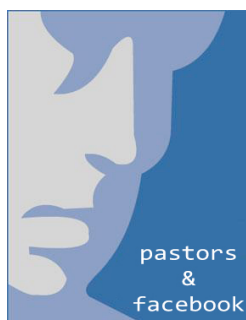


Pastors & Facebook



Facebook is a great way for pastors to build and maintain relationships with people both inside the church and in the community. But Facebook is not without its risks. Every time you post something, you risk hurting, offending or distancing yourself from people. So, here are 19 things you might want to avoid doing on Facebook & 10 things you might want to ensure you are doing.

19 things to avoid doing on Facebook

First, the ugly...

1) Post something out of frustration in the heat of the moment. We all get frustrated at times. And if you want to engage people authentically, you need to “keep it real.” But Facebooking when angry, frustrated, or hurt is never a good idea. Take a few minutes (or a few hours) to cool down, and then think again if you really want to use Facebook to vent.

2) Criticise people. Even if you don’t use a person’s name, chances are you’re Facebook friends with that person or someone close enough to the situation to know who you’re really talking about.

3) Embarrass yourself. Expect everyone in your congregation and your community to see everything you post to Facebook. So, don’t post anything you wouldn’t be comfortable saying or showing from the pulpit on a Sunday morning.

4) Embarrass your family. Our spouses and kids say and do funny things all the time. Most of those things can be posted to Facebook with no problem, and they help people to see you’re a normal person with a normal family. But be sensitive and when in doubt, ask your spouse and kids if it’s OK to share a quote, happening, or pic online.

5) Criticize other churches in the community. Every church has a different mission, ministry philosophy, style of worship, and theology. But we all share one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. We should be known for our unity not our division.

The self-absorbed...

6) Only talk about your church. Pastors, when people become Facebook friends with you, it's because they want to engage with you – a real person – not a spokesperson for your church.

7) Share everything posted to the church FB page. Even if you post personal updates to your Facebook profile, don't repost every church update as well. Some – yes, all – no.

8) Just talk about yourself. When you go to a social event, do you like hanging around with people who only talk about themselves and never ask you about you? Don't be one of those people online either.

The disingenuous...

9) Act like your life is perfect. Nobody is perfect, and everyone knows it. If you act like everything is good all the time, you'll be perceived as inauthentic, wearing a mask.

10) Act like you're always "joyful in the Lord". Nobody is happy all the time either. Be real.

11) Act like you have all the answers. Nobody likes a know-it-all either. Share insight and advice when asked. Be confident but not arrogant. Acknowledge when you don't know the answer.

The offender...

12) Act like the language/morality police. Your Facebook friends are not perfect. They are going to swear, post questionable pictures of themselves, and share things you don't agree with. If something is really bad, consider contacting the person privately about it, but don't call people out publicly for what is unfortunately common behavior in our culture.

13) Roll out the fire and brimstone. I don't know if preaching about sin and hell worked with past generations, but it's not going to put you in a position to influence people on Facebook. People on Facebook respond much more favorably to hope and love.

14) Be overly political. It's OK to take stands on key issues, but unless you want to offend half your church and close the door to half the people in your community, don't tow a party line.

15) Engage people in debates. Online (and offline) debates rarely cause anyone to shift their position on an issue. Discussion is great, but if things get heated or personal, it's time to lighten up.

The disengaged...

16) Post a lot of theological stuff that's over the head of your friends. It's great for pastors to engage their Facebook friends in spiritual conversations, but avoid posting your doctoral thesis. It's not going to engage anyone, and will put people off.

17) Login once every week or two. Relationships require consistency. You can take breaks, go on vacation, and don't need to be on Facebook every day, but you've got to be regular if you're going to build relationships in Facebook.

18) Fail to respond. When people send you messages, post to your wall, or post comments to your status updates and links, it's important to respond. Answer people's questions. Thank people for their insight and stories.

19) Expect people to know your context. Just because you know the context of what you are saying it's most likely your Facebook friends won't. At best comments taken out of context don't make an sense, at worst they can hurt.

10 things you should do on Facebook.

1). Listen. James 1:19 says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” Nothing could be more important on Facebook. Listen more than you speak. By listening you’ll get to know people better and learn what’s going on in their lives. You find out who is hurting, who is frustrated, who is thriving, who is gifted in ways you never realized.

2). Pray. James 5:16 tells us, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” Whether your Facebook friends post good news or bad, a success or a failure, you can always pray for them. When you do, ask God for guidance as to how to respond if at all. He may prompt you with the words to type in a reply. He may prompt you to pick up the phone. Who knows what could happen.

3). Engage/comment. Of course, if all you do is listen and pray, you’re not going to have much impact on Facebook. In fact, nobody’s going to even know you’re there. Show you care about your Facebook friends by engaging with them. Comment on people’s updates. When other people comment on your updates, reply back to them. Respond promptly to messages and new friend requests.

4). Publicly encourage. One of the best ways you can engaged with people and show you care is to encourage them. It doesn’t take a lot of time or effort either. Posting a comment on someone’s update with a simple “Congrats!” “That’s awesome!” or “I’m praying for you,” shows the person (and their Facebook friends) that you really are listening and you care.

5). Respond privately to sensitive issues. Facebook not only provides the means to respond publicly to your friends, but also privately. If someone posts an update alluding to a personal or sensitive issue – their relationship status changes, they’ve lost their job, they sound depressed – in addition to publicly encouraging them, you may want to want to send them a private message. Not only does it give you the opportunity to say something you might night want to say publicly, but by asking open-ended questions you invite them to open up more privately about what’s going on and how they’re really doing.

6). Be human. People are not connecting with you on Facebook so they can hear about God and church all the time. They want to relate to you as human being. Post about what's happening in your life. Share photos and video of your family. Talk about your other interests and hobbies. Share links to articles you think are interesting.

7). Be authentic. People are also not connecting with you so they can see how perfect people live. Don't just post the good stuff that's going on in your life. It's OK to express sadness, anger and frustration. In fact, it's not just OK, it's necessary. We are all frail and sinful. People need to understand that as a pastor you are not better than they are. You are just blessed to be forgiven and have the Holy Spirit at work in your life.

8). Initiate friend requests. Some people are afraid to initiate a friend request with a pastor. After you meet someone in the community or meet someone for the first time at church, initiate a friend request with them the next time you're on Facebook. Remember Jesus hung out with prostitutes and tax collectors, so you should be hanging out on Facebook with people who are not Christians too.

9). Move from online to in person. Online connections with friends inside or outside our churches cannot substitute for personal relationships. Invite your social media connections for coffee or meal, you will be surprised at how many will respond positively.

10). Be a witness. You can live out your Christian conviction's (sensitively) in your online community just like you do in your real-world community. Acts 1:8 you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere....