



## Why Social Media?

Current trends in digital media focus upon crowd-sourcing, collaboration and bottom-up approaches to content production. A commonly used phrase is that sellers should 'fish where the fish are', with the trend having moved from 'push' marketing to 'pull' marketing (where users opt in). Since 2004, the 'fish' have largely been on social networking sites. Friends Reunited, launched in 2000, was the first social networking site to achieve prominence in the UK, but since 2004, such sites have exploded exponentially, although the emphasis is moving from quantity to quality.

### Why do so many focus on the dangers of social media?

As with when the printing press, the telephone, email, etc were introduced, there are many fears which rise when first using social media. There are legitimate concerns that we need to deal with, but as always we should not be blaming the tools.



#### *The Negative Side*

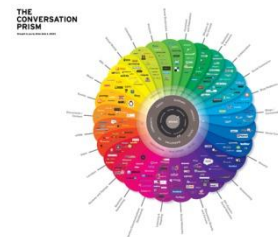
There are issues that we need to be aware of, but the media (as with all topics) tends to highlight the negative issues). We need to be aware of legal issues, including intellectual property/copyright, cyberbullying, defamation, information leaks, and misinformation. There are concerns about security, privacy, stolen IDs, the permanency of information on the web (if you don't want to see it on the front page of a newspaper, don't post it). Companies are concerned about the spread of malware, time-wasting and the dilution of brand reputation. For companies using social media as push-marketing, the story is not good.

#### *The Positive Side*

The benefits, however, are recognised by many. Regular users of social media, especially those who concentrate on one or two networks at a time, find it a great place to find others working in the field, to share and build on information, rather than multiple users reinventing the wheel. With an increased focus on authenticity and trust, relationships are built through regular interaction (one Tweet a day doesn't really cut it), whether that is with new external contacts, or for internal communications, and users become adept at adapting to each new system.

### Where should I go?

If you look at <http://www.theconversationprism.com/>, there are countless options for social media sites, and it's an incredibly rare social animal (most social media users are social animals rather than technologists) who is on all sites. The job is, as it has always been, to find the right tool for the job. Pick one of the below and try it for a fixed period of time.



### Writing from the heart? Blogging

Blogging consists of regular online entries, generally displayed in reverse-chronological order, and is a term that has been used since 1999. The conversation "is a website of any value?" is one that has

been had with increasingly frequency over the past few years. No website which is interested in improving its search rankings (on Google) can afford to be without a blog. For those who are interested in writing reflectively, blogging allows you to share your thoughts with others.

#### *What makes for a good blog entry?*



Each entry should be targeted around a keyword, consist of around 500-800 words, include an image, and offer a 'call to action' (encourage people to interact with you, or sign up for something).

#### *What tools can I use?*

Blogger, WordPress, Posterous and Tumblr are some of the many (free) blogging platforms available for use. For regular, planned blogging, Blogger is a site that many find the easiest to use, whereas WordPress offers more functionality, and can be hosted under your own domain name. Sites such as Posterous and Tumblr are growing in popularity, and designed to allow for quick and easy posting, e.g. a link to a video here, a website there. Posterous users can send posts via email, which will then be converted it to the most web friendly format available, and can then be linked to many different social media accounts, with material posted to all those chosen.

#### *Do I just use words?*

No, there's options for Vlogs (video blog), PhotoBlog (image blog), and podcasting (audio blog), or mix any of them up within a standard blog!

#### *How do I make it easy for people to join in?*

There is an increased emphasis on single-sign in, leading to the development of options such as OpenID and Facebook Connect.

#### **What is Microblogging?**

Twitter, created in 2006, is a form of microblogging. Initially based upon SMS messages. It's not the only microblogging site, but it's the world's biggest. 'Tweets' are limited to 140 characters, displayed and delivered to the author's 'followers'. A 'retweet' (RT) is when another user reposts your message, thus circulating it to their followers – a true compliment.



Twitter is great for making and maintaining contacts with others with similar interests, with hashtags, e.g. #digidisciple, functioning as active links and helping find these, and making contact before an event. The average user age is 25-54, although the celebrity culture means an increasing number of younger users. Third party applications, especially via iPhones, expand the usability of Twitter.

#### **How do I get traffic to my blog?**

Much social media is used to provide traffic streams back to blogs and websites. The ROI (return on investment: which tends to consist of time rather than money) can be hard to quantify, but indicators such as traffic spikes and external comments can be used as measurements, along with

specific software such as Google Analytics, which allows you to see stats on how many visit, from where, for how long, etc.

### **Which social networks are key?**


Facebook, created in 2004, was built around a core user base of 18-34 year olds, but now users of all age groups can be found on Facebook, especially grandmothers keen to see pictures of their grandchildren. Facebook famously has over six-hundred million active users worldwide, with a successful targeted paid-for advertising model, and third party applications are key. Traditional group pages are being replaced with 'Like' pages, which allow stories to appear in your supporters news feed. Facebook is typically used to maintain friendships with people already known in the 'offline world', making viral campaigns successful, as people trust the information that their friends post.



MySpace in 2006 was the biggest social media site, but was overtaken by Facebook in April 2008. The site still has a following amongst musicians, and it is claimed that artists such as Lily Allen, the Arctic Monkeys & millions of other artists been 'discovered' through the site.

Bebo, an acronym for "Blog early, blog often, has existed since 2005. Offering quizzes, videos, photo uploads, music, pop polls and third party applications, the site was typically used by younger users, built around school networks, although many have now moved onto Facebook.

### **What about if I want to network for business?**

**LinkedIn**  LinkedIn has the strongest reputation in the business world. Users can import their CV, link to Twitter, blogs, and Slideshare PowerPoint uploads. Users can host readings lists and join groups with similar interests. LinkedIn recommends connecting only with those you really know as users can post recommendations on their connections. Companies can also create an online portfolio. Particularly good for head-hunters, job-hunters and entrepreneurs.

Viadeo views itself as the 'HSBC' of business networking sites, a global company, which provides business networking in local languages, and local-specific functionality according to cultural needs. A large following in Europe, Eastern Europe and China, where many other social networking sites, and Google, are banned.

### **What about if I need to collaborate with others?**

Ning, Chinese for peace, launched in October 2005, offers an online platform for people to create their own social networks around specific interests, whether local or global. Network pages are customisable with features, visual design and member data. Educational groups have found them great places to connect and start discussions. In 2010 Ning moved from a free to a paid service, followed by a huge drop-off in user numbers.

Wikis tend to be used to create collaborative websites, the most famous of which is Wikipedia, created in 2001, offering 13 million articles in more than 200 languages by September 2009. Wikis do not offer static content, but actively seek to involve the visitor in an ongoing process of creation

and collaboration. Changes can usually be made without review, although entries can be post-moderated, with a record kept of page changes. Wiki platforms include WikiSpaces and PBWorks.

### **I'm not great with the written words, but love audio-visual materials**

YouTube, created in 2005, is a video sharing website on which users can upload and share videos, and create themed playlists of favourite saved videos. In March 2008 it was estimated that it would take 412.3 years to view all YouTube content. If you'd like higher quality videos (but less users), check out Vimeo. If you want Christian specific content, try GodTube.

Soundcloud allows you to upload up to 2 hours of audio content every month for free. Material can then be embedded in websites, commented upon, and favourited by other users.



Flickr, created in 2004, is an image and video hosting website, widely used by bloggers to host images that they embed in blogs and social media. Hosting over 4 billion images in October 2009, the site offers photo storage, tagging, photo-favouriting, group photo pools, and rating by level of 'interestingness'. Requires a Yahoo login. Picasa is a similar site.

12Baskets emerged from experiments in multimedia worship in 2002, which moved onto producing materials for assemblies. In 2009 the full company emerged, with the website launched October 2010, to encourage people to "Create it - Use it - Share it", with regards to Christian resource materials. They "believe the Church is full of creative people, who are not fully aware of how their skills and gifts can be of great value to the Worldwide church".

### **What about voice calls or chat software?**

Voice calls can be made (often for free) over the internet (VOIP), often accompanied by webcam images, and/or instant messaging. Skype is the most commonly used, allowing instant messaging, file transfer and video conferencing. Calls to other users of the service are free, while calls to other landlines and mobile phones can be made for a fee. Chats can be copied and stored elsewhere, although there's no ability to save conversations. Conversations can be recorded with software such as Pamela (free version allows 15 minutes of recording).

Other sites include MSN Messenger, and Facebook Chat.

### **I've heard about people 'checking in', what's that about?**

A growing number of people are learning to use the GPS functions in their smartphones to 'check-in' to locations. Ideas for applying this functionality are still emerging, but one warning – don't log in at home, then you're OK to log in elsewhere.

Foursquare and Gowalla are location-based applications, allowing users "check in" to a place when they're there, tell friends where they are and track the history of where they've been and who they've been there with. Users can post photos, comment on each other's posts, earn badges, and, in Foursquare, those who check into a location more than once, and more than anyone else can become the "Mayor" of a destination, and may be offered special offers by that location. For Gowalla, which has less users, users can drop & collect virtual items (which can be exchanged for

real goods) as they follow trails around. Facebook allows you to check into specific locations, but only your “friends” will see this.

Geocaching is an electronic treasure hunt which also uses the GPS function in smartphones (although it's possible to identify options before you leave, and print maps) to identify & track the location of items (which can be any size from a 5p piece, to large army boxes). [Video: <http://youtu.be/-4VFeYZTTYs>]

### **How do I encourage people to come to my events?**

Online spaces are great for allowing us to create events, and invite others to them. The most commonly used are Facebook events, although these are not a great substitute for individual invitations.



If you are seeking to plan a meeting, with a number of users, you can use Doodle, which allows you to suggest possible dates that you can do. Other users indicate which they can do, might be able to do, or can't do, and the software suggests the optimal meeting time.

If you want to advertise a number of events that you're attending, there are a number of “I'm going to be here” options growing. Two that we have recently been experimenting with Lanyrd, which a huge number of conferences have subscribed to. For more general events, and the ability to embed your calendar on your website, try Plancast.

### **How do I share documents?**

There are a number of options for uploading documents, PDFs, and slideshows for sharing with a wider audience, which usually have ‘sharing’ options to share more widely on the social networking sites, and embedding in other sites. Scribd and Slideshare are two of the best known sites for this.

Prezi is a flash-based presentation tool, hosted online, allowing for multiple authors to contribute. Considered by many as the next step on from PowerPoint, Prezi "allows the speaker to encourage a dialogue, and visualize ideas as if you were drawing a mind map for your audience."

Squidoo is a community-based publishing platform on which users create “lenses”. Lenses are pages, tending to be overview articles, gathering everything a user knows about a topic of interest. Launched in 2005, Squidoo is in the top 500 most visited sites in the world. Hubpages is similar.

You can also share large files without having to email documents to each other. The best know software for this is DropBox, but AVG LiveKive is another one I am playing with.

### **How do I share the sites that I'm interested in? Bookmarking**

Users used to store all their “bookmarks” on their own computers, but for years it has been possible to share your links with others. Sites such as Digg, Delicious, Stumbleupon and Reddit allow you to submit links, comment on why they've been chosen, tag with appropriate categories to allow others to find related materials.

Diigo allows users to highlight text and attach sticky notes to specific parts of web pages, and remain available when users return to webpages. Highlights are collected in a library, and entire sites and associated documentation can be saved for future use or downloaded for online browsing. Items can be tagged, and can also be published as blogs, reports and slide-shows. Content is fully searchable, and users can join groups for those with similar interests.

### **How do I find information from a number of places at once?**

Friendfeed is a real-time feed aggregator consolidating updates from social media and social networking websites, social bookmarking websites, blogs and micro-blogging updates, or any other RSS/ Atom feed. Friendfeed provides the facility to track activities across social media networks. A concern is that readers will comment on blog-posts within FriendFeed instead of on blogs, resulting in fewer page views for the blogger. In 2009 it was purchased by Facebook.



Addictomatic “inhale the web” allows you to search for a particular term, and see where content is available across a number of websites.

Sites such as DandyID allow you to collect your digital fingerprint (you, uniquely online) in one place.

### **What about virtual worlds?**

Second Life is the best-known internet-based virtual world launched June 2003 – there are others! Its users create avatars for themselves, are called Residents, and interact with each other and the virtual environment, participating in individual and group activities, travel the world, undertaking tasks, and creating and trading virtual property and services with one another. Users must be over 18.

### **I’ve heard about ‘augmented reality’, what does that mean?**

Augmented Reality describes a layer of digital information superimposed upon a picture of the real world, often seen nowadays in sci-fi movies, on smart-phone apps. Reality is augmented, made more understandable and richer by adding a digital layer to it. It’s a growing field, and apps such as Layar on your smart phone will give access to this extra layer of information. [Video: <http://youtu.be/D-A1l4Jn6EY>].

There are *huge* numbers of smartphone apps available, thousands on iTunes alone, with lots of free apps available on OpenAppMkt.

### **I’m feeling overwhelmed...**

There are hundreds of other options, so do not try and join them all. Know what you need to achieve, and find a platform that allows you to do it. Pick one and try it for a fortnight, but anticipate that the social media scene will continue to shift... so no waiting “for it to settle down”.

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