
Small Group Leader and Technology



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As a youth pastor, volunteer, or parent of an adolescent, you will inevitably find yourself in the position of trying to help both kids and parents navigate the world of technology that teenagers are immersed in. It comes with the territory of loving on the students God has placed in our care.

Research conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics shares some great insight on teenage technology use. This research gives us a chance to step back and evaluate the role of technology in our kids' lives:¹

- 1 in 5 teens logs onto a social media site more than 10 times a day.
- 1 in 2 teens logs on more than once a day.
- 3 of 4 teens own a cell phone, and 25% use them for social media.
- 1 of 3 6th-graders [owns a smart phone](#).
- 1 in 5 teens have texted or posted nude or seminude photos or videos of themselves.
- Facebook itself is remarkable. In the first quarter of 2009, every week, five million people joined Facebook. Its membership doubled from one hundred million to two hundred million from August 2008 to March 2009. Perhaps most incredible, the vast majority of its members—140 million, in fact—have only been on the rolls since February 2007. That's 140 million users in just over two years.
- "[Facebook depression](#)," or the feeling that one doesn't measure up in the face of their peer's Facebook profiles, is a rising trend among social media-using teens. [Adults](#) are not immune.
- 1 in 10 teens are awakened almost every night by a phone call, text, or email, leading to [sleep deprivation](#). Sleep loss is also [connected with higher drug use](#).

Given these facts, here are some ways we can leverage technology to help us reach the next generation as well as some things to be aware of as you utilize these tools.

Technology Benefits:

- Contact Work. Cell phones, e-mail and communication technologies make it easy and cost-effective to talk and connect with students instantly. Students prefer communication technologies and are way more open to talk when they are hiding behind their computer/smart phone keyboard than they are in small group. Start on the keyboard and move to face to face time.

¹ These stats came from the American Academy of Pediatrics. AAP suggests that physicians [discuss social media with teenagers](#) during regular checkups. This stems out of a report released this week in *Pediatrics* entitled "[The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families](#)."

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- Cultivate Community. Through social networking programs such as Facebook, Friendster and Twitter, we can now connect, interact and know the details of each other's lives like never before. The goal is to cultivate both our online and offline relationships with our students.
- Text Messaging is the way. Students won't call you back, but they will text you back. According to Mashable, teenagers send and receive 3,339 text messages a month.² With that said, it may be wise to get an unlimited text-messaging plan when working with students.
- Streamline promotion. Utilize social media to help push student ministry activities. Create a Facebook page that is worth visiting.³ Be intentional by always updating what is happening in your student ministry. Pictures and videos speak volumes, so upload media regularly.

In order to further gather and synthesize information on teen technology use Orange has partnered with the Barna group to produce a study on the church and the family. In 2011, the study directly dealt with How Technology is Helping Families and Where They Need Help.⁴

Boundary Setting For Technology Use In Student Ministry

- Always be asking the question: How is the use of technological tools helping us move towards our ministry objectives?
- Monitor and filter social media (Facebook, Google+, twitter, etc) profile pictures and status updates. Online presence can be seen by everyone, including your students, so be mindful that what you post and say reflects Jesus.
- No late night conversations via text messages or Facebook
- Don't use communication technologies with students during the school day
- Unplug. Make sure to find times during the day and during the week to NOT be on social media sites.

² <http://mashable.com/2010/10/14/nielsen-texting-stats/>

³ Saddlebacks' high school pastor, Josh Griffin, strongly advocates for having an engaging Facebook page for your student ministry. Read more here: <http://www.morethandodgeball.com/tag/social-media>

⁴ We would highly suggest you to take a peek at this State of the Church and Family study here: <https://secure.rethinkgroup.org/store/product.php?productid=1015>

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- Be a student of social media. The new report from the Kaiser Family Foundation on media consumption by teens is mandatory reading for youth workers everywhere (<http://kff.org/entmedia/mh012010pkg.cfm>)⁵

The use of technology should be used to enhance what you are already doing and to potentially change the way you are doing it, but only if it furthers the Kingdom and the mission of the student ministry. Just being connected for the sake of being connected will waste the resource that technology can be. It's important to identify WHY your student ministry is a part of social media. Figure out both why and how your student ministry will leverage social media and lean into technology. But be wise and careful how you represent yourself on it and how much you use it.

⁵ Being a student of social media has been suggested by Youth Specialties web guru Adam McClane. To read more about social media and youth ministry see here: <http://adammcclane.com/2010/01/21/social-media-and-youth-ministry/>