

Awana®

11 WAYS

— TO ENGAGE —
STUDENTS USING
TECHNOLOGY

JEREMY PETTITT



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YOU MAY FEEL OVERWHELMED.

But be encouraged: Technology is used best when it focuses on information and connection.

Digital technologies can deliver information to audiences faster than all previous technologies combined. Social media, text messages, and other personal forms of communication can extend connections across thousands of miles in an instant.

But technology's speed becomes a problem when it's moved into areas of meaning and relationship. For humans to understand the meaning of something requires both time and reflection. Technology may be able to record a sunset but cannot comprehend why such experiences could inspire awe and wonder.

The best conversations of your life are about more than just the content you exchange. They involve listening and laughter, tears and trust – all of which require you to be present as a leader and a disciple maker.

A stylized illustration in shades of blue and white. It features a profile card with a silhouette of a woman's head and shoulders, and a mobile phone interface with a speech bubble icon. The background has a repeating pattern of small, stylized leaves.

1

UTILIZE FACEBOOK GROUPS



UTILIZE FACEBOOK GROUPS

Facebook features three different types of groups. Before creating a group, consider your intended use. Public groups are good for making announcements or highlighting recent events since a larger audience will see these posts. Private groups work well if you desire to share more specific information with your students, like follow up information or questions from last night's message. Your purpose for posting should determine your group type.

Public Groups

Public Groups offer transparency (everyone can see the posts) as well as inclusiveness (anyone can join). Consider creating a public group for your church or youth group.

Closed Groups

Closed groups offer some privacy (only members can see posted content) and belonging (all members share a mutual bond). These types of groups are appropriate for your youth group or even your small group. However, when used with student small groups, select at least two adults to administrate the group to avoid any inappropriate behavior.

Secret Groups

Secret groups offer a high level of privacy (no one can see the group) and greater level of trust (all members have a specific purpose for participating). A secret group will work well for a leader's group or a parent's group. However, I would caution against using them with students as they can give the appearance of inappropriate behavior.

2

USE

#

HASH

#

#

#



#



#

TAGS

TO COORDINATE POSTS



#



#

USE HASHTAGS TO COORDINATE POSTS

Twitter's most famous contribution to social media is the hashtag. A hashtag (#) represents a means of coordinating posts from a variety of users around a particular topic. For example, if you're watching the big game and you want to comment to other people, you create a post ("Terrible call on 3rd down") and hashtag it ("#SuperBowl"). Then when others search for posts with that hashtag, all the appropriate posts appear in one column.

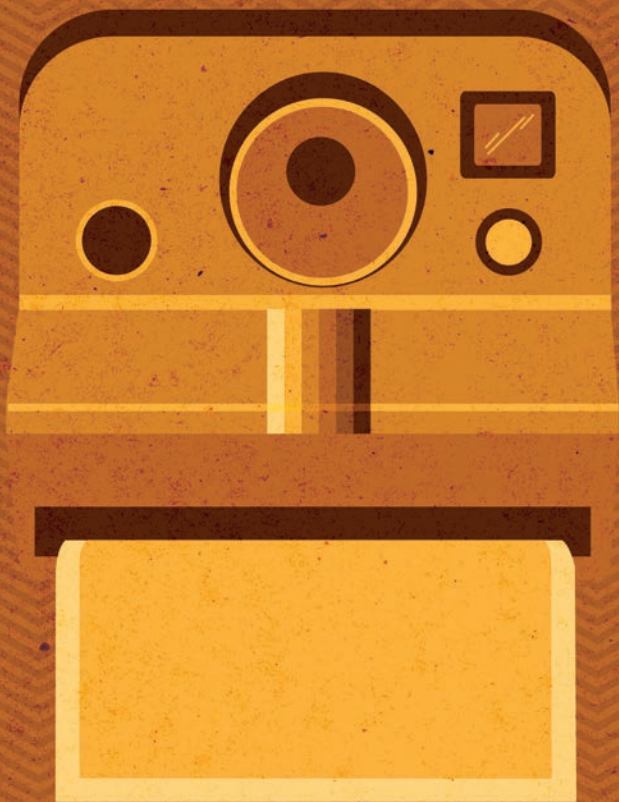
You can create a hashtag at anytime by simply typing it into a post (#NewHashtag). However, if you want to engage your students on social media using hashtags (which also work on Facebook, Instagram and many other sites),

you will need to choose a unique one and make sure to communicate it to your students. For instance, you may choose to create a hashtag for your group (#SummitYouthMinistries2016 or #SYM16) or for your message series (#RealLife or #TheTruths).

A well-chosen hashtag has the potential to create an ongoing conversation that engages your students through social media over a long period of time.

3

ENGAGE THROUGH
INSTA
GRAM



ENGAGE THROUGH INSTAGRAM

Students want to see and be seen. They want to know that others are paying attention as well as what is getting their attention.

Instagram is a social media platform based entirely around pictures. Each post begins by choosing a picture of a person, place, and/or thing, then adding comments to give the picture context. On the surface, this concept doesn't seem incredibly different from other social media platforms. But the adoption of Instagram demonstrates a shift away from words and to images.

Instagram presents tremendous opportunities to engage students on an ongoing basis. If you follow their Instagram accounts, you can keep up

on their vacation photos, sporting events, school plays, and just about anything else going on in their lives. Many of their posts will be “selfies,” pictures of themselves taken from a mobile device they are holding at arms length. Be sure to press the heart-shaped button when they are doing something you enjoy seeing.

You can use Instagram personally or for your group. Many youth leaders share pictures of themselves and their families to help their students connect with them. You can also create an Instagram account for your group to post pictures (and quotes) from your message series, mission trips, games, or any other group moments.

4

**CONNECT
WITH TEXT
MESSAGES**



2:15 PM

100%

< Messages

Johannah

Looking forward to seeing you at church tonight! Don't forget to bring your own Bible!

I won't! BTW, would it be alright if I brought my friend Emily tonight?

Totally! :) The more the merrier!!!

Delivered

Awesome!

CONNECT WITH TEXT MESSAGES

While students spend a lot of time on social media, they text message each other even more! They are willing to exchange very personal information via text.

Choosing how to use text messages with your students is crucial. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Opt in:** Instead of asking students for their information, ask them to text you. In doing so, they will have to choose whether or not they want to communicate with you using text.
- **Stick to information:** If your group is going to do something special this week, text the information.
- **Be careful when texting individuals:** Remember, all of your words are being recorded and text is easily misinterpreted.

If the conversation begins moving away from information and too far toward the personal/relational, ask the student if you can meet before or after your next group meeting. Avoid texting situations that could be misunderstood and/or deemed inappropriate.

- Use mass/group text messages sparingly: While you may want to create a group text conversation engaging multiple people at once (especially to avoid the above concern), students have a limit as to how often they are willing to pay attention to group texts.

5 WATCH AND CREATE



VIDEO CONTENT



WATCH (AND CREATE) VIDEO CONTENT

Your students are used to watching and sharing videos with one another everyday on sites like YouTube, Vimeo, and Vine. The videos they watch give you insight into their world. Even if you're not as interested in the video of cats or skateboarders that your students shared on social media, take a minute and watch it. Students share what connects with them. Watch the video and then ask: "What does this video tell me about my student? Their sense of humor? Music preferences? Family situation?"

You might be surprised what you learn if you pay attention. If a video they shared confuses you, ask them about it the next time you see them.

In addition to watching what students post, consider using more video when teaching them. The change of pace in using a video during a message will help break it up and sustain their attention. While you can pull content from YouTube (or DVD/Blu-ray), consider using your large group messages as an opportunity to allow your creative video students to help you. Your students create more video than you think. Find the ones who love it, nurture their creative gifts, and watch them communicate amazing truths to their friends and fellow students.

— USE —
**PRESENTATION
SOFTWARE**

BUT USE IT WELL

6



USE PRESENTATION SOFTWARE, BUT USE IT WELL

When teaching a large group of students, leaders often create visual presentations like PowerPoint® to reinforce their message. Unfortunately, many are done poorly. When your PowerPoint is just your outline on the screen, you have unwittingly created a serious problem for your audience: two communicators on stage. Now your audience must decide which one is more important: the person talking or the notes on the screen. Many times, they will quickly read through your notes, think they understand what you're saying and tune you out.

Here are three tips to create better visual presentations:

- Use a handful of slides – Don't go overboard! Stick to 10 slides or less for a 30-minute presentation. The sheer volume of slides flashing on a screen will distract students, not engage them.

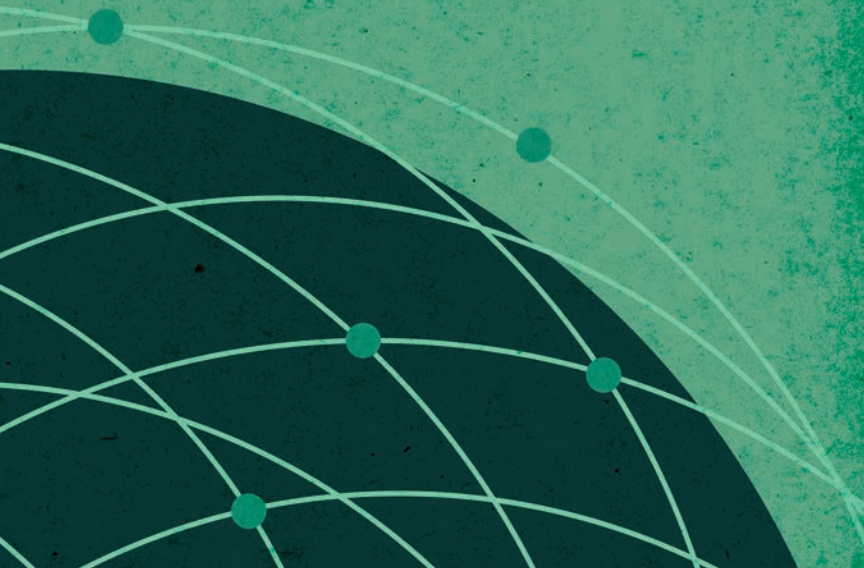
- Use phrases, not sentences – While words on the screen can reinforce your point, condense what you are saying to a memorable word or phrase. This technique will encourage memory while limiting distractions.
- Use meaningful pictures – Use a simple picture without words to create an atmosphere (like a beach, forest, or historical location). Or use pictures to create a visual metaphor (like a car engine, surfer, or ants working). These pictures should help your students understand the place or metaphor without being a distraction.

7

DON'T FEAR



THE INTERNET



DON'T FEAR THE INTERNET

Many leaders express concern about students being distracted if they're allowed to use their personal technology during teaching time. I have found the opposite to be true. When they use technology well, students are not only more engaged, but also remember more of the message. The key is simple:

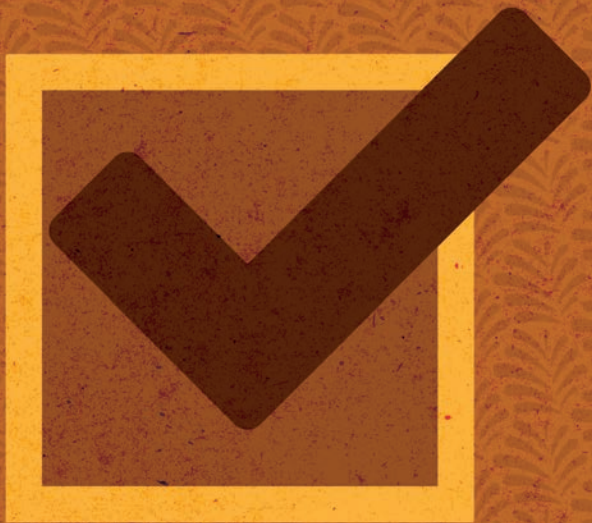
When teaching students, shift from passive forms of learning (watching and listening) to active forms of learning (asking and exploring).

- When students arrive, I ask students to connect their devices to the Internet (most of them used the building Wi-Fi).
- I open the teaching time with a question like, "How many new animals and insects do humans discover each year?"
- Instead of providing them with the answer, I simply say, "Look it up."

- As they begin to find the information online, we record the answers on a whiteboard for them to see.
- After a few brief comments (“Wow...that’s a lot!”), I pose another question for them to look up (“Can you find some pictures of creatures discovered this year?”).
- I continue asking questions until we arrive at the point of the lesson, where I explain the meaning of their searches (something technology can’t do).

Our students don’t lack information. The Internet is full of it! What students need are the right questions that lead them to discover the best answers for themselves. Curiosity is a powerful tool in helping your students understand truth.

8



**GET FEEDBACK
— USING —
POLLING
PLATFORMS**

GET FEEDBACK USING POLLING PLATFORMS

Polling platforms take the guesswork out of what students are thinking by putting their feedback information front and center.

When speaking to a large group of students, I seek to engage them to hear their opinions and beliefs by asking them to raise their hands. But this process has two significant problems. First, it only gives the students a “yes” or “no” option when usually the truth is more complex. Second, it encourages students to answer based on peer pressure rather than their own personal thoughts, since raising or not raising their hand with the rest of the group can make them feel isolated and awkward.

The best solution I’ve found for this issue is Poll Everywhere. Poll Everywhere is an online service that allows you to create custom surveys that students respond to via text.

With free accounts up to 25 participants, you can create surveys featuring multiple choice, free response, true/false, and Q&A's.

Simply create a poll from one of the templates on PollEverywhere.com and present the question to your students using a computer connected to a TV or projector. Your students can vote using their mobile device and see the results live onscreen. This process will ensure their privacy, resulting in more accurate and honest answers to your questions.

9



**CONNECT
CONTENT**

**— BY —
PODCASTING**

CONNECT CONTENT BY PODCASTING

Throughout my time as a youth pastor, it was a very rare occasion to have all my students show up on any given night. Inevitably, someone was sick, had a practice, or was out of town. All of these absences made it difficult to keep all of them on the same page, especially when I was teaching a series of messages. One of the best ways I have found to keep students connected is by recording my messages and posting them online.

While you could simply post your messages to a website or social media, a podcast might actually be a better fit for your group. A podcast is a regularly updated media channel of audio or video content to which students can subscribe. Unlike other online options, podcasts will usually download automatically to the students' device(s) for them to listen to when they have time.

While it may take a little time to setup at first, your podcast should be fairly easy to maintain after you get it going. Simply record your message using your mobile device or a digital media recorder and upload it to your account. If you feel as though this process might be too much for you to handle, ask one of your students to help you run it.



10

EMAIL BUT SPARINGLY

EMAIL, BUT SPARINGLY

Students don't generally use email to communicate with each other. However they do recognize that adults often like and use email frequently. So students will connect with you via email when you focus on one thing: business. Students expect that you will send camp schedules, permission slips, or any other official document that is necessary or required for participation via email. Sending them emails focused on business also allows you to copy their parents (to make sure that the permission form actually gets signed) without fear of "spamming" either of them.

Lately, some of the files that leaders are sending to students have begun to exceed the maximum size of an email attachment.

You can solve this problem a couple different ways:

- Create the file using Google™ Docs and share the link with your students (and parents) via email.
- Create the file in another program and upload it to an online storage service like Dropbox™ or Box (both offer free accounts with limited space). You can share the link to that particular file with your students (and parents) via email.

Remember, for students: email = business.

???



11

ASK.
LISTEN.
LEARN.

ASK. LISTEN. LEARN.

In the end, the people who can help you engage your students best are your students. Don't be afraid to ask them where they are engaging with others and if you can join them there. Even if they say "no," they will usually explain why they don't think it's a good idea.

As you engage students, ask these two questions regularly: *"Is this interaction with my student about delivering information or providing meaning?" "Is it about quick connection or deep relationship?"*

Once you've determined the purpose of your communication, you will have a clearer sense of whether or not you should use technology to engage your students.

While engaging with them may require you to continue to learn new technologies and apps, the information and connection you exchange with them will be well worth the effort.



JEREMY PETTITT

Over the last 20 years, Jeremy has poured his life into youth ministries in a variety of contexts. He currently serves as the Executive Director of Awana Youth Ministries™, which delivers curriculum and resources to over 4,000 churches and more than 60,000 students. He resides in the suburbs of Chicago with his wife and three children.



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