

Introducing Social Media as a Tool for MRE Practitioners

In the past, if someone wanted to learn more about an organization and its services, they could visit its website, go to the physical space, or ask a past participant about their experiences. Now potential attendees for marriage/relationship education (MRE) programs can do all that and more through social media – they can search for your program on Facebook, follow you on Twitter, or read your blog.

According to a 2010 Pew Internet study, social media use has increased rapidly over the past few years. There is little variation within the age groups when considering socioeconomic status. While Millennials (ages 18-33) are more likely to use social media, GenXers (ages 34-45) and Boomers (ages 46-64) have made notable gains. More than half of online adults in these groups are active users of social media sites. There are three reasons why social media is great for recruitment and marketing:

- **It's trackable.** Unlike traditional (print) communications, you can track the number of clicks, mentions, forwards, comments, etc.
- **It's shareable.** With a simple click of the mouse, users can spread information about your marriage/relationship education program to their entire social network without any additional effort on your part.
- **It's cheap.** Most sites are free. It costs nothing to set up a profile and use the site regularly.

If leveraged correctly, these tools have the potential to become a cost-effective way to supplement your marketing budget. Couples or individuals may make decisions based on their social media networks. For



example, their friends or family members could tag a marriage/relationship education program as one they like. Be sure to consider the demographics of the couples you serve and your staff's time as you create your plan. This Tip Sheet will give you concrete tips and advice on launching a successful social media strategy to increase the number of participants in your MRE program.

Overview of different social media platforms

Facebook - <http://www.facebook.com/FacebookPages>.

Facebook allows individuals to create "Official Pages" to represent their programs. Features include discussion boards, photo and video uploads, and more. **Example:** [Relationship Skills Center](#)

Twitter - <http://business.twitter.com/>

Twitter is a social networking site that is designed for quick bits of information. Updates are limited to 140 characters (roughly 1-2 sentences) to encourage brevity and conciseness. Users can "follow" any other user they choose, meaning they will

receive updates (called “tweets”) from that person.

Examples: [Divorcebusting](#) and [Marriage Works](#)

YouTube - http://www.youtube.com/t/about_getting_started

As one of the largest websites in the world, more video content is uploaded to YouTube in 60 days than NBC, CBS and ABC created in 60 years.

YouTube allows for programs to create their own “channel,” complete with custom colors and images. Establishing a presence on the largest video site in the world adds to your credibility.

Example: [MarriagePrep101](#)

Blogs

Blogs are one of the original forms of social media. Think of blogs as organizational journals, chronicling the news of the day about your MRE program. Some people will find your blog (either through a Google search or simple web browsing) before they find your website. Thus, it’s important that your blog have an “About” page to invite readers to learn more about your program, with a simple description of your services and a link to your website.

Example: [Georgia Family Council](#)

Tips for a successful social media presence

1. Find your audience. It doesn’t make sense to build a presence on YouTube if couples aren’t utilizing it. Social media may be especially valuable for younger couples, such as those who are engaged, as they already rely on social

networking. Visit the [Pew Research Center](#) for recent statistics on social media usage and reports to help you narrow your focus.

- 2. Set up complete profiles on your social media sites of choice.** Make sure to upload a profile photo and fill out all information fields – website URL, program offerings, etc.
- 3. Adapt your content to different platforms.** Updates on Twitter are limited to 140 characters, which makes the platform especially suitable for quick bites of information, like open registration for programs. As an alternative, Facebook allows for more detailed posts. As a video website, YouTube allows you to use video as an important tool in your work. Blog posts vary in length, from a simple photo and caption, to a 1,000-word post on a topic of your choosing. See NHMRC Tip Sheet *Getting the Most out of Social Media for Your MRE Program* for writing tips.
- 4. Put links to your social media profiles on your website.** This makes it incredibly simple for potential attendees to find you at all the other places your MRE program resides online.
- 5. Strike the right tone.** Often, programs that use social media tend to be too formal in tone. Don’t be afraid to inject personality or humor into your posts. A great “voice” will have people coming back for more.
- 6. Post frequently.** The only thing worse than getting bombarded with updates and requests is when a program sets up a page – and then falls silent.
- 7. Include your social media profiles on flyers, handouts and other marketing materials to get the most mileage.** Think about TV

commercials. They often include multiple ways to get in touch (phone number, website, physical address). Your organization should do the same thing and help people find you.

- 8. Create an editorial calendar.** This will help bring structure to your efforts. To build your calendar, start with a list of program events like MRE workshops, lectures, and conferences. Then look at your program's calendar from the previous year for any events/news/topics that might be used year after year.

How to grow your social media following

Everyone begins their social media profiles at zero. But with diligence and a little know-how, most programs can amass a following that becomes an army of supporters:

- 1. Get your staff on board.** If you have 10 people working for your organization, you have at least 10 followers when you start out.
- 2. Link up with similar MRE programs, whether they have a smaller presence or thousands of followers.** On most social media sites, this is known as "[tagging](#)" another program. (Think of it as a virtual wave or "Hello!") More than likely, they will tag you back, exposing your program to their followers.
- 3. Take the time to reply to people who comment.** Whether it's on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or a blog post, thank whoever took the time to comment. It doesn't have to be elaborate – a quick "Thanks so much for commenting!" will suffice.
- 4. Ask (nicely) your supporters to help you**

spread the word. You'll be surprised how many people will share your message. Word of mouth is one of the best venues for recruiting for MRE services and doing so virtually can be just as effective.

- 5. Follow people to get followers.** An easy way to gain more followers is to follow a lot of people yourself. Much online interaction is based on reciprocity.
- 6. Run contests.** Trivia contests and giveaways are popular for a reason: People love to win things. Give away a new book about healthy relationships. Have followers answer a marriage- or relationship-related question for a chance to win.

Cautions

Consider the following as you think your plan through:

- 1. Just like any other successful marketing campaign, it takes time for a successful social media strategy to develop.** Once you've done research on your audience and you've begun to reach out to couples through the appropriate platform, give it three to six months before you can attribute any success to your social media efforts.
- 2. You won't reach everyone using social media alone.** Understand that while social media is popular, it is not a "one size fits all" toolbox. Instead, it should complement your efforts elsewhere – newsletters, direct mail, traditional media pitches, etc.
- 3. Don't get overwhelmed.** Instead of viewing social media as "one more thing to do," view it as complementary to all your other efforts

and devote a set amount of time each day to maintaining your online presence.

4. Track your results. Almost every element can be tracked in some way. Don't spend time publishing content without knowing if what you are doing is actually working. To help you measure your results, utilize free online tools like [Google Analytics](#). Also, see NHMRC Tip Sheet *Using Social Media Part II* for help making sense of your results.

Your social media efforts will depend largely on consistency. It is also very important to understand how your couples use social media as you consider your strategy. By knowing the tools, giving it 100% effort, and allowing it time to work, you will be on the road to social media success.

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