

*Using Social Media to
Share the Gospel
Effectively*

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I took up blogging. I had all sorts of social media platforms to grow my blog and extend my influence. After being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, I re-evaluated some things and decided I wanted to use my knowledge to spread the gospel. When I saw how simple and easy it was to reach tens of thousands of people for Christ from my living room, I wanted to share my knowledge with other people passionate about doing the same.

Social media and the internet are tools. In and of themselves they are not bad. I know some people who love Jesus, but will have nothing to do with social media or very little, because they are aware of some of its abuses. I'm here to tell you that if you are focused on practicing some of these principles, social media can be very, very good.

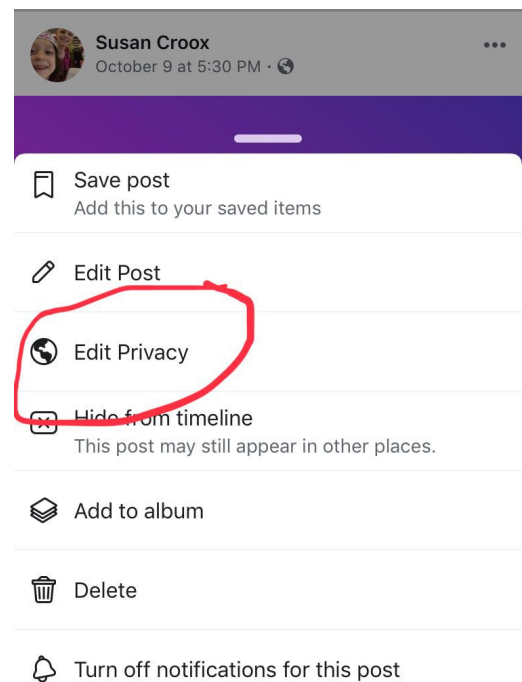
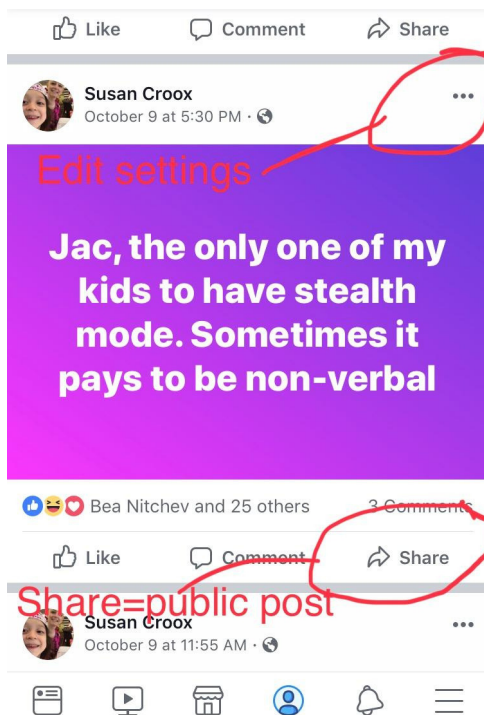
Susan Croox, owner, gloriousmomblog.com

SOCIAL MEDIA BASICS

Privacy concerns

If you are concerned about people you don't know having access to pictures of your family or personal information, there is a way to avoid that, but you must be intentional.

On Facebook, limit what information you put in your profile. Set the visibility feature to "friends" when posting about yourself, your family, or anything you want to keep private. Change it to public when you want a lot of people to see it. If you see the share button, it's public. Change this by clicking the three dots on the post to edit the settings, and then changing the privacy. I believe your posts will default to the last setting.



S O C I A L M E D I A B A S I C S

Privacy concerns (continued)

On Instagram and Twitter you either have a private account where people have to request a follow, or you don't. Individual posts cannot be made private or public. For these platforms, I recommend a separate account for evangelism if you don't want the world to see pictures of your family or personal updates. Because my social media platforms were created with the intention of promoting my blog, and because it was a mom blog, I kept pictures of my kids public. There was one instance on Facebook where someone I didn't know but had friended kept sharing my family posts and commenting on my kids, and I blocked them. It's easy to do and the other person doesn't get notified of the block, they just can't see your content.

Engagement

You may hear me refer to this term from time to time as it is crucial in getting an audience for your message. Engagement refers to likes, comments, shares and any other interaction on a social media post. The way most social media platforms work is the more engagement you get, the more your post will be seen by people, thus resulting in even more engagement.

Followers

I spent a lot of time as a blogger trying to build my following. For our purposes, it is mostly a waste of time. You can build your Instagram and Twitter followings up to a thousand or two to expand your reach by following people you want to hear your message in hopes for a follow back, however, there are follow limits and you don't want to unfollow people.

SHARING THE GOSPEL EFFECTIVELY ON FACEBOOK

Facebook seems to be the platform that most of my family and friends are on. Some of the principles I will share here can be applied to other platforms.

Posting to your wall

Sharing a scripture verse or even a wordy devotional is not the best way to go here. What you want is to grab people's attention. The best thing you can do is share a picture of you (you may be cringing here, but people actually want to see pictures of yourself. It goes without saying that you can forgo the sexy selfie look), or your kids or family, or your home. In the caption share a short personal story, and tie in Biblical truth. Make sure these posts are public.

Formatting is VERY important.

A long post with twenty sentences and no paragraph breaks is likely to get skipped over in the news feed. See how I formatted this page? Short paragraphs, Bold text, separated by short sentences. It makes the content appealing and easier to read.

How often should you post?

It would encourage you to share other content that isn't as serious or gospel centered as well, maybe silly anecdotes or personal updates, and then throw in the Jesus material once a week or so.

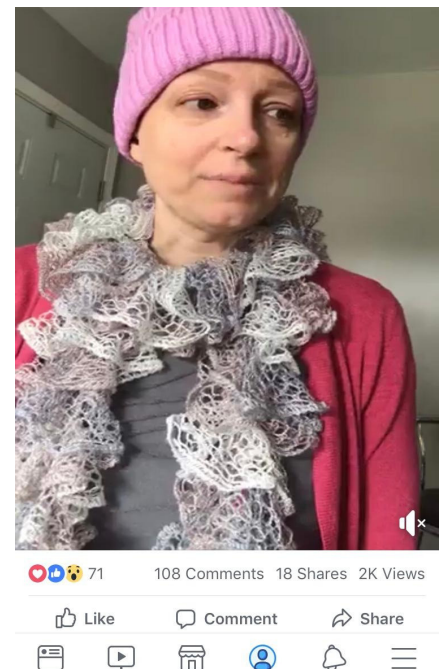
SHARING THE GOSPEL EFFECTIVELY ON FACEBOOK

Shared content

Steer away from political posts as much as possible. When you do share posts, make sure you provide a caption. It will garner more interest.

Facebook Live

Most people are too nervous to go live. Don't be. The Facebook algorithm (a computer formula which determines which posts get seen and how much) favors live videos. Your video will be seen by more people if it is live and longer than five minutes or so. I usually do ten minutes. Also, please share these videos in any Facebook groups if you feel the topic is relevant. ALWAYS include a thoughtful caption.



Facebook Groups

I am in two types of Facebook groups that are filled with people ripe for the gospel: breast cancer groups and autism parenting groups. I try to comment on posts in these groups in a thoughtful way and reply to concerns with prayers. Not just a "praying", but I type out my prayer. Find groups in your interest that may contain people who have an obvious need Jesus can fill.

Engagement Tips

Don't just post. The Facebook algorithm favors active users. Comment, like, and share other people's posts.

SHARING THE GOSPEL EFFECTIVELY ON INSTAGRAM

Content

Try to post almost daily. The same content tips apply for Instagram: post a picture of yourself, your family or home, or a beautiful family. Stay away from stock photos. My experience is that posts with words in the image don't get as much engagement. Tell a story about yourself, and bring in some of the gospel message.

Hash tags

Hash tags are how people who aren't following you can find your post. So especially if you don't have a lot of followers, you want to use hash tags. Instagram will let you use up to thirty, and you can put them in a comment; you don't have to put it in the caption. When you start typing a hash tag, Instagram tells you a number. That number is how many times that hash tag has been used. If it's been used a lot, like a million, your post will get lost because so many people are using that hash tag. If it's a few, like a couple thousand or less, no one will see it because no one is searching that hashtag. Try to use hash tags in between the huge and tiny range.

Comments and Direct Message

As with Facebook, you should respond when you can to comments on your post. Try to make your comments caring and thoughtful. Also engage with other posts, not just your own. Make sure to represent Christ in a loving manner. As the Spirit leads, you can direct message individuals. Make sure to demonstrate a caring, listening ear and not get preachy. I have a friend from school who only messages me to try to sell me her product and it's very off-putting. Don't be that person.

SHARING THE GOSPEL EFFECTIVELY ON TWITTER

Content

What you need to understand about Twitter is that a tweet is fast and easy, therefore there are so many more posts on Twitter than any other platform. As a result, it's easy for your tweets to get lost. If you're really a Twitter person, than I suggest building your following and tweeting a lot,. Again, not just a Bible verse; try to paraphrase Biblical truth in a succinct way that will invite retweets and likes.

Hash tags

Hash tags on Twitter are a little different than Instagram. Your best hash tags on IG will be a little longer, whereas the shorter ones on Twitter are okay. I've heard three hash tags is a good number to use on a tweet.

Engagement

The problem with direct messages on Twitter is that so many users use an auto DM that people end up just ignoring their inbox altogether. In my opinion, the best way to engage people for the gospel on Twitter is in replies to tweets. Try to respond to the people who comment on your tweets, and if God highlights an individual to you, try to engage them in replies and develop an online friendship.

GENERAL TIPS

A major difference between promoting a blog or a product through social media marketing and using social media marketing skills to reach the lost is that as a blogger, as much as you hate to admit it, numbers are important. Page views, followers, engagement; all of these can add up to actual dollars if you know how to use them. Our job as online friendship evangelists is not to cast a wide net, but rather, plant and water seeds, and sometimes harvest them.

If you're reaching out to a large quantity of people on social media a day, it may begin to feel impersonal and fake to them. Like my friend who only contacts me or comments on my online posts when she sees an opening to sell her product. She's lost my trust. Don't make that mistake. Be honest, be genuine, be kind; be Jesus.