

Where the People Are

Why even bother with social media?

Drew Dyck

What role does social media play in your ministry?

Over the past year, I've posed that question to dozens of church leaders. Their responses seemed to fall roughly into two categories.

Some were conflicted.

Just mentioning Facebook or Twitter made these leaders groan. They saw the value of social media. They believed their ministries would benefit from greater online engagement, but they couldn't seem to find the time for it. And they felt guilty. For them, social media was an overdue dentist appointment.

Then there were the zealots.

These leaders thrived online. "I can't do my ministry without this!" one young man said, holding up his smart phone that he used to send scores of messages every day. Those in youth ministry were the most engaged. Texting and Twitter were just tools of the trade.

Some had crossed the line. One man sat silently in a meeting. "How about you?" I asked, searching for eye contact. "Are you on Twitter?"

"Well, I used to be," he said. "But I don't do that anymore ..."

Turns out he'd become so addicted to Twitter, his friends staged an intervention of sorts. The micro blogging platform was draining his time and feeding his ego, so he had to let go, cold turkey.

When the question came back at me, I confessed to being a zealot. I spend more time online than I care to admit. I wouldn't say I'm addicted to Twitter (of course that's just what addicts say) but my wife might disagree. I remember her leaning over my shoulder one night as I composed a Tweet. "Spending time with your mistress again," she said. I laughed. She didn't.

Yet sometimes even I doubt the whole enterprise—especially as I see social media platforms proliferate. I'm already on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google Plus ... should I add Pinterest and Reddit too?

Should I start a blog? Sometimes the deluge triggers a Luddite reflex and I'm tempted to scrap the whole thing. Close my Facebook account, murder my Twitter avatar, and party like it's 1989.

So why do I stick with it? Why should you? Why bother with social media at all?

Because people are there.

Sounds simplistic, I know. But that's actually a key distinctive of our faith. We'll go just about anywhere people are. We've been doing it since Jesus sent his disciples to "the ends of the earth." No place is too dangerous, no location too obscure. We go anywhere people are because we have a God who was willing to go anywhere for us.

Using social media has allowed me to meet all kinds of people. I've had lively debates with atheists and pagans and pastors. I've reconnected with old friends and made new ones. I've been prompted to pray for others and had them pray for me. Many of the relationships have jumped the digital divide and become face-to-face friendships.

I'm not saying social media is without its dangers. We need the cautions and caveats, particularly zealots like me. We need to be alert to the subtle ways these new technologies can play on our weaknesses and draw us away from the flesh and blood people around us. Still, I think it's worth it. Even with the risks. Even though we're busy. I think we need to be present in these places. Why? It's where the people are. And that's somewhere I always want to be.

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