



MATTHEW RUTTAN

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Renewal Fellowship Conference – Westminster Presbyterian Church, Barrie, ON

PRESENTATION DESCRIPTION

Why did Jesus spend time on a hillside? Because he met people where they were. Today, “the internet” isn’t a separate category for a ministry or a budget line; it’s more like the air we breathe that is a part of everything else. We leverage the internet because it’s meeting people where they are—and this is true for people of all ages. This short workshop will help you better understand internet use in Canada, the power and presence of the internet and social media in the church, why it’s no longer optional, and provide advice about how to leverage these tools for discipleship today. It will include a visual presentation and social media guide.

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

I’m Matthew Ruttan

- I’ve been the pastor of Westminster Church in Barrie for almost 9 years
- I’ve been a husband to Laura for 16 years

- I'm a father of 3 children. I love playing Lego with them, wresting with them and making pancakes. I also love re-discovering the world through their eyes. This week my 3-year old said that they learned a new thing: That milk comes from cows and bananas come from monkeys!
- I serve on the national Church Doctrine Committee
- I like to write songs
- I try to be a student of culture
- I'm a writer—for my blog at www.MatthewRuttan.com, formerly for the Presbyterian Record's blog, and as we will learn more about soon, for my daily devotional called "Up!" at www.TheUpDevo.com.
- Primarily, I try to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I'm passionate about helping people live out their faith in practical ways today.
- In terms of the content for this presentation it comes mostly from my own reading, research and experience.

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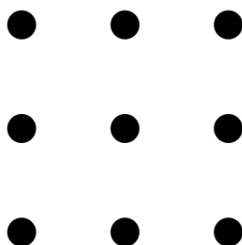


A SILVER BULLET?

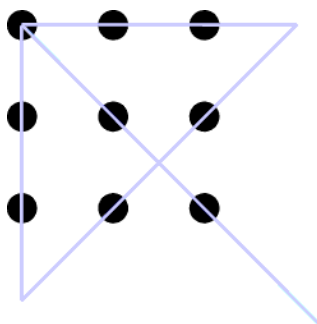
When it comes to understanding the internet and social media, and leveraging them for discipleship in the church there is no “silver bullet.”

A strong online presence and strategy is not magic that will grow the faithfulness or size of your church. People still respond to vibrant worship, solid teaching about Jesus, evangelism, hope and opportunities to serve and change the world for the better. All of that is still true. So this presentation isn't about a silver bullet that renders any of that obsolete. What we are doing is better understanding the internet and social media and exploring how we can leverage them for discipleship.

OPENING EXERCISE



Look at this picture of 9 dots. Can you connect them all using only four straight lines without taking your pencil off the page? Here's the answer:



When we first look at the dots, we struggle to find the answer because we think we need to work *within* the dots. But when we stretch our mind and think a bit differently, we can figure it out. This is where the expression “thinking outside the box” comes from.

Today, I hope we can think outside the box when it comes to the internet and social media, and how we might leverage them. They don't need to be seen as a separate entity from what we seek to do in the church. They can be integrated into our wider mission and activities.

INTERNET USE IN CANADA

- Globally it is likely that there are now more people using mobile phones than toothbrushes (Nicole Hall, 60-second marketer)
- 80% of Canadians (and Ontarians) are online
- Of the 80% online, over half use multiple devices
- This is a bit less in rural areas, but still over 70%
- “Canadians spend an average of 36.3 hours browsing and visit approximately 80 websites in one month's time.” This is more than any other country in the world. Comscore.com (2015)
- In 2017, online advertising revenue will eclipse television ad revenue for the first time in history.

- Seniors use the internet the least, but are the fastest growing group (Email is their biggest online activity)
- Online activity is increasing while TV watching is decreasing, especially for those under 50 (U.S. Study)
- In Canada, Facebook is the most popular social media network with 19.5 million users; Instagram has 8.5 million; Twitter has 8 million
- “Among Canadian Internet users, those ages 18-34 spend more hours streaming TV, movies or video than any other age group.” Cira.ca (2015)
- “Three out of four Canadians own smartphones and 49 per cent of Canadians’ time online is now spent on mobile” –Comscore.com (2015)
- 53% of teens would rather give up their sense of smell than lose their social networks. (U.S.)

*To reach 50 million users, it took radio 38 years.
It took TV 13 years.
It took the Internet 4 years.
Facebook added 200 million users in less than a year.
Mobile apps hit one billion users in nine months.*

Bottom line: Canadians spend more time online than other people in any other country in the world. While online they are using social media, connecting with others, shopping, watching TV, looking for information, etc. This trend is increasing.

Why do you think that is?

- (participants offered some guesses)

THE POWER AND PRESENCE OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE CHURCH

Why did Jesus spend time on a hillside?

This speaks to our own motivation. Jesus spent time on a hillside (and by the sea and in a field...) *because he met people where they were*. He didn’t just wait for people to come to him; he went to them.

In a similar way, we leverage the internet because it’s meeting people where they are—and this is true for people of all ages. People are spending significant amounts of time online.

As a church community (or as a person of faith), you need to ask WHY you are spending time online. You need to know your mission as a church—or your personal mission—so that your online activity can fit into that mission.

WHEN WE USE THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE CHURCH WE:

1. **Are influencing someone's daily culture**

For a long time, the word 'culture' was closely related to 'cultivate' (as in cultivate the ground). But in 17th century the word started to relate more directly to people. Someone who was "cultured," meant someone who was educated. More recently, it has come to refer to how we re-arrange different things in life—things that we see, do, experience, learn about—to express meaning. (See Tim Keller's video "Why Culture Matters" from September 2015.)

2. **Merge faith with daily habits**

Since people are spending significant amounts of time online, we share content so that it can merge with their daily habits and activities. Habits are powerful in people's lives and contribute to how they think, act, and see the world. Writer and pastor John Ortberg says, "Habits eat willpower for breakfast." What he means is that our habits are more powerful than our willpower. So integrating faith-based content into people's internet and social media diet has a powerful impact on their day-to-day thinking.

3. **Model responsible use**

It can be easy to spend too much time online. (When I get pulled into spending too much time on Facebook I call it face-sucking Facebook time. It draws you in and it's hard to get out!) So post helpful content—but not too often. Also, we only post things we would say or do in person. Integrity and consistency is important. We should be the same person online that we are offline and in person.

4. **Respect that people are busy**

Busyness is the modern cancer. And it's something many of us struggle with. So instead of clogging people's feeds and inboxes with useless information, we can be deliberate about what we share and why. We want to be helpful. When we overshare unhelpful content we are communicating to people that we don't respect their time and that their church is annoying.

5. **Meet people where they are to**

a. **Provide information**

A bulletin announcement with 10-point font for one or two Sundays isn't really adequate anymore to let people know what's happening in and through the church community, especially because of shifting attendance patterns. So social media use, email and a church website help make information more readily available. Key information to share is about what's happening on Sundays and other notable church events or programs. (Mistake alert: A mistake some churches make is that they *only* post about this. Don't just make your online presence about promoting events.)

b. **Provide inspiration**

People long and need to be inspired. Sharing Scripture verses (or insights from Christian writers or yourself) can remind people through the course of their week what life can be like. This can be done easily with images as well (which can then also be shared on social media or forwarded to friends and/or family).

c. Provide resources to build up believers

People need help. As you think about the people you serve, ask yourself, 'What can I share that is clear and helpful which builds up their Christian faith?' There are good Christian bloggers and magazines which help helpful content. TheParentCue.org is a great resource for parents, as can be Focus on the Family etc. Who are your favourite Christian writers? Chances are, many of them are sharing writing, talks or studies online that you can share with others.

d. Provide direction to help them bless others

Offer regular ideas about how people can love their neighbours and share who Jesus is. Again, this can be done with the help of blogs or other websites, or content from your own church community. Why not make regular suggestions for how to serve someone else in a practical way, or how to bless your surrounding community?

WHY AN ONLINE PRESENCE IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL

Well, it actually IS optional. But not if you want to be proactive about meeting people where they are. An online presence is very wise. Without it you can still be the church, of course, but it's like you are erecting a brick wall around your church property. You limit your visibility and reach.

Our society is increasingly indifferent or hostile to Christianity. Therefore, it is even more intimidating and rare for new people or curious seekers to come to your physical building to learn more. The new front door of the church is a www. More and more, the internet is where first impressions are made. At my own church, the majority of new people now tell me they first listened to some sermons online and checked out the church activities *before* they showed up for a service. (This includes seniors.)

Being active online is like saying Jesus and faith are important on a day-to-day basis, and should be consistently impacting how we live our lives.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Physical presence

The acceleration of internet use means your physical presence is even more valuable. Since people are spending more time online, when you actually show up in person to talk to someone face to face, it can be interpreted as having even more value.

Build trust

Being active online can actually communicate trust and authenticity with others. One study suggests that leaders who use social media increase their organization's visibility, give confidence to staff, and trust with people they serve. (Ladan Nikraven "Getting Executives on Social media Boosts Leadership Development." -Clomedia.com March 21, 2012.) I think this could also be true for the church. Increased visibility—if done in a helpful, hopeful and consistent way—can grow trust.

Amplifying ministry with younger Christians

You may not engage many new "unchurched" people through your online presence; but you will amplify your ministry with Christians, especially younger Christians (who are online the most).

Expensive?

A strategy is important because although a lot of online tools don't cost a lot of money, they are expensive in terms of *time*. If you're not careful, the internet and social media can be a vacuum for how you spend your day!

MY ADVICE FOR WHAT A CHURCH SHOULD BE DOING ONLINE

I would suggest three main things.

Website

First, an up to date website that is clean and easy to navigate. If possible, make sure it is "mobile-friendly" which means that it also easy to read and navigate from a smart phone. This is because "Three out of four Canadians own smartphones and 49 per cent of Canadians' time online is now spent on mobile" -Comscore.com (2015)

People used to think websites needed every bit of information imaginable, including church histories and profiles of every leader. I'm not so sure that holds anymore. Websites should be easy to use and operate, and should include the key information like phone numbers, address, service times, and what to expect when someone walks in the door. If you can include some sermons, even better. It's also important to keep it up-to-date. An out-of-date website might communicate irrelevance and a lack of care about the church's mission.

Major Social Media

Second, have a helpful, hopeful and consistent presence on the major social media platforms. Some argue that Facebook is declining in popularity, especially with younger people. Although younger generations are generally diversifying their online presence and

using more social media platforms, Facebook is still the monster. If you have a Facebook page (or group), and Instagram account, that is good coverage. If you're really keen, perhaps add Twitter. To learn more about these platforms, refer to the social media guide cited in the resources section below.

Group Email

A weekly email to the congregation can be highly effective. It can tell people what is coming up, notify about events or key programs, and also provide links to blogs, articles or graphics that build up people's faith and encourage them to bless and love others. If you're a Christian leader, you probably have a regular diet of faith-based content. But don't assume that other people have ready access to this same information.

In terms of getting set up, there are free programs such as MailChimp which provide a professional look. You can also just use your normal email program. Be sure, however, to protect people's privacy and use the "BCC" (blind carbon copy) function so that people's email addresses can't be seen by others. Also obtain permission from people before you add them to an e-mailing list. A sign-up sheet at the church can be useful for starting your subscription list.

Process

In all of this, it's important to obtain appropriate approvals, and to establish some guidelines for use. For example, can anyone from the church post pictures of people in the church Facebook group? It's wise to establish guidelines off the top. For example, I have a guide that you can only post people's pictures if they've given permission and if it's a nice picture. It's also important to have someone who can keep an eye on comments, and immediately remove any negative comments that are inappropriate. After you do so, contact the person who posted the comments to tell them why you removed them.

Designate a person to oversee online content. This doesn't have to be the pastor. But it should be a Christian who is familiar with the online world, and who has ready access to key information in the church. This person should be carefully selected because they will have a *major* role in the visibility of your church. The right person can be very helpful; the wrong person can be very hurtful.

SO, HOW DO YOU LEVERAGE THESE TOOLS FOR DISCIPLESHIP TODAY?

An online presence is meeting people where they are.

As mentioned above, all of what I've shared so far is how to leverage these tools for discipleship today. To recap, with these tools you can (1) provide information, (2) provide inspiration, (3) provide resources to build up believers, (4) provide direction to help them bless others, and (5) offer regular ideas about how to love their neighbours and share who Jesus is.

To do this you need to know what’s happening that is helpful in your church. You need to subscribe to helpful faithful content that is accessible and understandable to non-theologically trained people. As mentioned, some good resources are bloggers, TheParentCue.org, Focus on the Family, Christianity Today, etc. Plus, why not follow some of your favourite thinkers—people like Craig Groeschel or Lysa TerKeurst or Andy Stanley or Beth Moore or NT Wright or CS Lewis—and share what they have to say, especially when it supports and strengthens the mission of your local congregation?

BOTTOM LINE

Canadians are online more than any other country in the world. We leverage the internet to cultivate Christian culture on a daily basis. We do this not only to share information about the church, but to inspire people, to build people up as believers, and to help people bless others.

WILL ANY OF THIS WEB STUFF STICK?

The President of the Michigan Savings Bank advised Henry Ford’s lawyer **not** to invest in the Ford Motor Company in 1903. Why?

“The horse is here to stay but the automobile is only a novelty, a fad.”



RESOURCES

- See the attached pdf document/guide titled *Social Media Guide for Churches* by Justin Dean and Corrin Bauer. This explains the different social media platforms and how to use them. It also offers advice about best practices.
- See the attached “Template for Social Media in the Church” that I produced to help you schedule and keep track of the content you are sharing... and *why* you are sharing it.
- For help creating graphics and visuals visit www.Canva.com

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS