

Title: The 5 W's of the WWW

Subtitle: Web Strategies

Second Subtitle: #0 Key Concepts in Planning and Maintaining Your Web

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Date: 2008/6/22

URL: <https://www.christianwebresources.net/modules/article/view/article.>

Keywords: content, marketing, strategy, community

Summary: We all remember being taught the Five W's (and one H) in school. These are still relevant in the realm of the World Wide Web. Who, What, When, Where, and How, not only to your online content, but also to your online outreach.

Good journalism is rooted in providing the basic information on a topic and audience. It is not just about the content of your articles - it is also about the audience. Who is your audience (who are you trying to reach)?

This is probably one of the most critical elements of your online strategy. Many factors are not at play online. Cultural differences are not apparent until you reach your web site. While 'profiling' has some bad associations, knowing who you are reaching when developing materials just for them is a good practice you can adopt.

Here are some of the basic questions to ask about your intended audience:

What knowledge of your community do they have?

What knowledge of your congregation do they have?

What knowledge of your denomination do they have?

What knowledge of the Gospel do they have?

Are they receptive to the Gospel?

The [Gray Matrix](#) can help you determine your approach. Members of your congregation have different needs than unchurched visitors in a country on the opposite side of the globe from your community.

You also must understand the differences between online communities and offline communities. Online communities must have access to the Internet in order to interact. Online communities can be formed by people on the opposite sides of the globe, while offline communities are usually much more geographically concentrated. In an online community, it is difficult to ascertain one's financial status, educational background, gender or age. In offline communities, it is difficult to mask those attributes.

What is your message (and what are their interests)?

What impression do you want to make? Think of your first encounter with a new group at worship services - are you going to sign them up for ushering or teaching? The initial part of any relationship is getting acquainted with each other.

they are interested in. Get to know your visitors and they will guide you how you can help them.

When are they online (and when are you available)?

Services on Sunday morning, or even Saturday evening, are not the only spiritual connections. Get used to the Internet being global, without time chats with people 6 time zones away, even 12 time zones away. There are of the day and all around the globe. This poses some challenges, but also

A church or ministry web site effectively opens the doors to visitors for spending time online generally spend an increasing amount of time online usually many times throughout the day. If you only have fresh information you might be missing a lot of opportunities to connect with your audience. Where are they (and where are you)?

This is similar to the last 'W' (When) - the Internet is global, in case you have the opportunity to be visited by people in your community, in nearby communities in remote locations nowhere near you. Don't make assumptions that people know all about you and where you are.

Do your congregation members travel? How can you connect with them when regular worship times? Does your congregation partner with missions in other countries? How can you strengthen the connection with them when you are separated?

Members of your congregation already know how to get to your worship location. Members may, or may not. Visitors to your web site may be in a completely different point of reference for your location. Be sensitive to the location of your visitors and serve them from where you are.

Why are you using the Web (and why do you expect people to visit your site)? Do you see the Web as a tool, or as a ministry? Or, possibly, as both? Take time so don't zoom right by it. Spend some time in prayer about this - God has a plan for you ask him.

The Web is certainly a tool you can use in your church or ministry to level up your communication.

The Web is also a mission field. You can reach people directly with your website. Reach your congregation that are strengthened through your web site. Be sure to use various perspectives and balance your approach to fit your priorities.

How will they find you (and how will you interact with them)?

You have invested in informing people where your worship services are located.

phone directory listings, newspaper advertising, door-to-door visits, mail, or any combination of the above. A physical location also has some drive-by connections. How can you connect with people online?

I won't give you all the options, but use the same techniques you currently use for any church or event - publish in your regular print materials, announce it in worship services and meetings, discuss it in staff meetings, add it to your phone directory, postcards - basically, any communication channel you have should inform your online channels, too,

Then, turn things over to the Digital Generation - they can spread news about your church through cell phones, text messaging, instant messaging, online social networks like Facebook and MySpace, and even some 'older' technologies, like email. Just be prepared for new ways people will interact with your web site. In fact, if you are responsible for a church website, have a Facebook or MySpace account, you are not fully qualified to run a church website. Learn how people interact online, build communities and how the web will change.

Getting visitors to your site should not be your only goal - you need to serve your visitors and developing relationships with them, just as you would if they were in your services. Find ways to start those relationships online - feedback forms, question and answers and discussions, mailing lists, messaging options and social bookmark or comment on articles are just some of the ways.

The Five W's of the WWW are the same five W's you learned in school, but it is important to consider the five W's of your audience as the five W's of your website.