

How to Use Facebook for Outreach and Visitor Integration

by Mark Upton
(used by permission)

This year Facebook has become a major component of our outreach and visitor integration strategy, and it's working great! So I thought I'd share our discovery here.

Preparation

To best use Facebook this way you need to have a Facebook page where you friend everyone in your church. It works best if it's the upfront person that first time visitors will see. If you're the upfront guy and want to keep a personal facebook page that is different from your public/work page then you'll need to create one that runs off a private email account and use the one with your work email as your public page. I only have one page, but I'm sort of an open book from the pulpit so this isn't really an issue for me.

Once you have the page set up you need to set up a fan page for your church, and encourage everyone in your church on facebook to like that page.

Outreach

Then you can begin advertising on facebook in this manner. Tell facebook that you want your ad to target the friends of people who like you church's fan page that haven't liked the page yet. You can even tighten it up more than that.

We currently have two ads running. Our most narrowly targeted ad targets 18-40 year old college educated men who live within 10 miles of Charlotte who are friends of people who like our page, but they don't like it themselves yet. Facebook will tell you how many people your ad will reach given it's limitations. Very helpful way to target a specific audience without wasting your time.

If your people haven't set the privacy setting in facebook the ad will include your page logo, a tag line, and mention that their friend likes your page. So for example if our ad hit you it would display the Hope Community Church logo, our tag line "A Safe place for and Intelligent look at what the Bible Actually teaches" (This is the ad I'm targeting to college grads) Underneath it would say, "Mark Upton likes this." if you were my friend and hadn't liked our page yet.

You can set how much you're willing to pay Facebook to run the ad each day. Currently I am paying a maximum of \$3 a day. You only pay for click throughs. So every day I'm getting hundreds of ads put out there and paying roughly \$15 a week for this kind of targeted exposure.

Visitor Integration

In your bulletin include a tear off that visitors can turn in. For these purposes you need two pieces of information on the tear off.

1. Your email address
2. Who do you know at our church?

This information allows you to search facebook for them before they are your friends.

The easiest way to do this simply search facebook using their email address.

If you find them (and if they're under 30 you probably will) you can see who they know that is already friends with you. If nearly everyone in your church on facebook is friends with you this will generate a hot lead for who is the best person in your church to integrate them into your community.

For example, last week we had a visitor who filled out the form and gave me his email address. When I searched facebook I found we shared two friends in common, both members of my church. One knew him in highschool and one was his personal trainer. I immediately emailed them and asked them to keep an eye out for him in the days ahead, to ask him out to lunch after church, and to get him plugged in at Hope. To stick at a church people typically need 5 connections. If they start out discovering they already have two then you're halfway there.

I then make a copy of their profile picture (you can often do this even before they friend you depending of their privacy settings), put that in a spreadsheet along with the other information they filled out on our visitor form, and bring an updated version to every staff meeting for review.

After this I request the newcomer friend me. I include a message welcoming them to Hope and explaining that one of the best ways to get connected is to friend me and like Hope's facebook page.

Usually they won't like your page until they actually like your church. When they do the ad starts targeting their local friends as well. If they unlike your church page it stops.

This is by far the best bang for the advertising buck we've ever had. If you run ads on google chances are pretty good that it will start to target these same people as most folks believe that facebook ads and google ads are sharing info with each other on who to target.

Comments shared when this information from Mark appeared on facebook (names removed):

That's awesome Mark. And what a great service to the rest of us out here involved in establishing, growing serving congregations.

February 1 at 8:23am · Like

Thanks Mark. I forwarded this to a handful of folks in our church to see if we can't get something like this in place. Great idea! I especially like how it focuses on our existing relationships as the primary target of our outreach. This seems to be a distinctly biblical use of technology of the "come and see" emphasis of friendship evangelism. Hope you're well. I'm going to see you in March, yes?

February 1 at 12:25pm · Like

Mark's response: That's right. The big problem at Hope was getting people integrated into our highly relational but lowly programmatic church. This is the best vehicle I've found for doing that.

February 1 at 12:48pm · Like

I've sent this to our church Coordinating Council for consideration. We may not have the time or money to invest in such an enterprise, but it's worth thinking about. Thanks!

February 1 at 12:59pm · Like

Mark's response: It doesn't cost much. Most people spend a lot more on less effective advertising like print ads. Time wise it just takes me about 30 minutes a week to search the email addresses and email the friends we have in common to encourage them to help the newcomers connect at Hope.

February 1 at 1:03pm · Like

Response: We might be able to spare that. Right now we're not doing much of anything, so anything would be an improvement.

February 1 at 1:42pm · Like

Thanks . . . we've got a team working on it

February 2 at 9:46am · Like

Good work, great ideas, thanks bro!

February 2 at 10:00am · Like

Thanks for taking the time to share these ideas. We've got a page (Christ Church Greensboro) and this seems a great way to promote, connect and follow up.