

Developing a Social Media Presence for Your New Meeting

Congratulations! Social media is an important outreach tool for worship groups. By using social media, you are entering new venues for attracting and engaging visitors as well as staying on the radar of your currently gathered community.

Social Media is defined here as any online or virtual “gathering space” for meeting and exchanging information. At the time of this writing, popular networks include heavy-hitters like Facebook and Twitter (with Google+ on the rise) alongside supplemental virtual communities such as Instagram, Pinterest, Vine, tumblr, wordpress, YouTube, and Vimeo to name a few.

Social media doesn’t have to be hard. There is a Quaker meeting in Indiana that almost solely posts scripture verses and prayer concerns. It’s simple and straight-forward. But it communicates that there is *life* in this place, things are happening, people are able to be vulnerable, they listen to one another, and they are tuning in to something Higher. What’s not to like? The purpose of this guide is not so much a technical “how-to” manual as it is a map for developing and maintaining your online presence in a way that is engaging, useful, and reflects who you are as a group. It will also help you avoid some common social media pitfalls.

Getting Started

Everyone has a different approach to engaging with social media. There is no single formula for success (and success is defined in different ways--especially when it comes to worship groups.) Your group being kind to one another or actively contributing to the story of your communal spiritual journey may be as worth a goal as the number of “likes” you get from new people.

That said, to begin, consider your audience.

- Where is most of your current group “hanging out” online?
- Who do you want to attract?
- Where is the next social media venue you anticipate movement?

It makes sense to start with these places. Meetings and churches are frequently lagging behind when it comes to technology, so be sensitive to this fact. Ask what people are using. Also, if you are interested in attracting a different demographic, a presence in those places may serve you well – but **only** if you can commit to keeping up with that oversight.

Ask one, consistent person at a time to be the content manager. This will be the person who “oversees” your social media presence. Her or his role is to judiciously post updates as needed, field any questions, and delete any inappropriate content that a visitor might post. Others can (and should!) post, but your Content Manager ensures consistency in your outreach.

If you do not have that person yet, don’t fear. Go ahead and set up a social media profile anyway! Insert basic information so people can find you and a photo or two. Go ahead and establish a space so you can be found! People will search for you. Don’t worry about perfection; just insert the facts to start.

- Where are you located?
- When do you meet?
- Who are you?
- What are you doing?

If you **do** have someone, start with the same process and build from there.

Developing Your Voice

Learning to create a voice that speaks for all and yet is unique to your group can be a bit of an art. As you develop your emerging voice, here are some useful considerations:

Do:

Be real.

Be warm.

Be yourself. Speak authentically. Authenticity is what sticks out on the internet and makes you attractive.

Post events. Make sure the information is concise and give it the “who, what, when, where, how” check.

Post fresh spiritual insight. What is alive in your group? Are there quotes, stories, images that tell about what’s spiritually nourishing with your group right now? This is where the juice is! This is where building relationship and connection begins.

Consider the impact of producing media around your events or even your current spiritual learnings or yearnings. Are you talking/learning about healthy marriages or

managing money from a spiritual perspective? You might podcast or YouTube some of your talks.

Make a video of your group singing a favorite song! The internet rule-of-thumb is that shorter is always better. Edit well, and keep it short, but content-rich. What's the nub of that great talk, outing, learning, or adventure? Visitors will have to attend to get more! While you can hire an aspiring video editor to get a fresh perspective on what you are doing and how to communicate with those currently outside your group, there are many free tools you can learn to use quite easily.

Think about also having full-length versions for members who may be shut-ins or those who desire relationship with your group, but live at a distance.

Consider "live" tweets from one of your fun activities.

Post 1-2 times a week as a goal. If other members or attenders are posting on your page--that's perfect. That means you may not need to create content as frequently.

Be supportive on and off-line of those who are contributing your group's social media presence.

You can be humorous, but avoid inside jokes or sarcasm. Sarcasm is dangerous online. Don't go there!

Approach your page with the mind (and eye) of a visitor. Make sure your social media presence is inviting and makes sense on a practical level to a visitor.

DON'T (Or "Stuff you probably already know, but doesn't hurt to say again"):

Don't use acronyms. (Spell out the organization and explain what they do and how or why you are affiliated.)

Don't post pictures of your building – unless something newsworthy is happening. Take photos of what's interesting and beautiful around you. It's always good to include people. The vase of flowers on your potluck table, however, also gives a sense of space and personality.

Don't post too, too frequently. It feels like spam.

Common Pitfalls

One of the most common mistakes a worship group or meeting commits is not having a plan in place for consistent oversight of its social media. When a social media presence goes stale, and posting dates reveal a lag of months or years, it gives the impression that your group has died, disbanded or moved and left no forwarding address.

If you *do* move communication operations, make sure you announce that clearly on your page. Or simply, delete the old page. Old profiles that are at the top of search engines will remain there for some time as people continue to click on that link and may not continue to the new link.

The Ideal

Make your social media home(s) a place to stay active. Designate both a Content Manager and Assistant Content Manager. This person can step in when the main manager is off-duty. You'll also want to check frequently to make sure that your group is finding your sites effective and that the members are engaged.

- Are members contributing helpfully and healthfully?
- Is there energy to share the story of your group's found spiritual treasures?
- If others in your group are not participating – why or why not?

Make plans for a periodic (quarterly and as needed, perhaps) check-in to gauge the effectiveness of your social media presence.

And finally....ALWAYS ASK:

Who does this page praise and honor? Is it "us" or the Divine? If God is being pointed to – however, that gets communicated. People *get* that. And they return for more, because they are fed and inspired. Your group becomes a conduit for spiritual life in new and fresh ways!

Good luck and blessings on your journey!

This document was downloaded from the website of Friends General Conference. Explore the many resources and opportunities we offer for Quakers, Quaker meetings, and all interested individuals. Go to www.fgcquaker.org.

