

Title: Facebook Fan Page or Website - Where Should I Start?

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Second Subtitle: #0 My Church Doesn't Have a Web Site - Should It Get One?

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Summary: 1. Having a web presence is no longer a nicety, but a necessity.
2. You have limitations, as do the various options for establishing your web presence.
3. It's not that difficult or stressful to make a decision, once you know what you want.

There are lots of ways to communicate online and there are a variety of options. Where should you focus your attention? Where should you start? Website? Facebook? Twitter? Blogspot? Tumblr? YouTube? MySpace?

Well, you get the idea - there are a lot of facets to your online presence and you have to consider what others have to say about building your online identity and communicating with them.

You may be faced with this question and wonder how to approach it. There are several more to help us answer it - what is the barrier to entry and return on investment? The Big 3 - Time, Talent and Money

How much time do you have?
How much skill do you have?
How much money do you have?

Odd how it these 3 are ever-present in making decisions. They also must be in a certain combination. If you aren't pressed for time, or have a lot of time to spare, time goes down. If your project has a short timeline, you'll need to have a lot of money to complete the launch on time. Likewise, if you have a fair amount of time, but not a lot of money, the project sooner, relying on fewer outside resources (money). Be sure to have a good understanding of these 3 resources as you begin your adventure of communicating online.

If you don't have time, skill or money, you will need a different set of tools to get the job done. If you have them, they are out there!

Strategy and Maintenance

Once you've established the parameters of your project, you'll need to consider how to maintain that with your church's ministry and message -

How will people find out about you? (Discovery)
How will they know when you've posted something new? (Notifications)
How will you maintain your information or add functionality? (Ease of Use)
How will you moderate your information? (Moderation)

These last questions help determine the nuts and bolts for delivering your message.

the Field of Dreams, where if you build it they will come. You need to tell them how to find you. You need to let them know when you've added something. You need to spread your message to other listeners and stay in touch with those who listen. Time and money do play a part in answering these questions, but these efforts are not what your launch had a fixed duration and resource expenditure.

So far, we still haven't directly answered our burning question - Facebook or a website? More disclaimer before we get to the specifics - these 2 things are not mutually exclusive for the same purpose in different ways. Choosing 1 will not prevent you, nor does it prevent developing the other. In fact, your overall strategy should include both facets of your online message for your church or ministry. This is all about maximizing your efforts, given the 2 primary options.

Let's see how the 2 Big Choices measure up against the Big 3.

Time

Most people will say they have more time than money, but that isn't always true. If you have your own website, you'll need to have some extra time. First, you'll need to register (register) your domain name (web address). This can be rather simple, especially if the name you select is available and you don't need to find an alternative. But, with hundreds of similar names, you'll probably find yourself using a combination of your church name and a similar name. After you get your domain name, you'll need to get a place for your site to live. There are a wide range of prices, but you should be able to find a suitable host for your site and add your site in a matter of a few hours. It can take up to a day or 2 for a host to be able to find your site, so plan on being viewing a site on a new domain a few days or hours of starting. That is assuming you have content ready to publish.

The design, building and deploying a new website generally requires some time and rework before you launch. There are a myriad of decisions to make about the look, feel, functionality and maintenance. Depending on your organization, you may need to work out all those details. If you already have a detailed plan for your website, and built, 1 to 2 weeks is not a unreasonable length of time for this to take. Contrast all this with creating a fan page on Facebook. Select a page name, create a page, and than selecting and acquiring a domain name. Domain names usually go for a few minutes name in Facebook. So, a few minutes is all it takes.

No need to look for a host - your fan page will live on Facebook. No time to wait for a host. It is instantly available once you publish it.

Design, build, structure and functionality are also rather simple with Facebook. You can have elaborate and have custom applications written for you, but there are already many applications available for you to choose from to complete the construction. It takes yourself a 1/2 day for research and selection of a few basic applications. It takes time to figure out what you'd like to use.

The summary - Basic Website: 2 days - 2 (or more) weeks; Facebook: 1/2 day. Talent

Not only do you need some time to get your site started, you'll need a little talent for selecting a domain name registrar, selecting and setting up your site, and building your website. Web hosts are working hard to lower this barrier and there are many solutions for people.

Again, Facebook has lowered the barrier for people to create pages and use the software to use, no extra files to upload, no geeky commands to type to use. Of course, go all out and develop your own custom applications to use on your website isn't necessary and definitely isn't required.

The summary - Website: moderate skills; Facebook: basic skills

Money

While you might run across some very cheap domain registrars and hosting free ones. Domain registration and hosting costs are ongoing costs, so you'll need to keep. You can find free solutions for creating and building need to find some talent to help get to be just what you want.

Domain registrations - \$15/year

Basic shared hosting - \$5/month

Total for the cheapest website - \$75/year, ongoing

If you need to have a design created and any customized functionality, p \$5000.

Facebook - free.

I'll let you do the rest of the math!

The 4 other areas ~~Decision, Original Content, Ease of Use, Moderation~~ deserve some attention, too.

For a standalone website, your new site will be discovered by search engines while, even when you do submit your site to be indexed. Knowledge of you around the web as you spread the news about it and as those that do know too. Rarely do I know if someone I know has visited a site before me, unless it or have left a comment or post on the site. The very nature of Facebook what pages my friends like and where they are posting comments, Because more people will discover your fan page before they know about your website. Most websites are built to allow people to get notices when anything changes feeds provided by you. Using a feed reader, like Google Reader, they can over the web without having to visit the sites. Your site may also have members, through emails or text messages. A member of Facebook automates their friends' activities and by the pages they like. Signing up for notice RSS feeds to their readers requires a little more effort and tech savvy. The question of ease of use I'll call a tie - while there are websites that use some specialized software and require special skills, you wouldn't pick to use them. That said, you do have to pick the right tools for your site to build. Final ~~Moderation~~ your site will have no user contributed comments or posts going to be an issue. However, if you do, someone will have to monitor and them. Not too big of a problem. But, a person can have only 1 identity on posts are not allowed. With only 1 identity, people tend to protect it and better, on Facebook. On your site, you don't have any way of connecting other sites, so it is a bit easier to post without consequences.

Wrap Up

You aren't the only facing these decisions - I face them in projects I work and even [Guy Kawasaki faces them](#)

All-in-all, Facebook has lowered the barrier to entry and made establishing church or ministry dead simple with no costs, unless you go into customizing sooner, cheaper and with less technical skill than you can on a standalone you create a fan page?

Now, I wouldn't stop with a fan page - as time, money and talent allow, a Facebook is supported by advertisers, so visitors to your fan page will all control which ones. You will also be stuck with the way Facebook looks. Facebook, with your information tucked inside. A content management system a domain name you control can give you the ability to totally build in something hard-pressed to do in Facebook at a reasonable price. Plus, on your own

the other noise going on around you. Your site is dedicated to delivering
Facebook your message is squeezed between everyone else's.
If you haven't done either a fan page or a website, start with a fan page.
If you have a website, get your fan page started and tie it to your website.