

In 2019, the Church of England's digital team spent 254 hours training churches, guiding 1170 churches through 35 day-long training sessions on an introduction to social media and websites, bringing hundreds of churches together for our Labs Learning Roadshows and hosting individuals on our webinars to find out more about our church-finder tool, A Church Near You.

We also wrote 42 Labs Learning blogs, covering a range of digital topics for churches to engage with, such as how-to guides for Instagram Stories,

even a self-care guide, exploring how to look after yourself on social



Read all our [Labs Learning blogs here](#).

So why does the Church of England invest in these projects?

In 2019, there were 38.5 million page views on [A Church Near You](#), 100,000 questions were asked of the Church of England via Alexa, our apps were accessed more than five million times and more than 90 per cent of people said our Lent and Easter campaigns brought them closer to God.

Digital offers us a unique opportunity to meet people where they are, invite them into our worshipping communities and bring them closer to God.

Is your church ready to make the most of this incredible tool in 2020?

We've collated a list of trends we think you should be exploring over the next 12 months as you plan how you'll be using social media and websites as a part of your church's mission.

Which of our 2020 trends will you try?

Stories

Instagram Stories were a key tool for social media users and the brands trying to communicate with them in 2019, and they're set to grow in 2020. Few brands are using Facebook Stories, so this is an easy way to ensure you're seen by your followers before the industry catches up. Find out how to [share a Story here](#).

Stories offer a more personal view of a church than the pictures posted to your Facebook page or Instagram feed. This ephemeral content is a growing trend, as because it only lasts for 24 hours, businesses, charities and our churches are using Stories to show a more authentic, less polished look at daily life, such as a behind the scenes look at church life or snippets from the vicar's day.

HAVE A GO: Many people have never been to a church, and it can be daunting to walk into one of our buildings. Can you break down the walls by showing people what goes on during Sunday services and all the events throughout the week? Try a mixture of short videos – the limit per Story is 15 seconds – and photos. Try adding text to explain what's happening, remember that most people watch Stories on their phone without headphones.

- **Making the most of Instagram Stories**

Video content

Again, our love of video on social media is nothing new, but this trend doesn't show signs of going anywhere. In fact, by 2022, 82 per cent of all content is expected to be video, according to a Cisco study.

But do remember, while research shows that we might be willing to watch a video where the picture quality is less than perfect, we won't accept poor sound quality.

If you're new to social media and videos, consider going Live. Going live on Facebook and Instagram is a free way to make videos. It's also particularly useful for reaching a younger audience, as the 25-34 age group watches the most online videos, and engagement – likes, comments, shares on a post – is three times higher on a live video than a pre-recorded one. Read our guide to going live on Facebook and Instagram [here](#).

HAVE A GO: Going live means any mistakes are excused and the quality doesn't have to be perfect. We've seen some great examples from churches, from informal chats with the vicar about prayer, discipleship or a local issue to an interview with members of the church about their own faith journey. Many now broadcast sermons on Facebook Live to allow those who couldn't attend the service to participate.

- [How to use Instagram Live](#)
- [Using Live Video](#)
- [How to set up and record a video on your smartphone](#)

Likes will be removed on Instagram

Instagram is already trialling the removal of likes on posts in Australia, and it looks set to hit the UK in 2020. This is to create a “less pressurised environment where people feel comfortable expressing themselves”. While the algorithm will still use engagement rates to weight content – or in other words, the more people like and comment on your posts, the more likely other users will find your content – it means your followers won’t know if your post isn’t performing well.

The good news is this won’t affect analytics for brands. Have you turned your church’s Instagram account into a business page yet? Doing so gives you access to your account’s insights. Find out how to do that in our blog [here](#).

HAVE A GO: When this launches in Europe, think about what you would like to post if you weren’t concerned about people not liking it. Would you like to trial a [new theme on the grid](#) or post more photos of the people in your community rather than just the building? This will be a great opportunity to try new things and then see what works for your account – and stick to it.

- [Creating a consistent style on Instagram](#)
- [How to create a free Instagram profile and business profile](#)
- [Understanding Insights](#)

Influencer marketing

Influencers were king in 2019, with many major brands ditching traditional advertising with celebrities in favour of paying ‘influencers’ – social media followers with a large following – to talk about their products on a video, wear their clothes in a photo on social media and recommend a company in a comment to their followers. However, this idea doesn’t have to cost the earth, or just be used to encourage people to spend money.

In fact, the rise of micro-influencers is a positive trend for the Church. Rather than focussing on people with millions of followers, many brands are opting for social media users that focus on a niche topic, as despite having a smaller follower base, these followers are often more engaged.

HAVE A GO: Think about influential accounts, pages or groups in your community. Is there a Facebook group with hundreds of members, or a local shop that has a lot of followers? If someone shared about your Easter service on this page, people are likely to listen if it’s endorsed by this trusted account.

So, invite members of the group or the page’s admin along! Drop off an invite to the person who runs an organisation's social media and tell them you’d love to see them there. Include something photo-worthy with a hashtag to encourage them to share it. Flowers or chocolate work well!

Analytics

Don’t do more in 2020, just do better. Monitoring your analytics is the way to ensure you learn more about your audience and discover trends on what kind of posts your followers engage with most.

Read our blog about which analytics to monitor on social media [here](#), and get smarter with what you’re posting and when. If your followers tend to be online at 8pm in the evening, ensure you’re scheduling an evening post at that time. If people aren’t responding to posts you’re sharing with pictures without people in, could you try to build up a bank of photos of your community to ensure you have options for future posts?

HAVE A GO: Put an appointment in your diary for every three to six months to check your analytics, and write three lessons these analytics show you. Try compiling these into one report to track your progress over the year.

- [How to show the value of social media for your church](#)
- [Understanding Facebook Insights](#)

Social media for customer service

‘Customer service’ might seem like a funny thing for churches to consider, but just like brands and business, churches can use social media to answers questions and engage with potential visitors. More than a quarter of consumers in the UK used social media to communicate with a business in 2019. Unlike traditional ways of getting in touch, such as by phone, letter and even email, social media makes this engagement visible to others too, so doing it well is key.

We all know that bad customer service can put a customer off a brand. What can the Church learn from this? If you offer helpful information, sound positive and tell people they’re welcome to attend your church services and events, there’s more of a chance they will!

A timely response to a user’s comment is key – whether the comment is positive or negative. In 2019, we saw some great examples of churches using Facebook and Twitter to respond to people, like a church who were tweeted by a mother who attended a Sunday service and had complaints about the provision for children. Rather than leave this complaint, or respond in a defensive way, they tweeted: *“We are so sorry that you had this experience. We would love to chat with you about what we could do to make a future visitor better for your family. Could you send us a DM (direct message) with your contact details so we can be in touch?”*

HAVE A GO: Have a schedule for monitoring your social media accounts, so that users’ comments aren’t left too long without a response. Is there a team of you that could take it in turns to check the accounts each day? If you’re looking after your church’s social accounts alone, could you commit to checking once a day, or another regular pattern that is manageable for you?

Local content

Personalised content is key for 2020, and people increasingly expect to see content that is right for them – such as targeted adverts showing products they use from brands they like. What does this mean for churches? People want relevant and accessible content – and that means *local*.

There's a number of tricks brands are using that we can mirror as we look ahead to 2020. How can you ensure your posts are having their maximum reach locally?

Geo-tagging posts and stories will automatically attract a local audience. Have you tried adding a location to your post on platforms like Instagram? You can either select your village, town, city or get more specific – tagging your church itself. This will help local people find your content.

Tagging your location works especially well when boosting a post. Find out how to do that on our [Labs Learning blog about Facebook ads](#).

Many people also follow local hashtags on Instagram, so have a look at the hashtags local businesses and organisations are using and think about trying them out.

HAVE A GO: Add a location to all of your usual posts for the next week. If it's a church service you're promoting, tag the church itself, and it's a community event try tagging your town. See if this helps increase your engagement.

- [How to boost a Facebook post](#)

Social listening

Do you know who your ‘audience’ is? This might sound like a question better suited to brands than churches, but if you don’t know who you’re talking to, it’s hard to ensure you’re sharing posts that they will engage with.

Listening to followers, or the kind of people you would love to engage with on your page, is key. What are they talking about, what issues do they care about and what tools are they using? Think about three key audiences you would like to reach, and ensure you’re tailoring you’re posts to these kinds of people.

Responding to local issues or concerns could help you to reach new people, like [St Mark’s, Pennington](#), who have become known locally for their care for the environment and their activism.

HAVE A GO: If you’re a family church, or know that there are families in your community that you would love to welcome into your events and services, think about how you can write posts for parents. To better get to know them, join local Facebook groups for parents.

If you have a lot of B&B owners in your neighbourhood, follow the local tourist hashtags that they are likely to be using.

If you are in a commuter belt and would like to speak to local professionals, think about the times of day these users might be most active on social media and see what they’re sharing.

- [How St Marks in Pennington is using Facebook to reach their community](#)
- [Understanding your audience on social media](#)
- [Our top five tips to develop an effective church digital strategy](#)

Limit your posts and include questions

More is not always better.

The algorithm on all social media platforms rewards pages or profiles that share content that is consistently engaged with by their followers. As our lives are busier than ever, some people feel overwhelmed by social media. How can we share posts that add value, rather than just fill a feed?

Another trend predicted for 2020 is digital detoxing, but our love for social doesn't mean people are going to turn away from digital altogether.

It's key that we remember the social part of social media – are you encouraging conversation with your followers? Not only will this help them to better get to know you – and you better get to know them – but it will also increase the engagement on your posts, helping the platform, such as Facebook, know that your page is worthwhile to push to other people's newsfeeds, helping more people to see your content.

HAVE A GO: Have a schedule for your posts and stick to it. Don't share 15 posts across the Christmas week and then not post again until Lent.

Ensure there's consistency with the frequency of your posts.

Try to add a question to at least 80 per cent of your posts! If you're sharing about your Sunday services, ask who's coming along this week, or who they're bringing with them. If you're letting people know about your carol service, ask your followers what their favourite carol service is. If you're reflecting on how brilliant the bring-and-share lunch was, ask who will be coming along to the next one, or what their favourite dish was!

Emojis

If we're trying to keep our posts short, emojis are a great way of communicating in just one character. The most used emoji is the heart eyes ?, but there are hundreds to choose from to suit a range of sentiments.

HAVE A GO: Could you add an emoji to the next post you're sharing? Whether it's illustrating what you're saying, adding humour or used instead of any text at all if the picture you're posting doesn't need an explanation!

You could also use emojis to reply to comments left on your post, or to comment on other people's or pages' posts. For example, if another church in your Benefice shares a picture of their cake sale, you could use the cake emoji to comment. If someone tags you in their post saying how lovely the wedding they attended at your church was, you could use the bride, groom, prayer hands or even a church emoji!

Play around and see what could work for you.

User-generated content

This is not a new trend, but it's a brilliant way of getting more, and better, content for all your social media channels and websites, and something else churches should try in 2020.

Brands have really got behind user-generated content, or UGC, in 2019, and some, such as the [UK eBay account on Instagram](#), almost exclusively share photos from their followers.

HAVE A GO: While considering safeguarding and GDPR, how could you use photos and videos from your congregation and followers on social media to give users a real flavour of what your community get up to?

This could be photos of your Sunday services, a behind the scenes look at the midweek groups or even some videos from your young people showing what activities they've been involved in this week!

- [What is user generated content and how can you share it?](#)

Leverage the power of carousels

While Stories now reign supreme on Instagram, your church's grid still matters. Four in 10 people use social media to research a brand, so users are likely to look at your grid to get an idea of your community. What would they see currently?

You can post both photos and videos on the Instagram grid, and you can also post a carousel – multiple photos in one post. Data shows these get the highest engagement on Instagram, with followers more likely to engage by liking or commenting on your post.

HAVE A GO: If you haven't tried the carousel feature, now's the time. You could show the highlights of all your Christmas services and events, thanking all those who came along and inviting them to come back again this Sunday. If you've had some work done on your building, you could give people a tour with some great photos of the renovation – remember it's good to show your community, so potential people can see who makes up your church.

And remember...

- Get your ratios right. Find out what size images work for each platform [here](#).
- Every page, account or grid is different. Experiment and find out what works for you.
- This is a missional activity. You're not doing this for likes, you're working to grow your worshipping community and encourage more people into your church.
- Have a go! Just by having a go and using these platforms, you're already doing well. Sign up to our monthly Labs Latest blogs to ensure you're receiving help with the latest trends and new features from the Church of England.

Conclusion

As the world becomes more familiar with the role of digital, social media users are becoming savvier and more demanding in what they expect from brands, organisations and even churches. It's not about doing more, it's about doing better and ensuring that:

- **You know who you're sharing for.** Have you considered your audiences and spent some time getting to know what they're interested in?
- **You know why you're sharing.** Does this meet the wider goals of your church?
- **You know how to share.** You're regularly checking your analytics and statistics that are available via social media and on [A Church Near You](#) and targeting your posts accordingly.

Could you commit to trying at least three of these trends during the first few months of 2020?

And what can you expect from the Church of England in 2020 on websites and social media?

We'll continue to produce a number of national campaigns, with reflections available on the app, via email and on smart speakers, along with high-quality resources available for churches, like our social media graphics, logos and other design assets and professionally produced, personalised videos through our [video generator tool](#). Find out more about [Everyday Faith](#) and [#LiveLent](#).

As an increasing number of churches use [A Church Near You](#), we will continue to develop the site to ensure it works for you. Following the creation of [Benefice homepages](#) in 2019, we will be working on new functionality to make it easier to keep multiple pages up to date and give visitors more information about the group of churches. We will also develop the [Resource Hub](#) to become a one-stop-shop for church stock photography, free resources and videos for you to use across your digital platforms.

The audio trend will continue in 2020, and we have some exciting plans to build on the success of our [Alexa and Google Home skills](#) to help more people engage with our prayers, reflections and information about the Christian faith.

Is there any you think we've missed? We'd love to hear from you on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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