

Blog Mini-Class

Click PRESENT

CLICK Blogs were originally named “Web Logging” in reference to the idea of keeping an online log of your thoughts and findings. In 1997, John Barger combined and shortened these two words into the term “weblog”, and in 1999 Peter Merholz, originally as a joke, changed the name into the phrase “we blog”. Soon after, Evan Williams popularized the term “blog”, and it’s kept that name ever since.

CLICK There are many popular blogging and microblogging platforms including Wordpress, Blogger, and Tumblr. **CLICK** Blogs on these platforms function like personal websites, where their creators can post an online journal of their thoughts, ideas, and experiences. As a result, blogs vary widely in subject matter, scope and audience. Blogs are great for sharing and discussing using writing, pictures, and videos.

CLICK Along with the evolution of the name “blog” came an evolution of the popularity of Blogs. In 1999 there were an estimated 23 blogs on the internet; now there are over 240 million with a new one being created every half second. **CLICK** Not only are people writing blogs, but 77% of internet users are now reading blogs. People are sharing their feelings, opinions, and beliefs online through blogs now more than ever!

CLICK Our purpose today is to explore how to use Blogs as a missionary tool. Online missionary work is about people, so our focus will be on how to become more approachable, visible, and likeable to others as we blog our lives, and include our faith in the conversation.

CLICK Regardless of the topic or topics you choose to blog about, your online profile can and should reflect your faith. Updating your “About Me” section to include a statement about your beliefs, or simply saying “I’m a Mormon!” can do wonders. You can also link your blog to your Mormon.org profile, or add links, banners, and widgets that invite people to learn more about the gospel by ordering a free copy of the Book of Mormon, chatting with the online missionaries, or visiting an LDS website.

You never know who might come across your blog, and the impact for good that it may have on others. As you become more open about your religious faith, you allow yourself to be an approachable and engaging representative of the restored gospel. The point is that even if you don’t openly blog about your religion, you can be more open about what you believe in by adding a few details to your bio, and links to your page. These simple steps can and have opened the door to many missionary conversations.

CLICK What you post matters. People read, comment, and keep coming back to blogs that are well-written and address topics that they find interesting. Even if you choose to focus most of your posts on topics unrelated to the gospel, you can still share your faith. Maybe it’s just mentioning that you attend church. Maybe it’s including a favorite quote from a church leader. Or maybe it’s an entire post dedicated to one aspect of your testimony, your faith, or your religious experience.

President Uchtdorf taught that, “The Lord can magnify the words you speak and make them mighty. God doesn’t ask you to convert but rather to open your mouths.” In blogging terms, you can open-up your writing to include faith-filled messages. Like President Uchtdorf said, you don’t have the responsibility to convert, just to share.

Jennifer from Carlsbad, CA started a food blog called “Carlsbad Cravings” focused on sharing fun new recipes. But she also included a section titled “Soul Food” where she shared her thoughts about family and faith - the things that nourish her spiritually. While the majority of her blog remained devoted to a hobby that most people can agree on and enjoy - eating - she still made an effort to share her testimony in a simple but effective way.

When sharing gospel-related posts, no matter how frequently or infrequently, it’s important to pay attention to who is commenting, interacting, and sharing your posts, and who begins following you. You may be surprised at the impact you can have, and on who shows the most interest in these topics. Also remember what President Hinckley taught, that “our membership in this Church...should never be any cause for self-righteousness, for arrogance... for looking down upon others.” Let your posts reflect the joy that has come to your life through the gospel, and the blessings that you are eager to share. Avoid arguing, bear your testimony, and cite sources of additional information for those who are interested in learning more.

CLICK Ultimately interacting online is all about people. Since blogs don’t allow for messaging, chats, or similar social interaction, you might want to link your blog to your other social media accounts. Doing so will help you connect with your audience, and have a go-to venue available for conversations on gospel topics.

It’s also important to reply to and interact with those reading and commenting on your posts. As you have positive and friendly conversations with your readers your potential for impact grows. Interacting with your audience also helps you build relationships, so you have a better idea of who might be interested in learning more about the gospel in the future. If you have spent time talking with others about a variety of topics, those who are curious about Mormonism will likely feel more comfortable coming to you with questions.

CLICK Stephanie Nielson, author of the popular blog, “NieNie Dialogues” is a great example of sharing your testimony and faith through blogging. Her blog began as a place to share experiences and ideas with close friends and family. After a horrific plane crash burned over 80% of her body, Stephanie’s story, and her difficult journey to recovery, became a beacon of faith and hope to millions.

On the side of Stephanie’s blog, you’ll find a link to Mormon.org and another to request a free copy of the Book of Mormon. This simple, missionary-minded set up has led to at least 12 baptisms on record, and likely many more. Stephanie explained, “People send me their baptismal pictures. I get lots of emails from all over the world from people who have read The Book of Mormon. Some don’t necessarily want to be baptized but are grateful they know more about my faith. There are little seeds being planted, and I’m honored to be the one to introduce them to the gospel.”

In addition to these little seeds being planted, Stephanie routinely uses her blog to share her testimony and give updates on how her life is gospel focused. Although her story is a

unique one, the lessons and ideas she lives are universal: being a light to others, and opening up about the spiritual side of our lives can and will have a big impact on those around us.

CLICK And as President Uchtdorf taught, “Today there are more ways than ever for us to open our mouths and share with others the joyful news of the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . We can each find a way to use our own particular talents and interests in support of the great work of filling the world with light and truth.”

Just like the millions of Blogs online, we each have unique voices and experiences to share. As we follow the Spirit, “we will find the joy that comes to those who are faithful and courageous enough “to stand as witnesses of God at all times.” As we become more approachable regarding our faith online, more visible in our personal expressions of faith, and more focused on serving others, the Spirit will help us share the gospel in the right way, and at the right time- and perhaps even on a blog.

CLICK for Q&A

CLICK for During Activity