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# Social Media Management for Non-Profits and Churches

Paige K. Purtz 6896893

*The University of Akron*, [pkp8@zips.uakron.edu](mailto:pkp8@zips.uakron.edu)

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Social Media Management for Churches and Non-profit Organizations

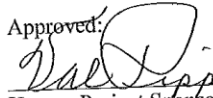
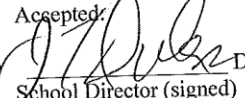
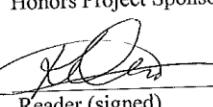
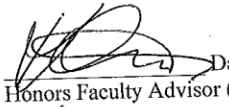
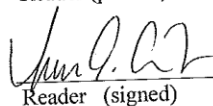
Paige Purtz

School of Communication

**Honors Research Project**

Submitted to

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Approved:	Accepted:
 Date <u>5/3/16</u>	 Date <u>5-4-16</u>
Honors Project Sponsor (signed)	School Director (signed)
<u>VAL PIPPS</u>	<u>John Thomas Dukes</u>
Honors Project Sponsor (printed)	School Director (printed)
 Date <u>5/5/16</u>	 Date <u>5/5/2016</u>
Reader (signed)	Honors Faculty Advisor (signed)
<u>Kathleen D. Clark</u>	<u>Kathleen D. Clark</u>
Reader (printed)	Honors Faculty Advisor (printed)
 Date <u>4/28/16</u>	_____ Date _____
Reader (signed)	Dean, Honors College
<u>JUAN E. CONTRERAS</u>	
Reader (printed)	

## **Abstract**

This project was created as a result of a need to for social media guidance and best practices for churches and nonprofits. Research was conducted on current social media trends, statistics, and strategy. Five medium-to-large nondenominational churches made their analytics available. Data was taken from their analytics to discover what kinds of posts received the most engagement. The result of the research is a reader-friendly, best practices social media guide for churches.

## **Introduction**

I am currently employed as the social media and web intern for The Chapel, a non-denominational church in Akron. I started this position in January of 2015.

Throughout my internship, I have been tasked with managing social media profiles, implementing strategy, and assisting smaller ministries with their social media management. I quickly realized that volunteers with no training were being asked to manage social media accounts. I spent the summer of 2015 attempting to figure the best way to teach the volunteers everything they need to know to do their jobs well.

In March of 2015, I went to a social media conference called YouToo at Kent State University. Mark W. Smith, the man behind social media for the Washington Post, spoke. He mentioned that he was having problems with educating employees at The Washington Post about social media as well. He said that he has learned that it is more efficient and effective to do one-on-one social media training with employees. After the conference, I realized I needed to make something to assist social media managers. So, for my honors project, I plan on making a guide for future social media managers.

This guide can be used by any non-profit organization, but it will focus on the church. The content of my project will include social media strategy best practices and suggestions based on research from real churches.

## **Literature Review**

The online Merriam-Webster dictionary defines social media as forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas,

personal messages, and other content (as videos). Social Media's popularity and usage has grown faster than any other kind of social media, according to Nielsen.

Marketing and communication professionals also have their own definitions of social media. Gini Dietrich, of Arment Dietrich, Inc., defines social media as,

"...a shift in how we get our information. It used to be that we would wait for the paperboy to throw our news on the doorstep (or into the flowers) and we'd read the paper, front to back, with our morning coffee before going to work. Now we get information, 24/7 and on the fly, from anywhere. In the more traditional senses, online, on our phones, and through the social platforms. Social media allows us to network, to find people with like interests, and to meet people who can become friends or customers. It flattens out the world and gives us access to people we never would have been able to meet otherwise" (Cohen, 2011)

Sam Decker from Mass Relevance defines social media as, "digital content and interaction that is created by and between people" (Cohen, 2011)

Eighty-seven percent of adults are using the Internet and 68 percent use smart phones or tablets. Furthermore, in 2014, 67 percent of Americans were using social media in some way. Facebook is continually the most popular platform. When it comes to how often they are using social media, 28 percent of Americans check their accounts several times a day (Adweek, 2014)

According to recent statistics, Facebook has the greatest number of active monthly users. With more than 1.4 billion people using the platform, Facebook has more users than any other network (Simply Measured, 2015).

The facts do not make it difficult to argue that social media is no longer just a hobby. It's a way that people are regularly communicating. People use it to connect with people they previously had relationships with and they sometimes use it to

create new relationships. It is called social media for a reason - users communicate on it in a social way.

One of the first steps of social media success is listening to what your audience is talking about and making your organization's social media a two-way conversation. Social media listening is "is the process of identifying and assessing what is being said about a company, individual, product or brand on the Internet" (TechTarget, 2016).

Much like interpersonal conversations, it is easier to jump in and know what to say when you stop and listen first. Because the goal of social media management is followers engaging in conversation, good listening is a way to strengthen your relationship with them. According to the book *Likable Social Media*, listening helps an organization better understand how consumers relate with its products, discover opportunities, understand what aspects are successful or not, understand what customers think are important, and strategically test new ideas and receive feedback (Kerpen, 2015).

While a church's audience is definitely church members and staff, social media creates an opportunity for churches to reach non-members. According to Ed Stetzer for *Christianity Today*, "[Social media] is a tool for interaction and connection, not merely a megaphone to announce the next church program and party. Social media opens doors and opportunities to engage with people who rarely, if ever, step foot in a church building" (Stetzer, 2014).

Brainstorming and creating content for the posts is a crucial and important part of the process. This process becomes a lot less confusing when you begin

thinking like a consumer. Consumers of social media are looking for posts that are useful to them in some way. Because people are bombarded with so many advertisements and messages every day, they will engage in the content on social media that is useful and has value to them. It is easier to identify what your consumer values by taking time to identify your target audience.

Developing a social media strategy can be an overwhelming task. When attempting to figure out where to start, social media managers can begin by listing their organization's goals and challenges. The social manager can then research and develop strategies to help achieve each goal (Sprout Social, 2015).

With all of the types of content on social media, deciding what content is best to post is another overwhelming task. I had a teacher (Eric Barnett) who taught me that there are three types of social media posts that are the most popular on social media and that create the most engagement: inspirational posts, informational posts, and transparent posts (a behind-the-scenes look into your organization). Using these three categories can be a useful guide as to what to post on social media.

Inspirational posts are an important part of content marketing. A key aspect in creating social content is creating something that people will want to share. People won't necessarily share content about church events and calendars, but they will share inspirational posts that have meaning to them. They will also share and engage in content that helps them in some way or inspires them (Reach, 2015). While brainstorming inspirational content, think of stories you can tell through social media that will impact the lives of your audience. For a church, inspirational

posts can be scripture, inspiring quotes from leaders, and encouraging stories from the congregation.

Informational posts are a great way to answer questions before are asked. It would not be a difficult task for a churches' social media manager to find out what questions church employees get asked time and time again. These kinds of questions could also be found on a church's FAQ page on their website (Howe, 2015). Posts promoting and sharing information about events also fall into this category.

Transparent posts are a way to bring the aspect of community and togetherness that occurs in a church family to social media. This is also a popular category. These kinds of posts could be anything from sharing a sermon video, a blog post from a pastor, a story about a group of volunteers, stories from a trip or retreat, or getting a behind the scenes look at the planning of an event. Transparent posts keep your followers in the loop about what is going on at your church.

Good social media content is consistent. An organization can only be posting valuable content, but if the members aren't posting consistently, they aren't going to create a social media following (Rampton, 2014). Social media management tools (Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Google Analytics) help managers maintain consistency. The program's scheduling tools help you keep track of how often and when you post.

Analyzing your audience helps you figure out what times of day you should post (Rampton, 2014) For example, high school students typically check their social accounts before and after school and working individuals will get online first thing



every morning, during their lunch break, and after work. Statistically, the most engagement is received on Facebook if content is posted towards the end of the week, in the early afternoon. Social media managers should still consistently post content, but important message will be more successful on Thursday or Friday (Reach, 2015).

More engagement should be one of the social media manager's top goals. This is one of main reasons why social media marketing is different than traditional advertising. "It's important to know that your social media efforts won't be successful if you use your profiles like traditional advertising. Instead, social media works when you create engagement through conversations and sharing" (Reach, 2015).

Before social media, website links used to be the best way to increase your consumer following. Gaining Facebook likes now has much more value than driving people to your website through links. A social media manager can lead people to liking his/her page by communicating the value of the posts to the Facebook user. Getting as many likes as possible is important for smaller organizations and businesses because it generates free word of mouth marketing. Social media managers can accomplish this by telling people to like their Facebook page often and consistently (Kerpen, 2015).

By using social media to create conversation between consumer/consumer and consumer/organization, engagement rate can greatly increase. According to Kerpen in *Likeable Social Media*, "To be engaged means to be genuinely interested in what your customers have to say. You have to want, even crave, feedback of all kinds

because you know it gives you important data to build a better organization” (Kerpen, 2015 pg, 1110). In order for social media efforts to be successful, the manager must truly believe that his/her work will create beneficial relationships with the public. Just like a couple commits to one another in engagement to be married, a company must be committed to engaging in relationships with its customers on social media (Kerpen, 2015). Any one organization can “look” like they are engaged, but authenticity is crucial in creating true relationships with your audience.

Just like real interpersonal relationships, it is best to step into conflict with your followers instead of just ignoring it. While it is easy to respond to positive praises, it is also important to respond to even the negative comments on an organization’s social account. Many organizations have lost favor by ignoring or deleting negative feedback (Sprout Social, 2015).

When a Facebook page becomes a place where followers feel comfortable asking and answering questions, a sense of community is created. Followers will notice your commitment to answering your questions. Engagement is even more important for non-profits. "Social media is tailor-made for such organizations, and the success of a nonprofit in fulfilling its mission, or a government organization in launching an initiative, is entirely dependent on an engaged constituent base” (Kerpen, 2015 pg. 1187).

After a social media manager implements strategies, it is important for him/her to then measure success. Many social media management sites offer tools (Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Google Analytics) offer these services. Facebook analytics

also gives an in depth look at an organization's social activity. Looking back and seeing what has created engagement and what hasn't, helps a manager have a clear understanding of what they should continue posting (Sprout Social, 2015).

## **Method**

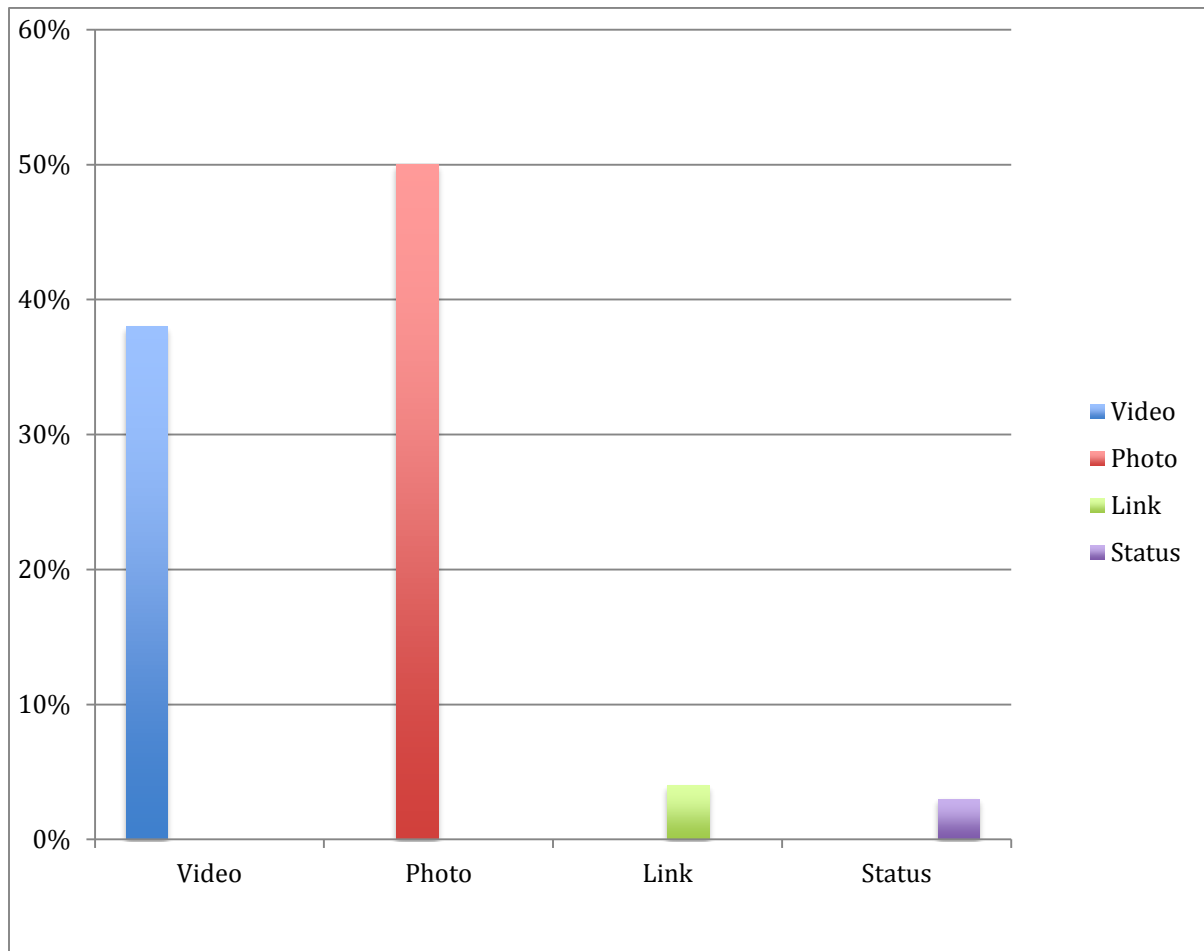
I will research social media best practices, trends, and statistics. In order to better suggest what type of content churches should be sharing, I will study what content has succeeded for real churches. I received access to the Facebook analytics to five medium to large sized non-denominational churches across the country. The churches I will use in my study are The Chapel in Akron, Ohio, Cross Point Church in Nashville, Tennessee, Venture Church in Howell, Michigan, Oak Pointe Church in Novi, Michigan, and Crossroads Christian Church in Newburgh, Indiana. I will use this data to determine what kinds of posts get the most engagement and reach for church social media accounts.

I will analyze the Facebook data by looking at each post's total reach. According to Facebook, reach is "the number of people who have seen your post. Your post counts as reaching someone when it's shown in News Feed." Because of the Facebook algorithm, total engagement (likes, comments, shares) results in a higher reach. Therefore, a higher reach means a higher engagement.

For the social networks I will study and export all the post data from the month of November 2015. I will look at what types of posts had the highest reach/engagement and will calculate the average reach for each kind of post. I also will categorized the posts by their subject (inspirational, informational, transparent) and calculated their averages.

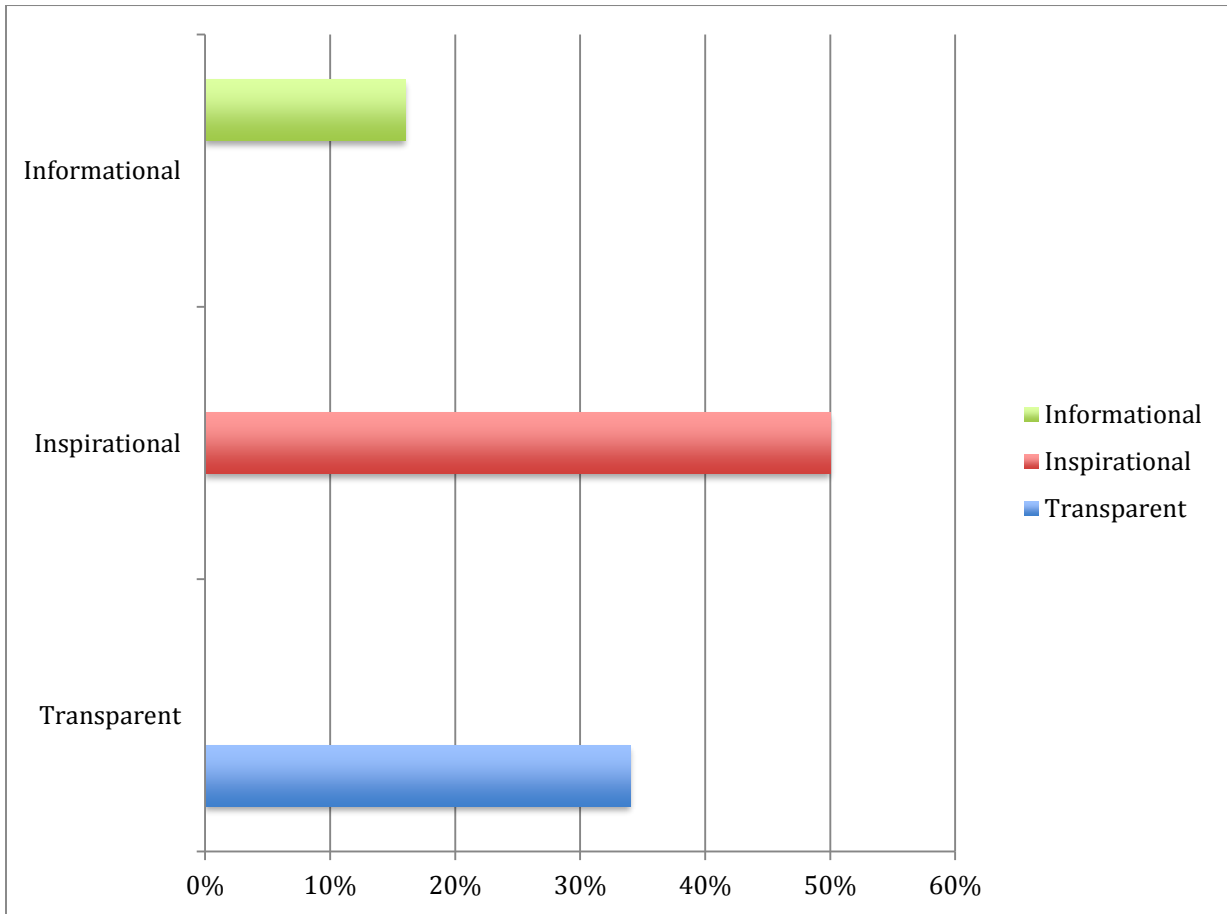
## Results

### Types of Posts



Posts with visual aspects to them (photo and video) received the most engagement by far, with a total of 88%. This study shows that social media consumers have a short attention span – they are far more engaged with the types of content (like picture and videos) that require them to do the least amount of work. Link and status posts require you to either click on a link to a different Web page or stop scrolling through your Newsfeed to read a status. These kinds of posts only received 12% of the total engagement.

## Post Content Categories



The most popular category of content for the churches in the study was not surprisingly, inspirational posts. Fifty percent of these posts received the most engagement. These posts offered encouragement, scripture, or advice. Examples of these inspirational posts were things like quotes from sermons or blogs written by pastors.

Transparent posts were the second most popular, with 34 percent of the reach. Lastly, informational posts only received 16 percent of the engagement. This does not mean users did not find them useful, they simply did not engage with them.

## **Discussion**

My research study shows that good social content is visual. The types of posts the churches in my research shared can be divided into four categories: link, status, photo, and video. Photo and video posts were the most popular, with 50 percent of the total reach being photos and 38 percent being videos. Consequently, status updates with no image, link, or video were the least popular, at only three percent. According to Hubspot, 87 percent of an average Facebook page engagement happens on photo posts.

As one could expect, the category of inspirational posts is the most popular for churches. Sharing scripture from a previous sermon is a popular choice. One particular church in my research study spent a week covering baptism stories. Since social media is so much about people and relationships, sharing stories about people from a church community is a way to get engagement. All of the churches that I studied created social media campaigns to promote events. This included multiple posts in one week informing people about a single event.

Inspirational posts were the most popular post category out of the analytics I studied. Fifty percent of all the posts reached from the churches were inspirational posts. This is to be expected, considering that people attend church so their faith can be inspired.

The amount of engagement a post gets results in an increased reach. When planning social strategy for Facebook, it is necessary that the manager understands how the Newsfeed works. Facebook bases what content it places on each individual user's Newsfeed on three things: "how recently the content occurred or was created,

the strength of your relationship with the person or organization that shared the content, and how much engagement (likes and comments) it received” (Kerpen, 2015). How much engagement a post receives is the biggest aspect that determines how prominent the post is in the Newsfeed. Strategically thinking about the best times of day to post content, how to get users to like a page, and what types of content the audience typically engages with, can help posts gain more engagement.

The result of my research is a social media management guide specifically for The Chapel in Akron’s Communication team. It is designed to help a social media manager think through how to listen to your audience, develop and implement a strategy, decide what content to post, and how to measure your success. The ultimate goal is for the ministry and/or churches’ message to be successfully communicated to the public.





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