

What type church website do you want?

Some thoughtful planning is needed to ensure that you produce the website you want and need. There are basically three audiences that you might want to consider:

- 1. Present church goers**
- 2. People new to the area looking for a church**
- 3. The unchurched and de-churched – non-believers and former goers.**

Do you want your site to be merely informative – like a church bulletin board or newsletter?

Do you want your site to be knowledge-seeking friendly? Educational? Evangelistic?

Perhaps you'd like to accomplish all of the above. Hmm???

Can this be possible?

Absolutely.

The Commitment and Planning

The senior staff will have to decide they want to address the needs of the broken or unchurched as well as the church community. They will need to completely understand the effort required and the commitment they are making.

Once this commitment has been made, a great deal of up-front planning MUST take place to ensure success.

A budget must be determined to:

- A. Include a cost for Web Hosting.**
- B. A cost for web design. (Sometimes resources are in-house for web design, but like anything else, it will be difficult to hold the designer accountable.)**
- C. Site maintenance costs.**

After you have committed to an amount of money to allocate for the web site, you will need to determine how you want the site to look. Always keep in the front of your mind that the site must be designed in a professional manner whether in-house talent is used or a professional designer is selected. Include the designer in the planning stages of the web site and listen to their input as to what can and

cannot be accomplished within your budget.

The Amateur Web Site

Church web sites often look “amateurish” and cheesy. While churches are known to spend thousands of dollars on print advertising in the Yellow Pages, local newspaper, or community Christian guides, most web sites are the result of a collage of topics and pictures thrown together with a cookie-cutter program like MS FrontPage (FrontPage can be used effectively, but often is not.). The overuse of animated clips, up to seven different font styles and sizes, and huge image files that take forever to load, add to the unprofessional web presence.

The Weekly Bulletin Board

Far too often, your church’s site looks more like an extension of your weekly bulletin filled with what are great and wonderful programs and announcements for your congregation. Occasionally, you will insert a sermonette that is geared to spark the interest of or give theological teaching to those who attend a church on some level of frequency. You might have an invitation to prospective members, or people new to the community to come and enjoy the church’s fellowship. You may even have an invitation, prayer of repentance and instruction for those who want Christ in their life. But far too often nothing is included to draw in the unchurched – those of our society that have never (or in their mind will never) set foot inside of a church’s front (or back) door.

Watch Your Language!

The unchurched do not understand *church-eze* and simply won’t “fellowship,” submit “prayer requests,” or participate in “worship.” To them, these are totally foreign terms that bring images of cult-type behavior and “blind obedience” to an illogical and impractical set of teachings.

Often, themed navigation tabs use a good deal of *church-eze*. For example, instead of a tab labeled “Ministries,” how bout something like “What We Do.”

It's a Group Project

The staff will need to commit to updating the web site weekly with new articles, testimonies, reports and so on. Remember that a stale web site loses it’s validity as a caring outreach. It gives the viewer the impression that if you don’t care about keeping fresh information out there, then what would make them think that you will hang in there with them. It is also a fact that the more varied the presentation, the greater the opportunity in reaching the target audience.

Site Ideas

Please, in your messages, announcements, reports and witnessing, get rid of church-eze. Then lay out the web site starting with the main page, have content that deals with real life issues:

A. Include weekly articles that speak to your target audience.

B. Present vivid testimonies of those who have walked out of sin and destructive behavior through the redemptive and restorative work of the Holy Spirit. Be very careful not to have testimonies that simply say “Jesus saved me and I never sinned again.” These testimonies ought to be true life sagas of the journey from sin to salvation including all the pitfalls. Real people telling their real stories.

C. Determine the real life issues that exist in your community such as sex, drugs, adultery, finances, gangs etc. When addressing these issues, you must always recognize that a percentage of your congregation is secretly entrapped in the same or similar behavior. Therefore, you need to provide:

1. A frank and open discussion of the behavior and its damaging affects on individuals, families and communities.

2. A clear non-condemning guide to the redemptive power of Christ.

3. Provide an anonymous “I have a question/problem” mail/form that will be directed to staff members for response. It is noted here that it is imperative that these requests get prompt professional attention.

4. Along with the form, you might want to establish an online forum or bulletin board where people can post questions, problems and opinions. A staff person needs to monitor the board closely to police for disruptive and/or vulgar messages, and to spot a seriously disturbed person that requires immediate intervention.

5. And, finally, you will want one or more photo galleries. These can go a long way in showing unchurched people that you are regular people just like them.

In your planning, be imaginative, creative and even bold in your design. To lead people to salvation, you must first get them to stop at your web site, and then scan the content to find something compelling that appeals to them. And, always keep your web site fresh and up-to-date.