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# Solid Tips for Creating A Healthy Online Presence

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A few weeks ago, the Rev. Todd Vick of Lakeside UMC sent me a “tweet” that had recently gotten a lot of engagement. It was shared by a layperson who I do not know and it read:

*"If you are looking for a church home, along with the usual things to weigh, I would add one more: see if the pastor is on Twitter. If he or she is, observe how they conduct themselves there. Hard to believe we're at this place, but here we are. I can't urge you to do this strongly enough."*

Part of my work is spent coaching church leaders on using social media to build a solid brand. Whether it is a church brand or a personal brand, it is very important that each of these speaks intentionally as to who they are for their online audience.

Since the mandatory shift to online ministry and branding because of COVID-19, church leaders are getting many mixed messages that make it even more difficult to create a positive brand. Some examples are: "Be authentic but avoid discussions that could be construed as political." "Be relatable but make sure not to come across as too eager to connect." "Be encouraging but be careful not to follow groups or like posts that could be seen as questionable." "Be creative but don't be awkward." The list could go on and on...

To make it as clear as possible, I have broken it down as three easy tips for church leaders to consider when building a positive brand which contributes to a larger online audience:

**1. Identify how people feel when they see your name on social media.** Could there be any anger or confusion from posts that you've shared? Could there be resentment from topics that you frequently like to discuss? Do you cause eyes to roll because you share things that are interpreted as you are in need of attention? Do people feel encouraged by your words? Are people proud to share and like and thank you for what you have posted?

**2. Mirror your in-person persona on social media.** Developing an online persona is something to avoid. It is very easy to hide behind a keyboard and type things, like posts and make comments that would never be said face-to-face and eye-to-eye.

**3. Be kind.** Would you want to be around yourself based upon the things that you post, share and like on social media?

Whether we like it or not, people are watching what church leaders are saying. This is a great opportunity for growth, or failure, depending on how you want to be seen online. It's not easy, it takes work, but it creates an amazing new opportunity for meaningful evangelism.

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