MISSIONARY COMMITTEES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Category: Computing/Internet

If you have a role in a Church supporting missionaries; then you must have a Facebook account!

Most people have recognised that we have moved from an age of print communication to digital, on-line communication. In the missionary world, the old printed newsletters (our first ones were done on a manual typewriter) have been largely superseded by emails. However, what many people don't recognise, is that emails have, in turn, been superseded by social media.

I often meet with Church missionary committees. These wonderful folks do a great job of supporting and encouraging their church mission partners. They are up to date with the latest email correspondence and regularly pray for their mission links. However, when I ask if they are on Facebook, I'm often met with a blank stare. Why would I be on Facebook?

What some folks don't get is that while their mission partner may send out a monthly or even weekly news email; they are Facebooking or tweeting away on a daily basis. If you want to know what's going on in their lives and to see some really cool pictures, Facebook is the way to go. *Email is so twentieth century!*

So how could a church missionary committee member use social media?

Blogs

There are two types of blogs that could be of interest to church missionary committee members. The first (and most interesting) are blogs maintained by your mission partners about their life overseas and the second are issue based blogs (like this one) which will give you more background to mission work.

Following blogs that update regularly is a bit of a pain. One way is just to remember to look at the blog every few days, but that requires a memory better than mine. You can use a system called RSS to follow blog updates. Google used to support this with something called Google Reader which was excellent, but they dropped it a few months back and there isn't an ideal replacement (I use Feedly, but it isn't as good as the old Google service). However, if you only follow one or two blogs, then you don't need RSS because almost every blogger sends out news about new posts via Twitter and Facebook. Many blogs (including this one) also have a facility that allows you to receive the blog posts as email messages; sign up and you never need to visit the blog, itself, again.

Twitter

Twitter is a way of sending short messages (like texts) to a wide audience. Once you sign up to Twitter you can 'follow' people, which means that you will see the messages that they send. Like anything else it can be abused, but you don't have to follow anyone you don't want to, so there is no reason why you should ever see anything offensive. Many missionaries and most mission agencies are signed up to Twitter and send out a mixture of up to date news, prayer requests and challenging thoughts. Many will include links to interesting web pages, blog posts or news articles. If you aren't

following some key people on Twitter, you are missing out on your mission education.

Facebook

Facebook is a global phenomenon; a hugely important website and, for many people, their primary mode of electronic communication. It's function is similar to Twitter, but it is easier to use and allows you to post longer communications. Most missionary organisations and a vast number of missionaries post up to date news and prayer requests on Facebook. You might have to wait weeks for an email or print update, but you can find out what is happening day by day on Facebook. Not only that, but you can respond to what your friends are experiencing - send them an encouraging word about a problem or tell them that you are jealous when they are in the middle of mango-season. Facebook revolutionises communication to a much greater extent than email ever did.

If you are not on Facebook; sign up for an account, search for your friends and any organisations you support and start getting their news. If you are unsure about how to do that; ask a teenager!

I'm not an apologist for Facebook. It has it's problems and it can be used unwisely. However, if the missionaries you are supporting are using Facebook, then so should you be.To say that you don't use social media is a bit like saying you don't use the telephone and don't write letters.

Time does not allow us to talk of Instagram, Flikr, LinkedIn and the rest...