TEN TOP TIPS FOR KEEPING AND ENGAGING WITH NEW DIGITAL AUDIENCES AS WE EMERGE FROM LOCKDOWN

One of the great successes of lockdown was the way in which our churches adapted to using new technology to reach their congregations. As our church communities make sense of life after lockdown our church leaders are now in possession of some interesting facts about online audiences and how to keep interacting with them as well as continueing with traditional real life audiences. Amber Jackson has put together some top tips, designed to assist all to keep in touch with any new and/or emerging audiences.

1. In a GDPR complaint way, find out who has been accessing your worship online and make contact with them. Remember: some will wish to remain anonymous, but some will not. Can you ask them for feedback by sending out a brief survey?<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/top-tips-your-next-church-survey>
2. Make sure that your Homepage is up to date and try to keep it up to date.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/designing-effective-home-page-your-church-website>

If you have a parish weekly email, then include the subscription details on the homepage. It’s always really helpful to remember that the people visiting your parish homepage may not have the inside track on what is going on and when! It’s also important to note that the majority of web users are accessing the internet from their mobile telephones first. Are your webpages mobile device friendly?

1. Get strategic. Now is the time to be planning your digital strategy, not just for key festivals and projects but also for everyday Church activities.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/2021-social-media-calendar>

What resources do you need?

Spend some time reviewing what has worked and what has not.

Can you recruit from your wider community, perhaps from non-church goers to help with your comms?

Is your comms plan fit for the next phase of ministry and based around the 4 Ms:

Message – What do you need to say?

Market – Who do you need to reach?

Media – Where can you find them?

Moment – When is it best to find them?

The media form that you choose to use will be defined by the market you are trying to reach and the message that you are trying to convey. See here for more information:

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/so-everyone-can-hear>

What are you intending to offer the members of your community who are not online and who can easily feel forgotten or neglected?

Plus, it’s always worth thinking about impact:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/our-top-five-tips-develop-effective-church-digital-strategy>

1. Pray online in real time, regularly. Research indicates that many people in our communities are looking for spiritual guidance and help with prayer. It’s worth remembering how helpful it can be to teach people how they might pray on a regular basis. Perhaps consider setting up a space online for regular prayer?

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/tearfund-covid-19-prayer-public-omnibus-research/>

<https://www.24-7prayer.com/virtualprayerrooms>

<http://downloads.24-7prayer.com/pdf/Lectio%20365/Coronavirus%20Lectio%20365%20Week%20PDF.pdf>

1. Get creative and go younger.

Consider gathering the most creative members of your community, including children and young people, to dream dreams about how your digital content may creatively help to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

It’s worth asking two key questions: ‘How can we make this better for people who don’t know Jesus?’ and How can we build healthy community online?

<https://www.youthscape.co.uk/coronavirus>

<https://theconversation.com/how-to-build-community-while-worshipping-online-134977>

<https://www.thesofasingers.com>

<https://www.holytrinitysouthwell.co.uk/minecraft-youth-group/>

1. Share and discuss different online tools with your faith neighbours and perhaps work together to put in place a good shared database of online resources, that work well for your context and are ready to be deployed, no matter what the circumstances. Have a contingency plan and a crisis plan, for the times that things may go wrong! Make sure that everyone knows who to contact and when and have a back-up. It’s never a good idea if just one person handles all of the comms. Keep reviewing what you are doing and whether it is effective.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/31-amazing-tools-and-resources-support-your-online-or-offline-church>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/lessons-lockdown-covid-19-has-taught-us-importance-holding-things>

Don’t forget resources to encourage giving and always try to signpost how people can get involved:

https://www.parishresources.org.uk/encouraging-giving-online/

1. Don’t forget Digital Discipleship. There will be some who will not wish to come to church in person for services but who may wish to discover more about Jesus Christ. Perhaps consider creating modular learning units that people can access online in their own time to discover more about Jesus Christ. Remember: The Church is never offline! Consider using / linking to a wide range of resources, across a range of different mediums and keep it relevant and up to date. For example,

 <https://www.nomadpodcast.co.uk>

<https://www.instagram.com/thewayuk/?hl=en-gb>

1. It’s worth stopping to consider what content needs broadcasting and what is best suited for social media. Broadcast media works when getting a message out and for the consumption of content. Social media is there to spark a conversation and create social and relational connections – it is a two-way process! For example, you might consider using Facebook Live for follow up sessions after services to provide a much more interactive space to discuss a sermon or to engage in Bible study. It’s worth remembering that the more your own users ‘Like’ and comment on your content, the wider it is distributed. It’s also helpful to consider using cost effective paid adverts on Social Media to get the word out about your regular services and activities, not just your special events.
2. Go hyper local. Consider setting up an online community hub for issues relating to your community but make sure you make clear what the ground rules are for good engagement! Focus on issues that matter for the communities that you serve and aim to forge and to lead a welcoming inclusive community where all can access relevant content. Local stories are good for attracting positive attention. Also, consider partnering with other organisations as you seek to help to meet local needs. Share good news – we all need it!

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/digital-trends-churches-should-take-notice-2021>

<https://www.eidoresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-State-of-Christian-Organisations-Eido-Research-and-YourNeighbour.org_.pdf>

1. Where you can, keep going hybrid. Try to formulate a plan that works both for people in Church and online. It’s vital that we include all audiences including children and young people and those not online. Consider running classes, when it is safe to do so, to help connect those not yet on the internet in your communities. It’s really important to remember that online Church is just as important as Church in a Church building for many, many people!

https://www.churchof england.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/nine-tips-planning-your-online-service

<https://www.allchurches.co.uk/advice-and-resources/how-to-engage-young-people-in-church-after-lockdown/>

*Please do share with us what your plans, ideas and tips are for engaging with new digital audiences as we emerge from lockdown!*