

Title: Church Websites 101: Fix the Easy Stuff

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Summary: Intro Church Websites 101: Easy Not Simple going to dig deeper into the strategies you can employ to build and maintain a more effective web ministry.

The easy fixes are things you have, or should have, direct control over - all about what you post online. Examine your topics, your schedule for posting, the language you use and your presentation. Do it now and keep doing it - establish discipline) for your ministry.

It's embarrassing, but as simple as these things are, they often get overlooked. We think the web is much more complex than it is. Whatever the reason, here are some easy fixes for your website.

Place location and contact info on every page - top and bottom

People like to know where they are, and the web is no exception. Your identity and context for your content - who is behind this information? Contact information is the next step - a chance to connect with a person.

Why top and bottom? Readers will come to your pages either through a link or from a search engine (Google, Bing). This could bring them to a point on your page where your contact information isn't visible. If your information is only at the top or bottom, you have a lot of visitors lacking the contextual clues from your site information.

Remove or archive outdated content

Announcements about your upcoming church picnic, held last summer, will be outdated if you're still around. If the content is just as relevant today as it was when it was posted, there is time-sensitive information, be sure it is archived or isn't the primary content. It has taken place. If that is the only content you have, see the next point.

Add current content

Seems like a no-brainer, but often the church website is the last thing to be updated. Schedules, weekly bulletins and announcements often get top billing. Consider what your readers want to know you're still active. If some content has gotten stale, replace it. Be ready to take its place. Right? You don't need to report on every bit of news. Pick out the big rocks and give them some space and time online.

Do not use jargon

Have you read your announcements or newsletter as someone who knows nothing about the church, your theology or your culture? A fun way to get an idea of the words you use them is by reading Jesus spoke in parables to make complex things understandable. We don't need to complicate matters with big words. Unless you are theologians, seminarians or doctoral candidates, use the simplest words possible. No in tongues.

Use pictures appropriately

Pictures are worth 1,000 words, but shouldn't take their place. Words should. This includes the banner at the top of the page, too. Your page needs to have white space to be enjoyable and readable. Too often I see images posing as text is always more appropriate.

Related to this is the use of text formatting in your posts. Use 2 or 3 font sizes and 1 for general text is really all you need. Font ~~bold~~ **bold** should be used for emphasis, and no colors, other than your primary text color. Yellow, pink, and other colors, but they are difficult to read and more of a distraction than a help.

Do not use clipart

Just as bad as using an image for text is using clipart instead of a real picture. The use of graphics is fine, just use elements that reflect a somewhat current style (a designer) review the graphics you are using or intend to use. They'll be in your opinion and perhaps even help with finding appropriate graphics to use.

No 'Under Construction' or 'Coming Soon' pages

Let's face it - pages announcing they are ~~under construction~~ **under construction** are rarely actually being built and often never materialize. Those pages serve no purpose, except for planning and commitment. When search engines come across those pages they find pages without any real value. When you do finally get something posted it's a while before the search bots return to discover you've updated the content.

This is Easy - and Simple

All of these are corrective measures - easily remedied and also easily prevented by deliberate discussions with the people updating and publishing your web content. You need to include your leadership and clergy and any other staffers that can help construct your website.

Next in the series: **Note Always Easy, But Should Be**