

The Social Media Guide for Missionaries

By Anna Lisa Magulac

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Social media can no longer be called a “passing fad.” It’s time for missionaries to embrace and use this tool to its fullest potential!

A missionary’s prayer and support team are the roots that hold up the tree of the mission. That team can be made to feel more a part of a community when it is connected on social media.

Don’t let a low “number of followers” discourage you. It’s all about the additional effort you’re taking to connect with people, and how that might move them to action - whether to donate or to tell others about you.

Don’t be conservative about who you invite to follow you, because you can never tell who God might use to support you.

Unlike email or mail, social media is “non-intrusive.” When people come to a social media site, it’s because they have a desire to see what is going on in others’ lives.

Video

- Videos are a powerful marketing tool, heavily supported by social media, and are great for displaying everyday mission life and exposing needs. Mini-biographies of the people you work with and serve can also be effective, as can video series with an expressed topic. Rehearsed videos can be impressive, but humility goes a long way in the video world.
- One video can have a long life. Start by posting your video on YouTube. Then expand its reach by posting it on Facebook, a blog, “tweeting” it, or sending a link to it in an email.

Facebook

- Make sure your Facebook account or page has a good photo of you or your family that communicates who you are to the world. You might be remembered by your Facebook photo.
- Know who your audience is on Facebook. Write down four general types of people that you are “friends” with. Are they church youth? Middle-aged volunteers? Think of what they would be interested in hearing about, such as volunteering, or youth missions trips, and post some articles from the internet or Facebook on those subjects. Most importantly, don’t post anything that would be out of character for you. The best thing you can do on Facebook is be yourself!
- Do post photos, and videos! Both will be seen by many more people than a simple status update will. Try not to post more than two updates/photos/videos/links a day. Overwhelmed viewers may “hide” your posts or “unsubscribe.”
- Don’t be discouraged if you don’t see a community of donors forming right away on Facebook - it can take months or even a couple of years.
- Spend time looking at other people’s updates. It may seem like snooping, but get to know what’s going on in their lives! When you talk to or see them again, mention their trip to Tahoe and ask how it went. They will feel loved. You took the time to care!
- Occasionally you will need to ask your Facebook friends for help in funding your mission. Don’t be afraid! Tell them what their money will do, and give them a quick, easy way to donate – such as a link to a donation site. Resist the urge to say “please.”

Recommended Reading

- * The new relationship marketing: how to build a large, loyal, profitable network using the social web by Mari Smith
- * Getting sent: a relational approach to support raising by Pete Sommer
- * Friend raising: building a missionary support team that lasts by Betty Barnett
- * Socialnomics: how social media transforms the way we live and do business by Erik Qualman
- * <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/>
- * <http://www.brianbarela.com/blog/>

Blog

- Be accessible and humble. Use the terms “my work” or “our work” instead of “ministry.” Use short sentences with powerful words, and never write more than a page and a half in one post. Highlight your main point in bold, or put it under a picture as a caption.
- Make sure your blog is simple and easy to navigate. Don't clutter it, or use a blog that downloads slowly. Internet users are increasingly impatient!
- Don't know what to write on your blog? Pretend you are writing a personal letter to a specific donor. Write about things that are getting done and lives that are being changed and developed as a result of your donors' prayer and support. Don't mention money unless it is the main topic of the post. Mini-sermons are discouraged. They are best shared during in-person presentations.
- Use this test before you post: ask yourself if you would mind seeing this post again in a year. Never post when you are emotional. Sign your posts with your first name – especially if you are part of a family page.
- If you receive an angry comment, the worst thing to do is ignore it. Instead, take some time to cool down, and then show empathy and concern for the person.
- Use a blog format that has social media “sharing” buttons. These buttons allow users to quickly share your blog post with Facebook, Twitter, or other social media sites. Don't leave out the button that can email your post to others. This button is still one of the most used!

Twitter

- At a loss for what to say in 140 characters? One of the best things you can do is tweet encouraging quotes or Bible verses. People love good quotes, and will likely pass them on (retweet them), which builds your influence on Twitter.
- Use HootSuite to preschedule your tweets, so they don't have to be on your mind all the time, and use Twellow.com if you're unsure of who to follow.

Survey Results

(From a Sept. 2012 online survey of 151 Christian missionaries by Anna Lisa Magulac)

- The respondents differed widely in their opinions on the impact social media has had on fundraising for their missions and on building awareness of their missions, but overall, the view was positive.
- The power of social media to build awareness was rated higher than the power of social media to raise funds. Awareness was most-often rated at a “5” for “large positive impact.”
- As a general rule, the younger the respondent was, the more they believed social media had a positive impact on fundraising for and on building awareness of their mission. The correlation between age and belief in impact was very strong.
- Personal Facebook accounts, Facebook group or fan pages, and Blogger blogs were the top social media methods used for fundraising and keeping in touch with family or friends while on mission.
- The social media methods the respondents were most comfortable with were Facebook, blogs, and YouTube.
- Top 6 social media methods of fundraising for missions:
 - 42.9% Personal Facebook Account
 - 23% Facebook Group or Fan Page
 - 14.2% Blogger Blog
 - 11.5% YouTube
 - 7.4% WordPress Blog
 - 7.4% Fundraising Sites (Such as StayClassy, GoFundMe, or Chipln)
- Top 6 social media methods of keeping in touch with family or friends back home while on mission:
 - 72.8% Personal Facebook Account
 - 29.3% Blogger Blog
 - 23.8% Facebook Group or Fan Page
 - 16.3% YouTube
 - 14.3% WordPress Blog
 - 13.6% Twitter

Experts agree that the consequences of not using social media are worse than the consequences of making mistakes with it. Simply be yourself. Be the same person you are offline, online, and you will get out of social media what you invest in it! ■