

# Pope to Catholics online: It's not just about hits

24 January 2011, By NICOLE WINFIELD , Associated Press

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(AP) -- Pope Benedict XVI told Catholic bloggers and Facebook and YouTube users Monday to be respectful of others when spreading the Gospel online and not to see their ultimate goal as getting as many online hits as possible.

Echoing concerns in the U.S. about the need to root out online vitriol, Benedict called for the faithful to adopt a "Christian style presence" online that is responsible, honest and discreet

"We must be aware that the truth which we long to share does not derive its worth from its 'popularity' or from the amount of attention it receives," Benedict wrote in his annual message for the church's World Day of [Social Communications](#).

"The proclamation of the Gospel requires a communication which is at once respectful and sensitive."

Benedict didn't name names, but the head of the Vatican's social communications office, Archbishop Claudio Celli, said it was certainly correct to direct the pope's exhortation to some conservative Catholic blogs, [YouTube](#) channels and sites which, with some vehemence, criticize bishops, public officials and policies they consider not Catholic enough.

"The risk is there, there's no doubt," Celli said in response to a question. He confirmed that the Pontifical Council for Social Communications was working on a set of guidelines with recommendations for appropriate style and behavior for Catholics online.

"I don't love such things, but I think we can define some points of reference for behavior," he said, adding that he hoped such a document would come out as soon as possible.

The Vatican's concern comes at a time when incendiary rhetoric - in the media and online - has

come under increasing fire; even U.S. President Barack Obama has urged greater civility in political discourse following the attempted assassination of a U.S. congresswoman.

In his message, Benedict echoed many of the same themes he has voiced in years past about the benefits and dangers of the digital age, saying social networks are a wonderful way to build relationships and community. But he warned against replacing real friendships with virtual ones and warned against the temptation to create artificial public profiles rather than authentic ones.

"There exists a Christian way of communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others," he wrote. "To proclaim the Gospel through the new media means not only to insert expressly religious content into different media platforms, but also to witness consistently, in one's own digital profile and in the way one communicates choices, preference and judgments that are fully consistent with the Gospel."

The 83-year-old Benedict is no techno wizard: He writes longhand and has admitted to a certain lack of Internet savvy within the Vatican.

But under Benedict, the Holy See has greatly increased its presence online: It has a dedicated YouTube channel, and its Pope2You.net portal gives news on the pontiff's trips and speeches and features I-Phone and [Facebook](#) applications that allow users to send postcards with photos of Benedict and excerpts from his messages to their friends.

Celli said the Holy See was working on a new multimedia portal that would be the point of reference for the whole Vatican that he hoped would be operational by Easter. It would start out in English and Italian, with other languages added later.

Currently, the Vatican website <http://www.vatican.va> has links to the Vatican newspaper, the Vatican Museums and other Vatican departments, but it's clunky and out of date.

Celli acknowledged that the pope's annual message - which is full of technical jargon - is not his alone. Celli's office prepares a draft and the pope then makes changes. Celli said he didn't know if Benedict had ever been on Facebook, but said he expected one of his aides had probably shown him around.

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APA citation: Pope to Catholics online: It's not just about hits (2011, January 24) retrieved 25 September 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-01-pope-catholics-online.html>

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