

Social Media + Big Data Services

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Personal Social Media Audit: Questions to Ask Yourself

A checklist for cleaning up your digital influence to avoid embarrassing situations and misunderstandings



Seventh-day
Adventist[®] Church

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

Many of you are church employees with a potentially large digital influence. What you do with that influence matters. We've all made mistakes communicating online, but it's never too late to start fresh by conducting a personal social media audit. Below is a checklist to help you evaluate your social media profiles and identify areas of potential change or improvement. Whether you have four friends or four thousand, as disciples we must strive to reflect Christ always, drawing others to His life-saving truths and love. We cannot do this effectively when our words or actions send mixed or divisive messages.

Social media is public by nature and has blurred the lines between a person's work life and personal life. No matter how high your privacy settings are, your activity is always public at some level. As representatives of a faith group, your individual accounts are no longer just personal. This can be a positive thing. Each of us are called to be disciples, and this includes reaching the digital mission field. I believe that God is calling a generation of youth to the digital mission field, but, to be effective, we must begin by setting boundaries with ourselves.

I encourage you to read through these questions carefully and make any necessary changes to your social media profiles. This may include removing old posts and pictures. In extreme situations, deleting accounts may be necessary.

PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIT CHECKLIST:

- Do you list your employer or ministry on your social media profiles?**
 - **Brand your posts as personal and your own opinion.** Employees are allowed to associate themselves with their organization when posting, but they must clearly brand their posts as personal views and purely their own opinions.
- Are you sharing your faith with personal stories?**
 - **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.
- Are you taking the necessary precautions to protect you and your loved ones' personal information?**
 - **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.
- Are you spreading "inflammatory speculations," "rumors and gossip" or confidential information?**
 - **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. Do not publish, post, or release information that is considered confidential. Remember, you can be held personally liable for content you publish online. Follow federal privacy requirements as described in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Make corrections to mistakes quickly and apologize.

- **Are you giving credit where credit is due?**
 - **Respect the intellectual property rights of others.** It's okay to share, just don't claim it as your own work.
- **Would people know that you are a Christian based on your social media and would they like Christians?**
 - **Represent your faith values.** Social media can be a powerful witnessing tool; remember that your posts can have a greater impact and reach than you realize. Diversity of opinion is respected and valued within the 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, prevent confusion by avoiding posts that conflict with your organization's official positions on matters and observe principles of impartiality.
 - **Follow the golden rule.** Do to others as you would have them do to you: Luke 6:31. This means avoiding gossip, mean-spirited comments, mocking or shaming others, bullying, and any other behavior that causes emotional harm or distress.
- **Do you have any content on your profiles that would be potentially embarrassing if an employer, grandparent, or respected mentor saw it?**
 - **Use only uplifting images and language.** Do not post sexually explicit images of yourself or others. Do not use profanities or violent language.
- **Do you find yourself in heated discussions online? Do you ever write comments online that you would never say to a person's face?**
 - **Avoid conflict.** Avoid publicly discussing controversial topics 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. As members and leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we represent a diverse people with a diverse set of ideas, experiences, and perspectives. We cannot properly serve when we are dismissive of certain groups and ideas.
 - **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.
- **Do you air your work frustrations online or gossip about co-workers?**
 - **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.

- **Have your opinions, habits, faith, or attitudes changed over the years?**
 - **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.
- **Do you find yourself glued to your phone, losing track of time, and not accomplishing what you need to do? Do you browse social media until bedtime and then have difficulty getting to sleep?**
 - **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 affect your job performance or 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 or write something online, err on the safe side and simply don't post it. It is likely that you have friends who are not Christians or who may be struggling with their faith. Don't be another reason for them to leave their Church. Find ways to use your digital influence to encourage others and share your faith in positive ways.

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IF YOU ARE FORGETFUL OR IGNORE THE GUIDELINES ABOVE, THERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT 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
- Get fired

A special note to employers and supervisors:

In regard to an employee sharing their personal life on their social media profiles, "offenses" must be evaluated on whether the content or behavior is in clear violation of Church doctrine, and it is not to be gauged by individual preferences or interpretation. Behavior on social media prior to conversion or a re-commitment to the faith should not be used against an employee who is now a member of the Church in good standing.

On a personal note, I converted in my early 20s from atheism. I have since lived as a committed Adventist for over 10 years. Until I did a personal social media audit, if you dug far enough back in my post history, you'd find images of me drinking wine and eating unclean meats, because this is what many non-Adventist Italians are culturally raised to do. At the time, I did not know that there was a Biblical way of living healthier. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent": Acts 17:30. This was prior to my conversion and my commitment to the health principles, and I think it's important that we understand 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. By removing old content that does not reflect who we have become, we can prevent it from sending mixed messages to those we witness to online or providing fuel to those who seek to find fault. —*Jamie Domm*

Let us know how we can help you navigate and utilize the transformative power of data and social media.

Alvin Kibble, Vice President
AlvinKibble@nadadventist.org
443-391-7141

Paul Hopkins, Director
PaulHopkins@nadadventist.org
443-391-7155

Jamie Domm, Digital Strategist
JamieDomm@nadadventist.org
443-391-7156



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