

# Guide to: using Instagram and Twitter for evangelism

## WHY INSTAGRAM IS EFFECTIVE

Instagram is a growing platform with over 1 billion active monthly users and is extremely popular with 18-34s, so provides a great opportunity for reaching a new generation. However, this is by no means the only demographic that use it, with over 49% of internet users in the UK using the platform in 2020<sup>1</sup>.

## WHY TWITTER IS EFFECTIVE

Twitter is a well-known platform with around 330 million monthly active users in 2020<sup>2</sup>. It is an online news and 'micro-blogging' site that is great for posting quick and frequent updates by individuals and public figures.

This guide is for those who have their own Instagram and Twitter accounts or who run church accounts to provide tips on using these platforms effectively as tools for evangelism.

<sup>1</sup> [www.wearesocial.com/uk/digital-2020-uk](http://www.wearesocial.com/uk/digital-2020-uk)

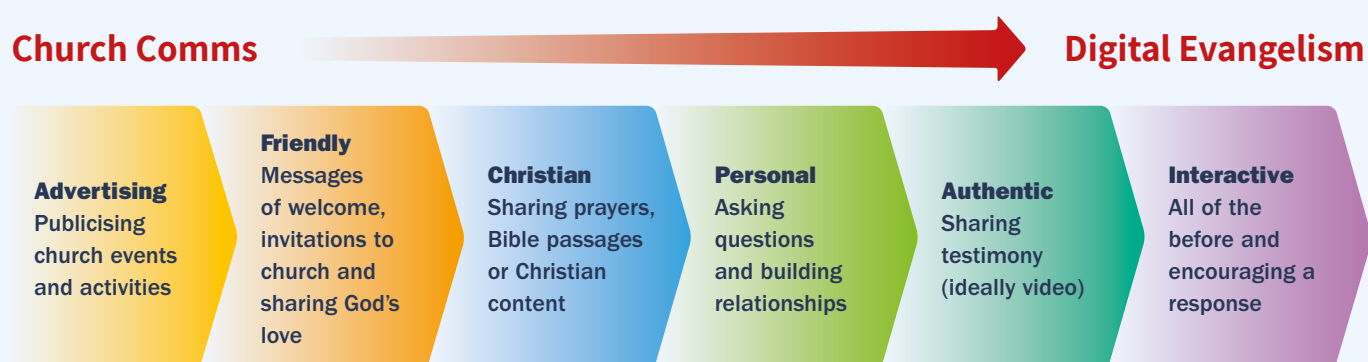
<sup>2</sup> [www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/](http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/)



# USING YOUR CHURCH INSTAGRAM FOR EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

You may have many aims and purposes for your church Instagram account: to promote church events; to reach people in your town/city; or maybe to connect with your youth and young people. Whatever your church's level of engagement on Instagram, 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 Instagram for evangelism?

It is not clear cut and there isn't a 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 these could be considered 'digital evangelism', but why not try to move along the scale?



Unlike other social media platforms, these suggestions do not generally overlap on Instagram, unless you use the carousel feature to include multiple images/graphics/videos in a single post. When it comes to what content you post, try to move from 'advertising' along the spectrum to the other suggestions on the right. So, if you usually post event invitations with a friendly message, try sharing graphics or images that inspire, provoke, or tell a story. Or it could be as simple as including a question in the caption of your posts. 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? When it comes to Instagram in particular, the 'story' feature is a unique and highly effective way of providing personal, authentic and interactive content for your followers. As such, it is highly recommended to use 'stories' as a tool for evangelism alongside standard posts (see below to learn more about 'stories').

The titles in bold are not to give a fixed label, but to help explain the motivation behind each example, and we should aim for a mix of all of them.

## Advertising

Be careful to avoid purely posting service information, event promotions, or photos from past or upcoming church events. Instagram is not a noticeboard for your church, it is a conversation – our aim is to post meaningful and engaging content that builds relationships. Try to only post advertising content 20% of the time and fill the other 80% with the suggestions below.

## Friendly

Do you use your church Instagram 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 with them. Encourage your followers to share your posts to their 'story' or send it to a friend. Do not be afraid to post the same content more than once, just post it in different ways. It is good to invite people to your church each Sunday but avoid posting the same photo every week. Continue to post messages of hope, love and kindness through 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 and graphics. 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 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. Top tip: use hashtags as part of your post, as this helps new people find your posts.

## Personal

Engage in conversation and reply to all comments and messages on your Instagram account in a timely manner. Try asking "How can we pray for you today?" or encourage people to comment on your posts. Be transparent about who is posting on behalf of the church. Using Instagram 'stories' is a key tool for creating a personal connection and gives you lots of interactive features. You can run a poll, a quiz, let people submit questions, post a gif, share music or the list of your Sunday songs, add a countdown, ask for donations, share a quote, promote other Instagram accounts, draw a picture, or use one of the many other built-in Instagram templates. Instagram stories are only visible for 24 hours and so they are perfect for more informal, personal and behind the scenes content. Replies to your stories appear in your messages, where you are able to follow up and promote further direct conversation.

## Authentic

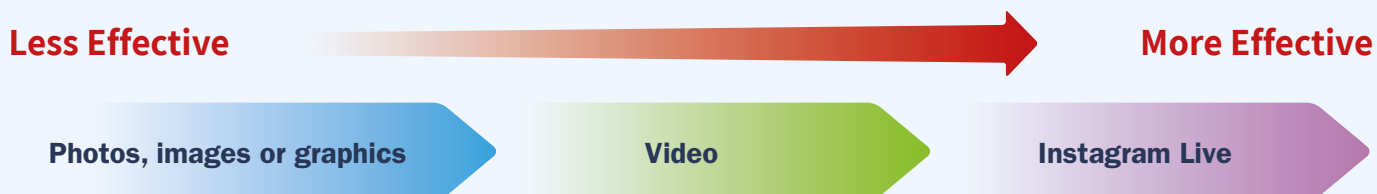
Share short real-life faith stories from your church congregation and do it in ways that feel natural and comfortable. We need to be genuine online. Video is one of the best ways to share testimony on Instagram, as this type of content performs best on social media. You can share these videos on your 'story', as a standard video in your feed (limited to 60 secs), or as a longer video on the IGTV section of Instagram.

## Interactive

This doesn't mean we have to have a call to action 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? It might be as simple as asking people to comment on your posts, clicking the link in your bio, or encouraging people to get in touch. Instagram in particular is a platform geared to being interactive, so be sure to make use of the features it provides, such as 'stories'.

# HOW TO CONVEY OUR MESSAGE

As well as thinking about 'what' message we communicate online, it's also important to consider 'how' we communicate our message. Certain types of content perform better on the platform, either because it's more engaging for users, or because the Instagram algorithm prefers and promotes it. Use the following scale to try and improve the effectiveness of what you post on your Instagram account.



Unlike other social media platforms these options are exclusive and linear. Instagram is a highly visual platform and so, unless you use 'stories', you can only post images or video and not plain text. Videos perform better and are more engaging than images and Instagram Live videos perform better than pre-recorded videos.

## How to get found on Instagram

Instagram is an effective platform for getting content seen by those outside of the church, but only if we use the tools provided. Follow these simple tips:

### 1. Have a public account

If your account is private then people are unlikely to find or follow you. Instagram is predominately a public platform. As a church there is no reason not to have a public profile (this may be different if you use Instagram in a personal capacity).

### 2. Use relevant hashtags

Hashtags are the main way to get found on Instagram. You can use up to 30 hashtags on each post. Include hashtags that are used by your target audience, such as location specific ones (people in our communities are not necessarily going to be searching for Christian hashtags).

### 3. Include a location tag

People can search by locations on Instagram and your content is more likely to be found if you include a location. Try varying the location you use on each post to reach more people (eg if your church is in the suburb of a town you could use the suburb name, the street name, the town name, the county name and perhaps neighbouring suburbs too).

### 4. Post regularly

Instagram will not show your content to your followers if you are not active on the platform. You are unlikely to reach more people by only posting once a month. Try to post a minimum of once a week.

## USING TWITTER FOR PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Much of what has already been mentioned is also relevant to those engaging in evangelism in a personal capacity (rather than running an official church account). Publicising church events, creating graphics, sharing Christian content and posting testimony videos are all great ways to engage. Some people might feel comfortable, and have the digital skills, to do this on their own account and others might find it easier to share or repost content produced by their church (whether on Instagram or on Twitter). However, here are some additional suggestions that might be of use if you have a Twitter account and want to be more intentional about using it for evangelism.

Just as with Instagram, there isn't a clear line in the sand around what content is considered 'digital evangelism'. However, the spectrum below might help give ideas of how you can make more of an impact with others. Through it all there is a need to build personal relationships and be authentic – Twitter can sometimes be associated with heated debate between strangers and so we must approach conversations with kindness and love. If this seems daunting, consider this quote from the CPO booklet *Using Social Media for Evangelism*: "We fear a negative reaction, but are unlikely to receive one if we speak of our own experience with grace and with truth."



These suggestions are not exclusive to each other, and you can of course retweet church events whilst including testimony, questions and endorsement in a single tweet. We need Christians that engage at every level of this spectrum, but why not consider what you currently tweet and whether you could take the next step? If your church isn't on Twitter maybe you could adapt the content your church shares on other social media platforms (or website) for use on Twitter?

# HOW TO BE NON-THREATENING AND AUTHENTIC

Social media provides a space to start faith conversations in a non-threatening environment. For those who would find coming to a physical church daunting or unfamiliar, online tools give us an opportunity to go to them and engage in authentic and personal conversations and discussion. Digital evangelism is not about broadcasting random messages to the world and hoping someone will find it, but enables sharing our faith in highly personal ways. This is often a harder task to achieve well on Twitter compared to other social media platforms due to it being such a public space – you are more likely to be engaging with people outside of your network of friends, and conversations play out on a very public stage (there are also other limitations, such as not being able to edit a tweet after you have posted it).

Be careful to avoid inundating your followers with Christian content – it's important that our personal accounts are not solely used for digital evangelism as this can be off-putting to others. Our aim is not to accuse others, but to post meaningful and engaging content that builds relationships with our Twitter followers and others who don't go to church. The key is to be authentic. Be authentic to who you are, your style and language, and how you would relate and talk to someone in person.

*"If we are perceived as trying to change or challenge someone else's narrative, we will get a hostile reaction. But if we share our own personal experience with authenticity, it might well get a respectful listen. Look for everyday miracles, stories of God at work and point to them (without hype or hyperbole). Share answers to prayer, or how you are dealing with a prayer that hasn't been answered." – Using Social Media for Evangelism (CPO)*

Can your followers tell from your activity on Twitter that you are a Christian? As well as displaying this in what we post, there are other ways to show our faith on Twitter. Everything we do online represents our Christian faith, we should consider how we interact with others and comment on their tweets. We can enter the story of others and look for opportunities to encourage and support others. We do not need all the answers, but be able to share God's love, such as saying "I'll be praying for you."

**Here are some suggestions to tweet that are engaging and disarming:**

- Going to church this morning at [tag your church Twitter account if they have one].
- Attended [example] Methodist Church this morning and had a great time. If any of my followers would like to come next week message me and we can go together ...
- I don't talk much about my faith normally, but this happened today ...
- This [song/film/other media] has had a real influence on my faith ...

## How to handle negative comments

Many often cite negative comments as a key reason for leaving social media, or why they are apprehensive to join in the first place. But don't panic when negative comments land on your church or personal Twitter account and don't worry about who is commenting. Instead embrace the opportunity to reflect the character of Christ. Here are some practical suggestions:

- Know when to report or delete tweets that are spam, break the law or are grossly offensive.
- If the response is just negative in nature, only delete or mute as a last resort.
- Sometimes you may find an individual causing ongoing problems and it may be appropriate to block them.
- Don't rush your response and get another opinion on what you have written.
- Remember, you are representing the body of Christ in how you respond.

## What is success?

Even if very few people outside of your church see your posts on your church Instagram, or few non-Christian followers engage with your tweets on your personal Twitter account, remember that you never know what impact you may be having. As a church, 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. As an individual, you are giving a positive impression of the church and Christianity, and we have no measure for how this may influence a person on their faith journey. Don't measure 'success' in digital evangelism by the number of likes or people following your account (although these can be good indicators to track) but remember that you could be planting the seed that will eventually flower. There is no 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.