

“Engagement is everything”

Mobilizing social media for mission trips



Stephen Morrison

Stephen Morrison (Twitter: @imstephenvictor) has worked in local church ministry, as a songwriter and worship leader, creative director, journalist, actor, director, design strategist, researcher, bartender, record producer, video editor, motion graphic designer, social media strategist, and all-around loving advocate and creator of new media.

Morrison is also a consultant to Vision of Twelve, an organization launching Going Digital for His Kingdom, a brand-new conference for senior pastors, online pastors and others sharing the faith through social media [goingdigitalforhiskingdom.com]. It kicks off in Dallas in April and continues to five other cities this year — Chicago, Washington, Nashville, Las Vegas and Tampa, FL.

So, when the topic arises of how a church can mobilize social media for mission trip engagement, Morrison comes by his insights honestly — and he’s passionate about sharing them with his peers in ministry.

Is social media an integral part of the mission trip experience, now?

I have friends who regularly swear off media because, variously, “It’s not real” or “I’d rather connect with you in real life.” They treat what’s essentially the new version of the telegram or USPS as if it were ripe for dangerous addiction. But, Facebook isn’t “the new thing” — it’s the new way of doing a very, very old thing.

Social media is as real as the world we live in, because it’s very much a part of that world. So, the question isn’t so much, *Is it common practice for churchgoers to share missions activities?* Rather, those churchgoers are often already sharing almost everything.

As believers, let’s talk about whether we can get more, and deeper, value from this thing we’ve been doing constantly without consideration. I believe wholeheartedly that we can — and are!

Among the churches that do use social media in this way, how many have a formalized, structured approach mapped out before they depart on a mission trip?

This is a beautiful question, and I would dearly love to hear a good answer to it. I’d say the lack of ability to give you any kind of estimate is part of why Going Digital for His Kingdom is so important.

Conversations about formalized, structured approaches to social shareability — formed well ahead major events — just haven’t been had yet at scale. We’re a part of the rise of that conversation in the local church.

Before a mission trip, what practical steps/groundwork should a group leader ensure are in place?

Guidelines should be agreed upon and established beforehand to clarify who will and won’t be posting, when, how often, to what media channels, and what kind of things are and aren’t good for posting. Each social media outlet is unique — good for some things, not so good for others — and each has a particular audience. Consider where your people are and how you want to have a “conversation” with them, and

focus your efforts. Don’t try to cover every single medium.

Also, there are real pluses to having the entire team direct the attention of their own network to a central feed set up expressly for the purpose. It can energize the community, centralize engagement/conversation, and give the team a chance to keep the engagement they build through the trip to grow the experience back home.

What are some common ways churches are already using social media for mission trip engagement?

Pictures are big. In fact, shareable pictures might be one of the cornerstones to good social policy. Some media — like Instagram or Pinterest — are almost only about sharing images. Facebook posts will get exponentially higher engagement with a photo involved. And now, with things like Vine, as well as video having arrived to Instagram and Facebook, most of us are now walking around with high-quality cinema tools in our pockets. Why not enrich the experience by making little, lightly edited movies right there in your hand?

Artifacting the experience like this has lots of upsides, among which is an amazing experience for people tuned in online. And, it’s a great source of memories and moments for trip-takers once they’re back home, which can be used as personal moments, as well as thank-you’s for sponsors, or outreach for increased involvement in the church program later on.

Are there any social media “do’s” and “don’ts” for mission trip leaders?

There’s really more than I can fit into this paragraph. (Which is why we’re gathering the best of the best of the best on social media in the church for the Going Digital for His Kingdom conferences!)

But, I will note this: Engagement is everything. Whenever anyone interacts with your posts or pages, et cetera, view it as an incredible opportunity. Affirm the good. Bless

GOING DIGITAL FOR HIS KINGDOM

Get all the details about this six-city social media and technology conference!

On the Web: goingdigitalforhiskingdom.com

On Twitter: twitter.com/DigitalforGod

the negative, anyway. Use social media as just another medium for communicating grace and love and patience.

We all know how acrimonious Facebook threads can get. What kind of sign would it be if the Church showed love and gratitude for every connection someone made? Treat your pages as your church building. CE

— Reporting by RaeAnn Slaybaugh

Read more of this insightful discussion in our March/April 2014 digital issue: churchexecutive.com/digital-edition.