



1) If we want to engage with people online, we need to truly engage with people by using social media well, especially if it is for the sake of the Gospel! Using Twitter or Snapchat or Vine halfheartedly, without taking the time to interact with others online, or bothering to really learn about how to use it, is not effective and can even be a less-than-positive witness to the Gospel. When we learn how to use a particular platform well, we don't need to waste time on it trying to take in everything.

2) No one can engage with all social media well all the time, because every platform takes time and energy, and we have limited amounts of both that we can dedicate to social media. Even if we are responsible at work for a range of social media, we will have to choose which to give priority to, according to our purpose, who we want to reach, and how we want to reach them. Setting boundaries in using the internet becomes essential because the internet has so few boundaries.

3) Create a plan for your use of social media with the following 6 questions.

How is God inviting you to use social media?

Who are you trying to reach?

What are you trying to communicate?

Which social media platform(s) are best suited to: your personal communication style, your message, and your audience?

How much time can I afford to give to social media: daily? weekly? monthly?

When will you give myself a break from social media? (Breaks may be times—such as a day of the week or between 8 PM and 9 AM; or places—such as the dining room table and the bedroom.)

4) Use your social media plan to achieve your goals and to set healthy boundaries for yourself. While the nature of social media often means that there is cross-over between work and personal use, if you use social media for both you may wish to have two social media plans. Either way, setting limits (time, place, platform) and scheduling can be both helpful and essential. Shape your social media use to fulfill your goals.

Examples:

If an author is trying to network with like-minded authors and potential readers, many social media experts recommend Twitter. If we choose Twitter, we need to become active enough on it so we can learn how to reach our audience with our message effectively. No one needs to be on Twitter all day long, but a consistent presence is important. We might want to use a tool to schedule tweets through the day. We may want to set aside three fifteen-minute segments each day to tweet, read your feed, and retweet. We may decide to be on Twitter Monday-Friday, and take off the weekends or Sunday.

If we want to communicate with young people and one of our communication strengths is visual, we

may wish to make Instagram or Vine our primary platform, and post once a week, and view twice a week.

If we use social media to support an interest group (such as a bird-watching hobby), we may simply choose the platform that already has an active and inviting group with that interest. Our plan may be to check in with them weekly for an hour. Or we may choose to check in before and after a related event (such as each bird-watching expedition).

4) Reexamine your use of social media regularly, since social media trends and platforms are constantly changing. We may need to do so as often as every six months or maybe every couple of years. We can apply the principles of discernment to help us to grow in balancing our life better by asking several questions:

What are the positive effects for my using social media?

What are the negative effects of my using social media?

How has my use of social media affected the overall balance of my life?

What do I have too much of?

What do I have too little of?

Do I still make the kind of time I need for:

- \* My relationship with myself: silence, solitude, and time to think
- \* My relationship with my body: relaxing, exercise, sleep, spending time in nature, etc.
- \* My relationship with God: daily prayer, meditation and/or time to reflect, confession, Mass, and other forms of communal prayer
- \* My relationships with my loved ones: quality time with family and friends
- \* My life: being a truly engaged presence in daily life, without constant distractions or feeling scattered
- \* My community: offering a contribution to the community (parish, neighborhood, family, etc.)
- \* My work: being able to focus and effectively accomplish my responsibilities

How much use of the internet and social media feels right for me? Right now, is my use of media right “out of balance”? What do I need to put my life back into balance?

For further reflection, read Pope Benedict XIV’s Message for 46th World Day of Communications:

“I would like to share with you some reflections concerning an aspect of the human process of communication which, despite its importance, is often overlooked and which, at the present time, it would seem especially necessary to recall. It concerns the relationship between silence and word: two aspects of communication which need to be kept in balance, to alternate and to be integrated with one another if authentic dialogue and deep closeness between people are to be achieved. When word and silence become mutually exclusive, communication breaks down, either because it gives rise to confusion or because, on the contrary, it creates an atmosphere of coldness; when they complement one another, however, communication acquires value and meaning.” – Pope Benedict XIV’s Message for 46th World Day of Communications

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