

Sharing the Gospel Online

Several years ago at a BYU-Hawaii devotional, Elder Ballard asked the member of the Church to have an active voice in sharing the Gospel online. The internet has taken over our lives and is such an amazing blessing. The Lord created the internet for us to further His work on this earth. It is time for us to stand together and learn how to properly use the internet in sharing the gospel. The Church will continue to create ways for us to share neat things with our non-member friends but we need to realize that there are effective and then there are even more effective ways to share the Gospel with our friends.

Preparing your friends

Full-time missionaries learn that to properly invite somebody they must first prepare them to feel the Spirit and once they feel it, to then invite them. I find that we as member missionaries forget that we need to prepare our friends (have them feel the Spirit) before we invite (hand out a Book of Mormon, invite to Church, or meet with the missionaries). I believe we would be much more successful if we better prepared our non-member friends to accept an invitation by helping them first feel the Spirit. Many ways exist in which we can help our friends feel the Spirit but a Stake in Boston created one of the most non-threatening, easy ways for members to help their non-member friends feel the Spirit. This effort is run under the direction of what is called the Digital Mission. Parts of the Digital Mission are described in this section and I would invite each of you to come participate.

Internet makes sharing the gospel easier

One of the great innovations of Facebook and other social networks is that they let us satisfy our curiosity about the personal lives of others. People are surprisingly candid about their feelings regarding their work, hobbies, and families. Many share with hundreds of Facebook friends things that they would rarely share face to face. It is acceptable to be very candid online. This culture of openness makes it easier to talk about our faith. Faith is a very personal matter and this makes it interesting.

It is easy to extend non-threatening invitations through the internet. The Digital Mission created a few blogs where members of the Church can post Gospel related messages. The Mission invites every member of the Church to post a Gospel related message at least once a year. What is amazing is the Mission helps members turn this into unbelievable missionary opportunities. They ask that before you post a message (generally 500 to 700 words) you send it to a non-member friend. You explain to your friend that your Church asked you to write a post on a Mormon blog which is targeted to people who are not members of your faith. Because your friend is not a member of your faith, you would like them to read your post to make sure a member of another faith will understand the message you are trying to convey. You will ask them to see if they understand your message and if they have any comments on how to improve it. This is an amazing opportunity for members because it allows them to share something personal and Spiritual with a non-member friend in a very non-threatening way because it allows them time to consider exactly what they want to say to their friend to give them an opportunity to feel the Spirit. The friend in turn could take the time they need to think about their response to the member. This opportunity for their friend is amazing because most people close up when religion is brought up but when in an act of service; their heart opens to truly understand the message which in turn will make it easier for them to feel the Spirit. The internet makes it easier to fine-tune the directness of our invitations as guided by the Spirit. The most compelling posts on the blogs are those where the author shares something deeply personal about themselves, their faith and their relationship with God.

The internet allows us to interact with many more people. Many members have been able to reconnect and ask help from friends that they have not seen for many years and who even live on different continents. The Digital Mission blogs have reached people in 100 different countries and there have been hundreds of thousands of page views. The internet helps us interact with people across time and space in a way that is nothing short of miraculous when compared to every other dispensation. Blogs are open to everyone and will reach people that we do not know and who may have never met a Mormon before in their lives.

Can my child share the Gospel?

Anybody who has or spends time with children knows that they have more faith and trust in God than most adults. Pure faith changes lives and if focused on sharing the Gospel will create miracle after miracle. Just think about this when nine year old Annie shares a personal experience she had with prayer with her non-member friend Dora. Probably within a few days a situation in Dora's family will arise where Dora will say, 'why don't we pray about it?' Dora's parents will think to themselves, 'prayer, we haven't taught her about this.' As they figure out she learned about this from her nine year old friend they will be impressed and this will most likely lead to missionary opportunities.

Another approach is for nine year old Annie to write a post about a Gospel topic which means something to her. Annie's parents explain to some non-member friends of theirs that their Church asked their daughter to write this post and if they would read it and let them know what they think. It does not matter what faith these friends come from, they will be impressed that nine year old Annie knows and understands these sorts of things which will easily lead to Gospel related talks with these friends. This process is so easy and non-threatening.

Following up

Another extremely important part of missionary work which is sometimes lost when sharing the Gospel online is the follow up. It is vital to follow up with our friends after they provide feedback. There is no universal way to follow up; it has to be done under the direction of the Spirit. I recommend working with your Ward Mission Leader and/or missionaries on how to follow up with your friend. But one easy way to start the conversation is to send them a thank you with a link to your post after it is officially linked on the blog or just post directly to their facebook wall. When some members have thanked their friend for helping them, they added in a 'hey if there's anything you see on the blog which you do not understand or what to know more about, please let me know.' Or more directly, 'what on the blog did you find interesting or would like to know more about?' Again, this is a very non-threatening way to share the Gospel and start conversations with friends.

What if I do not have non-member friends?

Some members of the Church have limited access to people who are not members and because of this are not able to receive the blessings one gets when they share the Gospel. The Digital Mission found that some of their missionaries felt this way. What they did was found a topic they were passionate about or through prayer and inspiration were guided to a specific topic. They searched for blogs and websites about this topic and provided comments and posed questions on these random blogs/websites. They would then explain that they were asked to write a post for their Church on that specific topic and would really appreciate some feedback before they posted their message. In almost all situations, the digital missionaries were able to find a few non-members to read their messages.

Online contact can lead to personal interaction

Ordinances of salvation cannot be administered online but sharing the gospel online can directly lead to personal interactions. Several digital missionaries noticed that they now talk to more people about the gospel in everyday situations. Sometimes online contact does not lead to a face-to-face conversation but can still be very personal and bring people closer to Christ. By asking for feedback on posts, we can gain valuable insights and make our online interactions more understandable and engaging. At the same time our friends have an opportunity to sacrifice some of their time in serving others. This will help them feel the Spirit.

Online missionary work does not need new programs or new types of callings. Ward mission plans can include online opportunities. Ward missionaries can share the gospel online as part of their callings. More importantly, they can function like the ward family history consultants. The calling of a family history consultant is not to do the family history of the ward members for them but to help them do it themselves. Likewise, ward missionaries can learn how to share the gospel online and then serve as consultants teaching the ward members how to do it. This can build ward unity and create a sense of common purpose as ward members learn from each other about best ways to share their faith and invite others to help them do it.