

## How to Tell Your Story & Social Media

Slide 1- So you want to know how to tell your story. This is something every person, organization, and brand wants to be able to do professionally and effectively. But How do you tell that story in a way that readers/viewers want to subscribe to your message on a regular basis. How do you get your audience to engage with the information that you are sharing with them. Today we are going to look at the simplest ways to do that. We will also go over some tips for effective communication and for using social media.

Slide 2- Every organization has 2 sets of communications they need to work with. There is the internal communications structure, this is for your staff, board/council, leaders, and volunteers. For internal communications it is all about what do they need to know. Keep internal communications to the facts (who, what, when, where, why, and how). These are the types of communications that most people are used to working with. These types of communications can even be more informal and can skip branding guidelines. External communications are for your target audience. The best way to work with external communications is to develop a strategy. A strategy does not have to be long and complex. It can be a one page sheet with guidelines for what you want to share and who you want to share it with. In ministry often the target audience is made up of 2 sections, your congregational membership and potential members. When sharing your story with your external audience the main thing to remember is that the facts are not enough. Your audience wants to know the facts, but they also want to know “why should I care?” There needs to be a personal or emotional connection in what you share. You also want to make sure that your communications look and feel consistent with your brand, your identity. This makes an impression that stays with the audience. Who is this, what are they saying, and why do I care. Those are the 3 key points to take away.

Slide 3- Who you are is basically your brand, your identity as an organization. This is the first step in communications. You want to establish your brand and be consistent with your communications across the board. Your audience should be able to recognize any communications you send out just by looking at it. Here are some helpful tips for creating a consistent brand people can easily identify. You already have a name and a mission statement, this is where any new organizations would begin. For all of you, visuals are first. People are drawn to visuals before they read anything. You want to be sure that all your web, print, video, etc. have a similar and consistent look. You will need to choose a logo, colors, and fonts that will be used for anything that goes out. Your logo, color, font scheme is how people will know you.

You will want to then use designs, layouts, photos, videos, and graphics that work well with your logo, color, font scheme and work with your message.

We will discuss content more in depth when we cover what are they saying and why do I care. In terms of Identity your content should always be in line with your mission statement and should be seen as professional. This means your individual messages are consistent with who you are as an organization and what you're trying to accomplish. It also means you take the time to write in the same way (unless you are using quoted or licensed material), you're checking for mistakes in spelling, grammar, and with facts. And you are getting permission to quote or use copyrighted materials. Having inconsistent branding and messages, mistakes, and getting hit with copyright infringement can create negative view about your brand with your audience.

Slide 4- The most important thing to keep in mind with any message you are trying to put together is how does this fit with who we are and what we do. Is what we are trying to tell people in line with our mission statement, with any vision strategies we may have. Once you have determined that theme of your message fits your mission and vision, there are some other details to consider. The facts- these must be accurate and must answer each of these questions for your audience. Think of a newspaper or magazine article. When you read these at the end you have an answer to each of the 6 question words. For internal communications you can stop here. For external communications you will need to go further, but we will cover that next. Your messages must be transparent, honest, an authentic. Whether you know it or not, your readers and viewers can tell when you are leaving things out or trying to mislead them. You need to earn their trust and keep it, to maintain that communication relationship. Language is another detail to pay attention to. You want to use simple, understandable words and phrases. You want to meet people where they are, meaning you want to speak to their level of knowledge. If they don't understand what you are trying to say, they will turn away from your message. And finally there is length of content. You don't want to bore your audience with too many things to say or lose them because they never have enough time to process too much information. All of these details affect your overall message and how your audience interprets the information that you are sharing with them. If you completely disregard these details you run the risk of losing your audiences attention before they can even ask the next question.

Slide 5- Here is where you can really tailor a message and make your communications stand out to your audience. You will always keep a percentage of your audience's attention. There will always be individuals who want to know what you are doing and what information you are putting out there. These are the people who want the facts because they already feel they have a vested interest in your organization. But many in your audience either have too little time or too little interest in interacting with your organization through your communications. They need another reason to be interested in your information, they need more. Beyond the facts, you should be including personal touches and emotional pieces in your communications. This could be as simple as a quote from someone people recognize to as involved as a video showing how your ministries help improve the lives of those in your community. Having a personal touch and making an emotional impact on the audience will give them a reason to care about your message. People want to feel something in order to continue

to read, listen, or watch. This kind of connection allows the audience to feel like they are a part of your story in some way, like they are on the journey with you. A connection to your audience will stay with them much longer than any cold hard fact that is merely thrown at them. You want to include your leaders or respected members in some of your communications. They are the “face” of the organization or groups within the organization. They are who your audience looks to, they are who the audience tends to trust. This will lend a sense of importance and a level of credibility to your messages. It will give your audience another reason to come back, to look for more information from you.

Again, meeting people where they are is important. You will want to include stories that you know your audience is already interested in, things such as trending topics or in the media now (if they relate to your organization), comments from surveys/polls and other audience feedback/suggestions, and data/statistics from your online platforms (social media, websites, blogs, etc.). Looking to your audience themselves to determine what it is they are looking for and including those in your communications will not only keep their interest, but will make them feel like they have a voice and they are being heard.

Finally, what medium you use to communicate makes a difference to getting your message out. You want to use platforms that your audience is already interacting with. I can't say this enough, meeting them where they are. Turning to where they already go to look for information means they are more likely to stop and read/view/listen to your message when they see it. They don't have to waste time trying to find your message among all the other messages out there.

Slide 6- There are some other tips that will help you to stay consistent with your communications and help keep your audience engaged.

Try to use visuals whenever possible and as much as possible, especially with your online communications. People like to see visuals because it helps to break up the text into manageable sections. Online viewers prefer visuals to text because they want to get the message as quickly as possible. Things like photos and videos really help to create an emotional impact on the reader/viewer.

Going with using visuals is length of content. A good rule of thumb is to save longer content for print and use shorter versions for online. Again, online viewers want to get the message as quickly as possible. Of course there are exceptions to the rule, such as postcards or online magazines/newsletters, those should be decided on an individual basis.

Making sure you have permission from contributors to use their personal stories, information, or photos is very important. Just like getting permission to use licensed materials, this goes to maintaining a consistent brand and positive identity in the minds of your audience.

Branching out and trying new platforms, especially online platforms is something to consider. If a large percentage of your audience is signing up for a new online platform, it is worth finding out if that platform will work for your organization, if it will fit in with your identity. If it does it should be considered because it is part of that idea of meeting your audience where they already are.

Lastly, re-evaluating your communication guidelines, your messages, the platforms you use every 2-3 years will allow you to stay on top of any gaps or new trends. This will also help you to

determine how effective your organization is at getting information out to its audience and if you are losing any specific parts of your audience. Then you will be able to address those gaps, platforms, and losses and redirect your efforts into new ways to improve your communications.

Slide 7- When talking about social media, we are often talking about Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube. But there are many others to consider. The best way to decide which platforms are worth investing time in using is A) research what is the average age of users of the app and compare that to what the average age of your audience is, if there is a significant cross over you should be looking more carefully into what the app is about and how it's used. B) Does the app and how it's used fit in with our brand/identity, if yes find out if it costs anything. C) If it's free sign up. If there are costs involve find out if it fits into your budget, if yes sign up. Don't get caught up in all the trends, choose the ones that will work best for your organization. Also, don't take on too many at once, unless you have a dedicated employee or volunteer to run all the different platforms.

Once you have determined which social media apps work for your organization and your communications, what are the best ways to use them.

Slide 8- Once you have identified your audience and which social media applications you will use to reach them. You need to use the apps in the ways that will get your audience to interact with your post. Unlike print media or websites, the main purpose of social media is to get the audience to interact with your message, not just read or view it. Each generational segment (as well as cultural groups) interacts within social media apps in different ways. As a social media communicator you should watch for patterns in how your different audience segments interacts with your posts. The statistical data from the apps will help you to figure this out as well. Another way to improve audience interaction on social media is to know when your audience is online most and post during those times. Posting positive or inspiring content also helps to get more interaction, such as likes, reactions, comments, and shares. You can't always post positive messages, but keeping the percentage of positive content much higher than negative or disappointing will often keep your audience coming back to your page and helps to get followers.

Slide 9- Social media allows for communications to be much more flexible. So, if in your research into your audience you find that you have more than 1 major segment, you can develop different messages for each major segment. For example, you can create a message for an event in one way for Facebook (Gen X or baby boomers) and in a different way for Twitter or Snapchat (for Millennials or Gen Z).

Having multiple messages or a message in different formats is acceptable as long as your content still fits with your organizational mission and overall brand identity. Don't change who you are to fit the social media trends, you will only alienate your audience.

When you post multiple messages for different audience segments, try to connect them across platforms and to each other when possible to create a greater sense of consistency in your communications.

Slide 10- A useful tool to help study the habits of your audience and audience segments is social media analytics. Using this statistical data can help you to create better communications for your audience in future posts. Tracking and benchmarking are often used for tracking brand popularity. These tend to work better for competitive brands. The important data for the purpose of ministry are Key Performance Indicators. As you work with the data you will find which specific measurements are the most helpful to tailoring your content.

Slide 11- In general there are some helpful tips to remember when posting to your social media. You should always interact with your followers when you can beyond your original post. This means respond to comments and questions, thank or like when they share your content with others, and share partner organizational content that is in line with your own. Try to use visuals as much as possible. Online viewers prefer visuals to text. Adding visuals to your content will get more interactions than text alone. Your content needs to be mobile-friendly. Keep text short, add links to longer versions for those who want more information, maintain smaller file sizes for visuals so they don't buffer on mobile devices using wifi. Use your networks when possible. Again, sharing information from partner organizations that post content that is in line with your own organization will encourage them to share your information in turn. This is allowing the 2 of you to work together to spread each other's messages. Also, asking employees or volunteers to share your content will help to get your message out further and reach more people. Integrate across your different platforms. Include links to your social media on your website, your blogs, and even your email signatures if possible. You want to have your social media presence visible on all your web formats. Including links to content on your website and blogs in your posts will also help to drive traffic to these sites. You want to make sure you are keeping up with your social media communications, they are just as important as your other communications. If you have several responsibilities in your position within the organization or if you share the social media responsibilities with someone else in your organization, you should create a content calendar. It is a good idea to post at least 3 times per week. You should set your notifications to your email so you can see if people are commenting. This will allow you to keep up with responding to your followers in a timely manner. This will make your followers feel like your social media page is a reliable source to get your information and to interact with your organization.

Slide 12- We can get busy with so many things in our daily to dos. But there are a few no-nos to avoid when you use social media platforms. No matter how little time you have and need to

post something, try not use generic messages. These will be obvious to your audience and you will lose their interest. Often once you lose a follower, it is really difficult to get them back. When you use hashtags to generate more interaction among your followers, do not include punctuation. Also, try to create a short and catchy hashtag, these will be easier for your followers to remember and they will be more likely to use them.

Again, it is very important to stay up to date on your posts. Many of the social media apps offer features to make it easier to keep up with your pages. You can schedule posts, so you can create them all in one day and set them to post when you want your viewers to see them. You can also set your Facebook to auto post on Twitter as well. This is helpful if the largest part of your audience is in the same segment or uses both platforms.

There is nothing wrong with posting requests for donations/sponsors/ or volunteers. These kinds of posts should be occasional at best. You don't want these to make up the majority of your posts, because your followers will feel like you don't really have anything to say and will become desensitized to your content.

No matter how positive you keep your messages, there will always be an occasional negative comment or troll(heckler) that tries to create a negative interaction that affects your other followers. In many situations we are taught to ignore the negative things people say, and they will go away. For social media this doesn't work. Ignoring negative comments is a bad idea as your followers will feel like you are not addressing an issue. Negative comments, if they address a concern should be responded to as delicately and positively as possible. Negative comments that have no purpose should be deleted as soon as they are discovered. Any person who continues to post negative, insulting, offensive comments on your page (trolls) should be blocked as soon as possible to avoid losing other followers as a result.