

How Social Media Will Help Us Finish the Great Commission

The church is living in an age of tremendous evangelistic opportunity.

As we venture into the social, digital era, the **gospel** can travel further and faster than ever before. If the church is a vast volunteer army of people carrying the Good News of Jesus to the least, the lost and the last, then it is safe to say this army is better equipped and more effectively mobilized than any other age to carry out its marching orders – the **Great Commission**.

We began planting Grace Hills Church in the summer of 2011 and officially launched weekly services in a local movie theater in January 2012. We don't have a building. We don't have a sign. We've never done a direct mail campaign or sent any postcards. We don't advertise in the local newspapers or on television or radio. But in January 2014 alone, we met almost 100 new people in our weekend services. How? **Facebook**.

Each week, we post a short video just a few minutes long that explains who we are as a church, what we value and what we will be talking about in our upcoming weekend services. We then “boost” that post so that it sees thousands of eyes within a 10-mile radius around our community, and we challenge all of our faithful attendees to watch it, “**like**” it and share it with others. On Mondays, we look through our communication cards to see how our guests heard about us, and it's not difficult to spot the pattern: Facebook, Facebook, Facebook.

Why Social Media Works

There are plenty of skeptics who may read this and scoff. I've heard every conceivable criticism of **social networking**. It feeds narcissism, keeps us shallow, distracts us from real

life relationships, wastes our time. While each of these arguments certainly can have some merit, they also represent a merely partial understanding of what is happening in our culture.

The fact is, most people are **online**. This is true of at least 95 percent of the unchurched people in our community, and it's even true on many mission fields. I was in Haiti a couple of years ago, and no one I met owned a television. Many didn't have electricity at all. But they owned smartphones and charged them at charging stations around the community.

Not only are most people online, but most people are also engaging in social networking. Every age group, from kindergartners to retirees, is connected socially. Today's youngest generation doesn't "**connect**" and then "disconnect" as we did 20 years ago. Most kids have no idea what it means to "dial up." Instead, the Internet is like a cloud in which we live and breathe. It is real life. Social media is about real conversations about real issues happening between real people in real relationships. And social media really works for spreading the gospel.

But Social Media Only Works If ...

Please don't misunderstand. **Social media** is not the universal cure for society's ills. It doesn't cleanse us from sin or feed all of the longings of the human soul. But it is a tool, a vehicle for sharing God's truth. Just as the early apostles used papyrus and the **Reformers** used the printing press, today's most effective Christian leaders and churches are using the Roman roads of our day – social networks. But it only works if we choose to engage.

Social media will only help us spread the gospel if we are bold enough to embrace the change happening around us, if we are wise enough to empower people with the tools to share Jesus relationally, and if we are courageous enough to engage

the conversations happening in our culture and even step out and lead those conversations.

We still need healthy churches into which we can receive newcomers. We still need a clear gospel, a unified body and a process for making disciples and deepening the walk of new believers. But social media affords us the chance to return to social, relational, viral, mobile methodologies for passing the gospel along to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Brandon Cox is the founding pastor of Grace Hills Church in northwest Arkansas. A pastor since age 19, he has served in small churches as well as at Saddleback Church, one of America's largest and most influential churches. He is an editor, mentor and community facilitator for and Rick Warren's Pastor's Toolbox, one of the world's largest online communities of church leaders. He's an avid, top blogger and lives in Bentonville, Ark., with his wife, Angie, and their two awesome kids.