

Church Website Design Philosophy

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When designing your church website the look can be anything you want it to be – whatever fits your local church identity. But what about the philosophy behind the design? What are you trying to accomplish with your website?

Your website can help you keep your people informed and up to date with what's happening in your church, but more importantly, your website is an always-on portal through which you can speak to the people in your community. Your website is the first place people outside your church will look for information about your church. Their experience with your website will be perhaps the single greatest influence on their decision to attend – or not. I can't imagine a church member leaving your congregation because they don't like your website, but someone who has never been to your church may very well never come if they aren't impressed with your site.

For this reason, a church website should always be designed for the person who has never attended your church. Theirs is the experience you should be most concerned with as you design.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Your website should answer the question “who is <YourChurch>?” on every page. In fact, it should scream the answer on every page, both visually and with content.
2. A visitor's experience should be like meeting a new friend (your church). This new friend should invite the visitor to hang out with their other friends soon (invite them to come to your service). The visitor should want to come! **Your website is your church's personal invitation to people you've never met.**

3. There are several questions a visitor may have in mind when they are looking at your church website.

1. Who's the pastor?
2. What is the preaching like?
3. What's the music like?
4. What does this church believe?
5. Will I fit in?
6. What will my kids do/experience?
7. Does this church do anything besides service on Sunday?
8. Where and when?
9. I need help/I'm facing a crisis, who can I talk to?

When designing your website ask yourself:

Are these questions answered?

Does our home page make it easy for a visitor to find these answers?

Is it easy for a visitor to find the next answer from whatever page they find themselves on? Will any page make a visitor think "what do I do now?" or "where do I go from here?"

How many pages (clicks) does it take to find these answers? It should never be more than 3-4.

An "I'm going to that church!" experience with your website will require this kind of easy navigation. Here are a few rules to live by:

1. Do not speak Christianese – never use words that non-church people don't understand. You may be surprised what words we use all the time have little to no, or very different meaning to people who don't go to church. Ask a friend of yours who doesn't attend church what they think you mean. Even words like "ministries" – a common heading on church websites - are confusing to some. It's important to understand what information visitors are looking for on your website, but it's equally important to understand how that information needs to be communicated to them.

2. The headings on your navigation bar should be clear, informative, easy to understand, and beacons for the information behind them. Any visitor should be able to know which button to push to answer any of their questions. The buttons need to be broad, but not vague. For example, people will be wondering what your church services are like (preaching and worship) so it's great to have some files online they can listen to. A good title for that button would be "Experience <YourChurch>" a bad title would be "Downloads." Have a look around at other church websites to see how they title their navigation buttons, and think about the visitor questions. Take note of buttons you see that immediately make you aware of where your questions could be answered.

3. Don't clutter up your home page. The first page people see should be your introduction – and that is all. What do you want people to know about your church in 3 minutes or less. That's all that needs to be on your home page. Of course, one of the things you want people to know about your church is how to find more information about your church, so a visible, well titled, easy to use navigation bar is extremely important.

4. Check, re-check, and then have someone else check your work. Typos, broken links, out-of-date information and poorly phrased text are easy to miss when you look at it all the time. But these types of mistakes are easily picked up on by a visitor, and will often communicate that your church is unprofessional, amateurish, or just plain careless – not a church they want to attend, especially if they have children. Put your best foot forward with your website. Have someone look at it often and critique it for you. It's a good idea to have someone who doesn't attend your church look at it too from time to time, maybe an out-of-town family member or friend.

5. Complicated is not always better. People visit your website for information, not entertainment. A really complex website with impressive graphics, video and sound that doesn't answer the visitor's questions about the church will not accomplish the goal of making the visitor want to come to your church. **Remember, your website is your church's personal invitation to people you've never met.**

Some Websites Examples

www.cotr.tv – good “Are you new?” questions

www.loveloud.org – good navigation titles

www.mscwired.org – good navigation titles, good experience

www.lifechurch.tv – good navigation titles – very conversational

www.johncalvinpres.org – good navigation titles – very conversational

www.northchurch.tv – good home page content – right amount of info and communicates what church is like

www.jamesriver.org – good navigation, great overall site

www.inlandhillschurch.com – good “welcome” on home page

www.northpointnow.org – good navigation, good experience

www.citychurchmpls.org – Great navigation, good home page, good welcome

www.thefallschurch.org – great navigation

www.liquidchurch.com – good navigation, good experience

www.mountainchristian.org – I don’t like “General Info” I do like “Learn”

www.myriversidechurch.com – great navigation, great experience

www.northpoint.org – great navigation and experience

Some Web Design Companies with more examples

www.elementfusion.com

www.siteorganic.com

www.plainjoestudios.com

www.cloversites.com