



Getting Your Church Online

+ Improving your church's online presence

A Simple Handbook



Contents

p.3 Building your comms strategy

p.8 Content planning

p.9 Fifty ideas for content

p.10 Online platforms

p.11 Social media

p.14 Further resources

Does my church really need an online presence?

The Great Commission in the 21st Century arguably includes the vast digital world. Here too we can share the gospel and build community!

The online space can be a daunting and complicated one, which does sometimes show the worst behaviours of society, but we are called to be salt and light here too.

Online we can reach far more people than in our own town or village, as well as build community within our own congregation and community throughout the week. The opportunities are truly endless. Even with just a little time and willingness to give it a go, a lot can be achieved!

We imagine you've picked up this handbook because you're inspired, but also a little (or very!) daunted by how to make online work for your church. Our aim is to guide you through the basics, alleviate your worries, and give you the confidence to get started, or to make some effective changes.

Building your Comms Strategy

Your Comms Strategy is a simple guide for your goals online. The next few pages contain a template you can fill out, followed by a sample version from a fictional church.

- Try to commit some time to considering the questions and filling this out, with other relevant people in your church. It will help set the direction and tone for this work and make sure everyone's on the same page.
 - It will be useful to refer back to when things change organizationally and your work online needs to change too.
 - Likewise, when a new team member or volunteer starts, they will have this to refer to.
 - Make sure to save this somewhere accessible, so that everyone can see it and adapt it.
 - It doesn't need to be overly complicated – two pages is plenty!
- o What are our goals?
 - o Who are we?
 - o Who do we want to reach?
 - o Audience avatar
 - o Where do we want to be online?
 - o Inspiration
 - o Social media content



Comms Strategy Template and Sample

What are our goals?

What do you actually want to be able to achieve through your comms? You can be aspirational and ambitious but also be realistic and practical about what you can feasibly do.

Who are we?

Who are you as a church family, as a community? What are you passionate about? (homelessness, poverty, environment, discipleship, worship etc.) Do you support local/national charities or missions? Who makes up your church family? Ages, demographics, interests, skills? Do you have a design, style, colour theme for your church? Do you have brand guidelines already?

Who do we want to reach?

Who is in your immediate community/ town/ area? Who does your church and its activities appeal to? It won't make sense to target students or young families if you live in a rural area with mostly older people. Similarly you can't expect to have much engagement if all your activities happen during the daytime on weekdays if you live in a place where there are lots of working professionals.

Audience Avatar

Create your audience avatar - a representation of the 'average' person you are talking to online. Think about a couple of different avatars of people who currently attend your church. Try not to make it too obviously based on one person but a blend of the church family. Consider your aspirational church family, again being realistic of the types of people who could actually attend your church. But also think beyond the trends, demographics and interests of your current family - what are people beyond the walls of your church passionate about? You may find it helpful to bring together a listening group who engage with your community to inform this.

Where do we want to be online?

Where are people (current and potential) gathering online? What platforms are they using? What are you currently doing? What would you like to try?

Inspiration

Whose content inspires you? What aligns with the type of content your church could make?

Social media content

Break down your content ideas into the following (though you could add others) content pillars:

Promotional

Educational

Community

Entertainment

Lighthouse Church Sample Comms Strategy**What are our goals?**

We want to connect with individuals in our community, allowing for more relationships throughout the week so that Sunday services feel like a family gathering rather than an obligated club. We want to encourage small groups and deep meaningful friendships between our members encouraging each other to grow in Christ. We want to use social media to foster those relationships between our current members but also share the work of our mission partners, ministry groups and individuals to our community. We want to connect with as many people as possible.

Who are we?

We are a small church of about 50 people in a medium-sized town by the coast. Our town has an iconic lighthouse at one end that brings visitors throughout the year to see it and our glorious beaches. We are passionate about our environment and often raise awareness and funding for climate crisis appeals both locally and internationally. We have a small leadership team of one minister, a minister in training, a youth minister and an administrator. There are also a number of individuals within our church serving in voluntary roles from worship, maintenance, cleaning, hospitality as well as various mission and ministry groups.

Who are we? (cont.)

We have a small but efficient church building with the main chapel, some side offices and a good sized hall with a kitchen. The hall is used most days by community groups or gatherings both connected and non connected with the church family. There is a steady stream of people using the facilities bringing people through the building.

We do not do much online as we do not have the understanding or the inclination as about 60% of our church family are over 50 so have not asked for more digital or online tools or resources. But lately we have had a number of younger families and couples join our church so are aware we are not providing for their context. A new housing estate is also being built in town which we anticipate will bring younger families into the area.

Who do we want to reach?

- Church family
- Those using the building
- Those in our immediate area
- Those interested in exploring faith
- Partner organisations - local (council, schools, shops, groups, businesses)
- Those visiting

Audience Avatar

Current - John is a 57 year old local council member who serves in the hospitality team at church. He has a past experience in biodiversity research and has been a Christian in his later years. He is an active member in our eco team, championing our faith reasons for wanting to respond to the climate crisis but also with his work hat on, he is aware of what is going on locally, what grants we can tap into and how the church is viewed by the local services. He is fairly active online with a twitter account that he uses for his professional life as well as LinkedIn. He does use Youtube frequently to listen to sermons, talks or how to videos. But he does not quite correlate how his faith journey and personal as well as group discipleship time can be connected with online resources.

Potential A - Annie is a 28 year old mother to a 2 year old boy who has just moved to the town with her husband, child and dog in the last year. She has been a Christian her whole life, growing up in Christian family. She trained to be a teacher and is looking to find a job at the local school but also connect with other young families in the town.

Potential B - Non church goer, occasionally uses building.

Where do we want to be online?

- Create deeper relationships with the church family
- Offer clearer communications with church activities both internally and externally
- Encourage discipleship
- Evangelise
- Connect with local and national partners to share news
- Using: website, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter

Inspiration

- Partner organisations - faith (BU, Association, BMS, MAF, Christian Aid, Operation Noah)
- Some other local churches
- Churches across country doing online well/creatively

Social media content

- Promotional
 - What events do we have going on?
 - What facilities do we have for people to use?
- Educational
 - What can we share to educate those looking to increase their faith knowledge?
 - What can we do to share with those who know nothing about the area/ about faith?
 - How can we equip people for holiday activities?
 - How can we equip people with life skills?
- Community
 - What can we highlight about local groups or activities, mission/ministry activities going on in and around the church?
- Entertainment
 - What fun things can we share to show our fun side?
 - What local things can we engage with?

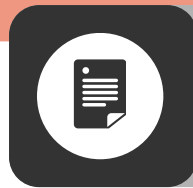
Content Planning

Take some time upfront to consider and shape your content for the next year, or six months, at a very high level.

Start big and work down, taking a few notes and considering:

- Key events in the year e.g. Christmas, Easter, other key festivals
- Quarterly/ termly rhythms e.g. sermon series, holidays
- Community events e.g. markets, carnivals, holiday clubs, community projects
- Church events and liturgical calendar

We would recommend then planning your actual content one to two months in advance, taking into consideration all you have noted above.



Simple Content Planner
bit.ly/4aSHcuX

Top Tips

Mix it up

Variety is key to engagement, so be sure to post 'evergreen' content (content that's useful all the time like a Spotify worship playlist) as well as 'topical' content (e.g. information about an upcoming worship event).

Use the power of pictures

Photos increase interest, and capture attention in endless news feeds. If you don't have an appropriate photo to use, try a free stock photo website like unsplash.com.

Don't only talk about your church

People want variety from you, so feel free to post about that interesting article you read in Christianity Today, the daffodils coming up in your garden, or the amazing work of a local charity.

At a loss for what to post about?

Have a look at the list of 50 ideas for content on the next page.

50 ideas for online church content

- Share a bible verse
- Share a quote
- Ask about favourite non-faith related items (tea v coffee, the best biscuit of all time, best local parks)
- Utilise unused features such as polls
- Ask audience to share photos of X,Y,Z (pets, holidays, favourite place in town)
- Ask favourite faith related item (bible verse, worship song)
- Ask questions about life (what challenges are you facing? How can we pray for you? What are you grateful for?)
- Share reflections from your congregation (short videos or text)
- Introduce church leadership and congregations (videos, text/photo)
- Share testimonies
- Introduction to different ministries/groups
- Behind the scenes of a church service
- Tour around the site
- Different roles within your church
- Bible verse lottery to encourage trying new verse
- Pause and pray (countdown video)
- Pause and pray (themed reflection)
- How to pray video
- Worship/ CCM playlist
- Preview of service
- Quotes from service
- Follow up from sermon (questions, additional thoughts)
- Go live and chat
- Go live for a bible reading with questions
- Offer external resources from other accounts
- Share other accounts posts relevant to your audience
- Bible study
- Regular Prayer meeting
- 24 hour prayer
- Daily devotional (can outsource from others)
- Updates on personal lives of staff (always with specific permission)
- Prayer requests & follow up
- Share online courses/ webinars
- Mentoring with leadership
- Mentoring with external partners
- Resources to help build faith (YouVersion Bible, Lectio 360)
- Christian-ese dictionary breakdown
- Bible translation versions breakdown
- Share history of church/building
- Competition (relating to sermon series, seasonal themes, day to day life)
- Promote upcoming events
- Promote local organisation (cafes, shops, tourist attractions)
- Upskilling & building digital confidence
- Share a reading list
- Promote a missional organisation or outreach project linked with church
- Prayer for national topics
- Invite people to church Sunday service and include invite so others can share too
- Invite to email newsletter
- Thank volunteers and those serving
- Share about small groups

Online Platforms

When thinking about where to invest your time and energy online, consider:

- Which platforms are our church members and potential church members using the most? It may be worth some informal conversations or a quick poll on the door on a Sunday to find out!
- How many platforms are we capable of maintaining, and posting on regularly? There is no point in having an Instagram account if you only post on it once a month. It is better to use one or two spaces online well than to use many poorly.
- Do we have the expertise and know-how to create quality short-form video content? If the answer is no, avoid TikTok.
- What do we want to achieve on each platform we're considering? Is it suited for that aim?

Website

Often the first place visitors will go to find out key information about your church: service times, children and youth information, house groups, community work, contact information etc.

Newsletter

Likely a monthly or even weekly list of updates for church members, via email. You can use free software such as MailChimp to create newsletters and manage your list of who is signed up.

YouTube

The biggest video-sharing platform, best suited to long-form video content. Ideal for sharing recorded sermons or full services.

Social Media

Potential to reach a large audience through virtual networks. Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok are amongst the most-used platforms.

Social Media Platforms

Social media is likely to play a large part in your church's online presence, helping you to reach new audiences.

Whichever platforms you use, you'll need to consider who has access to your social media accounts. If your account is going to be used by more people than just you, who are those with the authority to post on behalf of your organisation? This will allow for clarity so that you can choose those best placed to post and so you know who to talk to if something goes wrong. As well as thinking what you want to post, also be conscious of what you don't want to post.

Don't be afraid to get stuck in! As with most things in life, you only get out of it as much as you put in. If you stay an active member on social media, then you will see your audiences grow and engagement with you and your organisation will improve.

Always remember, however, that social media is transient, yet permanent. Think carefully before you post something, because if you aren't careful, some of your posts might come back to haunt you. Don't say anything through social media that you wouldn't be happy to say in public.

But, if your posts are considered, if you put in solid time and effort, you will reap your rewards and develop a fantastic social media presence from which to shout about your church and the great work you're doing.



Facebook



Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the UK. You'll need to set up a Facebook Page (different to a profile as an individual).

Content that is easy to engage with will perform better on Facebook. For example, a picture that has a nice background and a bible passage will go a lot further than a link to an article from an academic journal.

This doesn't mean that none of the content you put up on Facebook can have any depth. If you look at some popular social media pages you will see that they can reference serious material on Facebook, they just do their best to make this material digestible for somebody that is quickly flicking through a news feed. For example, if you wish to draw the attention of parents of young children to recent research about parenting, you need to offer a good caption with the link to the research. A caption such as: 'New research from Coventry University on young parents' won't receive as much interest as referencing an interesting quote from the research, e.g. 'Recent research shows only 35% of parents read their children a story before bed.' A caption such as this is both easily digestible and offers a hook to encourage your audience to engage with your post.

Another way to encourage engagement on Facebook is to offer lists. You might consider writing a blog article about how to engage with your community. For example: '7 ways you can engage more with your community today'.

Once you have set up your page you have numerous options available to you. The first is the option to invite people to like your page. This option will allow you to send an invite to anybody on your personal friends list. You can use 'Insights' on your Facebook page to learn about your audience. Through this you can get a sense of how many likes your page is getting, how many people you are reaching with your posts, which of your posts are the most successful, what time of day your audience is online, and who your audience is (gender/age/location/ language). This can be a valuable resource for you as you begin to understand what it is that your audience wants to see on their Facebook timelines.

As you spend more time on Facebook with your page you will begin to learn what your audience likes and you will receive increasing success. You will also begin to judge how often you should be posting. On Facebook, posting too frequently can be counterproductive, as people might lose interest or not see your most important posts. A good place to start is by trying to post once a day.

When you have your page set up you might want to consider allowing other people that you are working with control over it, including the option to post updates. You can do this by accessing the 'Settings' option through your page and selecting 'Page Roles'. Facebook also has a great advice centre that can assist you with any FAQs about running a Facebook page: www.facebook.com/help

If you are on Facebook and wish to tag a page into your post, you can do so by putting '@' in front of their name. This should produce a dropdown list where you can see their name and click on it. After you've clicked this should delete the '@' and mean that people can click on the link to follow it through to the page you have tagged.

X (Formerly Twitter)



Whilst Facebook offers a more relaxed approach to social media, X is more interactive and will provide an audience that is looking to engage.

X will provide you with far more opportunity to interact with other organisations and individuals, it will allow you to see what conversations are taking place locally, nationally, and internationally. X also provides a space for content that is a little more serious than what you can get away with on Facebook; X is commonly used by politicians, senior faith leaders and academics as well as local community activists and other, more general users.

A lot of the same principles about posting on Facebook apply on X. You still need to provide a 'hook' to draw your audience in and you should still include a picture where possible. However, there is one crucial difference between the sites: all posts must be 280 characters or less. This can be limiting and force you to come up with creative ways to convey your message.

X is also a much faster site than Facebook. People will post far more regularly on X than they will post on Facebook, so your post could be pushed very far down a newsfeed only a few minutes after having been posted. This means that you might wish to post several times a day so that you have more chance of your audience seeing your posts. However, X is not just about your own posts; it is about engaging with others. You have the option to 'like' (as on Facebook) and to repost the content of other users, as well as reply. Because it is so easy to engage with others on X, it is important for you to know how to reach the right people.

X also makes use of something called 'hashtags'. These are useful tags that people can add to a tweet, making it easy to follow categories of messages. A hashtag is simply a word with a '#' symbol included at the beginning, such as #community or #churchlife. You can search twitter for hashtags and view all posts that use these, even if you don't follow them. They are also a great way to have a conversation online. For these reasons it is important that you incorporate them into your posts when possible. By doing this you increase the chances of people engaging with what you're saying. However, it is advised by X that you don't use more than three hashtags in any one post, or you risk the hashtags having an adverse effect on the performance of your post.

Other useful tools are professional X platforms such as Hootsuite or XPro. Using these sites means you can view multiple different feeds at once, as well as creating a newsfeed based on hashtags. For example, a #churchsocialaction news feed would mean that every time somebody posts #churchsocialaction you will see it here. Through such lists you provide yourself with ample opportunity to engage with the right people for your organisation.

X may be a more serious space than Facebook, but don't be afraid to have a little fun, as well. Also, don't worry about following more people than you have followers; following people is a great way to get started!

When you want to 'tag' somebody into a post on X, don't start with their handle (e.g. @churchurbanfund) because then this post will only be shown to those people that follow both you and them. If you want to start a post with a handle, try starting your post with a dot first, like this: .@churchurbanfund

Instagram



A significant proportion of Instagram users are younger people. Instagram is a format that is entirely based around images.

Everything you post on Instagram will be a picture which you can then accompany with some text. Instagram has a similar style to X in that you can follow people and they can follow you as well. Try to keep your pictures colourful and engaging. Also, don't be afraid to take a picture on your phone of an event and then immediately post that to Instagram.

TikTok



A quick-moving platform for short-form video content (usually less than 60 seconds).

Content has to be highly engaging to receive interaction on TikTok. It's typically fast-paced and often follows trends. Unless you have someone with experience of creating this kind of content, we'd recommend avoiding using TikTok, as it's a time-intensive platform.

Useful Free Resources

Unsplash.com/ Pixabay.com: For free to use stock photos and imagery

Canva.com: Free design software for putting together posts e.g. a quote on a background

bitly.com: Shortens long URLs (website addresses) so they aren't as long in your post/ website

Church of England Digital Labs: A hub of resources, news and events to support digital evangelism and digital discipleship in your church. [churchofengland.org/resources/church-england-digital-labs](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/church-england-digital-labs)

