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Social Media in the Church

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Social Media in the Church

Social Media in the Church

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Journalism

by

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Arkansas Tech University
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, 2012

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Abstract

This thesis project examines the effectiveness of social media in the church. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have the potential to shape the way the world communicates. Many churches have even begun utilizing social media in their ministry efforts. They publicize, pray, encourage, and promote events, all using social media. This paper argues that Bible believing churches can effectively use social media to communicate to their members by announcing upcoming events, sharing audience specific information, and knowing the best time to post on these sites. This project shows a social media strategy implemented into New Heights Church in Fayetteville, Ark. Data was collected from an entire year, and used to prove social media's effectiveness.

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Introduction

In this thesis project, I have implemented a social media plan into New Heights Church in Fayetteville, Ark, to study the effectiveness of social media within a church. At the completion of the project, I have hopes of taking it to other churches in the area as a social media consultant. I would then be able to present research on social media in the church, a detailed breakdown of ministries using social media, and a short video with interviews of New Heights ministry leaders expressing their thoughts on the use of social media. For this project, ‘church’ will refer to a group of people, and not a building.

In October of 2000, two couples that attended a church in Fayetteville, Ark., began praying about the possibility of starting a new church that would allow them more freedom and flexibility in practicing their Christian faith. Their desire was to be a part of a church that would have a ministry based on small groups. They desired a celebrative, contemporary style of worship. They wanted a church that would be a place of healing for the spiritually wounded, and would appeal to their unchurched friends, as well as believers from other traditions. By January of 2001, a core group of six couples had formed, and begun praying earnestly for these desires. On May 27, 2001, after finally receiving what the group believed was affirmation from God, 52 people met at Holt Middle School in Fayetteville.

The congregation has experienced dramatic growth since their first service in 2001. As they sought to keep in step with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, many different ministries have emerged and become a part of their identity—prayer ministries, small groups, children and student ministries, worship ministry, care ministry, special needs ministry, Potter’s House, Potter’s House Thrift Store, global cross-cultural ministries, adoption ministry, Mama Carmen’s Espresso Café, The Joshua Center, etc. (Discovery, pg14).

New Heights Church is led by a team of elders who make directional decisions, guard the church's mission, cast vision, and ensure the health of the congregation. The elders always make a decision by unanimity. Key staff members serve as facilitators and advisors. The elders are men nominated by the body and selected by the existing elder team. If there is ever an impasse in making a decision they continue to pray, seek the guidance of the Spirit, and dialogue until they are on the same page. No single person will make the final decision (Discovery, pg 17).

New Heights Church is a Bible believing church with around 2000 documented members. The church comprises four legal entities, one for profit and three non-profit. They meet on a weekly basis, every Sunday, at the Boys and Girls Club in Fayetteville. They do not have a church building. There are 65 home-based adult small groups, 12 home-based teenage small groups, and dozens of discipleship groups and other small groups in Fayetteville. New Heights employs 140 employees, contractors, and interns. When all of the local and global workers are added to the count, New Heights has 650 people that they fully or partially support or employ. Throughout all of their ministries, they interact and engage with more than 25,000 individuals within a month. They have 61 global workers on the field in 19 nations. The Joshua Center is now the largest private pay counseling organization in Arkansas. Potter's House Thrift is the largest thrift store in Washington Co. The Prayer Room has documented more than 70 people from a variety of churches that are involved, and that does not include the hundreds of people who have been ministered to by their Healing Ministry. The church not only reaches a large part of this area's population, but also globally, so it is important to learn how to communicate effectively to these people.

I sat down with ministry leaders in the Fall of 2013, and asked them to share about their social media experiences within their own ministries. From that meeting, I developed a purpose

statement for my thesis: “To show how to effectively create a centralized social media presence and communicate within a structurally diverse church.”

One of the leaders stated that passion is the fuel for social media. He is passionate about the students in his ministry, and therefore is fueled to communicate effectively to them where they are. His students are online, and are active on social media. As a group, we decided on a few key purpose statements. We felt it is important to interact with people where they are, give a sense of community, and give people resources that will ultimately connect them to the gospel. Using these key points, I began implementing a social media plan into each ministry.

My implementation process began by explaining my thesis project to each of the ministries. I then instructed them to use social media as a form of communication for an entire year, and informed them that I would then collect data from their social media platforms. I would use this data to show them how effective they were at communicating to people through social media, and I would give them tips on what they can do to make their ministry members’ virtual communication more effective.

New Heights Church, just like any other church, wants to communicate effectively to a large number of people. I believe, based on research, that they can do this through the use of social media. The church wants to reach a wide variety of people, and social media allows this to happen in an instant. For the sake of this thesis project, I will use a writing style that is less formal than a typical thesis paper.

Research

(There is information in this section that does not directly correlate with New Heights Church.)

Sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have the potential to shape the way the world communicates. Many churches have even begun utilizing social media in their ministry efforts. They publicize, pray, encourage, and promote events, all using social media. This paper argues that Bible believing churches can effectively use social media to communicate to their members by announcing upcoming events, sharing audience specific information, and knowing the best time to post on these sites.

First, the phrase “Bible believing church” needs to be defined for clearer understanding. Bible believing Christians follow two creeds written to express shared beliefs. The Nicene and the Apostles Creeds state that Christians believe in:

- One God who is the maker of all things, visible and invisible, whose grace and mercy were revealed through Jesus Christ;
- The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who has spoken through prophets and continues communicating God’s wisdom and guidance;
- God-inspired Scripture that communicates ethical standards and guidelines for behavior;
- Actively living Gospel teachings about love, service, faith, and hope as individuals and within a community of believers.

Research has shown a positive relationship between the money spent on marketing and the support given by church members (White & Simas, 2007). In order to meet the needs of a variety of markets, churches must remain faithful to doctrine and theology, but accept the rapid changes that are required to exist in an advancing society and environment (Wrenn, Shawchuck,

Kotler, & Rath, 1995). Social media now allows churches to market themselves at no cost. Julian Saunders (2009) argues that social media has supercharged the ‘for free’ revolution engendered by the web. He argues that marketers started out by seeing the Internet as a sales response medium, but now all marketing functions have migrated to the Internet. So the real marketing investment is not in buying space and time but in the energy, culture and imagination of the company (Saunders, 2009). This is great for non-profit organizations and churches. I agree with Saunders (2009) that social media has supercharged the “for free” revolution, but I argue that churches should steer clear from the use of the word “marketing” in their efforts.

Churches have to be careful with the use of the word “marketing,” or even the action of marketing itself. The objective is to help bring people into a relationship with Jesus. With that being the objective, they should use Jesus, Himself, as a model. He never “marketed” Himself. He engaged with his followers and changed their lives. When a life change happens, people begin to talk, and more people begin to show up. People invite their friends to social media sites because they have a reason to invite their friends. The desire for churches should be for more people to be in a relationship with Jesus. Of course churches should want more people to attend their services, participate in classes, and engage in home groups, because reaching a larger audience with The Message is an important aspect. Churches have to be so careful not to jump to marketing tactics too quickly. More marketing doesn’t always mean more people engaged in the church. It doesn’t matter if a church has a Facebook page, a Twitter page, an Instagram, a Pinterest, and a YouTube channel if they aren’t engaging with people through their media. It’s called social media for a reason.

Data show that churches are divided on the social media platform. Buzzplant is a Christian-based digital advertising agency that works closely with churches to teach them how to

effectively use social media. They have even developed smartphone applications to help missionaries in the field. They surveyed 250 churches to see how they're using social media within their organization. They found that more than 30% of churches surveyed said they update Facebook each day, while 15% said they have never used the site. Just under half of those surveyed said social media is the most effective method of communication, while about 25% prefer knocking on doors, which is the more traditional method (Pitman, 2012).

Just under half of those surveyed said they use Facebook everyday, but the majority said that they never use sites other than Facebook. 51% of churches said that at least one of their senior staff members regularly blogs or updates social media. 56% of churches surveyed allowed and/or encouraged staff members to update their personal social media pages while at work. 74% of churches do not have a paid staff member that updates their church's pages. Statistics show that just under half of all the churches surveyed consider Facebook the most effective method of communication. This doesn't mean that the rest of the churches consider Facebook an awful method of communication; they just don't consider it the best. The reason behind this data maybe the lack of knowledge of the effectiveness of social media in the church. There is a clear divide in a generation that fully understands social media, and one that speaks an entirely different digital language (Pittman, 2012).

Marc Prensky (2001) argues that students today (digital natives) are all native speakers of the digital language of computers and the Internet. Those who were not born into the digital world but have become fascinated by and adopted aspects of new technology are considered digital immigrants. Prensky (2001) writes, "The importance of the distinction is this: As Digital Immigrants learn—like all immigrants, some better than others—to adapt to their environment, they always retain, to some degree, their 'accent,' that is, their foot in the past." Digital

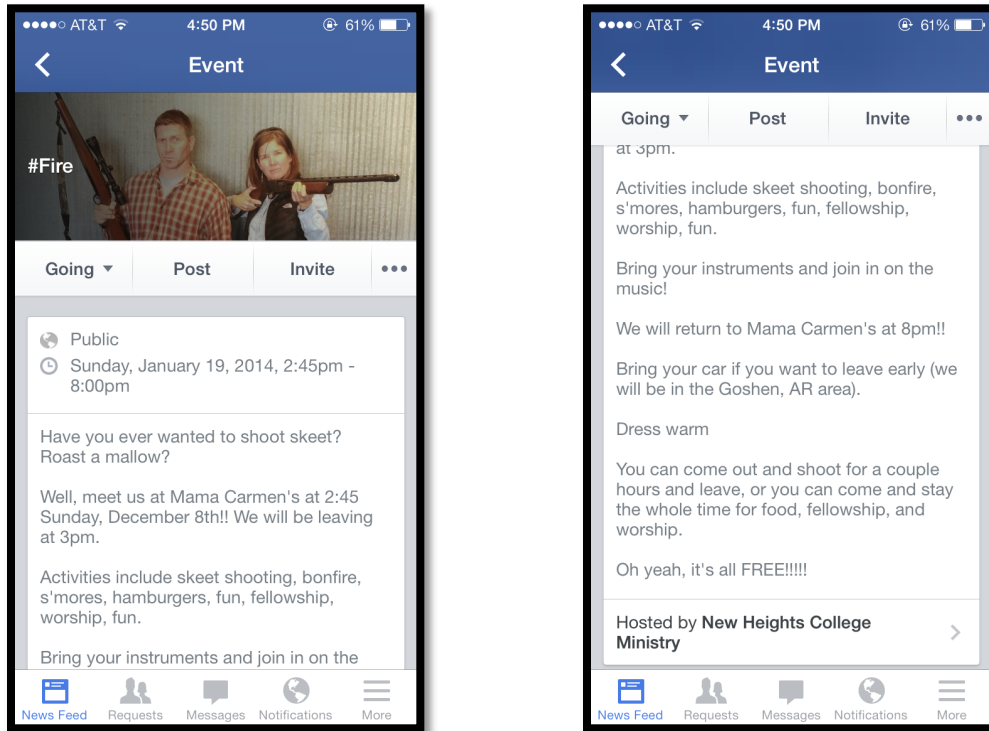
immigrants turn to the Internet for information second rather than first, and they may read a manual for a program rather than assuming that the program will teach them how to use it. They were socialized differently from their kids, and now have to learn a new language. Prensky (2001) states that scientists tell us that a language learned later in life goes into a completely different part of the brain. “Our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the predigital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language.” This may be why some churches do not want to use social media, or even view it as an ineffective method of communication. They, the digital immigrants, are trying to manage technology that they don’t completely understand (Prensky, 2001. pg 1-6).

Social media can be an influential way to announce upcoming events within the church. United Methodist Communications gives “10 Tips for Promoting Your Event on Facebook.”

They suggest you:

1. Create a page.
2. Create a Facebook event.
3. Share the event – and share it again.
4. Include a photo or video clip of the event.
5. Consider whether to show “who’s coming” to the event.
6. Comment, comment, comment.
7. Make social media a formal part of your church communications strategy.
8. Remind the Facebook community of your event.
9. Be sure to follow up.
10. Decide whether to advertise. (10 Tips for..., 2013).

Below is an example of New Heights College Ministry’s post for an event they planned.



(Figure 1)
College Ministry Event
(New Heights College Ministry, 2014)

St. Edwards University’s Associate Professor of Communication Corinne Weisgerber, gave a presentation to the Clergy Leadership Institute’s social media workshop on May 4, 2013 in Austin, TX (Weisgerber, 2013). Weisgerber stated that you have to know the “why” before you get to the “how.” Why you, as a church, are establishing yourself on social media should be the first question you ask yourself. What are you trying to accomplish? Who are you trying to reach? Churches can effectively use social media by connecting with other pastors and churches, connecting with the congregation, reaching out to people outside the congregation, and increasing visibility of the church and its programs. People are more likely to interact with

photos posted to sites. Weisgerber (2013) suggests inspirational pictures that answer the question, “Where did you see God today?” Churches can post scripture, create Facebook cover photos for events, and upload videos that allow the church to tell their story (Weisgerber, 2013).

In his book *Digital Jesus*, Robert Glenn Howard (2011) argues:

The idea that sharing knowledge generates a community is at least as old as the Christian idea of ‘church’ itself. Individual Christians are members of distinct communities on the basis of their shared knowledge. There are traditions of self-expression within the church that are often referred to as ‘witnessing’ or ‘sharing testimonies’ with one another. This is when believers stand in front of their congregation or just simply gather with other Christ followers and share about their personal experiences with God. So the body of Christ creates a virtual church when these testimonies are shared online.” (Howard, 2011)

Of course, the initial shared testimony starts with the individual managing the site. Once he/she posts a testimony or even asks followers or friends to post a testimony, it is in the hands of the readers to reply with their response. The readers will see others struggling with the same issues they themselves struggle with, and will comment on the posts. When this happens, the church has effectively established an online community through social media where support and prayers are being exchanged.

Christianity is a religion anchored in community. Jesus declared in the book of Matthew that God is present when two or three are gathered (Matthew 18:20, New International Version). The church always was and remains to be an assembly of believers. The church wasn’t even thought of as a building until at least two centuries after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. Today, people gather online. Social media provides a means for sharing faith as well as modeling Christian life beyond the building commonly called church (Gould, 2013).

Sharing information that has already been posted has proved to be effective in marketing efforts for businesses. This is the same for Twitter. Twitter gives users the option to retweet information that others have already tweeted. Kyle Lacy (2011), from the popular publication *For Dummies*, wrote “How Retweeting Helps Your Marketing Venture on Twitter” in their book *Twitter Marketing For Dummies*.

To market successfully on Twitter you need to know how to use retweets. When you retweet, you tweet a message that was previously posted by another user; in other words, you’re quoting another user or echoing that person’s thoughts. Depending on your desktop application, to show that you’re retweeting, you can use the common format RT @username and then type or paste the original poster’s message... People commonly retweet so that they can share content they found valuable.” (Lacy, 2011, pg 6)

Retweeting allows churches the opportunity to engage personally with their readers. If a church member tweets a prayer request or a Bible verse, the person in charge of the church’s page can retweet them, and the reader is notified of the action. This builds community and a sense of involvement between the church and the member.

Madhavan Narayanan et al. (2012) argues “a significant contribution in the evolution of news is Twitter’s generation of the ‘timeline’—a string of contributions from various persons or entities that one ‘follows.’ The timeline has made news incredibly dynamic by enabling instant sharing of news in a web of connected people” (Narayanan, et al., 2012, pg.73). This allows for organizations such as churches to instantly get news or information out to their specific audience. It also allows for churches to have access to instant updates on other churches and Christian organizations. For instance, a popular Christian preacher such as David Platt from The Church at Brook Hills may tweet a verse or an inspirational quote, and it shows up on the churches’ Twitter

timeline because they follow him. They can then retweet or “favorite” the tweet and David Platt’s tweet can now be seen by all of that particular church’s followers.

A church would want to follow the people who follow them. If they don’t, they can’t see their tweets, it’s difficult to interact, and difficult to build community. When talking about people, organizations, and businesses, Twitter users should use the created Twitter handle or Twitter name created by that person, organization, or business. When talking about major events, Twitter users should use use hashtags. Hashtags give visibility outside a network. They allow anyone to search every single tweet using that hashtag. For instance, if a church (e.g., New Heights Church) is having a Christmas program, then an appropriate hashtag could be #NewHeightsChristmas. If anyone uses this hashtag on Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook, the church can search the hashtag and review feedback from participants, and see photos taken by viewers. It is important for a church to try to create interest in their tweets. The church should want to give people a reason to click on their links (Weisgerber, 2013).

Weisgerber (2013) suggests an 80/20 rule when it comes to how much content to post. “Thou shall not use more than 20% of thy tweets to promote thyself. 80% of thy tweets shall add value to thy followers” (Weisgerber, 2013). It is important that churches follow this simple rule. It all goes back to the “why.” Why are you posting this? Is it to promote yourself, or is it to further the Kingdom of God and to encourage others? Sometimes people managing social media sites are at a loss of ideas to post, and they post something random that doesn’t really apply to the personality of the site, or even apply to the audience. A few simple items to tweet about include: church news, sermons, Bible verses, prayer requests or prayers, pictures, behind the scenes pictures, a peek into the personal life of a ministry worker, public “thank you,” retweet others, encouragement, Q&A’s, and feedback.

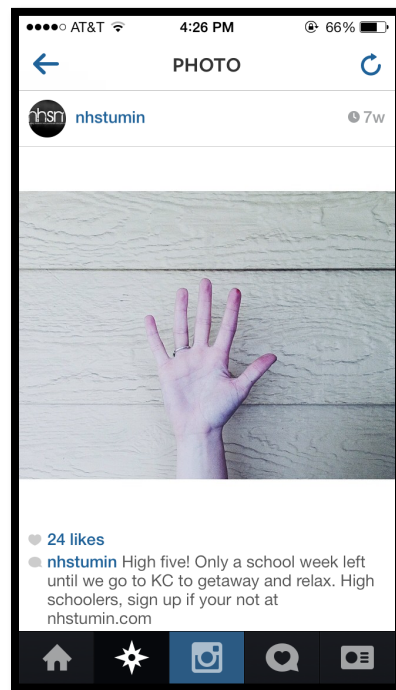
Relationships always take time to grow and maintain, and it's no different on social media. Weisberger says to listen to the conversations happening on social media sites, and respond to people. People like to feel engaged and important. Share other people's tweets and links if you think they brought up valid points or encouraging words (Weisgerber, 2013). Claire Diaz-Ortiz, Social Innovator for Twitter, said that tweets from religious leaders are very popular among Twitter users. "People on Twitter love positive content and love inspiration," said Ortiz. "The best way to use Twitter is to use it in a personal way" (Weisgerber, 2013).

Cheong, Fisher-Nielson, Gelfgren, and Ess (2012) argue:

Tweets play a constitutive role in religion, as microbloggers produce and circulate scripture and its interpretations as well as create new religious practices, including Twitter memes, prayers, and drama. In this way, microblogging practices enabled on Twitter on a variety of mobile platforms can be understood as microblogging rituals, as they facilitate epiphany and a sense of the sacred, which in turn revitalizes communal sentiments and a higher moral purpose through identification and solidarity with other believers. (Cheong, et al., 2012, pg. 201)

Pictures combined with announcements have been proven as a powerful way to grab attention, and Instagram is one such medium. On Instagram, churches have the opportunity to post pictures to announce upcoming events and engage followers through a visual post. It is important on Instagram to be unique, to know your audience, and to make the post engaging. Churches can even make it personal by introducing their staff with a picture and a short bio about who they are and what they do (Burnett, 2013). New Heights Student Ministry in Fayetteville, Arkansas uses Instagram to communicate to their students. The ministry has found that their students are more actively involved on Instagram than on the other popular social

media sites. They have found creative ways to post events and information with the use of one single photo, and have received great feedback from the students. The photo below is one example of the ministry using Instagram to promote their Kansas City Getaway.



(Figure 2)
Student Ministry Instagram Post
(New Heights Student Ministry, 2013)

Lori Andrews (2011), a law professor, bioethicist, and the author of *I Know Who You Are and I Saw What You Did: Social Networks and the Death of Privacy*, argues however that Internet companies are in it for the money — not to change the world, as many of them claim — and that their customers have no idea what happens to their personal information. Users may be getting more choices and controls over their data, but this doesn't always help (Andrews, 2011). She states that 'sharing' information on social media sites is dangerous because privacy is breached. Churches do need to be cautious of what they post to the Internet, but that doesn't necessarily mean that these social media sites as a whole are dangerous, and can cause trouble

for the organization. This is an issue when we look at churches that have multiple ministries and who serve completely different audiences.

Take the children's ministry, for example. Is it okay to post pictures of children at church on Sunday morning? What about at a "Back-to-School" event the church is hosting? Does each child's parent need to sign a consent form? What about a ministry that is serving at-risk children in the community? Can photos of foster children be uploaded to the Internet? All of these questions have to be addressed in terms of privacy and legality. Posting events and announcements can be very effective, but churches have to be cautious of privacy and legal implications. An example of a privacy breeching situation is the *Nussenzweig v. diCorcia* (2006) case.

Philip-Lorca diCorcia, an artist and photographer, took photos of individuals walking through Times Square in New York City, without any of them being aware of it. In 2001, diCorcia exhibited some of the photographs at an art gallery owned by Pace/MacGill, Inc., who published and sold a catalogue that contained pictures from the event. One of the images was of Erno Nussenzweig. Nussenzweig didn't even know his photo had been taken and sold to the public until four years later. Nussenzweig filed a lawsuit, claiming that diCorcia and Pace/MacGill had violated his privacy rights under Sections 50 and 51 of New York's Civil Rights Law and that, as a Klausenberg Orthodox Jew, such a display would violate the Commandment in Torah against graven images. DiCorcia and Pace/MacGill argued that the photo was protected under the 1st Amendment and that the statute of limitations had expired for bringing a lawsuit. diCorcia and Pace/MacGill moved for summary judgment dismissing the complaint on the ground that any claim of a Civil Rights violation had to have been commenced within one year of the initial display of the photograph, not one year from plaintiff's discovery of

the display, as he had argued. On February 8, 2006 the New York Supreme Court ruled in favor of diCorcia and Pace/MacGill gallery and dismissed the lawsuit on both counts (Nussenzweig, 2006).

In the United States, people of any age who are in public may be photographed without any prior consent or permission. There is no need for a model release or any other form of signed consent. As proven in the *Nussenzweig v. diCorcia* (2006) case, people in the US lose their privacy while in public places, and it is completely legal for their photographs to be displayed and sold without any permission. According to the Federal Communications Commission, there are currently no laws that prohibit churches from uploading pictures of any children, even without parent consent (FCC, personal communication, November 21, 2013). So, all the previously addressed questions are answered. If a child's photograph ended up online and the guardian did not want it there, that guardian would just need to ask for it to be removed. As for the church itself, using common sense and discernment is the best guide for posting pictures online. If a church has to question the photo upload, then it most likely shouldn't happen.

There is not much research currently available about the best times of posting to social media, but the best advice would be to use common sense. If a children's ministry wants to reach the parents of the children they serve, then the person posting to the site needs to think about when these parents are most likely to be engaged online during the day. Most likely, parents will be active online during their lunch break and in the evening after work. There are tools (SocialBro, Timing+, Statigram, Bitly, Ow.ly) that can track individual accounts and let the owner know when their "followers" or "friends" are most active. And, if a church were to want a one-stop shop to monitor their influence on all their social media activity, they can sign up for a Klout account. The Klout Score is a 1-100 number showing how influential someone is across

all of their social media accounts. If a church has an Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube account, Klout will measure how interactive people are to those accounts. The more interactive, the more influential, and the higher the Klout number will be. Facebook even has its own analytics page that accurately displays when people interact on their particular page. Knowing when their followers or friends are most engaged online will allow churches to reach them at the most opportune time (Klout, 2014).

Churches can also look into setting up their own social media policy for employees to follow. Inc.com suggests:

There are two approaches to creating a social media policy. You can write one complete social media policy that addresses all currently available social mediums. Or you can write policies as you need them. For example, if your company doesn't have a social media presence on YouTube you may not need to address YouTube and video usage. But as your business expands you add a YouTube policy later. (Black, 2010)

Social media policies allow for clear expectations on how church employees should conduct themselves online.

What we believe shapes how we relate to one another and how we interact with the world. Four historic accounts, most commonly known as The Gospels, show how Jesus actively engaged with his disciples. He used conversations, storytelling, inquiry, debate, dialogue, and truth telling to challenge notions about God, faith, ethics, relationships, and business. We learn about where Jesus preached and how he commissioned followers to spread the good news about God's love for humanity and how humanity should extend that love to others (Gould, 2013).

Churches can effectively use social media to communicate to their members if their "why" is backed up with scripture. Paul is an excellent example of a gifted communicator in the

Bible. He wrote countless letters to many churches so that he could encourage them, pray for them, lovingly call them out on their sins, and explain to them the correct way to handle situations. Colossians 4:3-4 says, “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.” It was important to Paul that the message he was trying to convey was proclaimed clearly to the people he was writing to, even in the midst of his imprisonment in Rome. In his letter to the Church of Ephesus, he says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29).

This should be the principle model churches follow today. If a church, as group of believers in Jesus Christ, wants to be effective through social media, they need only to measure their effectiveness by what scripture says. Paul used writing letters to his churches, and today, churches have social media as their tool. “We already have a theological framework that provides everything we need to justify using social media as a tool for ministry. Thinking theologically—seeing social media through the God-lens—will help you use it to share abundantly the joys and challenges of a life in Christ” (Gould, 2013, pg. 12).

Today, Bible believing Christians still have the commission and promise made by Jesus to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). Online tools allow Christians to reach those who were previously unimaginable to reach. Thinking theologically, by sticking to the creeds, will help them reach out to others while staying true to the faith they profess.

Gould (2013) puts the creeds previously stated into social media terms for Bible believing Christians to understand. “Here’s how our faith provides a framework for using social media:

- Believing in a gracious and merciful God calls us to be gracious and merciful during online interactions in terms of content and tone.
- Believing in the power of the Holy Spirit inspires us to be open to whatever is revealed during online conversation about God’s presence and our choices relative to faith and religious expressions thereof.
- Believing that Scripture provides a foundation for ethical living calls us to use social media as yet another tool to convey Scripture, not only by broadcasting verses but also by providing opportunities for their study and discussion.
- Believing in Gospel teachings calls us to model what we believe while using social media by offering helpful information, providing comfort, sharing joy, and engaging in conversations that build and unite, rather than tear down or divide the people of God” (Gould, 2013).

These words are so true today. The passion fueled by the gospel and affirmed in the creeds can be communicated in powerful ways using the reach and effectiveness of social media. The church has been given a powerful tool; they just have to know how to effectively use it. Their passion is to build the Kingdom of God and to love; social media is simply their outlet. Churches have to understand that passion is the fuel for social media.

New Heights Church

Social Media Policy

Social Media Policy

Summary & Purpose

New Heights Church is increasingly exploring how online community through social media can empower the New Heights Family to be witnesses of the good news of Jesus Christ as church members and Christians. We believe it is in the best interest of New Heights Staff to be aware of and participate in the sphere of online community, interaction, and idea exchange to find opportunities to share the life change that comes through Jesus Christ. The following best practices and guidelines aim to provide you helpful, practical advice—and also to protect both you and New Heights Church itself, as the church seeks to embrace social media.

Guidelines

As an employee of New Heights Church, you are seen by our members and outside parties as a representative of the church. Therefore, as in all areas of daily life, a church staff member's personal website or blog is a reflection on the church, whether or not the church is specifically discussed or referenced. If you choose to identify yourself as a New Heights Church employee or to discuss matters related to the church on your website or blog, please bear in mind that, although you may view your site as a personal project, many readers will assume you are speaking on behalf of the church. Therefore, we ask that you observe the following guidelines to preserve the Christian witness and effectiveness of both yourself and the church.

1. Live Out the First and Second Commandment- Mark 12:28-31

-Represent God, not yourself.

-Invest in others rather than ‘broadcast yourself.’

-Make sure your communications are above reproach.

2. Be Yourself and Be Transparent – Philippians 2:3

-Even when you are speaking or writing as an individual, people may perceive you to be speaking or writing on behalf of New Heights.

3. Keep Your Cool - Proverbs 29:11

-One of the aims of social media is to create dialogue, and people won't always agree on an issue. Do not use New Heights social media as a platform to engage in a debate. It is okay if your post starts a wave of heavy conversation, but be sure to only be a mediator and not to get involved in the debate. If you have questions or concerns about what is being posted by you or another party, contact the New Heights communication team.

4. Don't Be a Social Schizo

-Multiple personalities don't work well in social media. If you confuse, you lose.

- Find your focus for your ministry's social media site. You can occasionally mix it up while sticking to your main focus. Don't be afraid to use different mediums; everyone has a different learning style.

5. Stay Timely – Proverbs 15:23

-Part of the appeal in social media is that the conversation occurs almost in real time. So, if you are going to participate in an active way, make sure you are willing to take the time to refresh content, respond to questions and update information regularly, and correct information when appropriate.

6. Uphold New Heights' Values - 1 Corinthians 14:12

-Always demonstrate loyalty to the church and to each other.

-Be sensitive to linking to content. Redirecting to another site may imply an endorsement of its content.

-Here is what we believe: www.newheightschurch.com/believe

7. Protect Confidential Information and Relationships - Acts 20:28

-Online conversations and postings are not private. Know that what you post online may be around for a long time and potentially shared with others. Therefore, avoid identifying and discussing others, including church members, visitors, or staff-- especially any pastoral details such as hospitalizations, deaths, health concerns, or counseling engagements.

-Obtain permission before posting copyrighted material. Use your own discernment when posting pictures of individuals within your ministry. Take special consideration in the case of children.

-You must take proper care not to purposefully or inadvertently disclose or distribute any information or intellectual property that is confidential or proprietary to New Heights Church.

Individual Ministry Implementations

(All data and Figures collected September 23, 2014)



(used with permission)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/NewHeightsChildrensMinistry

Social Media Goal: The Children's Ministry will provide resources and connect involved parents

Primary Audience: Parents of children already involved in the ministry

Secondary Audience: Parents of children who are not involved in New Heights Children's Ministry, but are in the sphere of influence or online community of the parents who are.

New Heights Children's Ministry has four full-time employees, one part-time employee, and three interns. They serve approximately 300 families and 500 children from newborns to 6th graders.

New Heights Children's Ministry uses only Facebook as a social media outlet. The primary and secondary audiences are not highly active on any other form of social media. My research shows that as of September 23, 2014, they have 267 page likes, which has increased from 227 in the Fall of 2013 when I first met with them.

I found that the Children's Ministry was different than any other ministry while looking at social media. It is the only ministry where their audience is different than the actual people they are normally ministering to. For instance, they usually work with children, but on social media they are targeting the parents and guardians of those children.

As shown in Figure 7, 9pm and 8:30am seem to be the most trafficked times on social media for the Children's Ministry page. The research shows that the most trafficked day is Tuesday.

Statuses seem to be the best way to reach these parents, as opposed to photos or videos (shown in Figure 5). Statuses that offer a resource of some sort are the most popular among this demographic.

Case Study

On November 18, 2013, the Children's Ministry posted a resource Facebook status with a photo, encouraging parents to bless their children with words (shown in Figure 6). It was liked and shared more than any other previous post, and ended up increasing the total page likes. The circle in Figure 4 shows the increase in likes that happened within a couple days after the post.

Using the Facebook Insights available to Facebook page administrators, I found that parents want to know how to serve, teach, love, and parent their children in the best way possible. Social media allows instant access to unlimited resources.



Figure 3
 (Facebook, 2014)
 Children's Ministry Facebook Page



Figure 4
 (Facebook, 2014)
 Total Facebook Page Likes

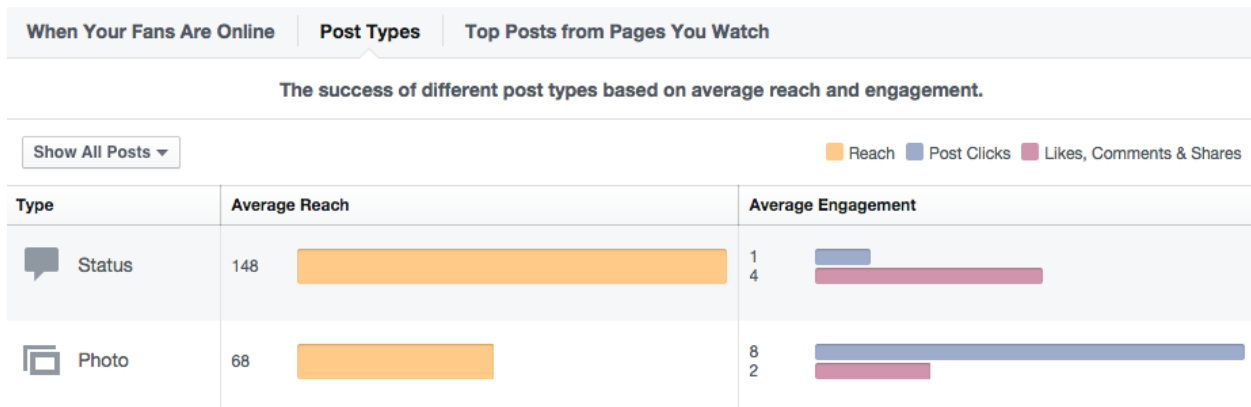


Figure 5
(Facebook, 2014)
Types of Posts



Figure 6
(Facebook, 2014)
Successful Post

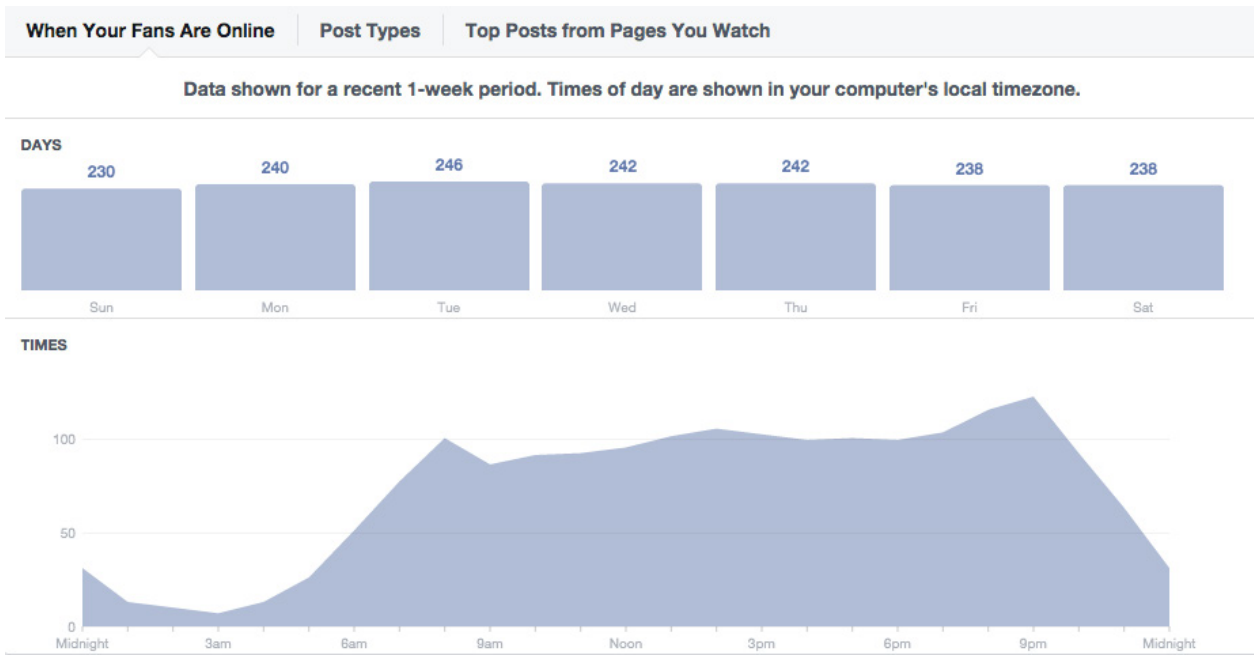


Figure 7
 (Facebook, 2014)
 When Fans are Online



(used with permission)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/nhstumin

Twitter: @nhstumin

Instagram: @nhstumin

Social Media Goal: The ministry will provide resources and connect involved parents

Primary Audience: Students and parents already involved in the ministry

Secondary Audience: Students who are not churched, but are in the sphere of influence of the
current

NHSM members

New Heights Student Ministry has three full-time employees, one part-time employee, and two interns. They serve approximately 80 families and 200 students from 7th grade to 12th grade.

The New Heights Student Ministry was already successfully using social media before this project began. Their “following” and “likes” have steadily grown since their Facebook launch on November 10, 2010.

When I met with the Student Ministry leaders, I found that junior high and high school students in Fayetteville, Ark., are on Instagram more than any other social media outlet. The Student Ministry uses Instagram to promote, encourage, and celebrate all of their events and ministry members.

As shown in Figure 11, the most liked media on New Heights Student Ministry’s Instagram are photos of worship, praying, and celebrating people within the ministry. The most commented on photos (Figure 12) are those that promote events the ministry plans on doing. If students need to know anything about the event, they only have to post a comment on the photo and wait for a response.

Even though Instagram is the medium of choice for this audience, they still use Facebook. Wednesday and Thursday nights at 9pm are the most trafficked times for the ministry’s Facebook page, as shown in Figure 9. They are most likely catching the students before they are going to bed, so posting important information on Facebook isn’t entirely helpful. Students do however react positively on Facebook to videos and photos.

Total Page Likes as of Today: 458



Figure 8
(Facebook, 2014)
Total Facebook Page Likes

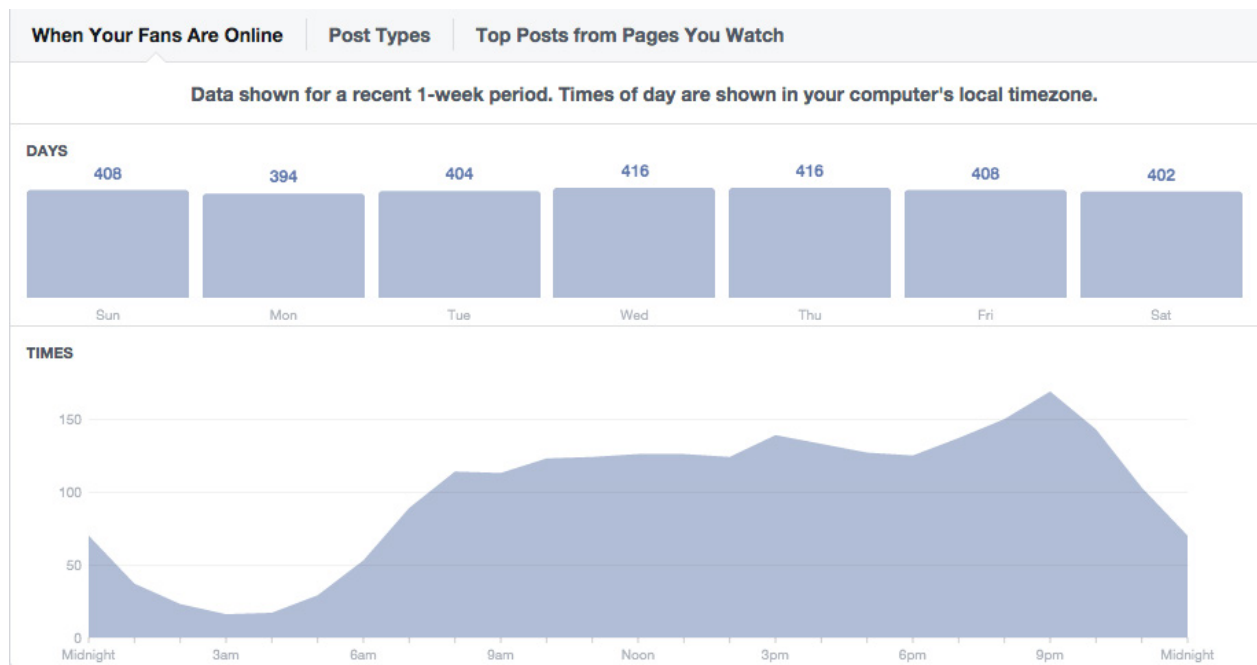


Figure 9
(Facebook, 2014)
When Fans Are Online

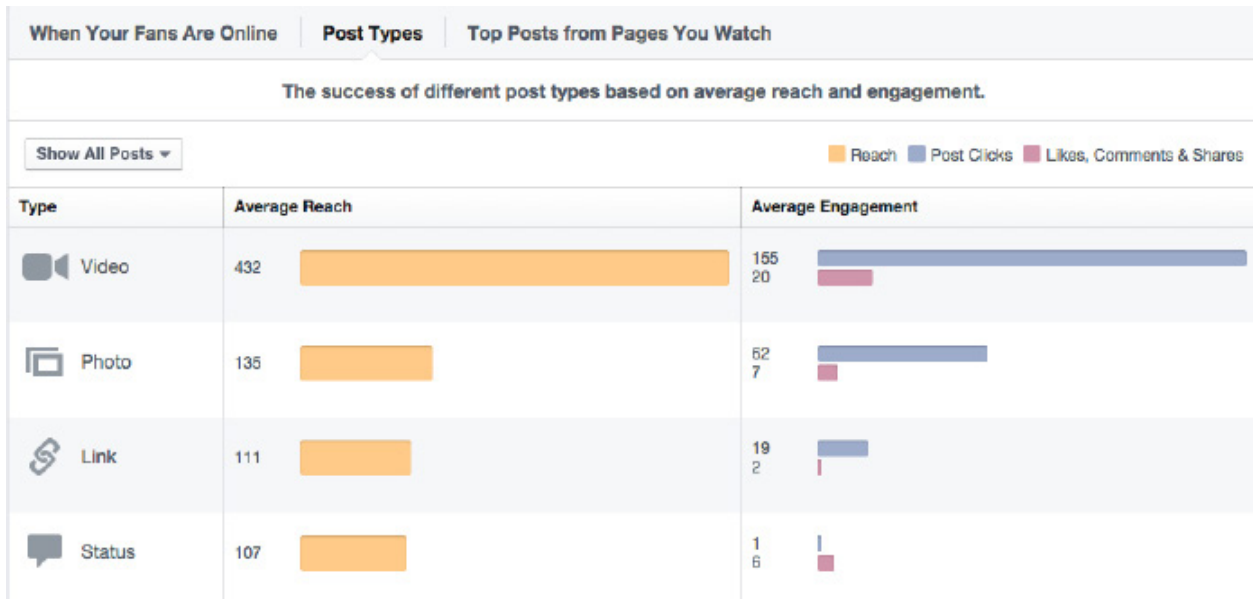


Figure 10
(Facebook, 2014)
Types of Post

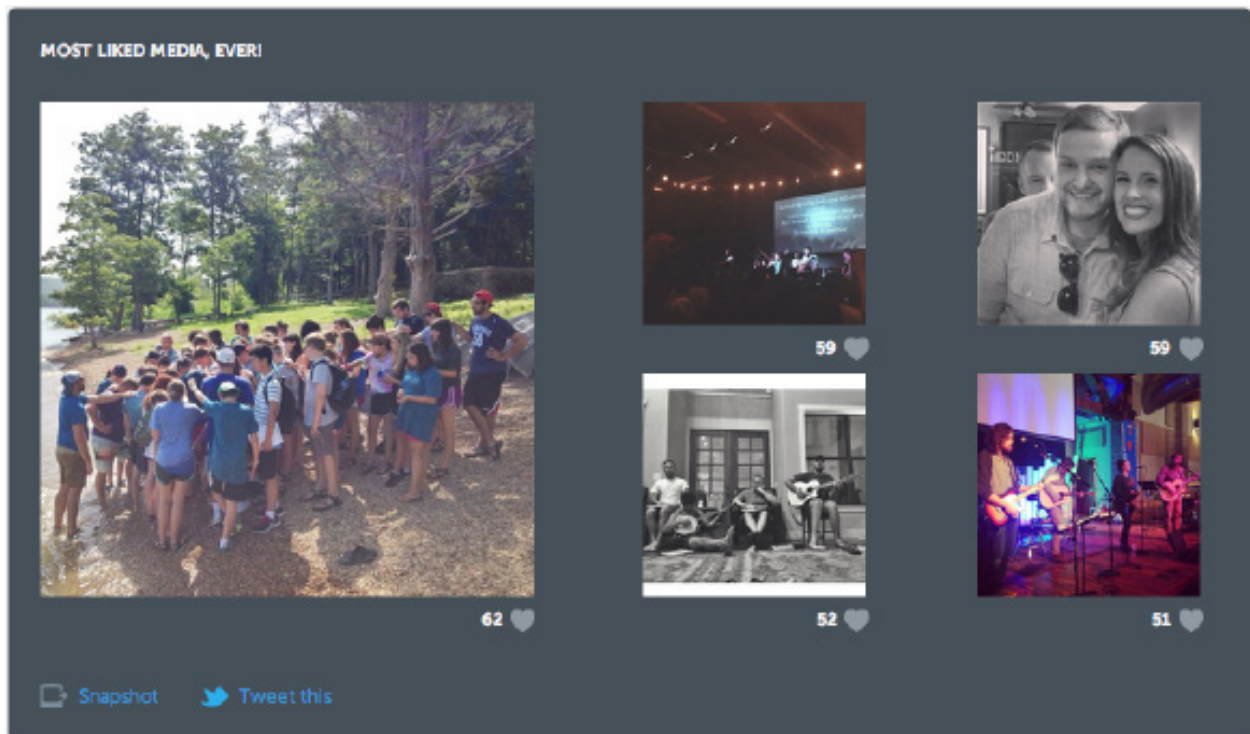


Figure 11
(Instagram, 2014)
Most Liked Instagram Posts

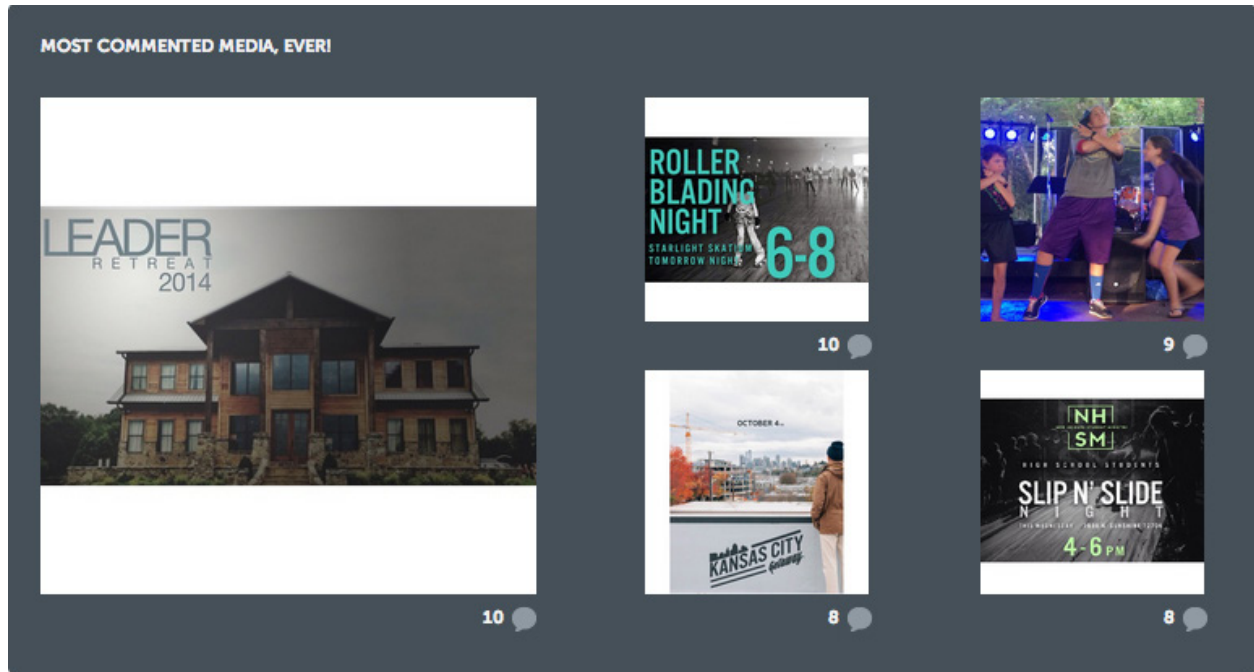


Figure 12
 (Instagram, 2014)
 Most Commented Instagram Post

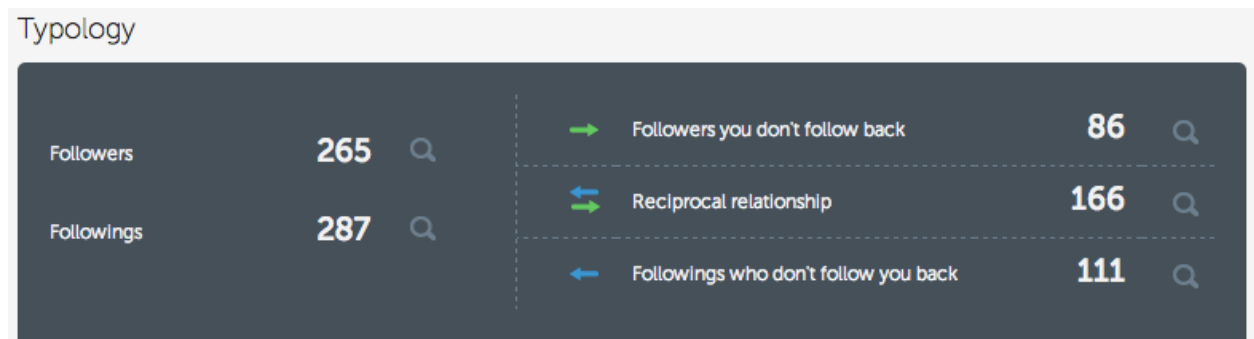


Figure 13
 (Instagram, 2014)
 Instagram Followers



NEW HEIGHTS COLLEGE MINISTRY

(used with permission)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/NewHeightsCollegeMinistry

Twitter: @N_H_College

Instagram: @newheightscollege

Social Media Goal: Build online community among university students and effectively communicate to them

Primary Audience: Students currently involved

Secondary Audience: Students who attend New Heights Church, but who are not involved in the college ministry

New Heights College Ministry has two full-time employees, two interns, and a college leadership team of 15-20 students. They serve approximately 600 college students.

New Heights College Ministry social media didn't exist until I met with the ministry leaders in the Fall of 2013. I didn't understand why a ministry that served millennials wouldn't have any social media established, so I explained to them the importance of communicating to these college students where they are. They are always online. I started this social media strategy to enable ministries to effectively use social media by giving them all the appropriate training and tools, and left it up to them to take charge of the media itself.

Fayetteville, Ark. is a college town, which also means that around half of the entire congregation at New Heights Church are college students. Even though there is an abundance of students they network within weekly, they have only obtained 114 likes on their Facebook page and only 83 followers on Instagram within the span of one year. Their Twitter is connected to Facebook, so it is just as dead as the rest of the media. They didn't keep up with the sites, so the statistics didn't show a positive growth.

The college ministry has the opportunity to reach thousands of college students with every post to social media. They host monthly worship services and numerous events, but are only communicating through word-of-mouth. Social media will extend the ministry's reach to people when they begin using the tool and connect with students.

Figures 15-18 show the data collected from Facebook and Instagram, but shouldn't be used in research due to the fact that the media was stagnant, so the results will not reflect an effective use of social media.

I met with the ministry leaders in October 2014 (a year after the original meeting) and showed them the positive effect social media had on other ministries. I explained how they can use the Facebook Insights to target their audience at the most opportune time. For the past month, they have been consistently posting to social media, and plan to continue to use it to reach college students. As the Social Media Director at New Heights Church, I will continue to monitor the site and assist when I am needed.



Figure 14
(Facebook, 2014)
College Ministry Facebook Page



Figure 15
(Facebook, 2014)
Total Facebook Page Likes

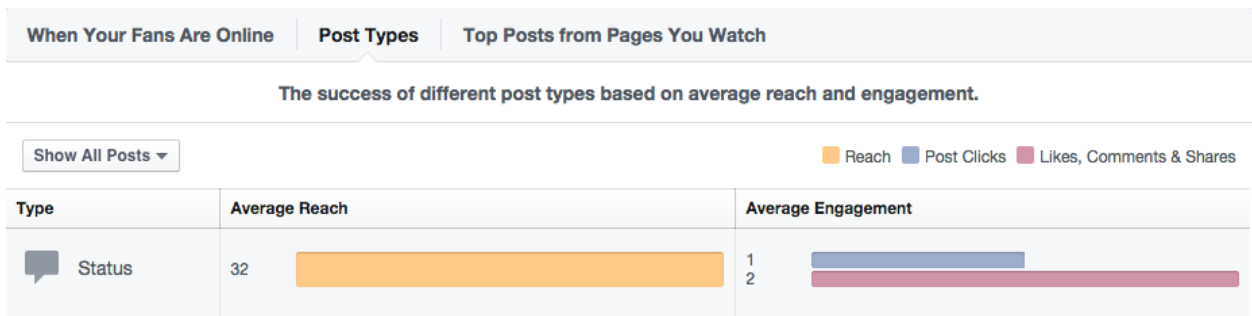


Figure 16
(Facebook, 2014)
Types of Posts

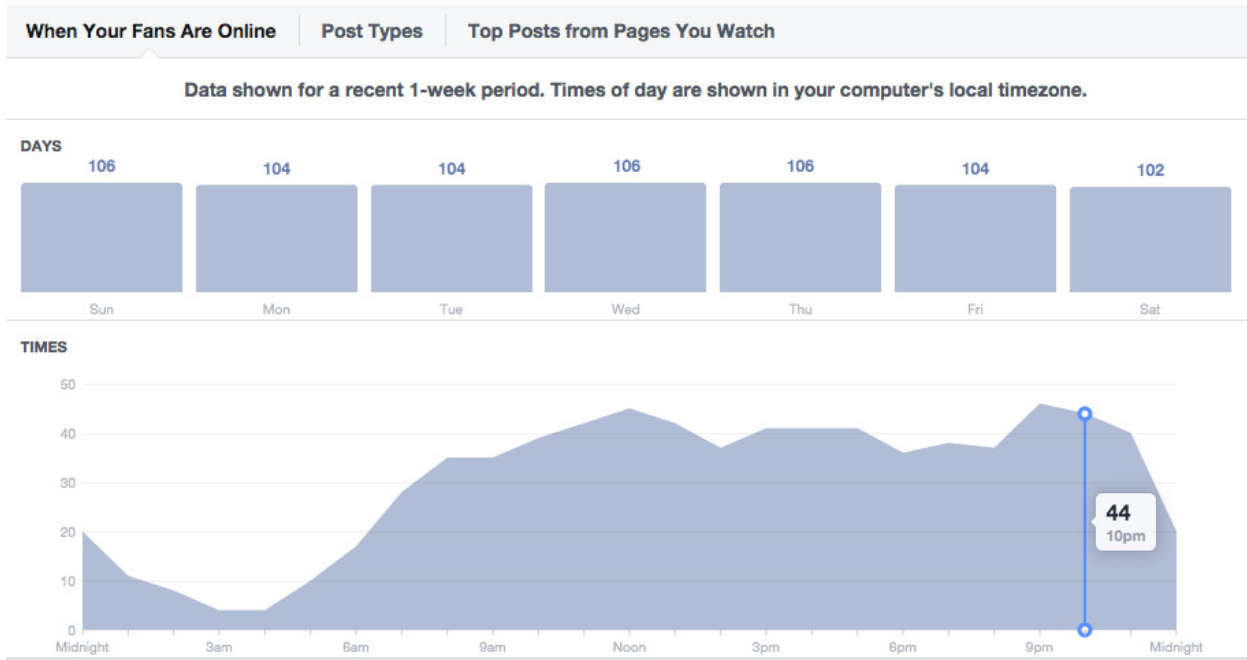


Figure 17
 (Facebook, 2014)
 When Fans are Online

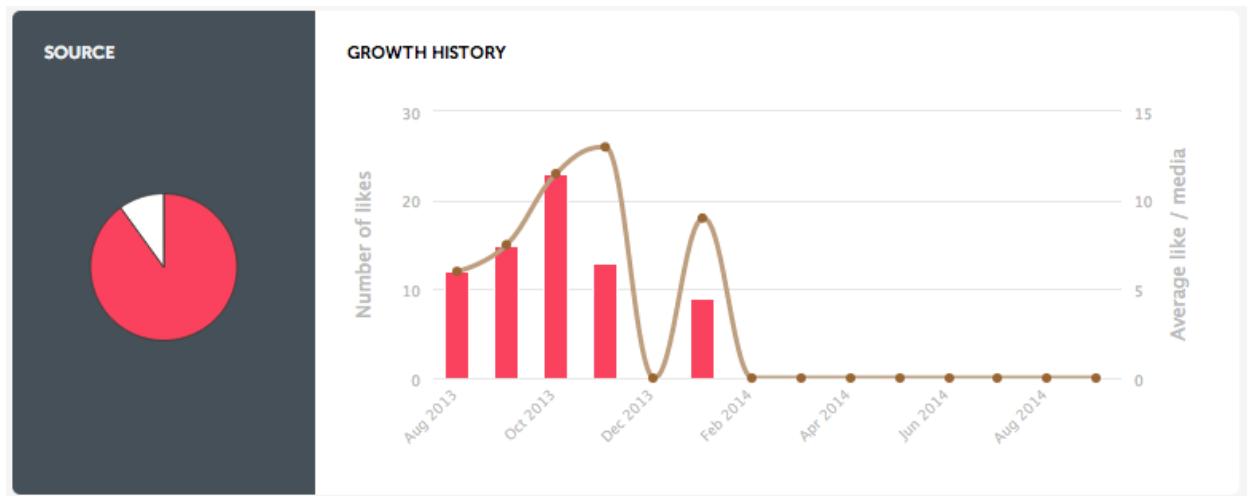


Figure 18
 (Instagram, 2014)
 Instagram Growth History



(used with permission)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Newheightschrch

Twitter: @NewHeightsChrch

Social Media Goal: Build an online community

Primary Audience: People and families who are members of New Heights

Secondary Audience: Non-Church members who are seeking a church

New Heights Church is a Bible believing church with around 2000 documented members. The church comprises four legal entities, one for profit and three non-profit. They meet on a weekly basis, every Sunday, at the Boys and Girls Club in Fayetteville. They do not have a church building. There are 65 home-based adult small groups and 12 home-based teenage small groups. New Heights employs 140 employees, contractors, and interns. When all of the local and global workers are added to the count, New Heights has 650 people that they fully or partially support or employ.

New Heights' main Facebook page has continued to grow steadily since its existence on November 13, 2010. They currently use Facebook and Twitter as their platforms, but will most likely expand to other forms of social media in the near future. They have the most diverse audience since they are trying to reach the entire church as a whole.

Tweeting specifically from Twitter has been placed on the back burner. Their Facebook is connected to Twitter, so every post is also tweeted. The most trafficked days on social media for the main page are Mondays and Thursdays at 9pm. The most successful posts are videos and resource links. New Heights Church has a YouTube account, and they post all of their videos that are shown on Sunday mornings onto their Facebook page. They are always a huge hit with their online community.

Case Study

As demonstrated in Figure 19, the page likes for New Heights have continued to steadily increase, with a spike in page likes around August 13, 2014. The post from August 13 (shown in Figure 22) was a personality profile piece with a photo of a woman who worked at the front desk in the New Heights office, and was leaving to pursue a different job. It reached over 3,000 people, and gained 179 likes, 19 comments, and a share. People didn't react because they were happy about her leaving, but because they wanted to celebrate and honor all of her work. Every personality profile piece posted on the page had the same results. This shows that people want to see and connect with people.

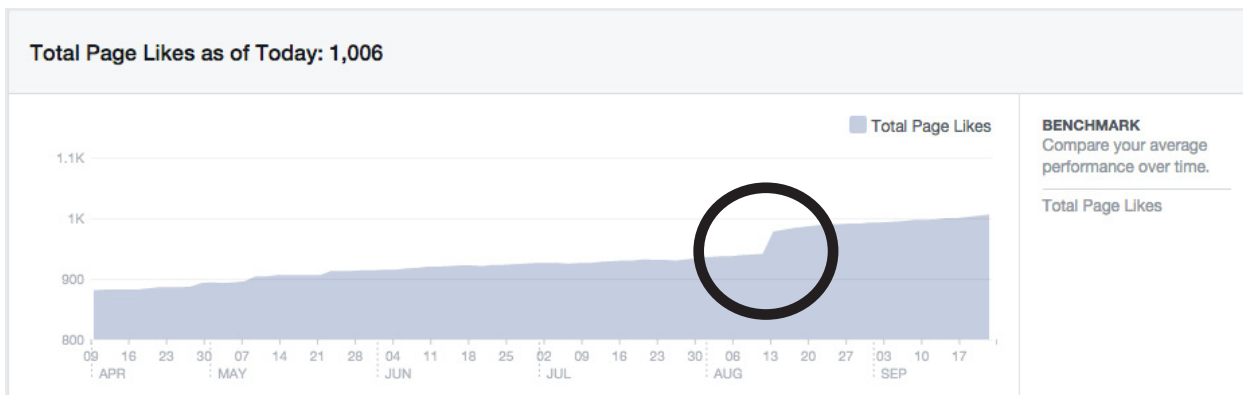


Figure 19
(Facebook, 2014)
Total Facebook Page Likes

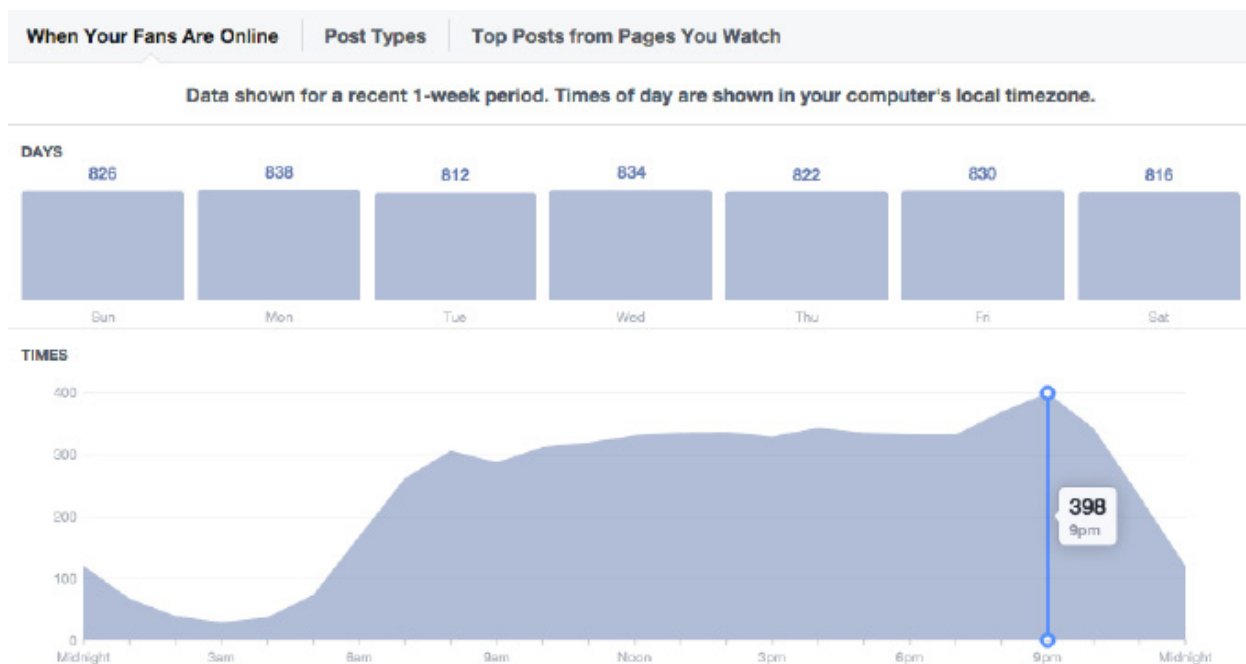


Figure 20
(Facebook, 2014)
When Fans are Online

Type	Average Reach	Average Engagement
Video	1.3K	325 50
Link	721	75 16
Photo	565	101 32
Status	365	55 11

Figure 21
(Facebook, 2014)
Types of Posts

New Heights Church with **Kathy Schieffler Bell**
August 13 · 🌐

Today is Kathy Bell's last day working at the front desk. Her smile and contagious personality will be greatly missed. She has inspired each of us by the way prays over the phone with people, and how she poured so much love into every person that came through the doors of the New Heights offices. Kathy will still be the Women's Ministry Director, so you will see her around! ... [See More](#)



3,282 people reached Boost Post

Unlike · Comment · Share · 📌 140 🗨️ 10

3,282 People Reached

199 Likes, Comments & Shares

179 Likes	140 On Post	39 On Shares
19 Comments	10 On Post	9 On Shares
1 Shares	1 On Post	0 On Shares

525 Post Clicks

85 Photo Views	0 Link Clicks	440 Other Clicks ⓘ
--------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide Post	0 Hide All Posts
0 Report as Spam	0 Unlike Page

Figure 22
(Facebook, 2014)
Popular Facebook Post

fpr fayetteville prayerroom

(used with permission)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/FayettevillePrayerRoom

Twitter: @FayPrayerRoom

Social Media Goal: Connect and build a culture of prayer in NWA

Primary Audience: People already involved

Secondary Audience: People in NWA who aren't connected to the Prayer Room

The Fayetteville Prayer Room has three full-time employees and 60 weekly volunteers. It is located at 2846 N. College Ave. Fayetteville, Ark.

The Fayetteville Prayer Room is a unique ministry in that it serves, not just New Heights, but churches throughout Northwest Arkansas. When I sat down with their team in the Fall of 2013, their Facebook page already had around 470 likes (as shown in Figure 23). Their most trafficked days are Sundays and Thursdays at 9pm (as shown in Figure 24). The Fayetteville Prayer Room consistently posts statuses in the form of encouragements, scriptures, and weekly events on their page (Figure 25), so people know they can rely on content delivery. The Fayetteville Prayer Room is a prime example of a ministry effectively using social media. They haven't kept up with their Twitter account however, and it isn't connected to their Facebook page, so nothing is being tweeted. I will recommend that they consistently keep up with their Twitter account. Tweeting prayer requests and answered prayers on a weekly basis would be an effective way to use the medium.



Figure 23
(Facebook, 2014)
Total Facebook Page Likes

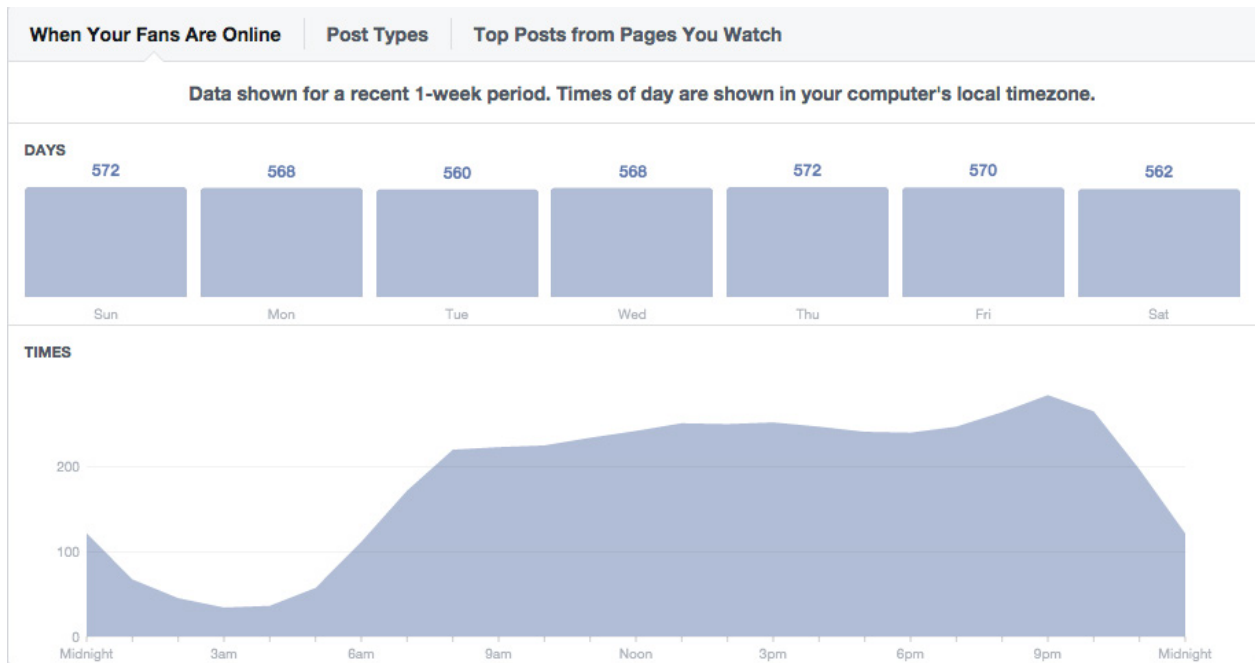


Figure 24
(Facebook, 2014)
When Fans are Online

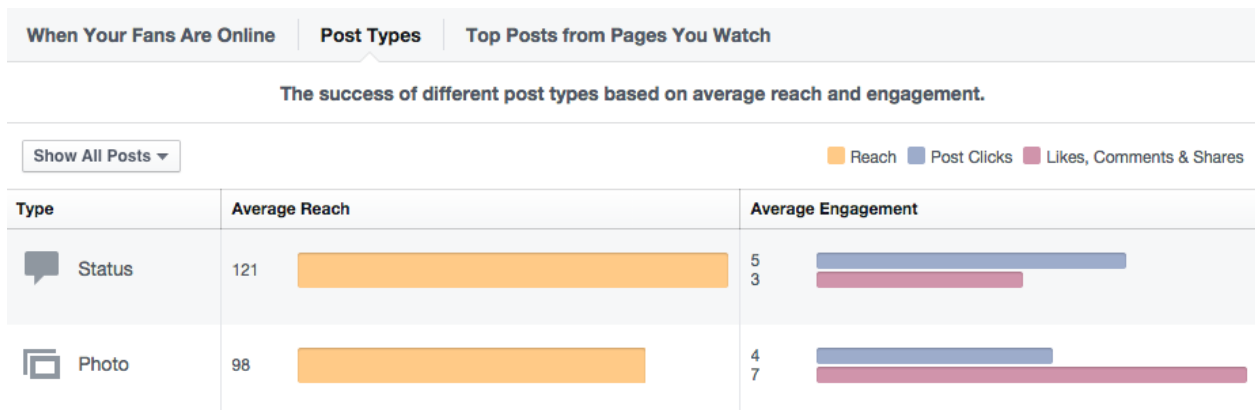


Figure 25
(Facebook, 2014)
Types of Posts



(used with permission)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/pottershous1998

Goal: Increase awareness of events, and create an online community for
Potter's House

Primary Audience: Potter's House families

Secondary Audience: Donors and prayer community

Potter's House is changing lives of inner-city children, youth and families by relationships through mentoring, academic tutoring, small group bible studies and life-on-life activities. It has five full-time employees, 3 part-time employees, and serves 75 families.

Potter's House turned out to have the most surprising results in the study. In the Fall of 2013 their social media was pretty much non-existent. They only had around 50 page likes and they weren't posting any content. They only use Facebook, because that is the social media platform the majority of the inner-city Fayetteville families use.

Case Study

I met with the director of Potter's House, Shawn Schwartzman, in the Fall of 2013, and he was very vocal about his extreme dislike for social media. He felt social media was only harmful to families and to relationships, and that there was no purpose for people to always know what he was up to. I then showed him my thesis research paper, and explained to him that passion is the fuel for social media. Not a passion for social media, but a passion for the people he is trying to communicate to. His reaction was unexpected. Shawn completely changed his mind about social media, and was really excited to start reaching the people in his ministry effectively. He left our meeting and went straight to his team and told them what I had just presented to him. In just two days, as shown in Figure 27, their page likes went from 52 to 562. They have continued to gain page likes, and are consistently posting content.

Total Page Likes as of Today: 876



Figure 26
(Facebook, 2014)
Total Page Likes



Figure 27
(Facebook, 2014)
Increase in Page Likes

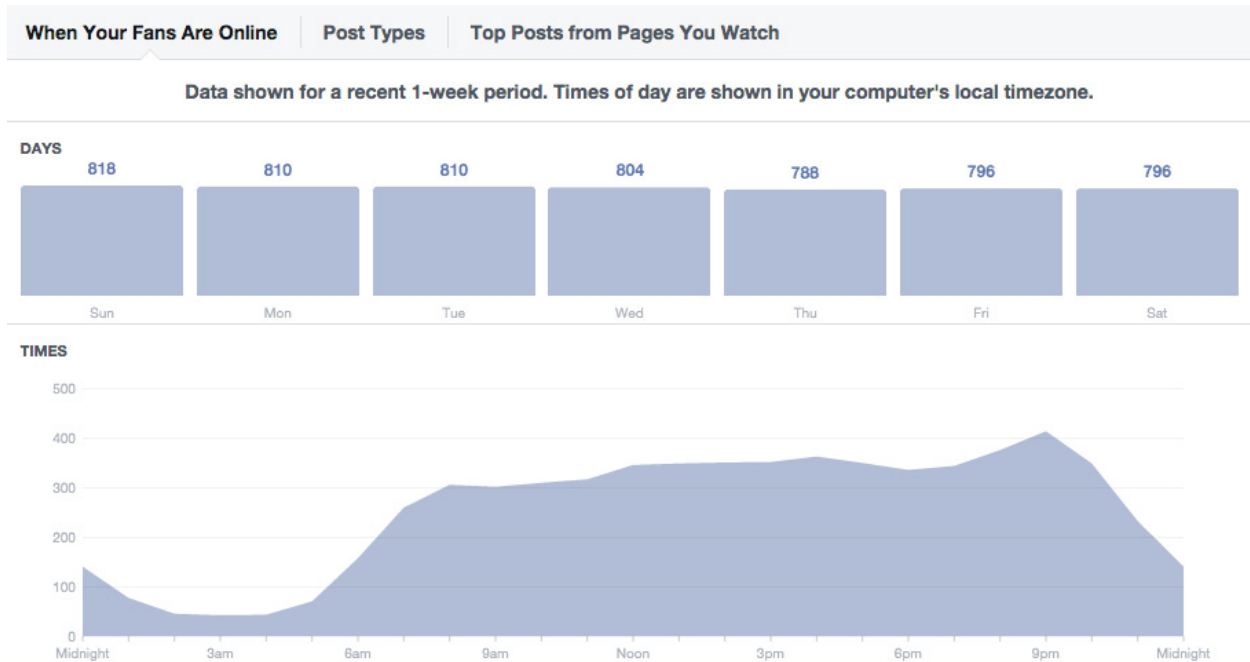


Figure 28
(Facebook, 2014)
When Fans are Online

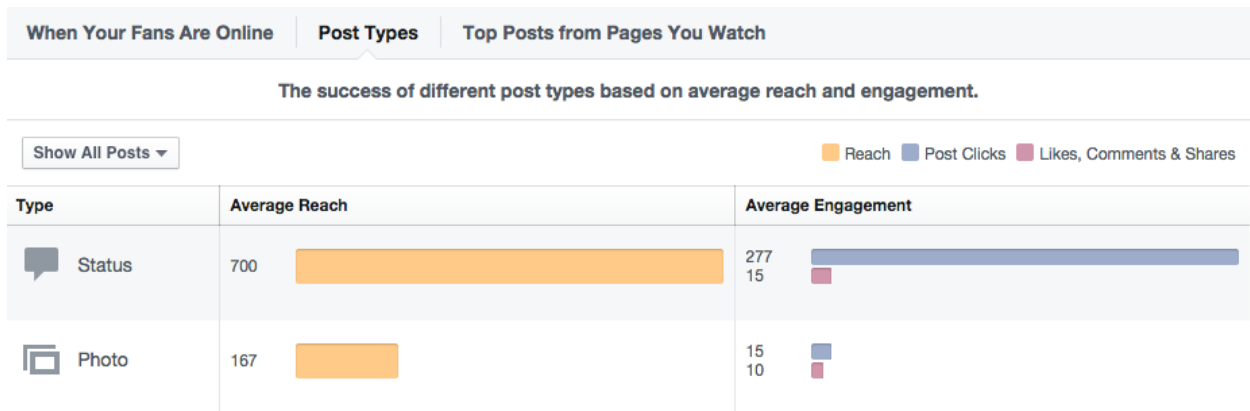


Figure 29
(Facebook, 2014)
Types of Posts

Assessment

The goal of this thesis project was to show that churches can effectively use social media. I implemented social media into multiple ministries within New Heights Church and watched the data throughout the duration of a year. My study was successful because I proved that social media can effectively be used by churches. Having a brainstorming session with the ministry leaders of New Heights Church about their target audience and who their ministry was as a whole was essential. It allowed the ministry leaders to have a communication focus. Teaching them the basics of how to post and how to connect their multiple social media platforms was also an important step on the front end.

I learned however that some ministries needed more than just a meeting and an implementation. They needed to be coached for a couple months on how they were using their platforms. I learned that making a weekly posting calendar with each ministry would have helped. I could've even sent out weekly emails, reminding ministry leaders to post to social media. Potter's House understood what I told them and successfully changed the way they communicated to the people in their ministry. However, the College Ministry got excited about the idea of reaching a large number of college students, but simply did nothing about it.

For future church implementations, I will spend more time working with individual ministries who are struggling to get started. I believe that it is important to have one key person in charge, instead of a small group of people. In the future, I will work with one representative from each ministry, and then they will delegate within their own ministry.

I also learned that social media is intimidating to many people. But, when I explained they didn't have to have a passion for it, only a passion for the people they are trying to

communicate to, their attitudes always changed. According to my research, when you use passion as their driving motivation to communicate, regardless of the outlet, people seem more eager to reach others.

As the Digital Media Director at New Heights Church, I will continue to monitor the ministry's social media outlets. Social media is changing everyday, so I will remain up-to-date on the newest forms of media and how they can better the communication efforts of New Heights Church. I will take this project to other churches and help them successfully use social media as an effective communication tool.

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UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

October 27, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Derick McKinney
Patsy Watkins

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 14-10-181

Protocol Title: *Social Media in the Church*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 10/27/2014 Expiration Date: 10/26/2015

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 6 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior* to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

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Appendix A