

TECHNOLOGY FOR *MINISTRY*



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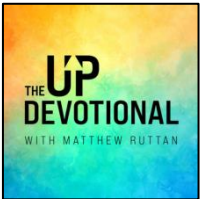

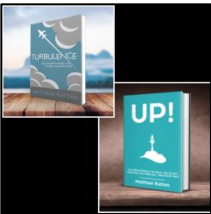



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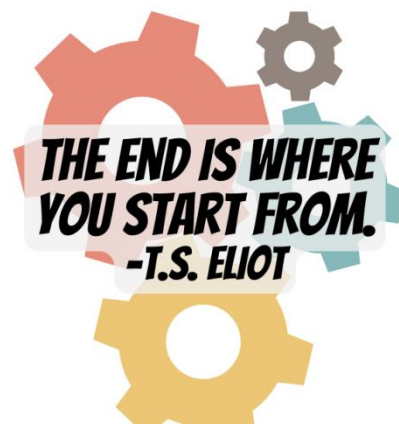
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Matthew Ruttan's Contact Information and Online Ministry

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	<p>Online Home Base <i>MatthewRuttan.com</i></p> <p>This is my online home base where you can access The Up Daily Devotional, The Pulse Podcast with Matthew Ruttan, sermons, books, blogs, music, and videos.</p>
	<p><i>The Up Daily Devotional</i> <i>TheUpDevo.com</i></p> <p>This is a daily devotional that I write 5 days a week (Monday-Friday) which can be read or listened to in a minute or two. "Espresso for the soul." –John Vissers</p> <p>It is published over email, social media, on the Life Radio Network (Central Ontario), and as a podcast (Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Audible, Google Podcasts...)</p>
	<p><i>The Pulse Podcast with Matthew Ruttan</i> <i>https://matthewruttan.com/thepulsepodcast/</i> <i>Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Audible, Google Podcasts, etc.</i></p> <p>This podcast is about living abundantly wholeheartedly. It includes feature talks, interviews, and weekly biblical studies.</p>
	<p>Books <i>Amazon, Kindle, Chapters...</i> Visit MatthewRuttan.com for purchase options. I have written two books based on The Up Daily Devotional. Both are published by Thicket Books.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2018 – "Up! 313 Devotionals to help you start your day in a biblical, relevant way." • 2020 – "Turbulence: Devotionals to steady you through the storms of life."
	<p><i>The Word at Westminster</i> <i>The Podcast of Westminster Presbyterian Church (Barrie, Canada)</i> <i>Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Audible, Google Podcasts, etc...</i></p> <p>This podcast includes talks, sermons, interviews, and special features.</p>

Strategy: “The end is where you start from” (T.S. Eliot)



Mission Statement:

- Know your church’s mission statement. How does your use of technology and the internet contribute to that mission? Build your strategy around *that*. Don’t be random.

Include appropriate decision-makers:

- There can be a temptation to make decisions about the use of your church’s technology (or the internet/social media) by yourself since you are often sitting there alone on your phone or computer.
- Online ministry *is one of the most highly visible aspects of your church’s life*. Include the appropriate decision-makers (elders, deacons, staff?) in big picture processes and strategy.
- Estimate a budget and ensure it is included in the annual budgetary process.

Guidelines:

- When it comes to sharing content *establish guidelines*. Here are some examples.
- On social media, who moderates (i.e. approves or responds to) comments through the day, and then on evenings and weekends? This is important to think about because online comments can sometimes be upsetting or require significant thought to respond—this is an area which can easily upset people and derail down-time.
- Who can share content to the Facebook Group? This should not be ‘open,’ meaning that people can submit a picture or post, but it needs to first be approved by an approved ‘Admin.’ What is on your page or group says something about your community.
- What kind of pictures or comments can be shared on the church’s Facebook page?
- If someone submits a post or picture to the Facebook group, and if it is not appropriate, who responds to tell them why? Our policy at Westminster is that if someone submits a picture or comment which isn’t appropriate, an Admin reaches out right away to explain why (clarity is important).
- Who updates the website? (In addition, ensure you have a computer or tech company at-the-ready to troubleshoot problems. Know how much they cost for hourly work.)
- More guidelines will be shared in other sections.

Weekly Online Schedules:

- It can be helpful to have a weekly online schedule which shows what will be shared and where. This can keep you on track instead of a wing-it-as-you-go approach (which is more likely to stray from your strategic goals). For example...

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Facebook	Volunteer thank you	Bible verse	Link to sermon	n/a	Upcoming food drive	Youth Gp reminder	Service reminder
Instagram	Volunteer thank you	n/a	(story: pic from picnic)	Upcoming food drive	Youth group reminder	Youth Gp reminder	Service reminder
Push Notification (smart phone)	Theme for service	Link to sermon	Blog re: prayer	Link to video	Prayer requests	Youth Gp reminder	Service reminder

What to share: “Don’t waste good content.”

You’re most likely already creating helpful and hopeful content. Don’t waste it!

Most of what you share should be in line with your focus and mission as a church.



Sermons

- Videos or audio clips of fully recorded sermons or short clips. Short clips can be used in Instagram or Facebook ‘stories.’ Full sermons can be posted on YouTube and shared on social media pages or as a podcast.
- Snippets: Is there a good quote that was used in a sermon or Bible study which could be shared again with others online?

Bible verses

- These are always popular, because they are from God’s word!
- You can use a graphics website (like canva.com) to easily create graphics that are visually pleasing.

Music

- Are you learning a new praise song? Share a link to it online so people get used to it before they arrive at the Sunday service.

Children’s Time

- Many churches have some version of this. If the service is recorded, it can be re-shared for those who weren’t there.
- This content can also be re-produced as a short blog or podcast if the teaching would be helpful to a wider audience.

Pictures

- People enjoy seeing other people volunteering or contributing to a special project (community BBQ, outreach initiative, etc.)
- Ensure permissions are obtained (see section about privacy below).

Other helpful resources

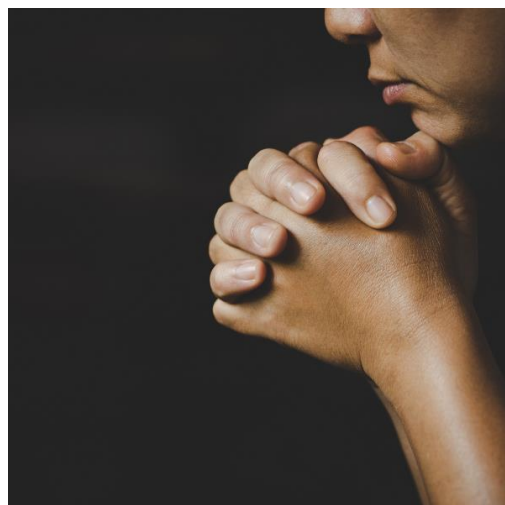
- You don’t have to be the author/originator of the content you share.
- Have you come across a blog or podcast from someone else that others would benefit from? Perhaps from a helpful speaker or an episode of Focus on the Family or other ministry?
- Have you read a book that addresses a helpful, faith-related issue? Share a link to it or a quote from it.
- These ideas are only the tip of the iceberg.

The Leader's Well-Being: The Parson

Parson - One of the older titles for the pastor/minister/priest was a "parson," the person. The ultimate person is Christ himself, but the parson was (and is) not only "Christ's person," but an *example* to the flock.

Wellness - As such, the leader needs to:

- a. Be well as a servant of the Lord
- b. Guard themselves against fatigue and burnout
- c. Avoid the pitfalls of online ministry (misuse and abuse)
- d. Set an example around healthy boundaries and rest



Suggestions -

- Model the light of Christ online:
 - Only say what you would say face-to-face and in-person.
 - Use the 24-hour rule when upset (don't respond right away); our first *reaction* isn't always our best *response*.
 - Don't get sucked into negative online debates around secondary (non-essential) issues; this is a massive pitfall (and time-waster) for leaders.
 - Don't keep your social media tabs open all the time; this increases the temptation to distraction. Only have one tab open at a time and close your email account when not actively using it. Otherwise we lose focus.
- Set online 'office hours,' i.e. only check email and social media between 9am and 5pm, and educate your other leaders and the congregation that you are doing so
- Use an email autoresponder when you are away (and even on weekends). This will lessen the pressure to check in because people know you won't get back to them until Monday or Tuesday. There are also auto-responders for the messaging functions on Facebook and Instagram.
- Turn email and social media notifications 'off.' The little red number icon is meant to get you back into the app. Only go into an app/website when you plan to do so.
- *Never* check email and social media right before bed or as soon as you get up (that's where the 'scud missiles' tend to come in!)

Text messaging

- People have different approaches to this. I do not give out my text number to congregants. I give it to elders and staff, but tell them to only use it if it is an emergency or if something is time-sensitive. Texting can be a serious source of anxiety which disturbs downtime and family time.
- Do you like this idea but have already given your number out to everyone? I have a suggestion. Get a new number and start fresh! ☺
- This is an act of care—not only to them but to yourself and family.
- During family or alone time turn to silent.

The Website: Keep it simple

Websites are less important than they were 10 years ago (in my opinion) because social media has become more prominent as a source of information. However, they are still used a lot.

For many, the website is the new 'front door' of a church, including for seniors. People tend to 'visit' a church online before they commit to show up in-person (which can be an intimidating experience).



Things to keep in mind:

- KISS. Keep it simple, _____!
- Gear the site more toward 'outsiders' than 'insiders.'
- Clean, clear and easy-to-navigate is a good policy.
- Include the location, phone number, and service time. Surprisingly, these basics are often missed.
- Include some sort of faith statement that tells newcomers your general theological outlook. "Christian" is too broad a category to be helpful to many people.
- Have a basic program listing and also some basic information about what to expect on a Sunday morning visit (how long the service is, is there a screen, is there Sunday School, what people wear, where to go when you arrive at the building if it isn't clear, etc.) For many newcomers, walking into a church for the first time can be intimidating; clear and straightforward information can help with this.
- Make it easy to find your sermon videos or live-stream if you have that. Some people will want to know what the teaching is like before they show up.
- If possible ensure your website is 'mobile friendly.' This means that when people find your site on their smart phone it will look good (instead of tiny print with tiny buttons which are difficult to navigate). At Westminster, we have data which tells us that most of the people visiting our website are using their smart phones (i.e. they are not sitting at a desk with a big computer or laptop). So ensure it looks decent and clear for those users.

Honesty:

- Don't misrepresent yourself. If you are a church of 80 people on a Sunday morning, don't include a picture of 1000 worshipping with hands in the air at a praise concert. People value honesty and will feel like you are misleading them. Put your best foot forward, but make sure it's *your* foot.

Group Email: Email is King

King - I'm convinced that email continues to be King, meaning that it's the best way to get a lot of information to people quickly and cheaply. Social media algorithms are tricky things. Email bypasses that and is delivered directly to your intended recipient in a more reliable fashion. Younger generations (below 30) tend to use email less than older generations, but they still tend to check it occasionally; they often have email accounts linked to their school.



Consent - Only use email addresses if you've been given consent. Create a sign-up list or email people individually (not necessarily you, but an office worker or other volunteer).

Purpose - A weekly email can:

- Connect regularly with those who aren't there every Sunday. (10-point font in a weekly bulletin just isn't cutting it anymore when it comes to informing the congregation about what's happening.)
- Include the main information from the Sunday bulletin.
- Include links to other helpful content (blogs, interviews, etc.)
- Tell people what to expect this coming Sunday (which people tend to appreciate; i.e. reminder about Sunday's theme, the last day to contribute to the food drive, Sunday School teacher commissioning, etc.)

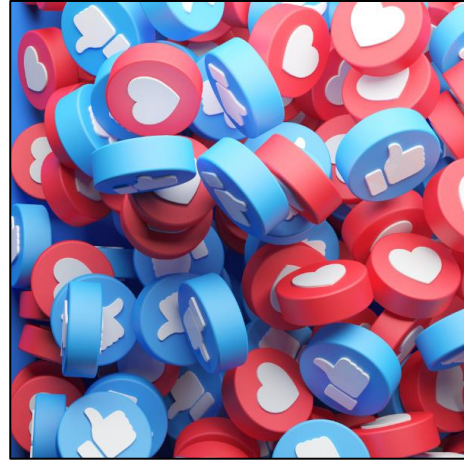
Method - You or an office worker (or volunteer or elder) can create and manage an email list. Be sure to 'blind CC' the group so that emails aren't shared with others. You can also use a service like Mailchimp (which I/we use) which handles sign-ups and unsubscribes by itself.

Oops - Don't start to CC (copy) or BCC (blind carbon copy) someone else *in the middle of an email conversation you're already having with someone else*. That person may have said things they only wanted you to hear. Introducing a third party in the middle of an email conversation is generally considered bad online manners.

Social Media: Stay focused

The social media landscape is always changing. Different age demographics tend to use different platforms. It's important to stay focussed on social media: *it can become a time-sucking vortex!*

Definitions - In general, social media refers to apps/platforms where people can share content (pictures, comments, links) with other people on their network list.



Major platforms -

- Facebook is still very widely used, but increasingly by an older demographic. Millennials and people in Gen Z may have Facebook accounts but they tend to use them less.
- Instagram is, in a way, the new Facebook in that it has many users and is the preferred app of many people. Younger and older demographics are here, but you can't share links to external sources.
 - Note: Both Facebook and Instagram are owned by Meta.
 - Note: You can share links on Facebook but not on Instagram. If you are sharing a link, your post will appear less frequently in people's social media feeds. Why? Because Facebook and Instagram *want to keep you in the app for as long as possible!* They are less likely to promote content that takes users to another website.
- X is the new name for Twitter. It is widely used but is less interactive. Information is more one-way.
- Threads is fairly new. It is like Meta wanted its own version of Twitter. It's hard to know what will happen with this or if it will persist.
- There are others: TikTok, SnapChat, LinkedIn, etc...

Social Media Managers – For people who post a lot of online content, they might benefit from a 'social media manager.' This is a program, not a person. When you use it, you can upload and schedule different kinds of content (pictures, links, comments) at different times of the day and on different social media platforms/sites. That way you can streamline your time by using one interface instead of many. Examples are Buffer, Hootsuite, Metricool, etc. There are basic plans which are free; if you want to connect to multiple channels, it may cost you some money. You can also pay for a feature which gives you a report about how many views/impressions/interactions your post received on various platforms/apps.

YouTube – YouTube is, in a sense, its own thing, but I would include it here. It is increasing its influence because TV shows and movies are increasingly being released here. It also provides live-streaming options.

Cautions – We need to be mindful about the harm and addition that is found online, particularly though social media.

- Girls tend to bond face-to-face, and the pressure to post pictures of themselves that others comment on or 'like' is huge, especially during a time which is already an identity crisis for many (Sociologist Jonathan Haidt).
- Boys tend to bond shoulder-to-shoulder, which heightens the appeal of online gaming (which serves as a kind of digital substitute for male bonding through sports or combat).
- Note the resource listed at the end by Jonathan Haidt.
- The pervasive prevalence of pornography online is alarming. Young children are being exposed to hard-core pornography and images of violence at younger and younger ages and it is harming them (and others).
- I include this information not only so that we as leaders are aware of it, but so that we can speak to (and help with) these issues that *most* people are dealing with.

Privacy Concerns: Take them seriously

When it comes to sharing content online, we need to respect people's privacy concerns.

Social Media – Ensure you get consent before posting pictures, and only post pictures which show someone in a positive light.

Youth –

- Be especially sensitive around youth. Ensure you get consent from parents, and possibly use a consent form. This should be used before posting pictures from youth group events, VBSs, etc.
- A special note: Youth ministry is hard and we want to do our best. When there is a successful youth event there is a temptation to take a bunch of pictures and post them online to share with everyone in your congregation. This may make some youth uncomfortable (even if they don't say anything to you about it). They may be exploring their faith, being teased at school, or perhaps they are a guest and don't know what you're using their picture for. Always exercise caution and wisdom.

Email – As mentioned above, don't divulge someone's email address to others. When emailing a larger group, use BCC (blind carbon copy) to protect identity.

Live-Streaming –

- If you are live-streaming ensure that the bulletin (or through signs in the building) explains that the stage/platform is being live-streamed so that people can stay away if they prefer to be unseen.
- When planning a worship service and there will be people at the front (readers, special guest musicians, someone getting baptized), ensure they know well ahead of time that it is live-streamed. Ask them if they have any concerns.



Blogging: Depth matters

A blog is a text (written) article or post which is distributed automatically through a website to a group of subscribers. There are different platforms (I use Wordpress).

The name comes from “web log,” which was shortened to “blog.”

Content – A blog can be about anything. Some people blog about their travels or favourite hobbies (cooking, baseball...) Leaders have endless possibilities; it can be a helpful way to share additional information or teaching that others might find helpful or hopeful. Perhaps the Bible study wants to know more about the character of God or eschatology or spiritual disciplines. A blog can be a great way to share more.



Changing landscape –

- It used to be the case (even 10 years ago) that if you started a blog, a tonne of people would see and read it. However, today there are many more bloggers and it is easy to get 'lost' in all the online content. It's harder to gain traction with a wider audience. (But remember, that's not always the point.)
- In some ways, podcasting has replaced blogging as the primary place people access online content (in addition to social media). However, it may be the case that religious content is being downplayed/suppressed by tech companies on social media (i.e. not showing up in people's feeds as much). If that is the case (and I believe it is), then blogging remains a place where people can gain direct access to their desired content (much like email). It can circumvent the censorship which happens with Facebook and Instagram.

In-depth – Further, in a time when people like 'short and sweet' blogging remains a place where people can go for more in-depth content that feeds the mind and soul.

Podcasting: The new reading?

The Name - The name comes from “iPod broadcast.” When podcasting first started, it was an audio (spoken) broadcast that someone could access and listen to on their iPod. Today, there are different types of phones, and many more podcasting services, but the term has remained the same.

On the go - Podcasts have become popular because you can listen to them while doing other things like driving, walking the dog, doing housework etc. (You can’t read a blog while doing those same things.)



Platforms - Many companies have apps that let people access podcasts (audio content and shows) for free. These are Apple Podcasts, Spotify (these two are the most popular), Audible, Google Podcasts (which is soon going away), and more. Most people have these apps already downloaded to their phones. You just open the app, and search for your favourite speakers or shows.

Uses – Since there are so many podcasts, you can look up favourite speakers, or find topics simply by searching for them. ‘Faith-based parenting,’ ‘prayer,’ ‘helping the poor,’ ‘Colossians 1,’ etc. A church can re-publish sermons for those who weren’t there, or other content like special talks (i.e. prayer, missions, faith in the workplace...), conversations (with the Choir Director, or local hospital director, or a local therapist).

- Of Canadians on the internet, about one-third tune in to podcasts. So, if you look out at 100 people on a Sunday morning, and if 90% of them are using the internet, that means that about 30 of them are accessing podcasts.
- The majority of podcast users are between 12 and 34. This is an audience we sometimes struggle to reach in the church.
- ‘Religion’ is a major category for podcast users (behind news, true crime, self-help and sports). Many people are accessing faith-based content through podcasts.

The new reading? – Much of modern life is on-the-move. Some people like listening to content instead of reading it. In fact, you can listen to the Bible or other books through a podcast. Each episode can be considered a chapter in a book.

Starting a podcast – A podcast can be a lot of work. You need to discern if this is for you. As always, ask why you are doing it (“the end is where you start from”). Find a website that can automatically connect your content with the podcasting platforms (I use Wordpress), and get a good microphone. Then start planning!

General Tips and Other Best Practices

Learning - Technology and the internet takes some expertise. If you are the one creating videos or other content, use some of your 'study leave' money and time to get equipment and training.

Email signatures – Include in your email signature something upcoming to which people should look forward—for example: a new sermon series, a community clean-up, a blog, a workshop on spiritual gifts, etc.

Thou shalt not steal – Be respectful of copyright and intellectual property. Take some time to find websites for graphics (either free or for a monthly or annual fee). In regards to music, have a license through CCLI to ensure you are using/streaming music in a way which is legal and which compensates artists and songwriter. Attribute credits when necessary.

Keeping track of ideas – When you read an article, book, or hear an interview and come across hopeful or helpful information, or useful illustrations, write down the reference. This helps not only with preparation for Bible studies and teaching/preaching, but with online content. I use a spreadsheet which, after 16 years, has thousands of entries. I can search by keyword for whatever I'm looking for—'compassion,' 'evangelism,' 'sacrifice,' etc.

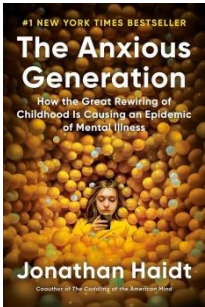
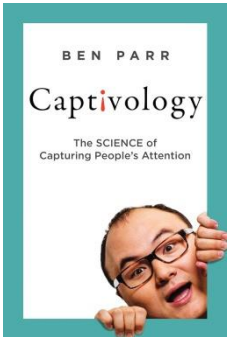
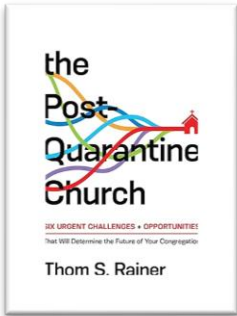

Online giving – More and more people are giving online. (If they're comfortable getting groceries or using Amazon Prime on a regular basis, they're probably going to be comfortable giving to the church.) Be clear and consistent about how to give. Include links on your website and in your email newsletter. Do you have an automated giving program? Are you set up for e-transfer? With people attending weekly services with less frequency, this is increasingly important.

Online engagement – A growing concern/issue is how to engage people online who see themselves as a part of the church family, but who don't show up in person very often (or at all). Is this an area an elder or staff could pay attention to? Should an online survey be developed to ask about people's experiences and how to help them connect?

Smart Phone Apps – Some churches are getting smart phone apps. This may or may not be worth your time. If your website is 'mobile friendly,' then an app might not be necessary. It can, however, be useful in sending out 'push notifications' (direct-to-phone messages). This is something websites can't do.

Other:

Additional Resources

	<p><i>The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness</i></p> <p>Jonathan Haidt</p> <p>In this book, sociologist Jonathan Haidt surveys data on mental health, particularly with young people and highlights concerning trends. He also notes the difference between boys and girls, and makes suggestions for going forward.</p>
	<p><i>Captivology: The Science of Capturing People's Attention</i></p> <p>Ben Parr</p> <p>In this book, Parr talks about changing trends in how people think and direct their attention. This is especially relevant in an increasingly digital world when people are often distracted. He provides suggestions—based on research and experience—about capturing people's attention. Many of these are helpful in the online world.</p>
	<p><i>The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges & Opportunities</i></p> <p>Thom Rainer</p> <p>In this (very) short book, Rainer leverages his experience and research as a consultant across a broad spectrum of traditions to highlight some important considerations going forward after the pandemic. Some of these are directly related to technology and online ministry.</p>
	<p><i>Pro Church Tools with Brady Shearer</i></p> <p>On his website (listed below) and on social media, Brady describes trends, tips, and best practices about online engagement for the church.</p> <p>https://prochurchtools.com/</p>