

Social Media Toolkit and Best Practices for Parishes and Schools:

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I. Which (if any) social account is right for my organization?

Why Social Media?

The power, promise, and potential of social media can no longer be denied. Billions of people use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate, interact, and share experiences. Corporations, institutions, and even governments are on social media, and when investing in it, are seeing immediate returns on their investments. Social media has become the front line of communications for any organization- to the point where many suspect an organization that does not have social media.

Social media wears many different hats- it can function as a communications platform for events and initiatives, a public relations tool to improve the public perception of your organization, and can serve to market your goals and agenda. A well functioning, constantly updated, dynamic social media presence is the very definition of a “quick win.”

Why not Social Media?

If you are reading this toolkit and wondering if you should start a social media account on any of the “Big Three” (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) for your parish or school- the answer is nearly always yes. Get started. If you are wondering about starting an account for a specific Diocesan initiative, stop right here and contact the Social Media Leader if you have not already. The Diocese of Bridgeport’s brand is carefully and deliberately maintained on social media, and you will need to discuss any account related to the Diocese of Bridgeport directly.

There are two reasons however, to not start a social media account. The first applies primarily to our schools and parishes: if you wish to create a soapbox to “push” your events and press releases, don’t bother. Social media is not a podium, and cannot be used as such. Social media is a forum, and needs to invite people to comment and contribute to the conversation. If people don’t contribute, that is their prerogative, but it is imperative you create an environment where they can.

The only other reason you should not create a social media account is if you cannot properly maintain it. We will discuss what exactly it takes to maintain a healthy social media account later in this toolkit, but the only thing worse than no social media presence is a page that has not been updated in six months. Re-launching a page is always significantly more difficult than launching a page. Don’t let this scare you though. There is tremendous upside to creating a strong social media presence, especially for parishes and schools!

What Social Media Platform is right for my organization?

In order to properly answer that question, you must evaluate the demographics, needs, and target audience of your organization.

As a result, there really isn't a "one size fits all" answer to this question. Facebook has shifted towards an older demographic, with a heavy population of men and women from Generation X and older. Youth and young adults are certainly on Facebook, but treat it more like a "website" and are more likely to spend time on their own profile than their newsfeed. That said, Facebook is by far the most active medium, and easiest to grow on. Facebook ads are also the least expensive and the most effective.

Twitter is decidedly geared toward the younger crowd and for interacting with other Catholic organizations. Given its dynamic nature and newsfeed centered experience, it requires significant maintenance and upkeep. Given that the user experience with Twitter is geared primarily through the News Feed feature, and depending on how many accounts a user follows, the volume can be significant. As such, in evangelizing, marketing, or communicating on Twitter, you are competing for space on a News Feed. Despite this, Twitter can be used to great advantage due to its fast paced nature.

Instagram has emerged as a worthy compliment to Twitter and Facebook, and has been on the scene as a viable marketing tool for a few years now. What was once a niche social media platform is now the place to highlight your most important picture of the day. It is also a very young medium, geared toward the millennial generation. As of now, Instagram requires the least amount of social media legwork to post, but the most to gain followers. Many schools and parishes are not on Instagram yet, but given their target demographics, a hard look at Instagram is highly recommended.

II. Social Media 101

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram Basics

Though we just discussed the three major social networking platforms briefly in the previous section, it is important to know the basics of each before deciding which will benefit your organization. Statistics updated: January 2017

- Facebook (Fan Page):
 - Demographics:
 - 58% of entire adult population (71% of Americans)
 - 77% of female Americans on Facebook vs. 66% male
 - Greatest population of active users is 30-49, followed by 50-64.
 - 56% of all Americans over 65 are on Facebook.
 - Interactions:
 - Reactions (formerly Like): voice your like, sadness, anger, etc about a specific post
 - Comments: Thoughts and reflections from followers regarding a particular post.

- Share: Taking a post and sharing it on your own, personal page. This is the easiest way to reach more people, but the least used interaction.
 - Reach:
 - The amount of people who have seen a given post in their newsfeed. A very handy tool to gauge your success on social media.
 - Ease of use:
 - By far the easiest to use and most intuitive social media platform. Requires at a minimum, one to two posts a day to maintain a steady presence.
 - Ads:
 - The easiest to use and most economical social media ad. \$5 a day goes a long way towards increasing your “Likes” and thus the people you reach.
 - Launch if:
 - You want to reach the middle-aged to younger parent demographic.
 - You need a host for videos, pictures, and events (and want people to comment on them).
 - You want to create a forum for people to discuss the recent happenings in your organization.
 - You want to reach people where they currently reside for hours during the day.
- Twitter:
 - Demographics:
 - 19% of entire adult population (23% of Americans)
 - 21% of female Americans vs. 24% male
 - Greatest population of active users is 18-29
 - Lowest population of active users is 65+
 - Interactions:
 - Like (Formerly Favorite): Agree or “Like” a specific post. Populates on your profile in a relatively hidden area.
 - Retweet: Identical to the “share” button on Facebook, easiest way to reach more people.
 - Tweet: Similar the “comment” button on Facebook, but not visible to anyone who is not following both accounts involved in the back and forth.
 - Ease of use:
 - The most difficult to use out of the big three.
 - Requires constant maintenance and upkeep to ensure you are populating on your followers feeds.
 - The least social of the social media accounts. Often, people will not engage with what you post. As long as your impressions are high (amount of people who have seen the tweet) you are still achieving your social media goals.

- The highest reach of any social media platform. Given its nature, Twitter has the farthest reach of all three social media platforms.
 - Twitter is a platform with an identity crisis right now. It is still worth launching, but a close monitoring of the changes the company is going through is recommended.
 - Ads:
 - Not as economical, nor as cheap. Often get spam accounts following you when investing in ads.
 - Launch if:
 - You want to reach the younger demographic.
 - You have an abundance of material you want to get out there.
 - You want to create a forum for people to discuss the recent happenings in your organization.
 - You want your organization represented in the Diocese and on Catholic social media.
- Instagram:
 - Demographics:
 - 21% of entire adult population (26% of Americans)
 - 29% of female Americans vs. 22% male
 - Greatest population of active users is 18-29
 - 53% of Young Adults are on Instagram
 - Women are particularly likely to be on Instagram
 - African American and Hispanic Catholics are more likely to be on Instagram than Twitter or Facebook. (According to Pew)
 - Urban and Suburban Demographics use Instagram significantly more than rural demographics.
 - Lowest population of active users is 65+
 - Interactions:
 - Heart (Like): Agree or “Like” a specific post.
 - Comment: Identical to the Facebook Comment feature.
 - Send to: Private message or forward a post to someone.
 - Ease of use:
 - Easiest to maintain out of the three, but hardest to grow.
 - Requires a heavy social presence (commenting, liking and following other related accounts) to grow. It is very difficult to grow followers without doing this.
 - Ads:
 - Since Facebook has bought Instagram, ads and analytics have only recently debuted. It remains to be seen how beneficial these are, but the early results are, if you have the money, it is a worthwhile (but not yet necessary) investment.
 - Launch if:
 - You want to reach the younger demographic.

- You need an easy yardage social media account to launch right away (can be done with a picture and a sentence).
- You want to be “ahead of the curve.” This is the social media platform of the future- it is growing rapidly and shows no signs of stopping.

Posting 101

It is important to know that a one size fits all posting strategy does not work for everyone. These guidelines are not meant for that. Rather, this section is meant to give you the basic information required to craft a personalized posting strategy, unique to your account, demographics, and the platform you are posting on.

- Frequency, times, and dates
 - Facebook:
 - Frequency:
 - Minimum 1 post per day
 - Maximum 2 posts per day evenly spaced.
 - Space out posts by AT LEAST 6 hours. Otherwise, you are cannibalizing your reach.
 - Times:
 - A healthy posting schedule would be 9am and 7:45pm. Times are flexible.
 - Highest traffic online peaks between 7:30pm and 9:15pm at night
 - Lowest traffic online (besides early morning hours) is 10:30am- 12:00pm, and 1:00pm-3:00pm.
 - Dates:
 - Highest traffic is on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday
 - Lowest traffic days are Tuesday and Wednesday
 - Friday evening is a surprisingly busy online time, but not for video. Use this for a graphic or picture with a short caption.
 - Twitter:
 - Frequency:
 - 5-10 Tweets per day minimum. No maximum.
 - Live tweeting can get annoying, be strategic and space your tweets out.
 - You really can't post too much, unless you are posting every five minutes. A safe amount would be one-two per hour.
 - Times:
 - Similar to Facebook.

- People check their Twitter feed at all times during the day, often further into the night (you can actually reach people late into the night and early morning hours given how the Newsfeed algorithm works).
 - Most trafficked Twitter times are early morning (wake up and scroll), lunchtime, and mid-late evening.
 - Dates:
 - Twitter is active all 7 days of the week, but is the least active medium for businesses during the weekend. You can either follow this trend, or use the lack of other accounts tweeting to your advantage.
- Instagram:
 - Frequency:
 - 1 post per every two days minimum. 2 posts per day maximum (but do this very infrequently).
 - DO NOT LIVE POST ON INSTAGRAM
 - Instagram is your highlight reel, so use it as such. Do not post as frequently on Instagram as you would on Facebook or Twitter.
 - People are very unforgiving about posting more than you should on Instagram.
 - Times:
 - Since analytics are relatively new for Instagram, and Instagram does not use a “real time” based Newsfeed, this is up for debate.
 - 8pm-10pm seems to be the highest trafficked time, and trends seem to suggest that people are even on Instagram into the night, with activity peaking at 1am on certain days.
 - 3-4pm is typically the best time to post during the day.
 - Posts usually take a while to “pick up steam.”
 - Dates:
 - The weekend and Mondays see more traffic than any other period of time on Instagram.
 - Activity decreases throughout the week from Tuesday to Friday, increases Saturday and peaks Sunday and Monday.

Subject matter, style, and formatting

Through the active usage of social media, the Diocese of Bridgeport seeks to demonstrate that the Catholic Church in Fairfield County is open, vibrant, active, and welcoming; that our Bishop is involved, warm, and accessible; and that our church is transparent, changing, and growing.

Guiding Principles:

- To demonstrate that the church in the Diocese is open, vibrant, active, alive accessible, and welcoming.
- To highlight specific, strategic aspects and programs of our Diocese.
- To expand our coverage throughout the Diocese in an effort to be inclusive.
- To act as the “front line” of our Diocesan renewal.
- To help engage those “already here,” and help bring back people who left the church. (Evangelization)
- To share and help teach the Good News of Jesus Christ with those in our Diocese. (Catechetical)
- To help people to contemplate, reflect, and participate in their faith in between Sundays.

After reading the first few sections of this toolkit, you are probably ready to launch your account. Great! Before you do though, it is important to discuss content. What are you going to post? More importantly, why are you going to post? The principles above are what we use to guide our social media presence in the Diocese. Our goal is to bring people back to the church (to evangelize) by our example, to teach people about our awesome faith (to catechize) and to show the people of this county, state, country, and world what it means to be a Catholic in Fairfield County.

So, with that in mind, what do you post? How long should a post be? What tone should you use?

These are all wonderful questions, and again, they will depend greatly on the organization. Here are a few helpful hints:

- Subject Matter:
 - Relevant to your organization ONLY. Parish or school events, pictures, videos, and news should compose 95% of your social media posts. Notable exceptions would be sharing something from the Bishop, Diocese, or Holy Father (highly encouraged!) or something related to catholic education (for schools) or parish life (for parishes).
 - NO POLITICS. You should refrain from posting about divisive issues. Any account that posts about divisive or controversial topics will not be featured by the Diocese of Bridgeport’s accounts.
 - No irrelevant material. Do not use the organizations account to promote something of your own.
 - Your goal is to get people to engage with your postings. Post content that others might be interested in commenting on, or sharing with their friends. Post uplifting content that helps spiritually nourish those who view it!
- Style:
 - The style of any social media post should be positive, warm, upbeat, and informal. You want to “let your hair down,” so to speak.

- Posting a press release would be a bad practice. Instead, synthesize what you want to say to no more than a short paragraph.
- Personalize your tone. Give the organization a “persona.” Social media allows organizations to have a personality and to speak for themselves.
- Formatting:
 - One sentence to one paragraph for Facebook and Instagram. 140 characters for Twitter.
 - Tag relevant accounts, register the location of the event, and include relevant hashtags!
 - Try to avoid hashtags on Facebook. Sporadic usage is okay.
 - Use full sentences and words on Facebook, do not abbreviate. Abbreviations (used sporadically), are okay on Twitter.

Hashtags:

A hashtag is like a basket of information. If you tweet “#catholic” you are now linked to a group of accounts from around the world who also tweeted #catholic. Not only that, but your account will be briefly listed on the top of all accounts that use that hashtag. A hashtag is a great way to find accounts and interact with people interested in the Church, or Catholicism. They are also a great way to grow followers.

The approved hashtag for the Diocese is #diobpt. When on Twitter or Instagram, when you use this hashtag, it links you to the Diocese. People know to click on this hashtag to find Diocesan material and information. You don’t have to use it in every posting, but it is helpful if you want the Diocese to share something, or if you want to be linked to the larger Diocese as a whole.

Hashtags also function well for events. The Diocese routinely employs them for major events: the Synod, the Christmas Concert, and the Catholic Service Corps all had successful hashtags. This allowed accounts to find out information, and more importantly, interact with each other. Hashtags can create a of momentum about and around the event.

Interacting with other accounts

Interacting with other accounts is highly encouraged, especially on Twitter and Instagram! Tweeting back and forth at each other, or commenting on another account’s Instagram can create a sense of momentum. The key is to use your discretion, and not to engage with those who are saying harmful, hurtful, or inappropriate things.

You are encouraged to respond to any and all comments and questions that come into you via social media- that’s the point! Even the negative material you receive, you should respond. Unless there is something illicit or slanderous, (in which case,

you can ban the person and delete/hide the comment), comments should be replied to. Remember, social media is a forum, not a podium!

III. Growing your followers

The question asked the most often in the social media world is “how do I grow my followers?” Many people, when asked why they don’t post often enough on their social media will say: “well I only have 85 followers, what’s the point?” That is precisely why! Social media can be a grind. There are many people who will tell you that they have the secret to getting followers fast, or people who will sell followers. Don’t listen to any of them. There is a reason there aren’t many accounts with tens of thousands of followers- because it is difficult to do! The only sure way to get followers is to provide good, consistent content.

There are methods though, for growing followers, with varying degrees of success. Again, the following methods **ONLY** work if you have a consistent posting strategy. They will not work if you do not post consistently or if you have poor content.

- **Follow as many relevant accounts as you can.** Accounts are more likely to follow you if you follow them. It also gives them a chance to interact with you, retweet/share your content, and creates a sense of community.
- **Tweet, comment, share and like other accounts.** This step is above and beyond just following accounts. A well placed comment or like can get your page out there to the viewers and followers of other accounts.
- **Use relevant hashtags.** Is it national hot dog day? Tweet about it using the trending hashtag! Sure, it may seem like it doesn’t have much to do with your organization, but put a fun twist on it. For example, the Diocese went out for ice cream and posted about it on national ice cream cone day. It is silly, but it goes a long way.
- **Promote your social media accounts at gatherings, in the bulletin, and on flyers.** A good grassroots strategy helps grow accounts. The Diocese does this with a flyer, a pull down sign, and through memos to parishes.

Don’t be discouraged! Growing followers takes time. When in doubt, a small amount of advertising dollars on social media goes a long way.

IV. Expanding your reach- Facebook and Twitter Ads

Once you have become comfortable with your social media platforms- and have spent time curating them, establishing your audience, and executing your strategy, it is worth exploring social media advertising. No matter how good you are on social media, there is a sizeable portion of your audience that is unavailable to you. That is because both Facebook and Twitter restrict your page’s reach if you do not advertise with them.

While many see this as a disadvantage, for a small daily advertising fee, your page can grow dramatically in days. The best advertising to do for new and old pages alike is to promote your page. This generates more likes, which allows you to reach more people. This is by far the best investment for smaller organizations, as it continues to bear fruit after the initial expense.

The other ad that this office would recommend would be promoting a specific post or event. This works if you want to drive people to comment on something, or to an event. A good example would be a major parish or school event, like an open house, parish fair, or large celebration.

V. Graphics and video

Graphics and video are no longer optional in a social media strategy, they are essentially. Nearly every post must be accompanied with a graphic, picture, or video.

Graphics are relatively easy to make, believe it or not. With web (free) software like Canva, you can create a graphic with text and a picture of your choosing in just five minutes. For trends such as throwback Thursday, wisdom Wednesday, or just a slow news day, this is a great way to evangelize.

Videos are a bit different. Though producing a high quality video is difficult without video editing software, an iPhone quality video works just fine for most of your purposes. At every event for your organization, you should be taking pictures and recording video. Even if it's raw, people love video, especially a well-placed hymn from a recent Mass, a homily, or a presentation.

If you have a major upcoming event, and you would like Diocesan social media coverage, you are encouraged to send material to the social media leader. They will help you get the word out, as well as post coverage of pictures and videos!

VI. What about... Snapchat, YouTube, Periscope, Flickr, SoundCloud, etc.?

If you already have an established presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, you may be wondering what the next step is? The answer, again, is not universal. First, there is ALWAYS an opportunity to increase your presence on your current social media networks. Sometimes, less is more. Unless there is a specific purpose for a platform, chances are, you don't need it. Too often organizations make the mistake of creating an account on every social media profile out there, and as a result, put out a poor product on all of them. Stick to where your users are. If they have Pinterest, and you see a need for one, get on Pinterest.

VII. Resources available to you from the Diocesan Social Media Office

While the Diocese of Bridgeport Social Media Office exists to support and promote the Diocese and Bishop on Social Media, a large part of that is helping parishes and

schools. If you have an important, promotions worthy event, pictures, or video, please, send it our way. We are more than happy to feature your school or parish on any one of our social media accounts.

Promotion

One of the main things this office can assist you with is promotion. If you provide a picture and a paragraph of relevant information at least TWO WEEKS in advance of your event, and provide pictures of the event after the fact, the Social Media Office will ensure that it gets promoted on relevant social media pages. Smaller events (fundraisers, dinners, youth group gatherings) are also welcome- they however will be featured either on our Twitter or our Calendar (not Facebook) at our discretion.

Graphics and Video help

If a request is put in at least 3 weeks prior to an event, we can assist you with graphic and video help. While we cannot guarantee a Diocesan presence at every event, we can assist in editing (small) videos, and in creating small graphics on Canva. This is not something we can participate in every day or week, but it is something we can help you with to feature a major event.

DOB Social

The first thing you should do after creating an account is send the links to the social media leader. A social media directory and hub exists and is well trafficked- we can add you right away.

When in doubt, call us! We are here to help you with all questions, big and small!