

# Social Media Guidelines

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Seventh-day  
Adventist<sup>®</sup> Church

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

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## Introduction/Purpose:

Social media represents a bold new frontier for mission and is a powerful communications tool. The North American Division challenges its departments and ministries to be intentional about reaching souls for the kingdom on platforms that are already designed for engagement and relationship building. The purpose of this document is to *provide resources and guidance regarding best practices for professional social media communication for all denominational entities and individuals under the North American Division.*

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## General Guidelines & Best Practices:

- **Name:** Use the North American Division name whenever possible, and include the full division name (not NAD) in the description for all social media accounts. Please refer to the [NAD Brand Style Guide](#).
- **Consistency:** Use the same name, profile image, header images and bio on each platform to affirm brand recognition and help members identify official accounts.
- **Contact information:** Provide additional contact information such as phone and email address where relevant in the about section of your social media account profiles.
- **Know your target audience:** Make sure to consider the following criteria when determining the target audience: location, age, gender, race/language, interest(s) and need(s). Frame your strategy, messages, and design accordingly.
- **Set measurable goals:** Have a clear sense of what you are trying to achieve with your social media communications and set measurable goals to evaluate success.
- **Message:** Have a clear sense of your message/mission and understand why it is important to your audience. Christ should be the main character in every story you tell. We want the world to know the Adventist Church by the positive impact and messages we produce. Put yourself in your audience's shoes. Can they easily understand the message? Is it interesting? Is it relevant?
- **Tone of voice:** Social media users expect one-on-one interactions when they engage with brands online. Therefore, your tone of voice should be friendly and welcoming, as though you are speaking with them over the phone or in-person. Write as though you are having a conversation, not talking at someone. Use straightforward, consistent language. Avoid condescending language. Strive to be open, empathetic and engaging. When dealing with complex or emotional issues, frame posts and comments in a positive way that seeks to create unity and understanding.
- **Be honest and transparent:** Represent the Adventist church with a positive and uplifting tone, but also maintain integrity and honesty to build trust with our members.
- **Confidentially:** Always ask permission before sharing personal or sensitive information about a member. Do not publish, post, or release information that is considered confidential, this includes private medical information, without direct approval from the person or their family. Follow federal requirements such as the [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act](#) (HIPAA) of 1996 and the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA).

- **Ownership:** Posts should appear to come from the official brand of the account, not from individuals. An exception to this rule would be church officials providing a public statement.
- **Organization:** Plan out your regular content and schedule posts in advance whenever possible. Be sure to take advantage of peak post times to maximize reach.
- **Keep it interesting:** Utilize a diversity of content and media to keep your audience engaged and interested with relevant content.
- **20/80 Rule:** Social media is about building relationships and telling your story in such a way that your audience understands the value of your brand and engages with your content. The ideal ratio of posts on an organization's social media should be 80% engagement, 20% sales messages (aka direct appeals). In other words, 80% of the content posted by your ministry should engage your fans, demonstrate the need your organization fulfills, share what initiatives your ministry is implementing to satisfy this need, update your audience on your goals and various efforts, and showcase impact through testimonials and results. The remaining 20% of your content can ask for financial support directly, direct fans to register for events, or take another action.
- **Posting frequency:** Commit to posting regularly. However, quality of content is more important than quantity. Stay engaged in the conversation, but don't post too much and overwhelm your followers. A good cadence is one that maximizes engagement and minimizes unsubscribes on your accounts. Each audience is unique; learn your audience. These are some general frequency recommendations.
  - **Instagram:** 3-5 posts per week
  - **Twitter:** 1-5 posts per day (scheduled at least one hour apart)
  - **Facebook:** 3-5 posts per week
  - **Pinterest:** 5-7 posts per week
  - **Snapchat:** 1-2 posts per day if relevant
- **Cross-platform publishing:** When publishing a post to more than one platform, avoid using terminology that isn't applicable to the other platforms such a Retweet or Share. Avoid tagging people or organizations in posts that will be published on multiple platforms, since usernames don't always align across platforms. Instead, schedule posts separately and edit them to reflect the platform on which they will appear.
- **Reference other accounts:** Partnerships benefit everyone! Be sure to tag other accounts (when appropriate or available) when sharing content about other organizations or ministries. When using another organization's or person's image or article, be sure to reference them and/or link to their account or website.
- **Live coverage of events:** Live-tweeting with a branded hashtag is recommended for important events and key speakers. Be sure to tag or quote the speaker. Post compelling images and quotes on your platforms of choice. During events, have an informed team member dedicated to engaging with your audience live and answering questions on your social media channels.
- **Link back to your website:** Your website is your biggest communications tool; link back to your website in almost all posts.
- **Promote your social media:** Include your social media handles (names) in all of your other communication channels, such as your website, emails, and print material.
- **Use proper grammar, spelling and punctuation:** Some cultural norms for social media may stray from traditional proper grammar and can and should be utilized when using each platform. However, all posts should reflect a high level of professionalism.

- **More helpful tips:**
    - Use a colon and a space before a link. (e.g. Read: [goo.gl/ABCD](#))
    - Use a single exclamation point to signal excitement.
    - Use an ellipsis (three periods, no spaces) to show where something has been omitted or to signal suspense.
    - Em dashes or vertical lines can be used to set off various parts of a sentence or post. (e.g. Oct. 13-16 | Denver, Co)
    - Use proper capitalization and spelling for names.
    - Capitalize pronouns when referencing the God. Example: Father, Holy Spirit, He, etc.
    - Avoid all caps, except for emphasis. It gives the impression of YELLING.
    - The period and comma always go inside the quotation marks. Dashes, semicolons, question marks and exclamation points go within the quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only. They go outside when they apply to the whole sentence.
    - Proofread and include other teammates in reviewing posts to ensure accuracy, relevance to the target audience, consistency of punctuation, style, and formatting, spelling, accessibility of language, and openness of tone.
    - For additional guidance, please refer to the *AP Writing Stylebook*.
  - **Writing for Social Media:**
    - Shorten all links using [bitly.com](#) or another link shortener. Creating a custom short link URL is recommended.
    - Delete the long text URL from your post if displaying the “link preview” on Facebook. You should still include a shortened link in the post text.
    - Give videos descriptive names to make them more searchable and include relevant hyperlinks after description.
    - Use short phrases instead of full sentences to make a point.
    - Be direct. Use active voice. (e.g. Service starts at 8 pm. See you there!)
    - Eliminate vague modifiers (e.g., really, very, actually, sort of, etc.).
    - Avoid empty phrases and floweriness. Readers are more likely to trust content that is not over-hyped. (e.g. use ‘now’ instead of ‘at the present time’)
    - Posts should include an image, short teaser text, a call-to-action, relevant hashtags, and a link.
    - [A complete guide to writing strong social media posts.](#)
    - [Download a comprehensive guide](#) to writing for social media.
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## **Account Protection:**

Please keep your account privacy and security up-to-date with the latest best practices. For Facebook, we highly recommend that everyone set-up two-factor authentication for log-ins from unknown browsers. This will safeguard against hackers who could otherwise take control of not only personal profiles but then also gain access to organizational pages, ad accounts, and credit cards through hacked personal profiles. It is also recommended that you choose friends and/or coworkers to be trusted contacts to help you regain access to a

compromised account. [Click here](#) to learn more about two-factor authentication, and learn more about Facebook security features and tips [here](#).

For all other social media accounts (personal and organizational), please choose strong, unique passwords and change them every six months.

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### **Intellectual Property Laws:**

As a representation of the church, it's important to stay in compliance with copyright and trademark laws and not infringe upon others' intellectual property rights. Reference or cite sources appropriately and obtain necessary permissions. Plagiarism applies online too.

[Please review these helpful guidelines \(applies to both images and text\)](#)

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### **Member Care:**

Social media is a valuable tool for listening to the needs of your audience and building relationships. Your audience expects a response when they engage with you online. Your goal in using social media for ministry should be to ultimately understand and fulfill a need and make a tangible impact in the real world.

- Check daily for comments, questions, and messages, and respond in a timely manner. Not every comment needs to be answered, but you are encouraged to 'like' them. Sometimes legitimate inquiries or simple misunderstandings are expressed that can welcome an opportunity to serve the needs of our members and/or provide clarification.
- Comments that are offensive should be deleted immediately. But do not automatically delete negative comments. Again, these are an opportunity to listen to and respond to the needs of our community. Depending on the situation, respond publicly to the person or via direct message. Use your discretion. Remove spam posts accordingly.
- If a person seems volatile, do not respond, and hide the comment. If the person is aggressive, block or mute them if needed.
- Talk with, not AT your audience. Follow the conversation and actively participate. Seek to understand their needs, and respond in a meaningful way.
- Frame every response with the salvation of others as your number one priority. Be diplomatic, professional, and empathetic. Reflect our values at all times.
- Redirect people to proper resources and or departments when needed. Always follow up to make sure they received an answer or help with their question.
- For more guidance, refer to our [Assessing Your Response guide for social media](#).
- If a crime has been committed, especially if it involves a minor, please contact the authorities immediately. Refer to the [EnditNow Abuse Response Decision Tree](#) for further guidance.

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## Crisis Communication:

It's important to provide timely updates in the times of crisis, but social media profiles should not be used as the only media for such announcements.

- When faced with a potentially volatile situation on social media, consult with your communications director immediately for guidance.
- Link to an official statement from the North American Division or your department/ministry leadership.
- Plan to be available to answer questions, as social media users expect immediate answers.
- If a member asks a legitimate question in a crisis situation, alert NAD communications and do not speculate about possible responses. Ensure the accuracy of any information shared.

*If a crime has been committed, especially if it involves a minor, please contact the authorities immediately.* Refer to the [EnditNow Abuse Response Decision Tree](#) for further guidance.

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## Visual Standards:

Imagery is critical to your social brand and communication. Keep a central repository of logos, images, and branding images that can be accessed easily for use.

- **Optimize images per platform:** Be sure to use the optimal image sizes for each social media platform to help your brand stand out and look professional. [Cheat sheet](#).
- **Quality:** Use high quality images that invoke an emotional response or tell a story. Be creative and utilize contrast to help images stand out in the news feed.
- **Consistency:** Keep a consistent look, brand, and color/font palette.
- **Design and stock imagery:** When creating posts, use public domain, fair use, or purchased stock images to avoid copyright infringement. Just because something is on the internet, doesn't mean it is in the public domain. There are a lot of FREE or low-cost web-based tools with pre-made templates for social media images. If you're short on high quality images, there are also photo stock resources available online where you can get free images or images for very low cost.
  - View this [helpful guide to finding stock photos online](#)
  - For design and additional image resources, [click here](#).
- **Editing images:** Crop and adjust photos to improve quality and overlay text for social media. Helpful Apps: Bible App, Snapseed, Photo Editor, WordSwag, Over etc.
- **Branding and logo:** The branding and logo guidelines for the North American Division apply to social media as well as print and all other forms of communication. Unless being used for the purpose of

engaging in concerted, protected activity, General Conference and North American Division logos and trademarks and the logos and trademarks of the various departments may not be used without written consent. Please refer to the [NAD Brand Style Guide](#).

- **Ownership:** Understand that you are giving up some of your ownership rights when posting; always read the terms and conditions.
  - [Click here](#) for more on choosing images for social media.
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## Video Standards:

“Four times as many people would rather watch a video about something than read about it.” – Animoto. Video is a powerful story-telling tool, and we encourage our ministries to incorporate social video into their digital strategy.

- **Grab attention quickly and keep it short:** Strong videos will place “hooks” within the first few seconds of the video and should include what it’s about, a solution to a problem, a clear point, a story, branding, and a call-to-action.
  - **Incorporate text:** Include closed captioning and text to attract attention without sound, especially for auto plays in newsfeeds and to improve accessibility.
  - **Give your audience something:** Inspirational videos that tell a story or educate the viewer get considerably more engagements than sales messages across all platforms.
  - **When developing and posting video:** choose an appealing thumbnail, focus on one message, include your logo or hashtag, include a call-to-action in the video and in the post text, choose relevant topics and hashtags, and share exclusive content (behind-the-scenes) or breaking news.
  - **Native hosting:** Upload your video directly to platforms like Facebook to maximize reach.
  - For more video guidance, [click here](#).
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## Live-Streaming Guidelines:

There are significant advantages to utilizing live-streaming tools to expand your reach and engage with your audience. However, maintaining a basic level of professionalism is required when representing a brand. Here are some helpful guidelines to follow:

- Use a stand, tripod, or stabilizer.
- Promote before you go live.
- Post with a strong teaser message.
- Prepare and practice to avoid rambling and vocal fillers.
- Check to make sure your connection is strong.
- Keep it short.
- When using your phone camera, forward your calls to avoid distractions.



- Plan when to acknowledge your audience & answer questions.
  - Be personable (smile, introduce yourself, explain the purpose of the video).
  - Adhere to the North American Division’s dress code that can be found in the employee handbook on the [internal.nad.adventist.org](http://internal.nad.adventist.org) website.
  - Archive the video (Facebook), edit the information, and choose a good thumbnail.
  - Make use of high-quality streaming devices and software when possible.
  - Ensure that audio is good, and that speakers can be clearly heard. Use a mic if necessary.
  - **For more tips on live-streaming [click here](#).**
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### **Paid Social Media Advertising:**

- Always target ads by location, interest, age, and language to ensure the correct audience is reached.
  - Ads should come from the official brand of the ministry.
  - Images should not have any text on them.
  - Use high quality images or stock imagery that meet the visual guidelines stated in this document.
  - Copy should be short and direct with a call-to-action.
  - Always include a link for more information.
  - Include relevant branded hashtags
  - Use a shared ads manager account that multiple people can access.
  - [Download A Crash Course in Tracking, Analytics, and Advertising](#)
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### **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a new data privacy regulation that aims to give individuals in the European Union (EU) protection and control over their personal data. This affects how organizations can collect and use personal data starting May 25, 2018. These regulations are applicable to **all organizations** who process and hold the personal data of EU residents, **regardless of the organization’s location**. Organizations outside of the EU must comply with these regulations when collecting data on individuals living within the EU.

For more in-depth information on the GDPR, visit [www.eugdpr.org](http://www.eugdpr.org).

While the GDPR does not apply to individuals residing outside of the EU, many of the requirements are still considered best practices and organizations are encouraged to follow them.

We are a worldwide church family, please ensure that your social media use is GDPR compliant, visit [sdadata.blog/GDPR](http://sdadata.blog/GDPR) for more information.

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### **Account Management:**

- Create a separate work Facebook account to manage official pages.
  - Facebook pages should have more than one staff admin on the page to prevent lock-out.
  - Never connect work profiles to private email addresses or even personal work email addresses. This guideline also applies to organizational websites and domain names which should be set up under the business name of the organization and connected to an official organization email address with access shared between IT and content managers.
  - Create a dedicated social media address (**socialmedia@yourministry.com**) for your organization and grant multiple people access. Connect with IT for assistance.
  - Connect accounts like Twitter, Instagram, and Hootsuite to the work social media email address.
  - When social media managers/page editors/admins leave your organization and no longer require access to your social media accounts, update page roles immediately and change your passwords.
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### **Key Hashtags for North American Division/Adventist Church:**

A hashtag is simply a way for people to search for posts on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and Instagram) that have a common topic and to join or begin a conversation. They are also a vital tool that can help brands reach their target audiences.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church appeals to a niche audience that utilizes the following hashtags: #NADadventist, #Adventist, #Adventista, #Seventhdayadventist, #SDA, #SDAchurch, #Sabbath, #HappySabbath, #Sabbathkeeper, #Haystacks, etc.

*This is not a comprehensive list; explore which hashtags relate to your brand, target audience, or ministry. For more information on hashtags, [click here](#).*

Browse our extensive [Adventist Hashtag Library](#). *We strongly recommend that you create your own hashtag library that is directly related to your ministry and target audience.*

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### **Communication with Underage Members:**

North American Division employees who work with underage members and communicate with youth through official social media platforms should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Ministry social media profiles that are geared towards underage members should be designed to address their specific needs, educate, and provide resources and spiritual guidance while promoting the mission and function of the ministry they reflect.
- Be careful about what personal information you share online about members, especially children. Avoid personally identifiable information including- full name, school, address, age, location, etc.

- Avoid images of underage children’s faces unless a photography waiver or release form has been signed by a parent or legal guardian.
- It is permissible to communicate with underage members who are engaging with the official ministry’s social media profiles to answer questions, respond to their comments, and meet their needs. If an emergency arises or the child appears to be at risk, contact the proper authorities immediately.
- Avoid communicating with underage members through your personal social media profiles with the exception of when an emergency situation may require such communication.
- Follow federal requirements of the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA).
- If a crime has been committed, especially if it involves a minor, please contact the authorities immediately. Refer to the [EnditNow Abuse Response Decision Tree](#) for further guidance.

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### Personal Use of Social Media:

A employee’s online presence always reflects their faith and organization of employment. Therefore, the Social Media + Big Data department of the North American Division recommends the following social media guidelines. The absence of, or lack of explicit reference to a specific site or platform does not limit the extent of the application of this policy. Where no guideline exists, employees should use their professional judgment and take the most prudent action possible.

- **Disclose your affiliation:** Employees are allowed to associate themselves with their organization when posting, but they must clearly brand their posts as personal and purely their own opinions. This applies to directors and above. Employees below the director level should generally avoid associating their personal social media with their ministry or department.
- **Disclaimers:** Personal blogs/profiles should have clear disclaimers that the views expressed by the author are the author’s alone and do not represent the views of the employer. However, including a disclaimer does not permit the violation of other social media guidelines and policies.
- **Share your story:** Be human, have fun, exchange ideas, and connect with others. Your life and work can be a powerful witness of what God is accomplishing through you.
- **Protect yourself and loved ones:** Be careful about what personal information you share online, and regularly check your privacy settings. Never publicly share your home address, social security numbers, login credentials to ANY account (especially passwords), credit card information, security question answers, complete birth date, etc. Only friend people who you actually know. Follow federal requirements such as the [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act](#) (HIPAA) of 1996 and the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA).
- **Act responsibly and ethically:** Be honest, be professional, and be kind. Always verify questionable content with credible sources before sharing information and remember to honor others’ privacy. Respect the intellectual property rights of others and always give credit where credit is due. Do not publish, post, or release information that is considered confidential, this includes private medical information. Remember, you can be held personally liable for content you publish online. Make corrections to mistakes quickly and apologize.
- **Represent the church’s values:** Social media can be a powerful witnessing tool; remember that your posts can have a greater impact and reach than you realize. **We recognize and value diversity of opinion within our church community, but as an employee, your followers may confuse your opinion with the official position of the church. While this is most likely not your intention, please prevent**

**confusion by avoiding posts that conflict with your organization’s official positions on matters and observe principles of impartiality.**

- **Images and language:** Do not post sexually explicit images of yourself or others. Do not use insulting, demeaning, vulgar, prejudice, racist, threatening, or violent language and profanities. Avoid gossip, mean-spirited comments, mocking or shaming others, bullying, making false statements against others, and any other behavior that causes emotional harm or distress.
- **Avoid conflict:** Avoid publicly discussing controversial topics and politics where emotions can run high and can result in inflammatory or inappropriate discussions. Take it offline, have a private discussion, or simply do not respond. Always show respect for others’ opinions. If dealing with a complex or emotional issue is necessary, frame responses and posts in a positive way that seeks to improve understanding and unity.
- **Protect your work family:** Everyone has good and bad days. Do not air work grievances on social media or use your channels as a sounding board for the problems you see in the church. Others may be negatively impacted and turn away from the church. You could also embarrass yourself or endanger your job. The Adventist community is very closely connected online so your posts may be widely seen. It is always best to seek counsel offline and/or direct your concerns to HR. Focus on the positive and, like any family, resolve issues privately.
- **Special note regarding politics:** The North American Division does not officially endorse any candidate or political party. Voting choices are strictly up to the individual. Church leaders and employees should not inadvertently or intentionally use their influence to advocate for their political preferences. Employees of the church should maintain principals of impartially and avoid promoting their political viewpoints on any of their social media profiles. Let us reflect Christ and His love at all times—avoiding public political discussions and conflict.
- **Use of work accounts:** Refrain from using your organization’s brand accounts for outside business ventures, personal solicitations or political campaigns and causes.
- **Recommendations or referrals:** Avoid writing any recommendations or referrals for friends/associates that may appear as an endorsement from the North American Division or its entities.
- **Keep us informed:** Social media is dynamic and constantly active. If you see something that should be addressed related to the social media activity of or about our organization and mission, let us know by contacting [socialmedia@nadadventist.org](mailto:socialmedia@nadadventist.org).
- **Remove old posts or accounts that may reflect poorly on you or no longer represent your beliefs.** Old posts or accounts that misrepresent who we are now, may detract from our ability to be effective witnesses, especially as many people seek to find fault with us. We are all growing in our faith and developing our character. It’s a good idea to clean up old posts or profiles that are no longer relevant to who we are.
- **Privacy:** Employees should have no expectation of privacy regarding content shared on social media networks, even “private” profiles. Social media is never private, regardless of privacy settings. The content you create is public information and can be viewed or shared globally.
- **Create balance:** Social media can be addictive; know when to turn it off. It is healthy to take breaks from social media. Don’t let social media interfere with your job performance and work commitments or negatively impact your personal life. Tune out roughly two hours before bedtime for optimal sleep, don’t check social media while driving or walking, and maintain good posture.
- **In summary:** If you are unsure whether or not to share something online, err on the safe side and simply don’t post it. Follow these policies and be a living testimony to the church’s values and philosophies. We all share the same goal.

- **In case you are forgetful or ignore the guidelines above, here's what could happen.**  
**You could:**
  - Inhibit the ability of the church to accomplish its mission
  - Turn someone away from the church
  - Get your organization in legal trouble
  - Lose your job
- **Note to employers:** Regarding an employee's personal life and sharing on their social media profiles, 'offenses' must be evaluated on whether the content or behavior is in clear violation of church doctrine, not individual preferences or interpretation. Behavior on social media prior to conversion or recommitment should not be used against an employee who is now a member of the church in good standing. It's important to consider that personal social media often captures snapshots at different points of an individual's spiritual journey. Given the gospel of grace, these snapshots should not be held against a person years after conversion and seasons of dedicated service.
- **We recommend that all church employees and leaders conduct a personal social media audit once a year.** For guidance, please review the following questions: [sdadata.blog/personalSMaudit](http://sdadata.blog/personalSMaudit)

*Any employee found to have violated this policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.*

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## **Contact Us: We're Here to Help!**

This is a living document and will be regularly updated as changes are needed. For more information and resources visit [SDAdata.org](http://SDAdata.org) or follow @DigiEvangelism on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/DigiEvangelism), [Facebook](https://facebook.com/DigiEvangelism), [Instagram](https://instagram.com/DigiEvangelism) and [YouTube](https://youtube.com/DigiEvangelism). You can also sign up to [receive our eNewsletter](#).

**Have questions?** Please do not hesitate to contact our team.

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