

A woman with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a white robe, is shown in profile against a teal background. A spotlight effect is visible in the top left corner, illuminating the scene.

TECHNOLOGY SPOTLIGHT

Be a Hero
with Instagram



CHURCH TECH TODAY
TECHNOLOGY FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

ABOUT US



ChurchTechToday

ChurchTechToday is the #1 church technology website for pastors, communicators, and leaders. With the goal to provide insight into a variety of topics including social media, websites, worship, media, mobile, and software, ChurchTechToday aims to shed light on how church technology can empower and position churches for impact and growth.



Lauren Hunter

Lauren Hunter is a freelance writer, consultant, and musician who loves the “big picture” of God’s journey we are all on together. She lives in Northern California with her husband, four kids, dog, and piano. She blogs at laurenhunter.net and is the founder and editor of ChurchTechToday.com, the #1 Church technology website for pastors, church communicators, and leaders.



Elsa Dooling

Elsa Dooling is the assistant editor of ChurchTechToday and a communications specialist. Her concentration is church and non-profit communications, business management, event planning, and fundraising. She is also an experienced teacher, personal development consultant, and dedicated mother. She helps churches, businesses, nonprofits, schools, and families innovate and take their success to the next level.



Ryan Holck

Ryan serves as the creative and tech director for ChurchTechToday and is the founder of RAD Ideas and Graphics.Church. He works with churches and denominations to grow their ministry through graphic design and marketing strategy. Follow Ryan at RAD-Ideas.com.

Rights and Liability

Rights and Liability All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of ChurchTechToday. For more information on getting permission, visit www.churchtechtoday.com. The information in this book is distributed on an “as is” basis, without warranty. While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, neither the author nor ChurchTechToday shall have any liability to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the instructions contained within this document.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Overview of Instagram	5
• Understanding Instagram	
• Demographics	
• Mobile Emphasis	
• Opportunity	
Chapter 2: Understanding the Culture of Instagram	9
• Visual Emphasis	
• Business Features	
• Marketing Opportunities	
• Advertising on Instagram	
Chapter 3: Getting Started With Instagram	13
• Basic Features	
• Advanced Features	
• Posting Original Content	
• Following and Gaining Followers	
Chapter 4: Fitting Instagram Into Your Church Communication Plan	20
• Account Management	
• Church Communication	
• Barriers to Success	
• Is Instagram Right for Your Church?	
Chapter 5: Helpful Articles	23
• 6 Steps to Posting on Instagram	
• 10 Ways Your Church can Use Instagram Now	
• 5 Traits That Differentiate Instagram From Other Social Networks	
Chapter 6: Resources List	33
• Instagram News	
• Other Helpful Articles on Instagram	
• Social Media Services to Consider	

CHAPTER 1

Overview of Instagram

Once upon a time, there was a church communicator who felt pressured to use Instagram. Her kids used it; the youth director used it; even the pastor thought it was a great tool for the church. However, this church communicator was apprehensive, scared, and even anxious about starting to use yet another social network.

This guide was designed to gently unpack Instagram's network and explore the valuable and practical tools it offers to build or enhance a thriving social media strategy for churches. With this guide in hand, the church communicator became more comfortable and confident about using Instagram and began developing ideas and plans for her church.

Understanding Instagram

Instagram has quickly become one of the most influential social media apps to emerge in recent years. With 800 million user accounts, an average of 500 million daily users, and 25 million active business accounts, it has made its mark on the digital communications industry. It's clear why Facebook paid \$1 billion dollars to acquire it in 2012.

To better understand what Instagram is and how to use it, it is also helpful to understand who is using it. Social media is a social connection tool that is used in different ways by different people. So what is Instagram and who is using it and why?

Dubbed a “photo-sharing app” at its inception, Instagram has grown to be so much more than that, and yet it has absolutely retained its essence. In 2017, it became *the* photo-sharing app because of its unique algorithm designed to hold users attention with images and video. With 800 million users, it is the largest growing social network online. Is your church on Instagram?

Social media networks offer churches, communicators, and pastors the chance to reach both outside and inside their congregations to increase engagement and participation, grow ministries, and share the Gospel. Instagram's social network is used by businesses and people alike to connect, view, and follow what's happening within their network and beyond. Sharing the ethos of your welcoming environment with others online can help with your overall church communication. Instagram is the place to do this in a bigger, bolder, and more creative way.

2017 Instagram Statistics

41% of users are 24 or younger

63% of users in the US are age 13-17

Demographics

2017 statistics revealed that 41% of all Instagram users are [24 years of age or younger](#) and 63% of Instagram users in the United States are between the ages of 13-17. It has also been shown that 68% of users are female, and Instagram is used by 31% of American women and 24% of men. ([source](#)).

The number of Instagram users grew over 300% in three years. 80% of users [follow at least one business](#) on their site and over 70% of users make purchases after seeing products on the site.

With nearly a billion user accounts and half a billion users online each day, Instagram's statistics show ample opportunity for churches to connect and grow their social media presence.

Learn more about Instagram's demographics and evolution here: [139 Helpful Facts About Instagram](#)

Mobile Emphasis

Because Instagram users are typically mobile and on the go, they are excited to share images of the fun they're having. An energetic nature is built into the usability of this app. Phones are light, portable, and easy to use, and whatever is done on them can be done quickly. The app is simple, easy, and fun-to-use. It's always in "go mode." This is part of Instagram's success.

Some church leaders may be confused about how to manage this social media app effectively from a mobile device rather than from the church office computer. Building a mobile strategy for church communicators can be easily done through conversations and planning.

{ Building a mobile strategy for church communicators can be easily done through conversations and planning.

Instagram users pay attention and follow the organizations, events, people, and products they love. Churches have the opportunity to increase online engagement, inspire advocacy, and help further their missions by engaging this growing user base. Connecting via Instagram can also help churches build their brand and drive traffic to their services, events, and websites.

There are many ways your church can learn to use Instagram effectively. The predominant way people are connecting on Instagram is through images and videos.


With more than just teen users, [Millennials](#) prefer also staying connected via Instagram too. They are also spending more than three hours per day watching video content on social media sites, Instagram being one of the top sites. Pastors and church leaders should consider whether this app can increase engagement with their youth members.

Opportunity

Joining the Instagram social network means that your church will be tapping into an enormous online community of people who might be looking for a new church or place of worship just like yours. Instagram holds the attention of millions. Your church can be a part of this too.

Through geotagging (see chapter 3), people can find your church by doing local searches on Instagram. Learning how to use this app plugs your church into a network of marketing opportunities that has unlimited potential. Instagram just might be the tool your church needs to attract new people and engage them both visually and spiritually.

Private accounts can be created on Instagram. As the name states, private account posts are only be seen by followers. This is helpful for youth groups and for the safe use of social media by teens. Account owners are in charge of accepting followers and can control who can and cannot follow them. This is one method for creating privacy protections for an account. The account name and profile image will be visible in searches, but not the content.

 Instagram just might be the tool your church needs to attract young people and engage them both visually and spiritually.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding the Culture of Instagram

Visual Emphasis

Instagram was created as an image sharing app. Plain and simple: your church needs quality images to share on Instagram. These images should speak your message. Original images of your church, its activities, and congregation can express the essence of your community and your worship together. This is what Instagram audiences are hungry for. The key is creating and posting original and authentic content.

Many [free tutorials](#) are available to teach church staff and volunteers how to take good photos and edit them well for Instagram. Developing an authentic image bank for your church communication strategy is paramount. Image quality and creativity can provide churches with a way to differentiate themselves. Creative images and videos are also vital to creating effective Instagram Ads.

Instagram for Businesses

If your church needs more convincing that Instagram deserves real consideration, then consider that in November 2017 Instagram celebrated [25 million business](#) users. This number includes a jump from 15 million in July 2017. Many of these users are small businesses and organizations.

25 million
Business Instagram Users
as of November 2017

Business accounts offer additional real time metrics and features to help owners monitor and maximize their site statistics and their campaign impacts. Businesses can also purchase Instagram advertisements to increase their exposure within their networks. A further look at Instagram ads will continue below.

Churches are not-for-profit businesses and can benefit from the business insights and strategies that other small or large businesses are using. Customers, members, and visitors are definitely finding and discovering new businesses, organizations, and churches on Instagram.

Business and organizational accounts are typically public accounts and designed for maximum exposure so all content is searchable and accessible. Private accounts can be created by businesses or organizations for special events, classes, or other needs. Personal Instagram accounts can be switched to business accounts easily. In the Instagram account settings there is a 'switch to business profile' option and the app will walk you through the steps to make the switch.

Marketing Opportunities

As Instagram marketing has developed, it has taken the social media world by storm. Out of this storm, a new set of Instagram marketing personalities have emerged: Influencers, Advocates, and Sponsors. These groups are responsible for driving traffic to products, events, businesses, and organizations on Instagram and beyond.

Instagram Influencers are users that have created a legitimate and loyal audience of followers. These followers can then be 'influenced' by their trusted Influencer. Influencers basically have a loyal fan base that has grown with them organically and follows them religiously

(all puns intended) and likes what they do, say, buy, etc. These Influencers have the largest number of followers and usually post with hashtags of brands, people, or businesses they like. When Influencers share information, their audience listens.

Advocates are supporters and enthusiasts of an organization, business, movement, event, product, person, or place. Advocates are a type of influencer that has an impact on their own followers and can create attention for other brands. Sponsors, on the other hand, are individuals or celebrities, who are paid to advertise and endorse a product on their own Instagram account and to their followers.

Advocates and Sponsors are both technically Influencers. Statistics show that brand advocates have more influence and drive engagement better than celebrity endorsements. Advocates are essentially passionate fans that have become the best-untapped resource on Instagram to help businesses and organizations flourish organically. Advocates praise because the genuinely love whatever it is they are praising, not because they are paid to. This energetic and sincere support seems to translate very well on Instagram and adhere to illustrate the successful 'authenticity' factor.

Instagram's new algorithm now increases the visibility of posts as more people view it and as its popularity rises. Advocates and loyal Instagram followers of your church can help increase your visibility, popularity, and build your online community.

Popular Instagram Terminology:

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Profile | 5. Hashtag |
| 2. Story | 6. Advocate |
| 3. Follower | 7. Influencer |
| 4. Highlight | 8. Sponsor |



Advertising Opportunities

As with most social networks, businesses can purchase ad space with an Instagram Business account. Ads can be created in Instagram feeds or within Stories. When an ad is created, a target audience, objective, and ad format is selected using the Power Editor or Ads Manager. From there, decide on what the budget for the ad will be and then click 'Publish' and the ad is live.

Remember: business accounts come with lots of helpful data features to let users track the performance of their ads. Learn more about Instagram Ads [here](#).

Instagram Live is another new feature that is also positively impacting ads and marketing practices on the network. The key here is the same: engage with your followers and create compelling, authentic content that gets followers excited and taking action.



Instagram Live video feeds live within Stories and can be saved for up to 24 hours before disappearing or these live video recordings can be permanently saved to Highlights. To go live, simply create a new Story and click 'Live' and your followers will receive a notification that you're going live. Broadcasts are typically under an hour.

CHAPTER 3

Getting Started With Instagram

Basic Features

Setting up an Instagram account includes thoughtfully creating an Instagram “handle” or username that represents your church accurately. Using consistent branding across all of your church’s social media and communication platforms is advised and your Instagram username should reflect this as well.

Instagram Bio

After your user handle, your Instagram bio is the next thing visitors will view when they find your page. Creating a professional bio is vital for businesses and churches. Personalizing and designing a bio to represent your church is like creating a mission statement that makes an impression. What kind of impression does your church want to make on Instagram?

The messaging in your bio should be consistent with your existing church messaging that is already in place on your church website, and it should absolutely contain a link to your church website.



Users can only insert one link into their Instagram bio, and this is the only place a link can be hyperlinked (other than a paid promoted post) in Instagram. Churches would be wise to expertly craft their bio and include a link to their church website. As of March 2018, Instagram has also added [the ability to link hashtags](#) from a bio. This is extremely helpful in order to market your church. Your communication team can create and begin to use its own custom hashtag, or use well known hashtags such as #faith, #jesus, or #love.

Posts

Instagram is designed for posting images and short, focused, authentic video clips. Images and videos can be of your church’s programs, ministries, events, or even a live stream.

Instagram videos can now be up to 60 seconds long (as of Sept 2017). As previously mentioned, [live video streaming](#) is also available on Instagram. You can share a live video to connect with your followers in real time. When the video ends, it can be saved to the camera roll or shared in Stories.

To keep content in your Instagram feed fresh, alternate between posting images and videos of a variety of church activities. Create effective posts that give followers value and inspire them. Also plan to interact with followers at certain time during the day or week. Posting a few times per day, at peak traffic times, and creating authentic and compelling content are all keys to your Instagram account success.



Instagram Post Ideas:

1. Graphic Bible verse images
2. Short video of worship team rehearsing
3. Short video message from pastor
4. Question in form of graphic
5. Behind the scenes photo or video
6. Event announcements or images/videos from recent events
7. Milestones – church anniversaries, fundraising goals, membership drives
8. Weekly service announcements
9. Special updates – holidays, special events, exciting news, etc.

Hashtags

Hashtags continue to be a dominant force used to draw attention and connect Instagram users to one another. Choosing effective hashtags is an art and there is a science to it. The key is using a mixture of original hashtags that are uniquely designed for your church and more standard and generic hashtags that are widely used.

In 2017 [#love](#) was the most popular and most used hashtag on Instagram. Statistics show that including multiple hashtags in posts (up to 30) is more effective in growing long and short-term post popularity.

Hashtags are supremely important to the success of your posts due to Instagram's new algorithm. This algorithm consistently evaluates the statistical data that measures the engagement of your Instagram posts. Effective hashtags are essential to hacking this algorithm and raising your post engagement levels to reach more Instagram users and level up post popularity and views.

In December 2017, Instagram rolled out a new and very important feature that allows users to follow hashtags themselves. This is a new way to find content related to user-specified topics. Simply enter a hashtag into the Explore search box, select the one(s) you wish to follow and click the “Follow” button. Popular content containing this hashtag will now appear in your feed. Filters are available to eliminate unwanted or unrelated hashtags, which is helpful for hashtags that may also double as acronyms. [Instagram hashtag user instructions.](#)



Top 10 Instagram Hashtags for Churches

- | | | |
|------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1. #Love | 5. #Christ | 9. #faith |
| 2. #God | 6. #Bible | 10. #pray |
| 3. #church | 7. #blessed | |
| 4. #Jesus | 8. #Christian | |

Geotagging

Geotagging posts with your church’s location or the location of church events is another one of the most effective methods to attract Instagram followers. Geotags allow Instagram users and followers to find your church by your location in searches, without necessarily knowing the name of your church.

Using geotagging and city, town, or state specific hashtags will also give your posts the best chance of being found in searches.

Tagging and Linking Posts

To further increase exposure and grow your audience on Instagram, users can tag other Instagram users in photos. This links your account with theirs and can widen your message’s audience. This is a feature Instagram calls ‘Mentions.’ Tags only link to other Instagram accounts.

Instagram users are only allowed to include one website link in their account Profile. When posting, users can refer followers to this URL in their bio. The URL text can be inserted into the caption below a photo or video post, but this is a less successful way to share a link since

it is not clickable. In early 2017, Instagram did add a website linking feature to the photos and videos in the 'Stories' feature. (learn more below).

Advanced Features

Instagram Stories

One of the most popular features Instagram has introduced in recent years is the 'Stories' function. This feature allows Instagram users to post and share images and videos for a short time. These stories are temporary and are



removed after 24 hours (see Story Archives below). Posting to Stories is sometimes dubbed “secondary sharing” or some users refer to it as a place to share pictures or videos that are not worthy of posting on their main page. This feature is similar to the features Snapchat offers.

Businesses use Stories much differently than personal users. Businesses build brands and advertise via Stories. Imagine how well a business could use a Story to sell a product or demonstrate its effectiveness. The possibilities are endless.

Knowing this, in early 2017, Instagram also enabled photos and videos in 'Stories' to be linked to websites. Simply upload new photos and videos - or ones from your camera roll - to 'Stories' and click the link icon and insert your link. The Stories feature has become a valuable tool for promoting events and church services.

Story Archives and Highlights

In December 2017, Instagram announced the creation of Stories Archives and Highlights. Story Archives are where Stories can now be saved after their 24 hour expiration date.

Story Highlights appear in a new section below your church bio and can be made of any content that has been shared in Stories and is now stored in your Stories Archive. Highlights will display as a stand-alone feature in your church's profile and will remain there as long as you'd like it to, and churches can add as many Highlights as they like. These features allow

churches to group Stories into Highlights that can then be posted, featured, and also saved. Stories can also be linked to websites. A 'See More' button has been added to the bottom of any Story that is linked to an outside website. Simply click and you're off.

Live Streaming

Live streaming is another advanced feature that Instagram rolled out in [November of 2016](#), giving users the opportunity to live stream to their followers. In 2017, Instagram users were also given the opportunity to live stream with friends using a split screen feature. Unique to Instagram, live stream feeds disappear as soon as they are done, but they can be saved to the camera roll or to Stories – and a replay can also be shared.

Churches can live stream services, programs, or special events in real-time with Instagram just as they can or would with Facebook Live. Church groups can also use live streaming for meetings and other social interactions as well. Learn more [here](#).

Live streaming could be a way to share special “hidden content” from church happenings too. Hidden content is really “behind the scenes” video or photo content that isn't usually part of traditional, everyday social media marketing or sharing. This bonus footage gives fans and followers a special inside glimpse and increases their sense of connection to your church.

Posting Original Content

Instagram's [terms of service](#) clearly point out that original content is what users should be posting. Instagram states: “Before you post content on Instagram, you may want to ask: Did I create all of the content myself? Do I have permission to use all of the content included in my post? Does my use of the content fall within an exception to copyright infringement? Is the content protected by copyright (for example, is it a short phrase, idea or public)?”

These are excellent guidelines that will keep your church safe from legal infringement, but also encourages the creation of unique content that will differentiate your church. Content includes any images, videos, and text. Also, you need to be careful about posting videos of adults and children and get [photo releases](#) for people when possible.

More information about creating photo releases for children can be found in CTT's free [Guidelines for Children's Ministry Volunteers ebook](#).



Following and Gaining Followers

Because Facebook owns Instagram, users can connect, invite, and follow their Facebook friends on Instagram easily. In the user profile section of your Instagram account, click the 'Options' wheel icon beside 'Edit Profile' to access these Facebook connecting tools.

Initially, the goal will be for your church to open its account, invite any/all relevant Facebook friends to follow your Instagram feed, and begin sharing photos and videos daily. Gaining more followers is equal to widening your audience, and so it will be important to spend some time initially to widen this audience by gaining followers as much as possible.

Some tips from [this helpful article](#) on Hootsuite's blog encourage Instagram account users to promote your Instagram presence on other social networks your church might already be using such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. Make sure to share your Instagram handle in all relevant communication tools such as your print or mobile church bulletin, your website, and your emails. Following other relevant users such as neighboring churches in your community as well as other pastors and church leaders can also boost your follower count.

CHAPTER 4

Fitting Instagram Into Your Church Communication Plan

Account Management

Your church's Instagram account will need consistent management, just like all other communication tools. Daily posting is important for inspiring connection to your church and regular posting to Instagram in the form of photos and videos creates a community where followers enjoy spending time connecting and following your church each day.

Organizations and businesses using Instagram are also encouraged to occasionally post questions in their their feed to increase user engagement. To post a question, you will most likely need to either use your phone's image edit to create a graphic with text overlaid on it, or use one of the many apps available for this such as [Ripl](#). Responding to followers is a key function of Instagram management and one that churches should keep in mind when they choose their Instagram manager.

Church Communication

Churches will always need websites, email, social media, print publications, and in-person communications to share information effectively. Instagram is not a replacement for these communication tools. It is simply another tool that your church can use to communicate.

It is helpful to also remember that people respond differently to different types of communications. Some people may like email while others enjoy social media and others like face-to-face conversations. All businesses and organizations should use a diverse set of communication tools to share information with their congregation and with their local and online communities.

Instagram feeds can be integrated into websites to help cross-promote your church's social media platform. If your church uses WordPress for their website, Instagram widgets like this one <https://wordpress.org/plugins/wp-instagram-widget/> are available.

Barriers to Success

It is true that all churches, members, and community partners may not be using Instagram. Churches themselves may not be using Instagram for a variety of reasons, even if simply because there is no one in the church who can manage it – either because of a lack of time or a lack of training. Churches that do want to start using Instagram should start talking about

it. Conversations can help church leaders explore the big questions: who, what, when, why and how to use Instagram.

These are crucial questions to discuss. Managing church communications is a big responsibility in general. Building Instagram into your church's current communications platform (websites, email, Facebook, Twitter, event management, marketing, etc.) should be

carefully considered. Pastors and church communications or leadership teams may need to consult about using Instagram.

More information about creating a church communication plan can be found in CTT's free [Budget-Friendly Church Communication free ebook](#).

Questions you need to ask yourself:

1. Who will manage Instagram?
2. What will we use it for?
3. When and how often will we use it?
4. Why are we considering using it?
5. How will it help our church?

Is Instagram Right for Your Church?

Fear, overwhelm, confusion, and skepticism are some of the barriers to beginning anything new. If your church is not already utilizing social media, using Instagram may seem daunting, and rightly so. Engaging in social media management and outreach for a business or church is not for the faint of heart, even though it can be a lot of fun.

One way to begin testing the waters to determine if Instagram is right for your church is to identify someone on your church's leadership team who is passionate and knowledgeable about social media or Instagram itself. Invite them to share their perspective with you or spearhead a conversation about using Instagram at your church. Ask the group to consider what ways Instagram might help the church save time, advertise events, and reach the community in fresh ways.

This could also be an opportunity to invite young adults who are typically plugged into social media and Instagram to join in this conversation as well. These conversations are often where great ideas begin to emerge. Capture those ideas. They will make great content for authentic posts when you get started!

CHAPTER 5

Helpful Articles

6 Steps to Posting on Instagram

Is your church finally ready to dive in and start using Instagram? While you're nowhere near the last church on earth to take the plunge and join the Insta-church party, you will be joining this online community at a time when the platform is at its peak.



Churches and users have learned some pretty savvy tricks to keep their accounts visible, viral, and performing their best. So where do you start?

Once pastors and church communicators have discussed their Instagram strategy, set a few goals, and decide who is going to manage the account. If you haven't already designated a church social media coordinator, then take some time to recruit a paid or volunteer staff member to take on this role. Then, this coordinator can start setting up the church account and begin planning the first post.

Remember, the key to creating effective Instagram posts is great, visually appealing, authentic, and original video or photo content that tells a story about your church. Unique content created by your church and designed to connect and share your message with the world is what Instagram users want.

Here are 6 simple steps to get your church Instagram-ready:

1) DOWNLOAD THE INSTAGRAM APP

The Instagram app can be found in the iTunes, Google Play, and Microsoft stores or create an account online here: <https://www.instagram.com>. Accounts can be set up on the Instagram website, but posting can only happen on devices *that have the Instagram app*.

2) CHOOSE A HANDLE

Your church's handle is a professional username that is exclusive to your church, and it should also include the name of your city, town or community if possible. Including your location name will help users easily identify your church.

#3) WRITE A GREAT BIO

Creating a professional bio that expresses the unique character of your church is key. In the bio also include a link your church website. Linking your bio to your church website is supremely important!

#4) CREATE A PROFILE IMAGE

Choose a profile images for your church account that is unique and that can be used for at least one year. This can be your church logo or a quality image of your church building. This image should be professional and should not change.

#5) DESIGN THE FIRST POST

Plan and gather the content of the first post. Create an image, video, announcement, invitation, etc. for the first post that will beautifully illustrate the essence of who your church is and share your most important message. Also, determine the date and time of your first post, and use a [peak posting time](#) strategy to capitalize on high-traffic posts that increase user engagement.

#6) START POSTING

As your church begins using Instagram regularly, it is essential to monitor account activity and user engagement metrics that are included in the Instagram Business account features. These insights will help your account manager learn the best times of day for posting and which types of posts are most popular with your followers.

Remember to also post a link to your Instagram account on your church website. Then begin including your Instagram account in all communications where social media is applicable.

10 Ways Your Church Can Use Instagram Now

Instagram has become the place to be for social sharing of images and videos for individuals, businesses, and organizations like churches. With nearly a billion users, it also seems to be the place for fun. Instagram users enjoy following their social circles



and catching up on the news of the day with this app. The consistent flood of unique, user-created content and new features fuel Instagram communities and keep users coming back for more. Case in point, at the close of 2017 new features were introduced that allow users to follow [hashtags](#) on Instagram and [archive Stories and create Story Highlights](#). What will they think of next?

Keep It Simple

In our fast-paced digital world, Instagram's bite-sized posts keeps messages short and simple, which and time-crunched followers happy. Clever and catchy hashtags connect bigger audiences and inspire viral posting too. The 25 million businesses now using Instagram have also been capitalizing on this unique social media market. So what does this have to do with churches? And how can pastors, church communicators, staff, and members join the fun on Instagram with the 500 million users online each day?

Here are 10 practical ways your church can start using Instagram now:

1) EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INVITES

This image-centric platform is perfect for eye-catching photo and video announcements that get users and followers excited about church events. Instagram makes it easy to create a buzz, connect, and get followers engaged in the fun before it even starts. Because Instagram doesn't link urls in posts, you'll want to create a graphic that has the 5 W's – Who/What/When/Where/Why. Creating specially branded hashtags for events that will be included in all posts before, during, and after the event can also generate a buzz surrounding your event. And include more general hashtags (#church, #fun, etc.) that describe the event for increased exposure. Hashtags still reign supreme on Instagram.

2) SERVICE REMINDERS, INVITATIONS, AND UPDATES

Reminders are appreciated and often needed in our busy lives. Churches can schedule weekly Instagram posts that share service dates and times, special holiday schedules, closures, and information about guest preachers or speakers as gentle reminders. Followers appreciate weekly updates that keep them organized, up to date, and focused on enjoyable weekend activities.

3) SHARE DAILY/WEEKLY AFFIRMATIONS

Daily and weekly inspirational messages keep followers engaged and encouraged. People love inspiring quotes, [Bible verses](#), poems, song lyrics, and videos. Choose messages that are expressive of your church community, from pastors or other leaders, or from upcoming services or events. These posts have wide appeal, can easily be shared and go viral, and become great exposure for your church. Followers will often become accustomed to reading these and begin looking for them on a regular basis.

4) SHARE STORIES FROM YOUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

Pictures coupled with short and snappy captions can share important stories and news about your church quickly. A series of posts can be planned to roll out a story incrementally and keep followers engaged over extended periods of time too. The Instagram Stories feature also enables churches to pull together images and videos from previous posts into a featured gallery that tells a bigger story in the life of the church. Stories can now be archived and highlighted as well. This content lives in your Instagram account and gives followers more ways to learn about your church.

5) HIGHLIGHT MINISTRIES, PROGRAMS, AND MILESTONES

How many [groups](#) and ministries does your church have? People want to know. Capture images and videos of special moments in the life and work of your church groups and share them. Posts about church anniversaries, youth groups, choirs, volunteer opportunities, and other church activities keep church members and followers up to date and reflect who your church is through its actions. Use Instagram's new Highlights feature to pull together previously posted Stories and feature them in your profile to draw even more attention to your work.

6) REFLECT ON THE YEAR, SEASON, MONTH, OR WEEK AT YOUR CHURCH

Create a rhythm of reflection within your church community through reflective posts. These help members stay current or catch up on what's been happening at your church this week, month, and year. Recapping important events or news becomes valuable content that can easily be pre-planned, scheduled, and added to a communications calendar. It's really about repurposing the content that's already been created: reshare, repost, reflect. Instagram Stories and Highlights are perfect features to help with this.

7) START A DISCUSSION

Instagram is not just for posting, it's also for conversation. Posting and asking followers to share their thoughts is a great way to get to know your audience. Take some time to respond to people who are posting. Discussion posts might become something church communicators or pastors build into a weekly or month communication plan. Questions about current events, news, or church happenings can often get the conversation started. Make sure these discussions are monitored and followers can see that churches are responsive and willingly interacting with them.

8) CELEBRATE

Whatever the occasion, celebrate it on Instagram with photos or videos. Holidays, baptisms, birthdays, anniversaries, completed projects, remodels, or fundraising drives are all exciting happenings at your church and provide great content that can be easily shared on Instagram. Celebrations can be added to the church communications calendar and planned for in advance. Think of celebrating as part of the event follow up as well. Celebrate your church's accomplishments and share these to raise awareness of what's happening in and around your church community.

9) GO BEHIND THE SCENES

Bonus images and videos from behind the scenes of church events, fundraisers, services, celebrations, and trips gives viewers a more personal look at the life and people of your church. Everyone loves to feel like they are seeing 'the real work' that happens behind the scenes. This could be a once a month or seasonal post that follows a particular event, program, or ministry at your church. These images and videos could also become Stories or Highlights.

10) CREATE A CALL-TO-ACTION

Inspire and engage your followers to take action in important church-wide programs, campaigns, events, or to participate in a fun challenge or contest at church. Ask followers to post images and videos of their progress along the way. And remember to include those hashtags.

Link Websites and Instagram

Linking followers to your church website from your Instagram account is crucial. To do this, insert your church's website URL into the 'Profile' section of your church's Instagram account. Instagram only allows one URL to be included in each account profile. Then, when posting images or videos, use your caption to direct followers to your profile to find your website URL. Also, make sure to include a link to your Instagram account on your church's website to cross-promote your Instagram feed.

If your church is going to start using Instagram, go 'all in' and commit to learning and using all of its tricks and tools. With its popularity booming and new features being added regularly, this is one fun app that might survive the test of time.

5 Traits That Differentiate Instagram From Other Social Networks

What makes one social network stand out from the rest in our techno-saturated, app-centric digital world? [Instagram](#) has taken the world by storm and created legions of devoted users and followers. 2017 saw its member base surge to 800 million individual users and 25



million business users. So what makes Instagram so special and so different from other social networks? And how can pastors and church communicators take advantage of this unique app?

Having [Facebook](#) as an adopted guardian might give any social network a boost, but Instagram was pretty special on its own.

Here are five traits that differentiate Instagram from other social networks:

1) IMAGE IS EVERYTHING

From the beginning, Instagram made a bold statement that they believed sharing images was the central feature of a successful [social network](#). Branded 'the image sharing app,' they understood that visual images share ideas and motivate users and followers instantaneously, and in a way that is different from words. Visual recognition and appeal are powerful. People value beauty and are inspired by it. This ever-changing, fresh, and continuous stream of compelling images from around the world keeps Instagram users engaged and have the power to instantly grab attention and communicate complex ideas.

Instagram's social network also feeds our insatiable appetite for devouring these images and videos by helping us share them so easily. Sharing and accessing images and ideas from around the world keeps the millions of daily Instagram users happy and coming back for more. Sharing images quickly, consistently, and from mobile screens is another one of Instagram's keys to success.

2) MOBILITY

The new 24/7 plugged-in lifestyle revolves around one device, smartphones. Lucky for Instagram. Created specifically as a mobile app, Instagram is perfect for today's busy and mobile lifestyle. It was made for capturing and posting content on the go and users love it for that reason.

Around the world, mobile phone use has easily surpassed desktop and laptop computer use for the last decade. [Smartphones](#) are being used in the most remote parts of the world where people are less likely to even have computers. Nearly everyone has a smartphone and these smaller devices easily integrate into people's lives. Just slip it in or out of your pocket or your bag and go.

In recent years we were also told that our smartphones contain more sophisticated technology than the computers that took the first man to the moon. We have powerful microcomputers in our hands all day long. And with smartphones offering better technology at lower prices each year, camera resolution is always increasing and making it easier for users to share high-quality images and videos that grab more attention. This is great news for busy Instagram users.

3) SPEED

Life is speeding up and apps that keep things moving quickly are appreciated. Since Instagram is both a mobile phone app and image-centric, posting becomes simple and fast. Post a photo and go. The short, one-word captions that accompany many images and videos keep posts short and succinct as well. Instagram posting can take less than 10 seconds, though many users admittedly give more time to crafting important content.

Instagram also makes use of another facet of modern, digitally-enhanced time: the short attention span. Users appreciate being able to quickly swipe through images and videos to catch up on what their friends and followers have been doing. Quick searches on a topic, brand or person can be done in seconds or minutes too.

Millennials learn and move through new technology and content at warp speeds too. If an app can keep millennials engaged it has a future. Instagram has captured the attention, energy, and momentum of millions of millennials who just want to have fun using their app. Quick, easy, and fun to use apps can become popular based on usability and speed alone. Throw in a thriving social network of snappy pics and videos and a star is born.

4) SIMPLICITY

Instagram is all about keeping it simple. Download the app and start posting images. That's it. Search and find what you want. Simple. Instagram's new search by hashtag feature makes finding what you want even easier too. This keeps users engaged and the flow of information moving.

Want to post a photo or video with no caption or a one-word caption? Great! Perfect! The shorter the better. Everyone is in a hurry anyway. The app interface itself is also simple and streamlined, putting the images and videos front and center. These bite-sized, visual posts simplify the information exchange and keep the focus on the entertaining images.

5) FUN

Instagram has made it fast and fun to explore, research, follow, and connect with the people and topics we're interested in. There is also something unique about the desire to share inspiring, moving, funny, and thought-provoking images and videos on Instagram that say something about who you are. This seems to keep the momentum of Instagram posts flowing in the direction of being enjoyable and entertaining.

It's fun to learn about the things we like. It's fun to create and share content we like. It's fun to search and find content we like. And it's fun to connect with and follow people that we like. There's a world of fun and interesting information online. Combining compelling information with our social network makes it easy to find more of it.

Instagram's algorithm also presents content to us that it thinks we might like or that our friends and follower might like. And yes, all of these fun information transactions on Instagram do also release dopamine and make us feel good and keep us coming back for more (see all of the latest research and conversations about social media addiction). Can we really help that using this app is so amusing?

IS INSTAGRAM RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?

Some churches may still be unsure about whether [Instagram](#) is right for them. Pastors, church communicators, administrators, and youth and ministry leaders should review and discuss whether this social networking tool offers something their churches need right now. The data is clear that millions of people around the world enjoy using Instagram to build connections, gather and share information, and to communicate. Organizations and businesses are successfully advertising and selling on Instagram too. It might be time for your church to take a closer look at Instagram.

CHAPTER 6

Resources

Keeping Up With Instagram Changes

Keeping up with the latest updates, changes, and new features being added to Instagram is crucial. Instagram's [blog](#) and [press](#) pages are great sources for breaking news, information, and statistics about new features, changes, and ideas for using this app.

Reporters, news outlets, and bloggers are constantly talking about Instagram and sharing new insights and ideas that can help keep your church's Instagram account fresh and vital. Stay tuned in to Instagram news to see how these features might affect your account, followers or marketing campaigns.

Other Helpful Articles on Instagram:

[Articles on Social Media from ChurchTechToday](#)

[Hubspot Instagram eBook](#)

[Instagram for Churches: How to Get Your Congregation #InstaReady by Capterra](#)

[Ultimate Guide to More Instagram Followers by Hootsuite](#)

[Instagram Brand Resources](#)

[Using Instagram Brand Assets](#)

[Guide to Get Started on Instagram for Business](#)

Social Media Services to Consider:

[Church Butler](#) – Done for you church graphics for social media

[Ripl](#) – Social media marketing for small business

[Hootsuite](#) – Social media management platform

[Coschedule](#) – Content and social media marketing software

Follow ChurchTechToday on Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/churchtechtoday/>