VISION
NEW ENGLAND

Ten Tips for Pastors to Build Online Church and Community
From Nils Smith's talk at VNE's Large Church Pastors Forum
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1. **Start somewhere**
    a. You don't need to have it all figured out; whatever you do is good enough, and you'll improve over time
    b. Lean into God's calling for your church. Learn from but don't try to copy others - look to translate the unique strengths of your church into your online experience
    c. Keep it simple; pick one platform rather than trying to use many

2. **Define your goals**
    a. Set three goals for what you'll accomplish in the church in the next 8 weeks
        i. What does the church being stronger look like?
        ii. What is the difference between healthy and unhealthy online church?
        iii. Online can't replace face-to-face, but it can accomplish a lot.
    b. This moment is the biggest evangelistic opportunity your church has ever had. How are you going to reach people?
        i. Who do we want to reach?
        ii. What is the best platform for reaching them?
        iii. Where do you want to take them? What does a next step look like now that we can't meet in a building? They want to receive Christ, receive prayer, connect... where do they go?
        iv. How do we equip our people to invite their friends using social media?

3. **Pastor, share your technology learning curve with the church**
    a. Great opportunity to share: "Hey, I'm learning right along with you, and here's something I learned that I think is useful. And here's how to set it up."
    b. Give generic examples of how to use technology to build community: "Hey, I just had a great meeting with someone on [platform], and it was so good to connect."
    c. Constantly remind the congregation how easy it is to invite friends; especially encourage text invites

4. Identify what platform you will use

a. Churchonline - Can have up and running in an hour
  i. Has good chat wall, can share sermon notes
b. Facebook Live is sometimes best as a first step
  i. FB page is the front porch/intro to your church
  ii. FB group is where you go deeper/build community
c. YouTube Live
  i. Long term probably the most significant platform for video distribution
  ii. It is the future of television
  iii. Post content to YouTube afterwards - people are doing on-demand listening; impact of message is exponential
d. Zoom recommended for online small groups
  i. Pro account will cost $15/month
  ii. "Room" can hold up to 50 people
  iii. Need a separate account if two groups want to meet at the same time

5. Be wise in building your social media team

a. Don't need a huge team, just a wise one
b. Pair up a life-savvy 70 year old and a tech/social media-savvy 17 year old

6. Create and share out microcontent

a. Examples
  i. 30-second video clips
  ii. Graphic memes that pulls a quote out of the message
  iii. Scripture verses
b. Especially now, the pastor's sermon is central to the life of the church; make the most out of the work that has gone into it by creating microcontent from the sermon.
c. Use these in social media posts, include in mailings, etc.
d. Might translate into them watching the whole sermon as a next step
e. Make sure to set a positive tone: "We're excited to be together in a new way!" instead of "We're sad we can't be together".
f. For live-stream, informal may be better: sit in your living room, dress casually

7. **Email is your friend**
   a. Don't be worried that you're emailing too much. Church members need to/want to hear from their pastor, and they will thank you for it.
   b. Average open rate is 15% generally (businesses and nonprofits), but in churches the average is more like it's 25% (measured on platforms like MailChimp and Constant Contact).
      i. If you're over 30%, that's a sign you can email more
      ii. If under 20%, you're emailing too much
   c. Consider sending 5 emails per week for now.
      i. All five have ministry/devotional content.
      ii. Three have 1-3 announcements as well
         1. Announcement 1 focuses on sermon/service logistics
            a. 1 of 3 - link to previous Sunday's sermon
            b. 2 of 3 - teaser for this week's sermon
            c. 3 of 3 - instructions that make sure people understand how to join the Sunday live stream

8. **Develop a text messaging strategy**
   a. Texts are the most widely read communications by far
   b. 97% of people open their text messages within 5 minutes of receiving them
   c. Be careful not to overuse it ... people get annoyed if they get too many.

9. **Use Facebook Ads to expand your reach**
   a. Boost your ads to reach a larger target audience with a specific demographic
   b. Very little cost for a much greater reach - getting your content out to your community
   c. Short video clips are the best for boosting out

10. **Use Retargeting Apps**
   a. Examples
      i. Facebook Pixel
      ii. Google Tag Manager - use on Google apps
   b. Apps gather demographic data on who is visiting your website, attending your live stream, etc.
   c. By retargeting people who have already shown some level of interest in what you're doing, your ads are that much more effective