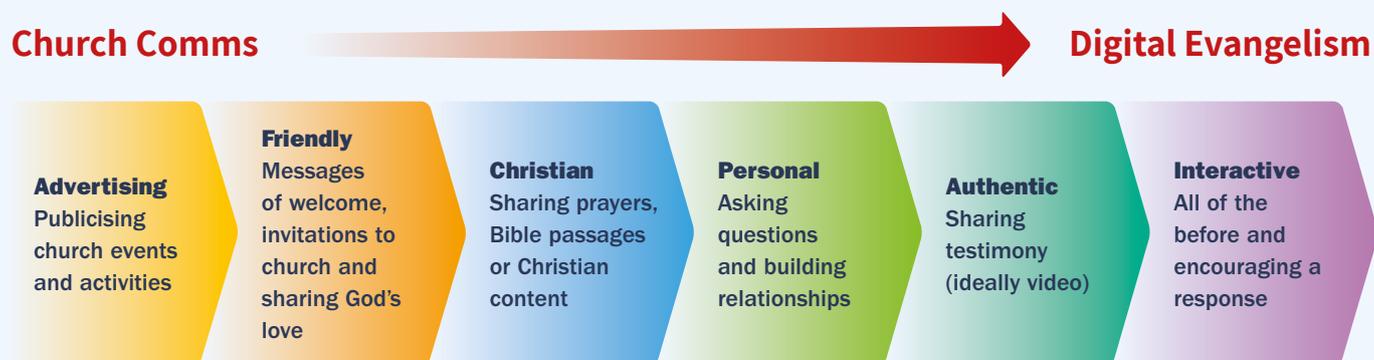
Facebook groups – for discipleship and community

In the words of Facebook: "Groups are a place to communicate about shared interests with certain people. You can create a group for anything — your family reunion, your after-work sports team, your book club — and customize the group's privacy settings depending on who you want to be able to join and see the group. When you join a group on Facebook, you start seeing content from that group in your News Feed." A Facebook group might be suitable for your church but remember they are best used for internal communication – a church group is a less effective tool for outward evangelism. They are a useful way for your congregation to communicate with each other during the week and for promoting discipleship (eg you could have a group for your church house group, Messy Church, Bible study, youth group, etc) but they can be a barrier for visitors looking to join. If a Facebook page is your front porch, then your Facebook group is the living room.

USING YOUR CHURCH FACEBOOK PAGE FOR EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

You may have many aims and purposes for your church Facebook page: as an internal communication tool to let members know the weekly notices; as a way to promote church events; or maybe to share photos of your missional activities. Whatever your church's level of engagement on Facebook, it is probably already being used purposely to engage with a specific audience (and maybe that includes those outside church), but how could you be more intentional about using your Facebook page for evangelism?

It is not clear cut, and there isn't a clear line in the sand about what content is considered 'digital evangelism'. However, the spectrum below may help your church to increase the effectiveness of your posts. All of these could be considered 'digital evangelism', but why not try to move along the scale?



These suggestions are not exclusive to each other, and you can of course post quotes, testimony and questions in a single post, but try to include more of the content to the right of the scale. So, if you usually post event invitations with a friendly message, try including a question or encourage church members to share the invitations on their own feeds with a comment about why it's important to them. What do you currently post? Filming testimony stories might feel like a challenge right now (although it can easily be achieved), but why not try to take the next step?

The titles in bold are not to give a fixed label, but to help explain the motivation behind each example and, really, we should aim for a mix of all of them. Furthermore, 'asking questions' is not inherently better than 'sharing prayers', as it depends how these tools are used and it's not always a linear scale from 'worst' to 'best'. Nevertheless, if we are aiming to be more intentional in digital evangelism, then sharing testimony online is nearly always going to be more effective than just publicising a church event.

Advertising

Be careful to avoid purely posting service information and events, as we are aiming to use Facebook for digital evangelism. Facebook is not a noticeboard for your church, it's a conversation – our aim is to post meaningful and engaging content that builds relationships.

Friendly

Do you use your Facebook page to invite people to church? Include a personal message or provide details of who they could contact if they want more information or someone to attend church with them. The real benefit of Facebook is that your church congregation can share it with their friends, which is a simple and accessible way for you reach out to new people. Don't be afraid to post the same content each week (such as inviting people to church) – just post it in different ways. Continue to post messages of hope, love and kindness throughout the week that are relevant to people's everyday lives – remember that 'church' is not just on Sundays.

Christian

There are lots of social media resources out there for churches to use online, including videos, graphics and posters. You don't have to reinvent the wheel – there are lots of easy and free ways to share Christian content. This 'category' works particularly well if you combine it with the other suggestions, such as including a question, response or using it as a basis to build community and relationships. Remember to find ways to get your content seen by those outside of the church as it's a less effective digital evangelism tool if only your church members see your prayers or Bible passages (although useful for discipleship and supporting your church).

Personal

Engage in conversation and reply to all comments and messages on your Facebook page in a timely manner. Facebook is a platform for building community, so provides lots of features to help engage with your audience. Try asking "How can we pray for you today?", run a poll, or encourage people to comment on your posts. Be transparent about who is posting on behalf of the church. Ask church members to comment on church posts to get the conversation started. Continue to engage in conversation in the comments.

Authentic

Share short real-life faith stories from your church congregation and do it in ways that feel natural and comfortable. We need to be genuine online. Stories help us better to understand the world around us, our relationships with other people, and even ourselves. Stories help enrich our knowledge of God and help others grow in faith. How can we better express our own story and hold it alongside the stories of God? Video is one of the best ways to share testimony on Facebook. Could someone in your church film a short video on their phone that you could share?

Interactive

This doesn't mean we have to invite people to church in every post we make, but are we providing a next step? If someone wants to find out more, or get in touch, is there an easy way to do this? Are we actively encouraging people to take the next step? It might be as simple as asking people to like our Facebook page so they can stay in touch, encouraging people to leave a comment with their prayers, or getting congregation members to share the post with their friends. It may be directing people to sign up to your Alpha course, to a webpage where they can find out more about the Christian faith, or to someone they can get in touch with directly. Provide a way to be interactive online with your content and your church; promote a call to action.

HOW TO CONVEY OUR MESSAGE?

As well as thinking about 'what' message we communicate online, it's important to consider 'how' we communicate our message. Use the following scale to try and improve the effectiveness of what you post on your church Facebook page.



These are also not exclusive to each other, and you can of course post text, links and video in a single post, but try to include more of the content types to the right of the scale. What do you currently post on your church Facebook page? Why not try to take the next step?

What is success?

Even if very few people outside of your church see your posts on your church Facebook page, remember that you never know what impact you may be having. As well as reaching people outside of your church with your message, through posting this type of content, you are also encouraging, equipping and giving individuals in your church permission to share and post similar content themselves. It will help to give people confidence in sharing their faith and make it as easy as possible to do this online.

Don't measure 'success' in digital evangelism by the number of likes or people following your page (although these can be good indicators to track) but remember that you could be planting the seed that will eventually flower. There is no real measure of 'success' with digital evangelism, and we do not necessarily seek to just bring more people to our physical church on a Sunday. Rather we hope to demonstrate a set of practices that enable us and others to enter the fullness of God's kingdom.