

*Social Media Quick Guide*

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# Instagram



## About ChurchTechToday

ChurchTechToday was born out of the need to find a place to discuss how technology can truly impact the Church in positive ways, whether it be reducing administration with a church office, allowing para church organizations to connect with their members online, or simply to share the Gospel message through non-traditional channels.

## About Lauren Hunter

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Instagram is not a revolutionary social network, it is fairly limited in its approach to using and analyzing if what we do is effective. The visual social networking model on which Instagram is based, as a whole, is still greatly maturing into something more. Yet, organizations are diving into this network and finding great success in sharing their message, as well as a new marketing campaigns, to followers.

With its acquisition and integration into Facebook as well as an increasingly widespread mobile hardware market, the ceiling for Instagram is still unknown. It truly is on the cutting edge for new marketing and engagement with customers and followers. For the church that has taken a complete stake in relational ministry and is reaching out beyond its own walls to the community around them, this social networking tool could be your biggest asset in the next couple of months.

### **The Network's Persona**

Instagram is more than selfies. Content creators are looking for the beautiful and creative, while still sharing the story of the user that begins and continues with the dialogue through the description and comments. Teenagers have widely adopted communicating via images, grandparents love seeing images of their grandchildren, and people are finding unique ways of sharing 15-second videos with friends and family.

In our social media town, Instagram would be seen as the coffee shops, movie theaters, parks, and other social events. This is because we are capturing moments to share with others and giving life to our stories online. It might be as simple as a single relationship that is remembered over coffee or it could be as big as a community wide event that involves everyone and “where were you when” moments. While Instagram is limited in what you can do (it is not a substitute for Facebook or Google+), it has one specific intention can serve the church well: (straight from their About Us webpage), “Share your life.”



*There are over 150 million active users every month.*

*Over 55 million photos get posted every day.*

*More than 1.2 billion photos are liked every day.*

## The Network's Lingo

- **App** – a mobile application on a tablet or smartphone. The only official way to fully utilize Instagram
- **Post** – content uploaded for viewing. Requires a video or photo
- **Video** – all videos must be between 3-15 seconds long
- **Follower** – a person that subscribes to your gallery and all uploads
- **Gallery** – the full collection of ones photos
- **Filters** – photo editing presets to stylize uploaded photos
- **Hashtag** – (# symbol) ways to categories via a keyword or united phrase. Hashtags are searchable and allow networking
- **Like** – a way to give positive feedback with things you care about
- **Instagram Direct** – private messages to a max of 15 followers

## The Network's Downside

The difficulty of using this application is that officially you must use a mobile device for uploading video and photos. If you are someone that wants to have more control over your photos and marketing for your ministry's Instagram account, you will have to use a cloud storage to transfer it to your desktop device, edit it, transfer it back to your mobile device, and then upload the image. This seems like a hassle for high-production videos.

Another other issue that churches and ministries need to understand is that as the terms of service are now, all photos uploaded to this network belong to Instagram in which they can use them however they want. That means if your ministry takes a photo, does not have a photo release from the person featured in the image, uploads it to Instagram before getting permission, and then requests to take it down, Instagram still has the image and can do with it all they want. You are responsible for what you do and your ministry needs to have a photo release on every person that attends your events before anyone takes any photos.

## Instagram Has Many Different Purposes

When you look at the general use of Instagram, people want to share memories and tell stories through visual mediums. As a parent, friend, and family member, I want to let others see what is going on in my life, post video clips of my son as he quickly grows up, and see what is going on in the lives of others I follow. A church could very easily take this route by being extremely relational and showing the life of the congregation and staff at your ministry.

An alternate route is that ministries can use the Instagram social network as a marketing avenue. The focus is that you build the brand with the intent of getting more people into your church building. This means that you show off events, services, and promotions that regularly have a call-to-action in it. This approach does not have to be cold, but you are pushing yourself as being an authority in Christianity, discipleship, worship, or service for Jesus that can entice followers and other viewers to come next Sunday to a service.

To ignore one of the two strategies can be deemed a failure. No church should hold to one model or another, but a general focus will come out and this purpose should fit into your ministry's overall social media strategy that includes goals. Is success primarily measured with a high number of comments and likes on your content or does do you consider a win with viewers and followers coming to your events? The answer to that question will drive the type of content you post.

## How to Use the Network Effectively

The content that is shared on Instagram could be split into two categories: highly produced content (both video and images) and in-the-moment posts. (Note: this is a break from the previous section of looking at the purpose of Instagram with your ministry, though there will be overlap) Some ministries subscribe to highly Photoshopped photos and edited videos that are properly branded, pixel perfect, and sharing a message that is more than just an image. This has huge image for intentional content, but can take time and seem artificial if overdone.

The alternative is a set of photos with minimal editing, all done in the Instagram application, and uploaded as soon as possible. This focuses on the faces and objected that are photographed, gives life to the visually creative as the scene speaks for itself, and can celebrate the ministry, church, and its members. Unlike the full editing approach, this style does not require highly skilled creative, posts go live while the event is still relevant, and the focus is on the photos instead of the added “extras.”

This issue of highly produced media is great for photos, but what about videos? While Instagram was originally designed for photos, the addition of video shorts gives high potential for engagement and impact. Yet there is a concern about bad or dull videos being posted. Unlike boring photos that can use filters to instantly become inspiring, videos are much more difficult to go from unimaginative towards entertaining or impressive. This requires a bit of effort on storyboarding, intentionality with those few, precious seconds, minimal “extra fluff” with transitions or introduction bumpers, and having clarity in what you want to communicate. Those that excel at using this format can greatly enhance your online approach.

*96% of posts on Instagram are pictures as opposed to videos.*

*Mayfair is the photo filter that receives the most interactions per picture posted.*

*You only receive 1 comment for every 32 likes.*

## Five Instagram Ideas for Churches

We want to set you up for success on Instagram, so we have come up with some great Instagram ideas for your church to use it well. Note that some of these ideas are perfect for large churches and others setup for small ones.

### 1. Promote a Sermon Series

One of the best uses of Instagram is the ability to promote sermon series through graphics or 15 second video bumpers. If you have a graphic that is used for Sunday sermons that is put onto the projector slide, why not post that on Instagram a week or two before you start the series. If you have the video capacity (i.e. everyone with an iPhone/smartphone), then go shoot a quick 12 seconds inviting people to your church, give soft background music, and post the same graphic from before at the beginning and end of the video.

*Need some inspiration? Here are a couple of great videos:*

*<http://thecreativepastor.com/instagram-promo-videos>*

### 2. Crowd Source Videos with a Hashtag

One of the best ways to engage with your congregation is to have them directly interact with the content using the medium as the communication tool. A crowd sourced video starts with you posting a video onto Instagram asking a question or giving a challenge. It can be fun and playful or deep and theological. Then ask your congregation or youth group to respond with their own video and a predetermined hashtag. Take several of the responses and create a quick two minute video as a great opener to your sermon next week as you introduce a new topic.

### 3. Inspiring Images with Scripture or Quotes

You see those images all over the place where someone has posted a quote or Bible verse as an image and shared it on a social network. Create your own set of ten or twenty of them, put your church's logo in the corner of it, and put your website in the description so people can get more information. Compelling and visually creative posts like these do not have to blast a, "Come to our church" message, but can be passive and allow the content and a link their for those that would like to know more information.

### 4. Instagram Youth Ministry Games

Social media and youth ministry go hand-in-hand and youth groups are finally figuring out that the best way to get teens to connect online is to get them connected in person. One of the best ways to improve engagement on your Instagram account is through youth ministry games. There are several out there that you can do, including Instahack (<http://downloadyouthministry.com/shop/instahack-youth-group-game>) Scattergrams (<http://youthmin.org/instagram-themed-youth-ministry-game-night>) or an Instagram version of a scavenger hunt.

### 5. Print Most Favorited Instagram Photos

While taking pictures of people and posting them on your Instagram is a great way to share moments online, printing them and featuring them in rooms or giving them away as presents are perfect ways for people to engage and then connect the online network with your congregation. Challenge event attendees to go favorite what they believe to be the best image on your gallery and then you can print the top one or two pictures to use as you wish. (Need a service to print your photos? Try <http://printstagr.am>)