



## Social Media for Missions: An Introductory Guide

Version 1.0 (September, 2017)

Mobile Ministry Forum ([www.mobmin.org](http://www.mobmin.org))

---



[Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

You are free to:

- **Share** – copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format
- **Adapt** – remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially
- The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms (see below)

Under the following terms:

- **Attribution** – You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in a way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use
- **ShareAlike** – If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.
- **No additional restrictions** – You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

# General Social Media How-Tos

---

Things to help you on any social media platform, from starting out to setting up your account and doing content and engagement well.

*Social media has helped make the world flatter and reduces the degrees of separation, leading to the situation where many of us can interact with people who, but for this platform, we may never have had the privilege to meet or speak with. That is the opportunity social media brings.*

Nana Awere Damoah

*Act wisely toward outsiders, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Col. 4:5-6



## Introduction

While there are many social media platforms to choose among, our recommendations in this chapter deal with commonalities in best practices across most platforms.

### 1. Determine Boundaries

Human relationships are precious, whether face-to-face or virtual ones that take place on social media platforms. They require time, prayer, and personal investment. While we applaud your interest in pursuing social media as a ministry platform, we want to impress upon you that the creation and building of relationships, something which ministry in general and social media in specific focus upon in a significant way, is both

a magnificent opportunity as well as a heavy responsibility that should not be taken lightly. C.S. Lewis, with his probing eloquence, stated:

*“It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest, most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”*

(C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)

Are you or your team willing to invest yourselves personally in any relationships that develop or ensure that others will? Will you regularly bring contacts before the throne, pleading for God’s mercy upon them? If you purpose to do both of these, continue on. But if you aren’t so sure you are willing or able to do them, seek the Lord’s face to see whether He really wants you to move down this path.

In that same vein, human relationships in a fallen world require much care and caution. We read far too often of pastors leaving the ministry after developing inappropriate relationships with church members they were counseling. Similarly, how many times have we heard of a husband leaving his wife after reconnecting with an old flame on Facebook? Our plea to you is that you not enter into any ministry, especially social media ministry, without both significant prayer backing as well as accountability from peers and spiritual leaders. No one is beyond temptation, and the potential snares to be found in social media are beyond counting. Our recommendation to any individuals pursuing social media ministry is that they, in conjunction with a spiritual and/or ministry leader, create a covenant stating the boundaries they will not cross as they launch into this ministry. Areas to be addressed include:

1. Relationships with members of the opposite sex
2. Relationships with minors
3. Things they will not set before their eyes and that they will share with their accountability partner/leader if they view them, whether purposefully or inadvertently
4. Steps to be taken should they fail to keep any of the standards addressed

For accountability to work, this covenant needs to be reviewed regularly, and ministry workers need to be asked frequently if they have broken any of the agreed to commitments.

Finally, many of us can think of times when we thoughtlessly pulled up our social media page on a whim just to see the latest/greatest and found ourselves, an hour or more later, looking up in bewildered amazement, wondering where the time had flown. While social media provides many opportunities for ministry, it also provides many opportunities to escape our reality and responsibilities. If you already find self-discipline in other areas somewhat of a challenge, social media ministry may not be the best outreach avenue for you to pursue. This is another area where some form of accountability can help ensure that the hours spent on social media are being invested in outreach rather than entertainment or the fulfillment of idle curiosity.

All this to say, do not lightly consider pursuing social media ministry.

## **2. Choose a Social Media Platform**

While it is possible to set up accounts on most every social media platform out there it is advisable to, instead, start with one social media platform and work on developing your skills and methods there before branching out to other platforms. The first and most obvious criteria for determining which platform/s you should set up shop on is which platform/s are being used by members of your target audience? Spending time with people and finding what they are using is the best approach to seeing which platforms are most used. Recognize that different platforms may be preferred by various groups within one society- whether by generation, occupation, etc. You can also check out the links in Appendix A of the [Digital Ministry Atlas](#) for country-wide insights into social media usage. Second, you should think through the types of interactions you want to have via social media. Each channel has particular strengths and weaknesses. If you're trying to create awareness then Instagram might be a good channel. If you're

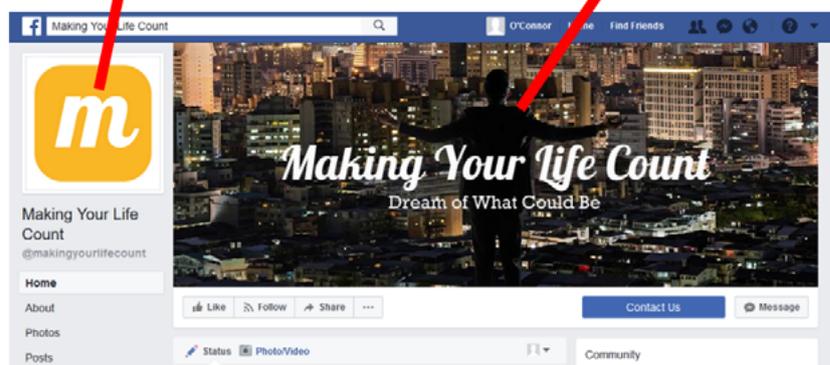
trying to develop group discussions around deeper topics, perhaps Facebook with its Facebook Groups possibilities would be a better platform to use. If you mostly want to listen in on what thought leaders are talking about you might want to try Twitter. The following chapters in this guide will give you more insights to various platforms strengths. Third, recognize your own strengths and limitations and the amount of time and effort you can realistically put into social media. Keeping up with postings and creating new content can be very time consuming. Instagram requires more proficiency and effort in creating high quality images than Facebook while YouTube users' appetite for new video content is insatiable.

### 3. Set Up

Once you have figured out the social media platform/s you're going to focus on, it's time to personalize your account. As you approach this you need to think about the "you" that others will discover when they first come across you/your ministry's profile or account. Realize that, as people come across your social media account for the first time they are, within the space of a few short seconds, going to ask questions like "Who is this?" "Is this somebody who seems trustworthy/credible?" "Is this somebody who seems relatable and relevant?" You can increase the chance they will react positively by the way you handle the following elements when setting up your account.

**Profile Photo**

**Background Image**



#### Profile Photo

The first thing most people will notice is your profile photo (sometimes called an avatar), the picture you use to show who you are. Leaving a gray silhouette or whatever the stock placeholder is as your profile photo definitely increases the chances of someone passing you by without a glance. Here are some recommendations for a good profile photo:

1. Choose an image that leaves an impression of you as likeable and trustworthy (smiles usually help with the former but not in all cultures).

2. The image you upload should be a reasonably large size (600x600 pixels or so) in order for those who click on it to be able to see it at a relatively viewable size rather than just the thumbnail size it is typically displayed at.
3. Have your face fill the majority of the image, as it will usually only be seen as a thumbnail-size image.
4. Have your face well-lit (while not blown out into a ghostly white image by too much light).
5. You can use an image other than your face. One Arab-world outreach uses a cartoon image of an Arabic person who appears good-natured and kind. This protects the anonymity of outreach workers and allows for different ministry staff to respond to social media contacts.
6. Alternatively, many companies and outreaches simply use their logo for the profile photo.

One other item to note: if you are setting up accounts on various social media using the same name, it is advisable to use the same profile photo/avatar across all accounts. If you are setting up the account to represent a ministry, you will need to use already established branding guidelines (the name to be used, a particular logo/avatar that is always used, a color palette, fonts, etc.) or, if none exist, develop them to keep consistency across social media platforms.

## Background Image

After your avatar, the second thing most people coming across your account will notice is the image that fills the background of your page. This image is called the “cover photo” on Facebook and LinkedIn and the “header” in Twitter. According to Guy Kawasaki, its purpose is to “tell a story and communicate information about what’s important to you” (*The Art of Social Media*, p 8). The cover photo can be used as a kind of “billboard” you can switch out occasionally to share the things you are currently focusing on as a ministry. Kawasaki would warn you to make sure you insert an image rather than leave the stock background in. We would warn you to make sure any image you use doesn’t distract from the content you are posting and doesn’t contradict the image you want people to have of you or your ministry. Types of images you could use include things you or your target audience have a passion for, something you are promoting, or scenes your target audience would find beautiful. The latter include local cityscapes, nature, folk art or events, etc.

## Profile

The final, and perhaps most important, part of your social media identity is the profile you fill out describing who/what you are. Be short and sweet here, trying to be relatable to members of your audience (such as being a mother, student, resident of the same city, etc.) while possibly sharing something of what makes you tick/what you are passionate about too.

## 4. Increase Reach & Engagement

Reach, for better or for worse, is what most people think about as their eyes go wide while contemplating the potential of social media ministry. It's the huge number of people who are a potential audience on the particular social media platform. It's the idea of the viral post or video that is viewed by thousands and hundreds of thousands that sends chills down the spine of marketers and missions executives alike. In the old gospel song "Deep and Wide," it's the wide we're talking about when we use the word "reach." How many followers do we have, how many people are seeing our postings, this is reach. Reach can provide exciting statistics to share with supporters. But our hope is that you're interested in social media ministry for much more than reach.

Engagement, on the other hand, is the deep part of "Deep and Wide." How much interaction are we having with our audience? Do we have likes, comments, shares, retweets, replies, and mentions in response to our postings. Reach and engagement can be measured and shared, and give us a sense of the effect of our efforts. But even engagement is only a waymarker on the path toward what we trust is your ultimate purpose: seeing lives transformed and people growing into faith, obedience to, and worship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and communities being transformed by the Spirit of God (for more on ensuring engagement leads to the achievement of ministry objectives check out the "Tracking and Follow Up" section below as well as the video [Why Rahmad Comes to Faith and Abdul Does Not](#)).

That said, communications and social media experts recognize that several variables can have a significant impact on the reach and/or engagement of our social media efforts and postings. I'd like to share some of them here, as they apply pretty much universally across social media platforms.

## Being Social

Conversations involve more than one person; there is a big difference between dialogue and a monologue. Social media is called that because it is meant to be

about interaction. Our efforts on social media must involve a lot more than simply broadcasting our message. Tune into the lives and feeds of others you are connecting with. Reply and comment on their updates, and repost their content. You may find that your interest in others leads to a growth in their interest in you and your message. One rule of thumb (The Pareto Principle) would have you strive for an 80/20 ratio of four interaction/community-building communications for every one ministry content/call-to-action/invitation/promotional message that your outreach puts forward. (This is explained more fully in the book [Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook](#), which has a wealth of social media insights interspersed, unfortunately, with far too much foul language).

## Storytelling

Everyone likes a good story, and it's likely that the story shared in a sermon is going to be better remembered the following Wednesday than the three points the pastor was trying to make. Whenever possible, share things in story form. We and your audience thank you for that in advance!

## Being Visual

Studies show that social media posts that include images have 180 percent more engagement than posts that don't. Likewise, memory recall rates for text-only sources is only 10 percent, while sources that combine text and visuals have a 63 percent recall rate. So if you want your postings to be noticed and engaged with, and if you want people to remember what you are posting, include visual images! Similarly, video engagement rates are way higher than text-only posting rates, so you should definitely consider the use of videos in your postings too. Note that some social media channels autoplay videos without audio unless the viewer clicks to unmute the video. In such cases you should plan on your video being seen without audio/narration, and add text overlays that share the message you wish to convey. (See [A Straightforward Guide to Text-Overlay on Social Videos](#) for some pointers and examples).

## Adding Value

While we know that helping someone come to faith and grow in the depth of their walk with Jesus is supremely valuable, we want to show our audience that we're also interested in their day-to-day needs and concerns. If you haven't already created a persona and worked through what your target members' interests and concerns are, take a break, go back to the previous chapter, and follow the advice in the "Who" section. Posting things that benefit our audience members in the areas they care about will

generate greater reach and engagement. Look for and post things that will bring a smile to your audience's face, make their life a little easier, or give them information they are looking for. Often you can simply repost others' content that fit these criteria. Your audience will appreciate what you've shared and will come back for more, including deeper posts you intersperse among the others.

## Using Hashtags & Keywords

One of the ways you can increase the likelihood of a post being noticed is by using a hashtag. Hashtags are keywords immediately preceded by the # symbol. It's easy to search hashtags on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. See what your target audience members are posting and the hashtags they are using. Then use what you learn to guide the kind of posts you produce and the hashtags you tag them with to potentially develop a greater following. A way to identify trending hashtags in a certain geographic area is described in the article [Locate Regional Trending Topics on Twitter](#). Posting content along with the associated hashtag increases the chances your audience find your posts, engage with you, and follow you.

## Being Active

You're much more likely to have people checking back in with your social media channel if you post regularly. This may involve locating others' content/postings that you can repost or, alternatively, creating a content calendar and producing a number of content pieces ahead of time, which can then be scheduled for later posting. One piece of advice is to think through the local "calendar" of important events, remembrances, celebrations and holidays, and consider timely imagery/messages you can prepare to share on those occasions.

## Being Brief

Time is valuable, and it is given somewhat grudgingly. Respect your audience's time by not being long-winded. [CHURCHM.AG](#) has an excellent post sharing the optimal length in characters, words or minutes for almost any type of social media posting, and we highly recommend checking out [The Optimal Length for Social Media Updates \[Infographic\]](#).

## Making Sure it Works on a Mobile Screen

In June of 2014 Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg declared, "We're a mobile company now." Not an internet company, not a media company, but a mobile company.

Why would he say such a thing? Because Mark recognized that more and more of the world's population is doing media first—and often only—on mobile phones. If you want your social media efforts to have an impact in the parts of the world where you are most likely to interact with the unreached—Africa, Asia, and the Middle East—you had better make sure your media and postings work well on mobile phone screens. That is the device that will mediate the connection you have with your audience in such places.

## Friending & Following Strategically

While it's great to have any and all friends and followers, in some ways you will find that friending and following certain people is key to opening the doors to a greater segment of your intended audience. Intimately knowing your Persona/s as mentioned in the "Who" section of Chapter 2: Developing Your Strategy helps here. Sleuth around both online and off, and find out who are the thought leaders, social leaders, "gatekeepers," artists, and other important members of your intended audience and attempt to friend or follow them. As they and their friends/followers start to notice you, you will be drawn further into the social web of the community you want to reach as they reach out to friend and follow you in return.

## 5. Track and Follow-Up

While many companies have a presence on social media and track the engagement and reach of their efforts, far fewer have actually figured out how to track the Return on Investment (ROI) for the money and time they are investing. What effects, if any, are their social media efforts having on their sales and profit margin? Similarly, while we sincerely hope most ministries aren't looking to see how much their social media presence is adding to their profit margin, we should be considering outcomes beyond reach and engagement. Outcomes we are looking for include people coming to faith, taking steps to deepen obedience to and worship of the Lord, and communities being transformed by the gospel.

Some amount of tracking and contact management are required to both create and measure these outcomes. Seriously consider tracking each individual that engages with your social media efforts in any way. As you do this, you want to potentially "score" their level of interest/place in the funnel (discussed in chapter 2) and determine whether you need to take follow-on actions/interactions. (See more on this at the [Media2Movements](#) website). This kind of tracking can be done through something as simple as an Excel spreadsheet or as complex (and expensive) as a Salesforce account. A helpful discussion of needs and possibilities for tracking systems like this (often called Customer Relations

Management, or CRM, solutions) can be found in this [CRM Meet and Greet Notes and Recording](#). As people move forward, you can make note of their progress and have good evidence as to the effectiveness of your efforts.

## 6. Analyze, Experiment, Adjust

The phrase “Once you stop learning, you start dying” is attributed to Albert Einstein. Indeed, ongoing learning, experimentation, and adjustment are hallmarks of a healthy social media outreach. Even if you feel like you are hitting the mark with your efforts today, the social media platform you rely on may change its system tomorrow. You need to be ready to adjust to accommodate that shift.

Many social media platforms give you means to assess your followers and their reception of your posts. Facebook analytics can give you a lot of detail on your followers. Twitter can tell you how many views individual Tweets had, and [Twitter’s advanced search](#) function can give you even further detail. With these data points, it is possible to assess when it is best to post, how often it is best to post, attributes of posts that are correlated with more or less engagement (length, subject matter, use of certain hashtags, images), etc.

While social media platforms provide some measure of free, built-in analytics, a large, usually fee-based industry has blossomed in recent years that can dig even deeper. It can provide greater and more actionable details about your followers and the relative success of your efforts. Providers of such services (listed alphabetically) include Argyle Social, Commun.it, Google Alerts, Hootsuite, LikeAlyzer, PostPlanner, SocialBro, Social Mention, TailWind (Pinterest), TweetDeck, and Tweriod.



## Summary

In this chapter we have presented requirements for making the jump into social media. We’ve also made recommendations for accountability and covenanting for those who believe the Lord is calling them into such ministry. Additionally we’ve reviewed the concepts of reach and engagement, and covered a number of cross-platform recommendations that can help your social media efforts produce a greater amount of engagement and/or a wider reach. We’ve also started the conversation about using tracking/CRM tools to measure outcomes as well as assist you in moving your

contacts through the funnel you'd like them to travel. Finally, we've taken a look at the importance of analysis, experimentation and adjustment in social media efforts to increase its impact among our target audience.



## Power Tips

1. Pray and ensure that the Lord is in you entering social media ministry. Set up accountability structures so that you have others standing with you as you enter an arena where temptations are rampant.
2. Set your social media pages up so that, within a very few seconds, people are attracted to the images you have set up for your profile and background and, further inspired by your profile description, check you out even further and friend or follow you.
3. Be social- make sure you comment on or repost others postings, respond to comments, etc.
4. Use plenty of images and video. The percent of people who actually view images and video postings is much higher than those who view text-only postings. Recall of details of visual postings versus text-only postings is much higher too.
5. Be regular/consistent. People are more likely to come back and check for postings if you are putting out new ones regularly.
6. Match your activity and interactions with your strategic goals. Make sure the majority of those you are reaching and engaging with are from your target audience- change your tactics if they aren't.
7. Track your interactions with those who engage with you and purposefully act to help them move them along the funnel towards high-level discipleship to Jesus Christ.



## Going Further

Cru's look at [9 Tips for Making Your Social Media Content Awesome](#) and [Social Media is Weird: A How-To Guide on Using Social Media for Ministry \(64 pg\)](#)

The US Agency for International Development's (USAID) [Social Media Guide for CSOS](#) (84 pg)

[How to Develop A Winning Social Media Content Strategy](#)

[The 21 Social Media Conversations You're Going to Face: How to Master Them All](#)

[How to Use Built-In Social Media Analytics to Uncover Hidden Insights](#)

[6 Fundamental Tools for Social Media Success](#)