

Mobile MINISTRY

Using Technology to Spread the Gospel



BY JOEL J. SAM
AND JASON ALEXIS

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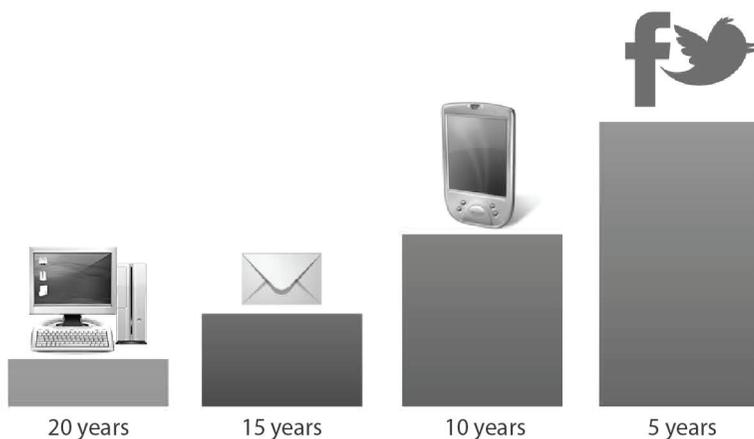
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INTRODUCTION: CROSSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

What is mobile ministry? At its core, it means using mobile communication technologies to spread the Gospel. But if it's that simple, why isn't everyone doing it? One reason may be that mobile technology is considered the domain of the young or hip. But it's much more ubiquitous than that.

In addition to mobile, the use of new and advanced communication technologies has skyrocketed in the last two decades.



Considering how far we've come, we're:

- Less than 20 years removed from people building personal and organizational websites on personal computers (or PCs)
- Less than 15 years removed from the widespread use of email
- Less than 10 years removed from the introduction of smartphones
- Less than 5 years removed from the large-scale adoption of online social networks like Facebook and Twitter

What do the communication methods on the previous page have in common? They all connect to, or are a part of, the aptly named World Wide Web, and they all can be accessed by portable, or mobile, devices like cell phones and tablets.

It would make sense that Christians, those who profess the mission of going into all the world to “teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19), should embrace, even lead, this technological revolution, right? Unfortunately, while hundreds of millions (and approaching billions) have access to the Internet, or own and use smartphones, when it comes to harnessing the power of such technologies, Christian churches lag behind commercial businesses and secular nonprofits in their adoption of mobile technologies. Shouldn't we be about our Father's business?

To be sure, mobile ministry is no replacement for pounding the pavement, knocking on doors, or visiting people in their need in hospitals, prisons, and orphanages. But mobile ministry is a relevant tool for such a time as this: because of their global connectivity, mobile technologies align perfectly with the Great Commission.

If it seems that your local church is standing before a figurative Red Sea, we invite you to take the leap of faith. This manual was written to help you and your church cross the digital divide: it introduces the spectrum of tools, techniques, and strategies that will transform your church into a mobile hotspot for your members, and for people around the world.

How to Use this Manual

- If you need motivation for why to do mobile ministry, start with the introduction and chapter 1
- If you need background on what mobile technology is, go to chapters 2 and 3
- If you need help choosing and applying the right tools, then read chapters 4-7
- If you need help with formulating a mobile ministry strategy, then chapters 8-9 are for you

1

REINTERPRETING THE GREAT COMMISSION: A LOOK AT THE EVOLUTION OF CHURCH COMMUNICATION

Do you remember when organizations would only provide their address or a toll-free telephone number at the end of an advertisement? These days, more and more businesses, and churches, are forgoing those standard methods of communication. Instead they're most likely to ask their customers to text them a message, to fan them on Facebook, or to follow them on Twitter. And now, businesses and churches expect that their (potential) customers and members will do all of the aforementioned on the go—from their cell phones or other mobile devices. What makes mobile platforms different from more traditional forms of customer/member engagement and marketing? And how do you determine if it makes sense for your church?

Mobile phones. We're less than three decades from the dawn of modern communication technologies. It was in the early 1980s when the first commercially available mobile phone, then known as "the brick," became truly available to the masses—that is, the "masses" that could afford the \$4000 price tag. Now, cell phones can be had for less than \$100—or for free, if you sign up for a cell phone contract.

Internet. By the late 1980s, a global system of interconnected computer networks was beginning to be privatized and commercialized for civilian (nonmilitary, nongovernmental)

use. That technology, known as the Internet, would become a worldwide phenomenon, especially by the late 1990s, when computers were transitioning to more user-friendly graphical interfaces. Now, the Internet can be accessed by talking to a futuristic-looking pair of goggles, the Google Glass. The thing is, this product is already on sale. The future is here!

The personal computer. A decade before “the brick” hit the streets, computers were beginning to grace the desktops of private citizens. Since then, the personal computer has undergone an astonishing evolution: Even as the PC has gotten exponentially more sophisticated, the physical device itself has shrunk from room size to palm size. And before there were icon-populated windows on the PC screen—and well before there were consumer touchscreen devices—people had to enter commands into their computer using strings of text that only made sense to the geek. Today’s smartphones have much more processing power than the mammoth desktop computers of a decade ago.

Essentially, the “mobile” in mobile ministry is: The merging of computer, Internet, broadband, and cellular technologies in portable computing devices. Mobile ministry then is the exploitation of mobile technologies and their associated applications, which include text messaging, social networking, and mobile apps.

A Historical Look at Church Communication

At the heart of communication in the Christian church context is the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV):

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Mobile ministry is the latest and arguably the most important technological tool to accomplish the Great Commission. Why? Because that's where the harvest is: More than 1.6 billion people own cell phones.

What Gospel communication tools came before mobile? Here's a fun timeline, starting from Bible times:

The prophetic voice - From Samuel to Isaiah to John the Baptist, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” to Ellen G. White, God spoke His truths through human messengers, who in turn spoke to His people.

The epistle – If you include the book of Hebrews, Paul wrote 14 (very long) letters that made it into the collection of books we call the Holy Bible.

Ships – Paul often found himself on a ship going to foreign lands with his spiritual brothers, Silas and Timothy. The early Seventh-day Adventist movement also had a rich tradition of distributing their printed material by ships.

Planes, trains, and automobiles – Even now, Seventh-day Adventist missionaries travel far and wide, including into remote regions, to spread the Advent message.

Telephone – Just a few years ago, pastors and church secretaries were just beginning to use phone features that allowed them to send automated messages—emergencies and other important announcements—to their entire congregation.

Email – Now just as important as your physical address, email is where most major information is delivered.

Websites – In the early stages, the home pages of church websites were cluttered with almost everything you needed to know about the church; now websites need to be clean, intuitive, content-rich yet clutter-free, and accessible on 3-inch mobile touchscreens.

According to Seventh-day Adventist historian Herbert E. Douglass in his book *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G.*

White (Pacific Press, 1998), the spirit of prophecy has, throughout history, used three methods of delivering God's messages: oral, written, and dramatized.

Oral messages – Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Written messages – The Lord told Jeremiah to write a book containing the words He would give him. Daniel himself was told to write a book especially for those living at "the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4 KJV). The apostle Paul wrote 14 books of the New Testament, all but one book being letters to various churches or their pastors. John wrote at least three letters in addition to his Gospel and the Book of Revelation: "And these things we write to you that your joy may be full" (1John 1:4 KJV).

Dramatized messages – Parables in words or actions are frequently-used teaching devices throughout the Bible. Jesus made generous use of parables to make clear the value of divine principles. Jeremiah's ministry often used the parable of action and example. God asked him not to take a wife (Jeremiah 16:1, 2) so that he would be a living reminder to the Jews of the approaching ordeal during the destruction of Jerusalem.

Douglass concludes that the biblical examples leave the impression that "God selected any method that would best fit the occasion. God is adaptable and persistent. All methods are authentic, for they come from the same Source."

Now let's see in the next chapter how people use mobile technologies to fulfill these tried and true Gospel methods.

2

HOW (AND WHY) PEOPLE USE MOBILE AND WHY YOU SHOULD, TOO

Thankfully, a person no longer needs a PhD to operate a computer, or to be a Wall Street mogul to own a cell phone. And these days, almost anyone can design their own website, manage their own Twitter account, post an Instagram photo, or Skype their grandchildren.

With mobile devices, manufacturers have taken user-friendliness to the next level. By just the tap or swipe of a finger, or the pinch of two fingers, or a simple voice command, users can launch sophisticated applications that will do their bidding.

According to the *Harvard Business Review*, people generally spend time using their smartphones for the following:

- Idle time: 46%
- Social time: 19%
- Seeking time: 12%
- Life management time: 11%
- Preparation time: 7%

("How People Really Use Mobile," *Harvard Business Review*, Jan. 1, 2013)

Here's how you can apply that information to your mobile ministry:

- **Idle time:** Spent entertaining themselves (for those who seek relaxation by listening to sermons, have your collection easily accessible through your mobile website or mobile app)
- **Social time:** Spent engaging with online communities (create a Facebook page or Twitter feed where your members and fans can interact with you and each other)
- **Seeking time:** Spent finding and acquiring things they need (if your church offers such services as childcare or health care, be sure to advertise them on your mobile website, or post QR codes around your church that link to the service information)
- **Life management time:** Conducting personal and family business (create a link on your mobile website or app for users to give their tithe or offering)
- **Preparation time:** Planning for upcoming activities (send text message reminders of your ministry's upcoming activities)

Is your church out of touch with the rapidly growing mobile population that is using their mobile devices for almost every conceivable aspect of their lives, from work to play? Your church can reach more people, including cross demographics of age, race, socioeconomic status, or education, through their mobile devices. There are more than 5 BILLION mobile phones in the world and more than 85% of Americans own a mobile phone. The fastest growth in smartphone use is in some of the least developed regions, not even accounting for the millions of app-enabled tablets being activated daily. If your church has a message to spread, either to its local membership or to the foreign mission field, mobile devices are an ideal conduit.

Here are 8 ways members and online visitors can consume church content on mobile devices:

1. **Watch or listen to live or prerecorded sermons.** A benefit of mobile devices is that they are portable. That means you don't have to be tethered to a computer to listen to a sermon, even if it is live. Users can listen to or watch sermons during their morning commute, on a treadmill, or in the comfort of their home.
2. **Read a bulletin or blog.** Access to the latest church news or events is very important. This will also aid members who want to find out information right before a church service and eliminate the need to turn on a computer to find that information. A visitor can make an informed choice after browsing the church's material and determining that your church provides a particular ministry that he or she is seeking.
3. **Submit requests for prayer and other needs.** There was a time when you had to login to your computer to submit a prayer request. Now, with mobile technology, submitting prayer requests is easier than ever. Prayer leaders can opt-in to receive mobile push messaging notifications when a prayer request has been submitted so they can immediately begin to intercede. There is no longer reason to wait until Wednesday evening prayer service to stand in the gap.
4. **Navigate to the church (event) location.** Especially for events not located at the church, location-tracking mobile apps can direct members and mobile passersby to your event.
5. **Purchase or reserve tickets.** More people are purchasing and researching items on their mobile devices. Some churches and ministries rely on free or low-cost tickets for specific events. Adding the option to reserve tickets with a mobile device empowers users to make swifter decisions.

6. **Contribute monetary gifts, such as tithe or offering.** Mobile phones make e-giving easy; members and other benefactors can return tithe or donate an offering through your mobile website or app—from anywhere in the world.
7. **Mobile access to Bible and Bible study apps.** With your mobile device, you can hold the Bible in dozens of translations, the concordance, the Bible dictionary, and Ellen White's writings in one hand.
8. **Receive SMS announcements or take short code polls.** Especially for emergency notifications, text messages are ideal and highly likely to be read. And increasingly, pastors and Christian artists are asking their audiences to respond to live poll questions simply by texting their responses to a unique short code.

3

MOBILE TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW

Jesus always seemed to know where to meet the people: sometimes at a well, at the tax collector's house, or at a dinner party. Where are people today?

More than ever, the place to reach people is through their mobile device. A growing percentage of mobile users have smartphones, which are capable of email, Web surfing, photo sharing, updating social statuses, and much more. So how can your church use mobile ministry to engage both its members and its community? And can mobile tools actually impact churches in the important areas of community service, discipleship, outreach, and evangelism? Already, mobile ministry has proven to be effective in those areas (see chapter 8 to discover ways your church can do the same).

These four mobile applications have been found to be very effective in ministry and in engaging a church populace:

1. **Text, or SMS,** alerts allow a church to reach its members and even visitors with timely messages right on their phone. The message the church sends could be a weekly Bible verse, information on an upcoming outreach event, or even a Bible study. Ninety-seven percent of text messages are opened, which compares to just 10-20% of emails, so your church can be sure its message will be heard. Studies show that text messaging is much more effective in getting someone's attention than traditional marketing.

2. With the increase in mobile devices worldwide, having a **mobile website** is all the more important for churches. A good mobile website makes it easy—with the tap of an icon, get directions to a church as well as quick links to the church's most important ministries. More than 50% of Google searches are now done on a mobile phone, so the next visitor to your church's website is very likely to find it with their mobile phone. This is usually the first interaction someone has with your church or ministry.
3. **Mobile apps** have become very popular. Apps, a popular buzz term today, are for people who want to interact with your ministry or church on a more frequent basis. Usually apps are recommended by friends and are boosted by ratings on the specific platform's app store—platforms include Android, iOS (Apple), and Blackberry. Churches now have the opportunity to have apps that allow users to watch sermons, submit prayer requests, and even return their tithes and offerings right from their phones.
4. By all accounts, **social media** platforms like Facebook and Twitter earned their massive membership in large part because they are accessible on mobile devices. In particular, the younger generation is connected to social media primarily via mobile devices, and the church must find creative ways to organize and synthesize information so they can repackage it and share it with their friends. A Tethered World study evaluated the mobile habits of students of 52 nationalities, attending universities in eight countries, on three continents. It concluded that, "More than any other platform, mobile phones have initiated a global youth digital culture, by making content and comment available all the time, wherever students are."

Popular mobile devices that your ministry should target include Apple, Windows, Android and Blackberry smartphones and tablets. If we are to be relevant while reaching people where they are, churches can no longer ignore mobile technology. Let us use every tool available to spread the Gospel.

4

TEXT MESSAGING: NOT JUST FOR GENERATION LOL :)

If you think texting is only for Generation LOL, think again. Reputable organizations around the world, including many churches, are taking this popular mobile phone feature more seriously; they've discovered that text messaging allows them to communicate more frequently, and more efficiently, with their members and followers.

Compared to newspapers, junk mail, radio, or TV, mobile text messaging (or SMS, for "short messaging service") is a relatively new communication tool. It has gained huge momentum since it was first introduced in 1996. Compared to other features and functions on a mobile phone, like mobile apps or near field communication (NFC) chips, texting is a "new media" veteran. And unlike most of the newer tools, the text messaging application is ubiquitous: so-called basic phones can send and receive text messages (smartphone not required). And lately, wireless service providers have begun offering unlimited text messaging plans with their most basic phone contracts.

Unlimited text messaging is clearly a good thing for the teenager who literally sends hundreds of messages a day (and for his or her parents who are footing the bill). But why does any of this matter for your church? Consider the following statistics:

- An estimated 7 TRILLION text messages were sent in 2011, and with the new unlimited texting plans, that number will surely rise

- More than 97% of text messages are opened, and 83% of those are opened within an hour; that's compared to a 20% open-rate for emails
- For all its benefits, text messaging is a relatively simple, low-cost, and low-maintenance marketing tool

5 Ways Churches are Using Text Messaging to Reach Members

1. **To send timely or important alerts.** After members or visitors opt-in to your text messaging campaign, you can then send your SMS subscribers breaking news, such as an event cancellation due to extreme weather, or a friendly reminder of an upcoming event. For example, a church in Iowa uses texting to send messages, like meeting locations, to members of its high school ministry program.
2. **To collect contact information.** When they opt-in to your SMS database, subscribers can also be asked to submit their email address for inclusion in that database. This builds your contact information for visitors and allows you to communicate with them for special events.
3. **To advertise and manage events.** Texting is ideal for live updates during events, and is a more stable and more utilized platform than Twitter.
4. **To conduct live “townhalls” and polls.** Some churches allow members to text questions during some services to the preacher, who then answers them after his or her message. Pastors at other churches will ask poll questions during Bible study meetings, then immediately discuss the (displayed) response with the congregation.
5. **To promote or connect to other media campaigns.** Are you hosting a great discussion on your Facebook page or in a Google+ Hangout? Or would you like to promote a sermon that's located on your website? Chances are good that you'll get your subscribers to click on the link if you send it via text message.

SMS in its simplest terms involves collecting the mobile numbers of your members and then sending relevant information directly to them through text messaging. The SMS marketing industry has grown exponentially over the past two years and the cost involved in setting up an SMS marketing campaign and running it monthly is far lower than other forms of marketing businesses traditionally engage in.

If you think advertising or marketing have nothing to do with church “business,” then perhaps you can consider it as promotion of such church-related events:

- Prayer meetings
- Evangelistic series
- Concerts
- Marriage and family seminars

A Common Term for a Sustained Promotional Effort is Campaign

An SMS campaign is a two-fold operation. The first process is collecting mobile numbers. Your church members and followers must opt-in to receive information from you. You cannot load in a set of numbers you have collected through other means and send an SMS message. That is spam and it's not allowed by cell phone carrier regulations. Your members and followers can opt-in from a web form and then confirm their subscription request via text. The most common way to opt-in is texting a keyword to a five or six-digit shortcode.

Once people opt-in to receive future offers and announcements, they are automatically sent an auto-reply message with information on how to opt-out and a phone number of the organization that sent the message. You can advertise your new SMS text messaging campaign by placing mobile call-to-actions in your church bulletin, integrating with your other campaigns, displaying details on your social media sites, and telling the congregation directly from the rostrum.

Another application of text messaging is sending SMS blasts to your entire subscriber list. Ideally two to three messages a month should be sent to maximize recipients' follow-up. Since people are giving you their mobile number, something they consider quite personal, the information should be exclusive and not found anywhere else. This will keep your opt-outs low and the amount of traffic it can bring to your church's events high.

It is easy to see why SMS marketing is experiencing such huge growth: It's extremely cost effective and it's very easy to track results. Best of all, it is direct and personalized. So why not do it for your church campaigns? Your church members probably receive hundreds of emails each day marketing one thing or another, few of which they will open. The opposite applies to those receiving an SMS. As most people receive very few promotional text messages, they are more likely to read the ones they do get. The average read rate for text messages is between 95% and 98%.

7 Keys for Effective SMS Campaigns

SMS marketing is relatively inexpensive and easy. But it needs to be done thoughtfully and intelligently or it can backfire. Here are seven keys that have produced great results, as measured by audience response and client satisfaction. Using these keys will lead to SMS campaigns that are effective and that create a pleasant experience for your members.

1. Find an SMS provider that you trust

All SMS providers are not created equal. Make sure you partner with an SMS marketing company that is competent and trustworthy. Having a company that isn't competent or that pays no regard to privacy or legal requirements for text messaging may end up being a costly mistake.

2. Respect your subscribers' privacy

You can do this by allowing people to opt-in to your campaign subscription after the first contact. Also, NEVER purchase and use phone number lists. It will likely backfire, and if caught, your organization will suffer a negative reputation. It is also illegal!

3. **Integrate with other marketing tools**

Use other communication tools like social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and email to create awareness of your text messaging service and the benefits of subscribing to your SMS campaigns. Such cross-platform marketing campaigns often prove to be the most successful.

4. **Keep them tuned in**

There is a lot of marketing noise out there. Get your members to keep paying attention to your SMS campaigns by rewarding them with bonus content, exclusive announcements, and so on. When they come back for more, they are more tuned in to your campaign message—your reward for providing value to them.

5. **Encourage a two-way conversation**

No one likes a one-way conversation. SMS messaging can also be used to hear feedback from your members and visitors. Send out surveys, solicit feedback about your latest event, and request suggestions for improving your program or ministry.

6. **Time it right**

Timing is everything. Choose the right time of day to send your text message alerts. Use web tools that allow you to program your message to be sent whenever you want. An SMS marketing campaign can fall flat if the messages are sent during times when people are disengaged from their technology such as when they're driving to and from work or when they're sleeping.

7. **Keep it simple**

Typically you will have 160 characters to communicate your message. Use simple and easy-to-read language that will create minimal confusion for your members. Also, by using simple and familiar language, you will find a higher rate of success in your text message marketing campaign.

5

(ASSUMING YOU HAVE ONE) IS YOUR WEBSITE MOBILE-FRIENDLY?

“If you build it, they will come.” Conversely, if you don't build it, or if you don't build it well, they will leave. That's essentially the gist of a survey conducted by Google, and summarized at Mobile Ads Blog. This study showed that 67% of people browsing a mobile-friendly website said they're more likely to buy (or more broadly, consume) what the site was offering, while 61% of people encountering a mobile-unfriendly site quickly move on.

A mobile website is essentially a sleek, stripped down version of your native (desktop friendly) site. With a mobile website, the content may be stacked vertically for easy scrolling, and many of the graphics from the native site may be streamlined or removed. As for what is a mobile-friendly site, the results from the aforementioned Google survey make it clear.

These **three features of mobile-friendly websites** are targeted to commercial websites (we've translated them for church websites):

1. **Fast loading**

If your mobile website takes more than five seconds to load, your mobile visitor would have already moved on. When thinking about website speed, consider the following:

- The user's device. Is it a basic phone with web access, a smartphone, or a tablet? Are they connected via Wi-Fi or through a cellular network?
- What browser are they using, and is your site optimized for it?

2. **Mobile-friendly features**

Don't make the user feel like he or she has unusually fat fingers. Key mobile-friendly features include:

- A small number of large, simple icons. If your website visitor has the choice between 10 text links and another five graphic links, and yet another three video links, they'll be overwhelmed. Not to mention they may not even stick around to see it, since such a page will likely take a long time to load.

3. **Quick access to important information**

Don't confuse the visitor with secondary or unnecessary services and products. Show them what they want and need from your ministry. As far as possible, the following items should be up front:

- Directions or a link to a mobile map
- Contact information—a click-to-call or SMS button makes it even easier
- Link to your giving/donation portal
- A featured resource—a sermon audio/video archive or an online store selling church-branded gear
- A featured event—an evangelistic series that is right around the corner shouldn't be hiding behind multiple clicks

Why weary the patience of your virtual visitors with a mobile website that's slow, unattractive, and confusing? Treat them as consumers, and they'll reward you by hanging around and partaking in your services. When was the last time you checked your website to make sure it still works properly, looks current, and is meeting your goals? It's a good idea to periodically evaluate your website so you can make any necessary changes and be prepared when it's time for a redesign.

Here are some questions to help you get started.

- **Does the home page load in a timely fashion?** Less than 10 seconds is excellent. If it takes too long, visitors won't wait.
- **Is the home page understandable?** Are the features easy to find and well presented? Are there many broken links, missing sections, or spelling errors?
- **Are the navigation options logical?** Do all pages include well-designed navigation, with little scrolling required? Are the navigation links adequate?
- **Does the website contain information about your church?** Does it include ministries, events, and the pastor's bio? How much information does it offer potential visitors?
- **Is the content up-to-date?** Are future events announced? Is the news new, or more than two months old?
- **Is contact information available?** Can visitors find the address, phone number, email address, and map link? If they can't find this on your website, they won't be able to find your church.
- **Are meeting and worship times clearly posted?** Are they easy to find? Are special events listed?
- **Do the colors and overall design complement each other?** Are the colors and design pleasant? Do they look professional and give a positive impression of your church?
- **Is the content easy to read?** How are the grammar, spelling, and punctuation? Poorly written content is hard to follow and will not make people want to revisit your site.

You can also run a current mobile test of your site at www.howtogomo.com

6

CONSUMING CHURCH CONTENT ON THE GO: THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT



When it comes to mobile platforms, your church has two choices. Mobile websites provide a simple, straightforward, and relatively static interface that will work on most mobile devices. Mobile apps offer smartphone and tablet users direct access to your text (blogs, announcements) and multimedia (calendar, sermons, photos, music).

Apps can be designed so people can take specific action. There seems to be an app for everything, including great resources like the YouVersion app for Bible reading and the Logos app for pastors wanting access to in-depth Bible study and reference tools.

A mobile app is software designed for such mobile operating systems (and their corresponding distribution programs) as Apple iOS (the App Store) and Google Android (Google Play). An app is generally useful for executing specific actions such as listening to a podcast, playing an interactive game, or making a purchase.

Mobile apps and mobile websites are similar in the sense that the both reside on, and are optimized for, mobile devices. Also, they generally serve the same purpose of delivering text and multimedia content to users. However, they're also quite different

in other ways, the most critical being that a mobile app is great for members and people who are already engaged with your church. However, your app is less likely to be discovered unless someone is specifically looking for it. A mobile website, on the other hand, is the best way to help everyone else discover you. It resides on the broadly accessible World Wide Web and may be accessed by anyone with a mobile web browser, regardless of whether they own a smartphone or not.

Ultimately, a thorough mobile ministry strategy would incorporate both mobile apps and mobile websites, but if your church's resources are limited, and you're wondering where to start, consider the following comparison table:

Key Considerations	Mobile Websites	Mobile Apps	Recommendations
Reach	Can run on basic phones, which still outnumber smartphones.	Can only run on smartphones and tablets, which are taking over.	You'll need a separate app for each smartphone ecosystem (Apple, Android, BlackBerry, etc.), which is a good reason to start with a mobile website.
Speed	Designed to be fast and lean.	Uniquely designed for the phone's hardware and software operating system, and is, in general, fast at what it does.	For mostly text-based content, a mobile website will suffice. For more complex multimedia like audio or video content, a mobile app might be the way to go.
Flexibility	A relatively static browsing experience.	A more dynamic experience for the user and for the content provider (you).	If your church really wants to get creative, go with a mobile app.
User Engagement	Provides a trustworthy, non-intrusive experience.	Can partially or completely function offline.	Apps are designed to be more engaging.
Offline Capabilities	Requires Internet access.	A more sticky experience. People are now spending more time using apps than in a mobile browser.	Go with a mobile app, but also consider providing free Wi-Fi in your church.
Cost and Maintenance	Generally cheaper to set up and maintain.	Cost more initially, especially when you factor in the cost of building an app for each smartphone ecosystem.	Mobile websites are more cost efficient.

Case Study: A Mobile App for a Growing Church

Thanks in large part to a series of successful evangelistic efforts, the Metropolitan Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hyattsville, Maryland is growing by leaps and bounds. This dynamic urban church is also home to the Metropolitan Media Ministries, which produces high-quality audio/video recordings of church services. But although they had recently completed a major website redesign, they were missing the mobile component—a mobile app that would provide convenient access to its rapidly growing library of sermons and other on-demand resources.

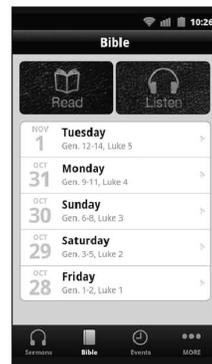
About Metropolitan SDA Church



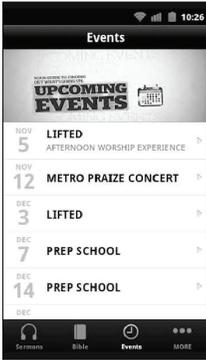
- Located in Hyattsville, Maryland, just four miles from Washington, D.C.
- Church body is diverse, primarily comprised of people of West Indian and African descent
- Surrounding community has high population of recent immigrants, especially Hispanics

Church Mission and Highlights

- Core focus on evangelism and discipleship
- Built a \$5 million multipurpose ministry center to serve the church and the community through health, recreational, and educational ministries, including English classes for non-native speakers
- Hosted a series of evangelistic meetings and concerts headlined by internationally known preachers and performers; more than 100 souls were baptized in one two-week series



Mobile App Success



- Commissioned a simple but content-rich mobile app design for less than \$3000
- Increased traffic (many sermon downloads and/or app downloads)
- Doubled Facebook fans within the year following the mobile app launch
- Users can download sermons, watch live programming, or even book a private prayer session with the senior pastor

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IS YOUR CHURCH READY TO GO SOCIAL?

Do you remember when churches would only provide their address or a telephone number in their bulletins or on billboards? These days, more and more businesses and churches are forgoing such standard contact information and are urging whosoever will to be their fan on Facebook or to follow them on Twitter. What makes online social media (or social networking) platforms different from more traditional forms of customer engagement and marketing? And how do you determine if it makes sense for your church?

The answer to the first question is simple. Nearly 25% of the entire world population, cutting across all demographics, regularly conducts business or hangs out on a social networking website. Within these global hubs, individuals and organizations gather and break news, promote themselves or their services, target their preferred audience, and decide whose conversations they want to hear. And much of this comes thanks to the growing number of mobile phones, which make it easy for users to access and update their social networking accounts on the go.

In addition to the obvious appeal of reaching millions of people at little cost, one primary advantage for churches to having an online social presence is to be found when someone decides to look for the message they're spreading (for example, archived sermons) or the services they provide. One disadvantage is that, by setting up an online identity, your church would be exposing itself to the wild world of cyberspace, where reputations can be enhanced—and just as easily destroyed.

And yet, more and more churches are beginning to go social. According to a 2012 survey by marketing firm BuzzPlant, 46% of 250 churches surveyed said that social media is their most effective method of outreach; that's followed by knocking on doors (24%) and advertising in the traditional outlets of newspapers, radio, and TV (a combined 30%). But the beauty of social media is that it's not an either/or proposition: You can literally knock on doors and tweet about it at the same time.

Is Social Media Right for Your Church, and Is Your Church Ready for Social Media?

Here are five questions you should answer before deciding.

- 1. Does your church want a two-way conversation with your followers?**

Unlike the church blog, a social networking follower can post content (if you allow them to) on the church's Facebook page for all to see. Or a complete stranger can send a direct message to the pastor's Twitter inbox. Or church members can chat with the clergy or hold church business meetings in a Google+ Hangout.

- 2. Does your church do frequent outreach campaigns, musical concerts, or fundraising?**

Then you definitely need to be active in the social media sphere. Connect with a mobile media marketing firm with extensive experience helping churches promote gospel concerts, evangelistic programs, and the like.

- 3. Does your church want to target the young and unchurched?**

Social networking is NOT just for the kids, but naturally, the young and young at heart gravitate to these relatively nascent media platforms. Also, the millions of people who may not feel comfortable stepping inside a church door could very well visit your Facebook page from the comfort of their home.

4. **Does your church want to educate the broader public, affect change, and at the same time protect and shape your reputation?**

The promise entering the dynamic world of social media is that you are on the same stage as politicians and celebrities. Anyone can find your church's account, and what you say or do online can go viral. And that's also a danger. If an improper photo or message is posted to your church's social media account, its reputation can tank within minutes. It pays to be aware of social media's unwritten rules of conduct.

5. **Does your church already have an existing but inactive or ineffective social media presence?**

It's possibly because the pastor or the communications director just doesn't have the time needed to keep it fresh by making updates several times a week—in the case of Twitter, preferably at least once daily. To be effective, your church's social media manager, whoever it may be, needs to learn social media's best practices such as responding expeditiously to questions or comments.

The Gospel, in 140 Characters

One of the best ways for your church to have a strong social media presence, and even make a national or international name for itself, is through Twitter. A single tweet can instantly become a national headline. But you need followers to make sure your tweets are seen.

Here are some rules and techniques for growing your Twitter followers:

- **Make it simple to find and follow your Twitter account.**

Make sure your Twitter account is easily visible on your website. If you have a blog, use social networking tools so others can easily tweet about your posts.

- **Follow other churches, ministries, and Christian businesses on Twitter.** More than likely, they'll return the favor and follow you back. Seek out the Twitter accounts of organizations with similar goals that are serving similar demographics and engage their users.
- **Write guest posts for other blogs and add your Twitter handle at the end of the piece.** Offer expert advice by writing posts for other blogs so you can build trust, gain new followers, and extend your reach.
- **Participate in and host Twitter discussions.** Such events will expose your church to new Twitter followers and enhance your branding.
- **Post quality tweets that are worthy of re-tweets, which means someone relaying your message to their Twitter following.** Twitter followers want to read about relevant news and solutions that you can offer. If the post is valuable, readers will share it with their own followers.
- **Schedule your tweets.** When it's hard to tweet every day or at a certain time, use an application that will post tweets for you.
- **Use hashtags.** A hashtag (represented by the ## symbol) is a way for Twitter to categorize tweets. Search engines use them for keyword searches. Use a hashtag before relevant keywords or key phrases.
- **Analyze your content.** See which posts have the most retweets and which led visitors to your website so you can optimize your tweets to gain new Twitter followers.
- **Engage the readers.** Twitter isn't your private diary. Use it to start discussions with readers, address specific followers, and get into conversations.

When using Twitter, focus on your influence more than your follower count. By organically growing your Twitter followers, you gain recognition from individuals who appreciate your messages. It's more important to have 100 followers who know who you are and what your church is about than to have 9,999 who are clueless.

Assessing the Risk of Social Media

"Social media has flattened the communication spectrum," says Pastor Rajkumar Dixit in his January 2013 article on page 1 of the *Practicing Communicating* newsletter (published by the Society of Adventist Communicators). Instead of competing with large organizations that have the financial resources to hire large marketing firms, relatively small players, including churches of any size, can project their message using the same social media platforms that large organizations use.

In the same article, Pastor Dixit provides three guidelines for preparing for the social media risk:

1. **Don't underestimate the power**

Many church organizations use their social media platform as a one-way communication delivery mechanism. Remember, your online presence operates under a completely different set of rules than traditional forms of communications like a press release. Church communicators should recognize how the power of social media can affect the reputation of the organization. If your message goes viral, it can make you; but if you can't stay ahead of the message, it can also break you.

2. **Stick to the plan**

Because anyone can create a Facebook page, Twitter account, or blog that hijacks your church brand, your ministry team should have an integrated marketing plan that includes a social media strategy. What message are you trying to convey through your online posts? Every single question, picture, and poll should be directly related to your online presence and brand messaging.

3. **Educate your organization's leaders on the power of social media**

For many church leaders, "social media" is still a buzzword that they may have learned from their grandkids. A large percentage of [business] organizations are still hesitant to get serious about social media and just 12% of companies have hired staff dedicated to social media activities.

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MAKING AN IMPACT WITH MOBILE MINISTRY

No matter which tool or application you choose, it all boils down to using the technology to minister—essentially to serve others. Mobile devices are a mainstay. Like the boom of ministry websites in the late 1990s, mobile ministry should no longer be an afterthought.

Here are four ways you can use mobile ministry to impact your world:

1. **Community expansion.** Reaching our communities has been one of the most challenging tasks in modern ministry. There have been community outreach days, ministry fairs, and community guest days. These days all have their place, but reaching the community via a mobile device means the church community is no longer limited to the church's four walls, or even its zip code. Here are some suggestions for expanding the community that is engaged with your church's activities, and tuned into its message.
 - a. **Host a contest during a holiday**, like Easter. Everyone loves a contest, so why not post on your church sign to text a keyword to a phone number to enter. This way you will gather all cell phone numbers and build your database.
 - b. **Promoting concerts.** If you have the budget to bring a well-known musical artist to your church, you can also

run a contest where discounted tickets are available via mobile platforms. Or potential attendees can respond to the church's short code, scan a QR code, or visit the church app to receive concert information.

- c. **Post on social media.** In your Twitter, Facebook, or Google+ streams, ask people to share your post. Who knows—maybe it will go viral.
 - d. **Encourage check-ins via location-tracking apps.** Apps like Foursquare and Facebook allow users to tell their network when they're near or in your church. That alone literally opens the virtual door to your church.
 - e. **Engage in outreach.** Once you've expanded your community, you next need to serve them. Some passive outreach methods include posting flyers around the community with QR codes that link to the "services provided" portion of your website or advertising your services on social media. A more active outreach plan could include planting some boots on the ground by sending church members out to the community to hand out tracts and food, and having them collect email addresses and cell phone numbers from those willing to share that information. You can use mobile applications to gather location-specific information from your visitors and QR codes on flyers so people can scan them and be directed to your ministry website.
2. **Discipleship.** Members can also benefit spiritually from your mobile presence. For example, you can send links to sermon notes via text, create and moderate Sabbath School lesson discussion forums on your social media pages, or give them the ability to sign up for counseling or prayer through your mobile website or mobile app.
 3. **Evangelism.** Who would have thought the Like, Share, or Retweet buttons were a form of evangelism? They are, so encourage your church members and followers to spread

the gospel message by engaging in your church's social media campaign.

4. **eGiving.** The trend of giving tithe and offerings electronically, or e-giving, will continue to grow. Mobile tools make it much easier for members to donate on the go inside of a mobile app or from a mobile website.

Here are several reasons why your church should promote e-giving:

1. **Americans giving to ministries and charities through technology-enabled processes grew from \$250 million in 2000 to more than \$15 billion in 2008** (*Star Tribune* Minneapolis-St. Paul, October 11, 2009).
2. In their 2012 "State of the Plate" survey, *Christianity Today* noted that **"the way churches receive donations has shifted from the traditional 'envelope packets' toward electronic giving."** Of the more than 1,360 church leaders they surveyed, 92% said that they still pass the offering plate and a combined 47% said they offer online and cell phone giving options.
3. **You can do it anywhere.** Traveling church members, college students, and the sick and shut-in can give to their home church in absentia. And e-giving allows us to give in secret, as Jesus advised in Matthew 6:2.
4. **It expands the donor base.** Because givers need not be physically present, anyone who stumbles onto your website or church app may feel compelled to give. Also, guests attending a special event like a concert at your church may be more willing to give if they knew they could do so electronically.
5. **With e-giving, people give more, and more consistently.** Many people no longer use checks, or even carry cash, so if all they have in their wallet or purse is \$1, that's all they'll give. A church administrator in an article on

www.adventistchurchconnect.com calls it “wallet roulette.” In contrast, a church member can use an e-giving portal to automatically debit 10-15% (or whatever they decide) of their paycheck to the church. There are some potential drawbacks of e-giving: For most electronic transactions, the church will typically have to fork over a small percentage for the convenience; when you submit your financial and personal data to a website or app, you also have to hand over some trust to that third party. More amusingly, offertory time may lose its appeal, since the optics of empty offering plates (because your members are giving electronically) isn't very motivating.

Though it may seem trivial, pastors and church leaders would do well to keep the church board and the church body as a whole involved in the process of evaluating e-giving, or any mobile ministry, so there are no surprises at the end of the process.

Adventist Giving

The North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has created an online giving website called Adventist Giving. Through Adventist Giving, members can pay tithe and select where they want their offerings to go. Members have the option of paying tithe and offerings through debit or credit cards or using electronic checks.

All funds are routed through the local church and state-of-the-art security measures are in place to keep members' payment information secure. Only the church treasurer will have knowledge of members' giving, as is the case with regular cash and check contributions. Funds are sent to the church checking account electronically on a monthly cycle.

After receiving a monthly electronic report of all Adventist Giving transactions, the local church treasurer receipts the funds and incorporates this group of givers into the monthly report to the church and conference. The treasurer then disburses the contributions in harmony with the givers' intentions.

The overall cost for credit card transaction fees and other banking fees is shared by the local conference, the union, the North American Division, and the General Conference to ensure churches get full credit for members' contributions.

Visit www.adventistgiving.org to enroll your church.

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THE 12 COMMANDMENTS OF MOBILE MINISTRY

However you slice or dice it—10 Commandments is already taken—mobile ministry has its rules and best practices. Here are 12 Commandments you should obey when it comes to ensuring that your mobile ministry is successful, secure, and spam-free.

- I. **Thou shalt start NOW.** If you don't have a mobile website, then you're already behind. Start with that.
- II. **Thou shalt not spam.** Sending people information they didn't ask for is a surefire way to make them hate you.
- III. **Thou shalt not slander.** Especially on social media, it's easy to get carried away with opinions, and criticisms, and politicking. Don't make it personal; keep it professional. Keep it Godly.
- IV. **Thou shalt engage thy users.** Responding expeditiously to user comments is an easy way to endear them to you. People expect nothing less from mobile and social: your platforms are an invitation for them to engage you—at least they should be.
- V. **Thou shalt engage thy competition.** Churches and other Christian organizations and businesses have much to offer each other; primarily, each other's networks.
- VI. **Thou shalt test before launching.** Even though we recommend you start now, don't put out a product that is dead on arrival. Give them your best.

VII. Thou shalt integrate thy products. Make sure a link to your Facebook page is on your mobile website, and vice versa; in your SMS blast, include a link to download your mobile app.

VIII. Thou shalt draft a mobile use guideline for thy church. If you find that the use of mobile devices in church is becoming disruptive, post and announce some general rules. An easy one is: phones on mute or vibrate.

IX. Thou shalt draft a mobile ministry marketing strategy. Without a vision, the people perish.

X. Thou shalt protect thy brand. Constantly monitor and moderate your mobile and social platforms; there are people out there who have nothing better to do than slander your church's good name.

XI. Thou shalt use graphics, videos, and photos as much as possible. Unlike print, it doesn't cost much more to mix in some eye relief. But don't overdo it.

XII. Thou shalt hire or consult a professional. Do you know what SEO is? No? Then you should get a mobile marketing strategy specialist who can make your mobile strategy work for you, even when you're asleep.

WEB RESOURCES

Resources	Type	URL
	Comprehensive social network	www.facebook.com
Google+	Social media	plus.google.com
 <i>Instagram</i>	Photo-sharing platform	www.instagram.com
<i>Pinterest</i>	Photoblogging social network	www.pinterest.com
	Short message social network	www.twitter.com
 crossMRKT	All-in-one system communication	sybiota.com/jcrossmrkt/
 groupme	Group text-messaging platform	www.groupme.com
 hootsuite	Social media management system	www.hootsuite.com
	Church-focused technology blog	www.churchm.ag
Mashable All That's New on the Web	Technology blog	www.mashable.com

Resources	Type	URL
	Video sharing site	www.vimeo.com
	Video sharing site	www.youtube.com
	Domain/hosting provider	www.name.com
	Domain/hosting provider	www.missionwebs.com
	Blog/website platform	www.wordpress.com
Ellen G. White Books	Mobile app	search “EGW Writings” in iTunes or Google Play
	Bible memorization app and online resources	www.fightverses.com
Sabbath School Quarterly	Mobile app	search “Sabbath School” in iTunes or Google Play
	Tools for Adventist church ministry	www.adventsource.org
	Mobile app	www.youversion.com

Resources	Type	URL
 EVERNOTE	Note taking and archiving cloud application	www.evernote.com
	Note taking and archiving cloud application	www.springpad.com
 Dropbox	Cloud storage and file sharing	www.dropbox.com
	Cloud storage and file sharing	www.sugarsync.com
	Free websites for Adventist churches and schools	www.adventistchurchconnect.com

Mobile ministry is a relevant tool for such a time as this. Because of global connectivity, mobile technologies align perfectly with the Great Commission.

This manual was written to help you and your church cross the digital divide.

It introduces the spectrum of tools, techniques, and strategies that will transform your church into a mobile hotspot for your members, and for people around the world.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Joel J. Sam is a follower of Jesus, husband, and father of two girls. Sam has been helping small businesses and churches manage technology for over 14 years. He is also the co-founder of Symbiota (www.symbiota.com) which is passionate about helping churches and ministry organizations use technology effectively to spread the Gospel. Churches small and large across the U.S. have been blessed by his expertise and heart for ministry.



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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
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OFFICE OF COMMUNICATION

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