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CPO Resource Booklets

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USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EVANGELISM

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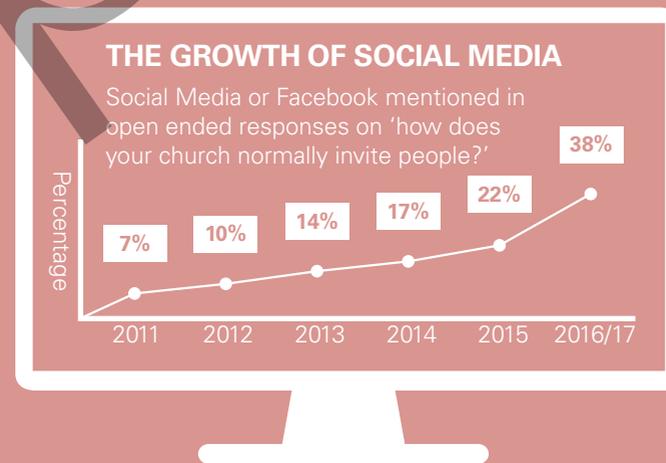
Jo Swinney



CPO Resource Booklets are aimed at training, informing and equipping churches in the areas of **communication, outreach and evangelism**. Produced in partnership with organisations and individuals with valuable knowledge and experience in these three streams, CPO Resource Booklets are accessible, affordable and applicable.

[] WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR EVANGELISM

Social media is mainstream. It is part of the fabric of how we speak, listen to, understand and relate to our friends and neighbours. Even if we are not on social media (and as individuals many choose not to be) we must understand its use and potential. We are made in God's image and it is God's nature to communicate. Digital tools are a gift for communicating – and so are all the other traditional church methods, but they're more effective when used together. Churches can default to running events and groups, but it may be a waste of time if no one hears about them. We've seen that increasingly social media is a powerful and free way to invite people to church events.



From a CPO survey on mission and outreach, at cpo.org.uk/toolkit

Whatever the level of your church's engagement in social media, it is probably already being used intentionally, prayerfully and even evangelistically by those in the congregation.

Four simple reasons social media is an effective tool for evangelism and church outreach.

1. It reaches places other forms of communication cannot reach

Social media enables the message of Jesus to go into parts of the world where no missionary would be welcome. It can be the feet and voice of the church worldwide without leaving the kitchen table. It provides the opportunity to share, to listen, to create conversation and to find common ground with people we might otherwise have never encountered.

For people starting a church from scratch, local social media activity can be a very quick way to reach thousands. Engagement with Facebook local groups, for example, can be extremely effective. For events it provides cheap, effective publicity. People telling their stories of faith, particularly in creative ways or using video or images, will find an audience usually far greater than any they'd find in church on a Sunday morning. Most people are not in church, but are online.

Posting on social media can sometimes feel like talking to the wind, but no public reaction doesn't mean no reaction. Our posts may be having more of an impact than we will ever know.

2. It is a non-threatening forum to start faith conversations

It can be hard to talk about our beliefs face to face without people feeling cornered or pressured, but we can do it online without directly targeting anyone, in the spirit of seeking genuine dialogue. Ways to do this might be by quoting a Christian thinker and adding a comment.

'Saw this – what do you think?'

Posting a link to an audio clip with something like *'Heard this – worth a listen. Message me if you want to discuss.'*

Social media is not just a place to broadcast a message (though of course churches do want to proclaim a message worth hearing). Social media is also place to be social. In church service terms, it's closer to the coffee time than the notices; closer to the sign-up sheet than the preach. It enables dialogue. The blog **ChurchTechToday.com** puts it like this: *'Throwing our message 'out there' into the digital space without hanging around for the conversation (and maybe even joining conversations that are not our own), makes people want to block us. It's that simple.'*

3. It is a destination for learning, discovery and spiritual growth

The enormous publicity of TED talks has shown that there is a hunger for learning, for public speaking, for the kind of mini lectures or short talks on meaningful topics that Christians can take for granted from a steady diet of preaching. Our generation has access to the largest ever free resource of online talks, courses, Bibles, commentaries, videos and discipleship resources online. We're spoiled. Social media helps us discover ('curate') what we need, seek recommendations and comment.

Social media is well placed to pull people in with content that is relevant, interesting, possibly even intriguing. The Bible says *'the Lord said I have drawn you with loving kindness'* (Jeremiah 31:3). What would it look like if our social media strategy were to draw people in with loving kindness?

4. It is a way to demonstrate what Christianity is all about

We are Christ's ambassadors on social media as in every other context. If we are open about our Christian identity (and why would we hide it?), the way we treat others, the kind of content we post, the language and tone we use, can all signpost people to Jesus. What might it look like to behave 'Christian-ly', like a follower of Christ, on social media? It might be by being a peacemaker in a fiery Facebook thread; it might be turning the other cheek if you are insulted or calmly defending and explaining an element of Christianity – being ready to give a reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3:15) Perhaps it will involve offering to pray for someone who's posted that they are struggling, being a friend to someone who feels isolated or standing up for the cause of the powerless, oppressed or unheard.

Social media is also a place to highlight the character of Christian community and the things the church is getting up to. Consider the impact you could have by showing support for Christian charities, sharing posts by Christians active in various spheres such as politics, education, the environment or the arts, or posting updates from Christian festivals and gatherings.

Some examples to get you started:

'Volunteers from our church are up for getting involved in this – we're all about community

#lovemychurch

Our church have given to this charity – hope the sponsored event goes really well

Did you see the documentary about xxx? This is the stuff I really care about.

I've signed this petition – will you join me?

All of these can be a springboard to further conversation, even face to face.