

Web Site Design & Hosting: Harnessing the Power of the Internet

By Gavin Fysh

When marketing researcher Matt Smith moved from Washington state to a new job in the Los Angeles area, one of the first things he did was look for a church to attend.

“Finding a new church can be scary,” Smith said. “You want an idea before you attend a service whether it is going to work for you.”

To gain an understanding of the churches that were in the area, he turned to the Internet, where he could check out such aspects of a church as its beliefs, the pastor and staff, and the services and events it offered.

“If a church did not have its own Web site, I did not even consider it,” Smith said. “I like to use it to get my first screening of the church — the size, the beliefs, and so on.”

Based on what he found on the Web, Smith selected a church that met in a movie theater in the area where he and his family moved. Several months later, they are still attending the church.

Internet Presence Is Vital

Smith’s experience is typical. Many church-seekers today consult the Internet before they decide which church to attend. Some have never attended a church before, others are seeking to move to a different church, and others, like Smith, are new to the area.

It is not surprising that so many are turning to the Web as part of their search to find a spiritual home. In today’s communications world, the Internet has become the preferred means of obtaining and propagating information, and an effective Web site has become an essential communication tool for every church.

Creating a favorable initial impression on church seekers and thereby boosting attendance is only one reason an effective Web site is important. Here are four others.

1. An effective Web site conveys basic information easily and effectively at all times.

Such details as the times of services and directions to the church are essential in reaching outsiders, but even regular attendees will want to consult the site for the times of special events.

2. An effective Web site serves as an ever-present and easily obtainable brochure.

A Web site is considerably more powerful than handing out flyers on street corners or advertising services on a reader board. It provides more information, can be easily updated, and is available at any time in every Internet user’s home.

3. An effective Web site provides labor-saving efficiency.

Many time-saving and labor-saving benefits are available through a Web site. For example, church attendees can register online for a special event, freeing up staff members — who would otherwise be required to gather the information — for other

duties. Should churchgoers miss a sermon, or potential attendees want to hear a message, they can access it through an audio or video recording posted on the church Web site, making the preparation and distribution of recordings unnecessary.

4. An effective Web site provides a mechanism for online giving.

Online tithing not only is efficient, but it also promotes giving. When people can sign up for automatic withdrawals from their checking accounts, they will not be a victim of such lapses as forgetting to take their checkbook to church, dropping their tithes because they were out of town the Sunday after payday, or failing to tithe while on vacation. Some churches have noted as much as a 60 percent increase in giving after they have provided online tithing.

Affordability

Convinced you need a Web site or that you need to upgrade the one you have? You do not need to spend a lot of money to do so. Indeed, most churches can afford to have an effective Web site if they know where to look.

True, if you use a Web designer to build a custom site for your church, you will likely spend thousands of dollars on the setup, not to speak of hundreds a month on keeping it up-to-date.

It's also true that if you select a volunteer from the church who "knows how to run a Web site," the site will be free. But, sooner or later, you are likely to get what you pay for. Often, the person's knowledge is inadequate, resulting in a poorly designed or broken Web site, or the site gets neglected when the volunteer is busy or is on vacation. And what happens should the volunteer leave the church?

The choice recommended as an effective and cost-efficient way for most churches to have a quality Internet presence is to plug into a company that specializes in providing turnkey Web sites for churches.

You should look for a company that will first take you through the steps of finding and registering a URL for your church and getting you up and running. The company should provide a variety of templates and design features that you can adapt to create a unique image for your church.

The site should be easy to maintain, enabling you or anyone on your staff, whether they are technology savvy or not, to upload information and pictures for the site over the Internet. It should ensure that information posted online remains current. And, it should provide a quality, professional-looking design that cannot be broken.

Finally, of course, you should be able to operate such a site without spending a lot of money.

Plugging into such a service will give you all the impact of an expensive, custom-designed site, will provide you with all the essential features you need, and yet will be affordable.

If you are still on the back roads of the Internet revolution, you have no reason to delay a decision to move to the freeway. After all, someone might be checking out your Web site right now to decide on that basis whether to attend service this Sunday.

Gavin Fysh is the founder of Church Web Works, a leading provider of quality, easy-to-use, and affordable church Web sites, www.churchwebworks.com.

Product Roundup

Church Helpmate

Church Helpmate is the church membership management system that's simply powerful and powerfully simple. Visit their Web site to learn how churches are using it to save time and money, build unity, make better disciples, increase ministry participation, and simplify their church office life. With its unique design, Church Helpmate is intuitive enough for your entire team to quickly learn and use, yet it provides enough power and flexibility to satisfy the most demanding church office.

www.helpmate.com

Church111

Build your church or ministry Web site with ease and at no cost using Church111. No other programs or software are needed. There is a one-time setup and training fee, but there is absolutely no development cost, since you can customize your church Web site yourself with easy-to-use content management system. If you need help, friendly experts are on hand to help get you started.

www.church111.com

PinPoint Creative Group

PinPoint Creative Group is an award-winning creative agency specializing in branding communications. PCG is dedicated to assisting churches and ministries as they initiate growth. Through research of their market, PinPoint determines the church's positioning in their local area. Then, their strategists develop marketing communications that will most effectively communicate with their potential market.

www.pinpointcreative.com

SiteOne Internet

SiteOne Internet believes that your Web site tells your visitors a lot about you and your organization. A slow Web site, or one that's poorly designed, can turn off a customer, while a site that's quick, well laid out, and dynamic can create a professional image that turns visitors into customers. The company strives to bring personal attention to every client and project to capture the full potential of the Internet. To help you bring your message to the world, they offer Web site hosting on fast, secure servers, dynamic Web site development, and Web site consulting.

www.siteoneinternet.com

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Mustard Seed Studio

Most church Web sites are static, hard to update, and don't capitalize on the potential of being a major ministry tool. Custom-designed Web sites by Mustard Seed Studio look great, are easy to navigate, and are set up so that they are easily updated without being a "techie." They divide your site in two sections: First-Time Guests and Members. This makes it easy for the first-timer to get right to the information they are looking for without wading through areas that aren't meaningful to them.

www.mustardseedstudio.com

E-zekiel

E-zekiel is a complete Web solution for ministry, from Web site creation, hosting, and e-mail to blogs and even video. Similar to word-processing software, included tools make it quick to build and update Web pages and other online content. And, you can rely on E-zekiel's ego-boosting support team to help you solve ministry specific communication challenges. Also, check out www.e-zekiel.tv, where you can easily upload, view and share Christian videos for free.

www.e-zekiel.com

Details Communications

At Details Communications, they believe communicating more effectively equates to greater impact. That's their focus and passion at Details—your message made clear. Details provides strategic design solutions tailored to meet your church's unique needs and objectives. Their experienced creative and marketing team will help you differentiate your message from the multitudes and initiate responses through custom Web design, robust content management, e-newsletter creation, and more.

www.detailscom.com

SiteWrench from SPEAK! Creative

Built to help you manage the content of your Web site and add functionality that makes it more than just an online brochure, SiteWrench is a premier content management system for ministries. It is Web-based, so you can access it anywhere (Mac and PC). It is simple and straightforward, so you can make sense of it even if you're not so tech savvy. And, it's powerful, so you can do more with your Web site when you're ready. Simply put, SiteWrench gives you power over your Web site.

www.speakcreative.com

Cornerstone Websites

Cornerstone Websites was established in 2007 by Jesse Kremer, owner and Web site developer. Based on a solidly Christian foundation, Cornerstone Websites is determined to provide high-quality Web sites to Christian churches and schools. Through their association with family-owned Christian publisher Kremer Publications, they are able to

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provide visually stunning graphics and logos that are sure to capture your visitor's attention.

www.cornerstonewebsites.com

Evolve Technologies

Is your network running slowly? Is your Internet speed at a crawl? To increase your speeds, you can invest in more bandwidth or you can take steps to manage your existing bandwidth better. Evolve Technologies' Managed Network and Web Monitoring Service can help you make the most of your network without upgrading your equipment or bandwidth. Their Managed Network and Web Monitoring Service identifies the applications, equipment, or users that are negatively impacting overall performance.

www.evolve-tech.com

OurChurch.Com

OurChurch.Com (OCC) was founded in 1996 on the idea that every Christian church should have a presence on the Internet. Twelve years later, OCC has grown into the premier "one-stop shop" for Christian Web site services. OurChurch.Com specializes in Web site design, hosting, and marketing for Christian churches. It currently hosts more than 12,000 Christian Web sites. OurChurch.Com can build a customized Web site for you or provide to you the free tools to easily create your own. OurChurch.Com provides Web-hosting solutions that will accommodate the simplest to the most robust Web sites.

www.ourchurch.com

RDS Advantage

RDS Advantage provides a flexible, fully integrated church management software system for all your church group and office management, accounting, and security needs. Its Virtual Village can help your church connect with your members and keep important data safe while allowing members access from home. RDS software provides comprehensive and feature-rich applications for churches and non-profit organizations.

www.rdsadvantage.com