



Web Matters

By Glenn A. Lucas

At the most recent Basic Mission Planter Training, we discussed the importance of a website as part of the overall marketing and outreach strategies of new church plants. In today's culture, people learn a lot about a church from its website, and the lack of a web presence can reflect poorly. Below are some things to keep in mind as you design and work with your church's site:

1. Brand

Your web site is part of your branding. It is important to create a site that will communicate what you want about your church. People will learn what you value from the content and look of your web site. They will decide whether your ministry is worth visiting.

2. Goal

What do you want your web site to accomplish for your church? Is it a communication tool for current members, an outreach tool for potential guests and members, or both? What do you want users to think, feel, and believe about your church? You need to answer these questions to design an effective web site.

The Center for U.S. Missions recently redesigned its web site to make navigation and event registration easier. Some new features include a forum for registered users and a blog.

3. Dynamic or Static

A cardinal sin of many church web sites is out dated information. Visitors to your site want to see content that is current and relevant. It is better to have a simple site with a welcome, your location, and times of worship, rather than a site listing past events that is rarely updated.

If you are going to have a dynamic site (i.e., updated regularly), it is important that someone in your church be appointed to maintain the site and its content. Your church should have a policy about what can be posted and where on the site.

4. Keep It Simple

Another problem with many church web sites is that they overwhelm the visitor with information on the home page. Google is a huge web site and company but their web page is simple yet functional.

- Decide what is most important to share on the home page.
- Decide what other content you want to share online and what sub pages are needed to share that content.
- Choose simple and clean graphics.
- Choose a simple and clear navigation system.
- Limit the number of fonts, sizes, and styles you use on the site. Too many fonts in various sizes and colors look messy and unorganized.

- Design cross platform and cross browser. While PCs are still dominant in the market place more and more people are using Apple computers. There are a plethora of web browsers. Each handles content slightly differently so you should test your site on different platforms with different web browsers.

Your web site communicates a lot about your church. It is important that your church knows what it wants to communicate and design the site with that goal in mind. Keep it updated and simple.

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Questions for Reflection

1. Do we have a web site?
2. Is our web site current? Who maintains it?
3. What is the purpose of our web site and does it accomplish that purpose? How do we know?
4. What are our church's values? Does our web site reflect them?
5. Is our web site easy to navigate?
6. Do our graphics communicate what we want them to communicate? Are they clean and clear?
7. What does our web site look like on a PC and Mac? How does it look in Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, Netscape, etc.?
8. What do we need to do to improve our web site?

Links

[Cross of Christ](#) [example] - Features a very simple home page as you enter their site. Each page on the site is focused. Notice how often you are invited to an action even if it is something as simple as click here.

[First Lutheran Church](#) [example] - This church's web site provides easy navigation. Each page is focused. It has cool calendar feature on the home page. The only problem appears to be the overlapping of elements due to the differences in fonts on different platforms and browsers.

[Clover](#) [resource] - Provides inexpensive web sites and hosting for churches. They focus on church plants but any ministry can take advantage of their services. The sites are built from templates and cost \$1000 for the site and \$20 a month for hosting. You can demo any of the available templates.

[ChurchWebsites](#) [resource] - Provides free web sites for churches through a form and template process. Take a look at the testimonials to get a sense of what they offer.

[Google "web sites for churches"](#) [web site] - Okay, just google it.

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