




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Online Sharing: How to Protect Your Ministry

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In 1990, computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web, the most common way everyone accesses the internet. During the last thirty years, the internet has seen a growth explosion like nothing else. Although the internet has given us access to such a broad wealth of information, it has also created several new risks. One of those risks is determining what is appropriate to share with your church's online audience.

Social Media

One of the most common methods of communicating on the internet is social media. Facebook is one of the largest social media sites and has more than 2.7 billion monthly active users worldwide. If your church is in New York City, you can livestream a church service that can be watched by someone in Australia!

Although social media can significantly benefit your ministry, your church needs to adopt a social media policy. This action protects the church and encourages social media usage that aligns with our Adventist belief system and the law.

Your church's social media policy should include best practices for using social media generally. Consider having more specific guidelines for what is appropriate to post, whether the content is text, images, video, or music. The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD) has created [social media guidelines](#) for Adventist organizations.

Another issue churches can run into is violating copyright and trademark law. This is common if you are sharing on social media platforms content that belongs to someone else. When posting to any social media one should always ask themselves: "Do I have the authorization to post this?"

Posting Online in a Pandemic

As this article is being written in 2020, the world is facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Because COVID-19 is mostly transmitted from person-to-person contact, many churches have had to close their doors or severely limit their services. Many churches have turned to online

video streaming services such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Facebook, YouTube, and other applications to share their sermons, Sabbath schools, prayer meetings, or Bible study meetings. While this new transition provides a significant benefit in reaching our members, it comes with pitfalls.

In fact, the most widely used video conference service, Zoom, fell victim to something that was dubbed “Zoombombing.” This disruptive form of hacking occurred when a person joined a random Zoom call and posted explicit images, pornographic material, or other attempts to disrupt the meeting.

Zoom continues to increase its security to prevent this from happening. Suppose your church, school, or Pathfinder ministry is using Zoom to connect with your members. In that case, you should read ARM’s article “[Protect Your Zoom Meetings from Being Hijacked](#).” Zoom has also released several resources on this topic, and you should consider adopting these recommendations to your church’s practice:

- [Practices for Securing Your Virtual Classroom](#)
- [Keep Uninvited Guests Out Of Your Zoom Event](#)

Consent is Very Important

Consent is the most important thing when discussing online posting. As I mentioned above, the question you should always ask yourself is, “Am I authorized to post this?” This is important, especially with posting pictures, videos, or other content that you do not own. There could also be privacy issues with posting images or videos of people whose consent you have not obtained.

If your church does not own the photos, videos, or music you are posting online, you need to ask the content owner for permission before publishing. If you do not, the content owner can legally force you to remove the content, and depending on how the content was used, could sue the church for thousands of dollars. In fact, most states have right of publicity or right of privacy laws. These may allow individuals to sue your church if you use their image without their consent for any purpose.

There are two things to remember if your church is posting pictures or videos of church members. First, you should always get the permission of the person before you post the picture. Remember, consent is an on-going process. A person can revoke their consent at any time. The second thing you should remember relates to minors. Minors cannot legally consent to anything. Suppose you are posting pictures of underage church members online. In that case, whether they are Adventurers, Pathfinders, or not, your church still needs to obtain the consent of the minor’s parent or guardian.

Regardless of who you post pictures of, consent is easily obtained by asking the photograph’s subject to fill out a waiver form. You can find a sample consent form from the [North American Division](#) that your church can use.

There are potential risks associated with online posting. However, it is important to remember that the internet is a valuable resource and can help your ministry reach more people than ever before. There are risks, but if we are careful, the benefits far outweigh the risks.

References

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