

# Creating a Good Website

A Guide to Achieving Outreach Objectives Online

Created by:  
***faithHighway***



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# About

faithHighway is an evangelistic organization with a primary purpose of spreading the gospel of the Lord and Savior Jesus. faithHighway's internet technologies empower over 4500 churches who combined receive millions of web hits; a number that is growing daily. faithHighway is the largest provider of custom websites to churches and ministries in the world and is continuing to expand at a rapid pace. In recent history, faithHighway launched its new product, SermonConnect.com. SermonConnect is an online media and communications center that enables pastors and ministry leaders to manage their media anytime, anywhere with excellence. With over 25,000 sermons online, faithHighway has built up one of the largest repositories of audio and video messages in the world. A few of the many features of SermonConnect include pod casting, blogging, and unlimited audio/video streaming.

In addition to custom website design, televisions commercials, and robust online media center, faithHighway offers an array of design services. From logos and identity packages to marketing campaign design and print fulfillment, faithHighway is prepared to assist churches and ministries in an array of branding and marketing arenas. By utilizing a variety of medium, faithHighway hopes to partner with Christian organizations as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

## Related Websites:

- **faithHighway** – [www.faithhighway.com](http://www.faithhighway.com)
- **SermonConnect** – [www.sermonconnect.com](http://www.sermonconnect.com)
- **Design Services** – [www.faithHighway.com/designservices](http://www.faithHighway.com/designservices)
- **Success Stories** – [www.faithhighway.com/success](http://www.faithhighway.com/success)
- **faithHighway Blog** – [www.mediaoutreach.com](http://www.mediaoutreach.com)

# Introduction

“It’s not about how many hits you get on your website, it’s about how long people stay. If visitors remain on your site long enough to get your marketing message, then you must have said something worth listening to; and if visitors get the message, your site has done its job.”<sup>1</sup> Jerry Bader made this a major point in the article 18 Web-Marketing Concepts That Make a Difference. For a Christian organization, a website’s purpose is to serve as a tool to aid in the success of the organization. For a church or ministry to be successful, it must convey to both nonbelievers and churchgoers that the

***“If visitors get the message, your site has done its job.”***

organization is honest and relevant. While much of this can be achieved from the pulpit and through multiple age and life stage targeted groups, church leadership must accept that before they get

the chance to meet visitors and convey their beliefs, they must first get them to walk through the doors of the church.

While this once was an element taken for granted, today’s society does not automatically promote regular church attendance. More and more people do not consider the traditional church building as a place for their Spiritual growth. If, however, they do find themselves looking for a church home, most individuals these days will look online.

As the use of websites in the non-secular market becomes more popular with each passing day, it has become clear that having a static, uninteresting website is no longer sufficient. Churches must convey their ministry’s image in an appealing way through their website. Before exploring more on why a good website is vital to ministry, it is important to understand what good entails.



# Identifying a Good Website

There are five major elements in every website. When utilized correctly, these elements create great websites: visual design, structure and navigation, interactivity, functionality, and content.

The first thing that jumps to mind when a person is asked if he or she likes a website is the visual design. This can include anything from the images and colors to the quality and relevance of the specific design

elements. A good website will utilize graphic elements to improve the aesthetics of the information the church is trying to convey. As one Web 2.0 design guide recommends “use visual detail – whether lines, words, shapes, color – to communicate the relevant information, not just to decorate.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, the graphics should be relevant to the intended audience and compliment the purpose of the site.

While the visual design is most often the first thing visitors notice about a site, the other major elements must be working correctly for a visitor to truly appreciate the site.

A well-designed site is wonderful but becomes irrelevant if the site is not easy to navigate. Having good structure and navigation is vital in getting information to visitors. According to a Web 2.0 design guide, “Users need to be able to identify navigation, which tells them various important information: where they are (in the scheme of things), where else they can go from here, and what options they have for doing stuff.”<sup>2</sup> This element involves not only the framework of the site, but also the organization of content and prioritization of information. As Larisa Thomason puts it in her Web Site Usability Checklist, “Visitors should be able to predict the location of important page elements after visiting just one page in your site.”<sup>5</sup> In order for the structure and navigation to be considered good, they must be consistent and intuitive. “Violating common expectations for how links work is a sure way to confuse and delay users, and might prevent them from being able

## 5 Elements for a Good Site:

- **Visual Design** – is appropriate to the intended audience and compliments the purpose of the site rather than distracting from it.
- **Structure and Navigation** – gets visitors where they want to go quickly and offers easy access to the breadth and depth of the site’s content.
- **Interactivity** – encourages users to not only gain information but share information as well.
- **Functionality** - makes the experience center stage and the technology invisible.
- **Content** - conveys a body of knowledge to visitors and members alike.



to use your site,"<sup>3</sup> warns Jakob Nielsen, an expert in web usability according to U.S. News & World Report, The New York Times, and many others.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the navigation should be labeled clearly, and as Thomason goes on to point out, "Don't make visitors guess where a link is going to take them."<sup>5</sup> When setting up navigation, remember that visitors to the site will often spend only a short time looking for information. Make every piece of information accessible in two to three clicks to ensure they find what they are looking for. Good navigation gets visitors where they want to go quickly, and offers easy access to the breadth and depth of the site's content.

Along with being able to easily move through a site, visitors should be able to interact with the site. In the age of Web 2.0, the internet no longer consists of static information. "Web 2.0 is a social phenomena deriving from new types of online communities and social networks."<sup>2</sup> Websites have become a place for interactivity and collaboration. It is more than just choosing where to go on the site, it gives the user a chance to participate. For a site to have good interactivity, it must embrace this medium to its full potential. It must encourage users to not only gain information but share information as well.

*"Web 2.0 is a social phenomena deriving from new types of online communities and social networks."*

Another key element is functionality. Even if the site looks great, navigates well, and draws the user in, it will all be meaningless if the site itself does not function. Functionality is everything from the time it takes for images to load to having links that go not only somewhere at all but where they are supposed to go. Good functionality makes the experience center stage and the technology invisible. By having a site that is browser independent, anticipates the diversity of user requirements, and works well, users can easily experience all elements of the site.

In the end, a good website combines good design, navigation, interactivity, and functionality for the ultimate goal of creating an environment that excites users and keeps them around long enough to get to the heart of the entire goal of the website: the content. As Jakob Nielsen puts it, "Let's all remember that web sites are about communication. If you've got nothing to say, nothing to offer, or are afraid to say what you can do for your audience, then how do you expect to be successful?"<sup>1</sup> Once a church attracts the attention of the user, there needs to be useful content or information available. By not only using text but also other elements such as music, sound, animation, video, a church or ministry can convey a body of knowledge to visitors and members alike. In order for the content to be good, it must be relevant and current. Nielsen also says, "Whether you are presenting your case in text, audio, or video, it had better be interesting



and enlightening. [...] When web sites fail, they fail because they do not communicate a realistic, believable, convincing marketing message.”<sup>1</sup> Having a great site in all other elements and then leaving the user with outdated, inaccurate, or impertinent information, defeats the entire purpose of having a website. After all, “You may attract visitors with an eye-catching design, but content is what keeps them at the site and encourages them to return.”<sup>5</sup> On the opposite end, if all the information is perfect but the graphics are uninteresting, the links do not work, and the navigation is confusing, no one will ever read it.

However, if a site can combine all these elements, then that site has the potential to do great things. Recently, faithHighway completed some surveys to find out about what objectives churches and ministries have for their websites. During the course of those surveys, one thing became very clear; Churches and ministries who rated the visual design, navigation, interactivity, functionality, and content of their sites to be good were the same ones who found that the website was achieving their objectives. In fact, 92% of the organizations who rated these elements positively said their site was definitely achieving their objectives.

***“You may attract visitors with an eye-catching design, but content is what keeps them at the site and encourages them to return.”***

## Results of Creating a Good Website

Taking these five elements into consideration a church can create a good website. But why does it matter? It matters because, as mentioned earlier, people do not always go to church to find spiritual answers. They will seek out those answers online. According to a report from Pew Internet, nearly two-thirds of online Americans use the Internet for faith-related reasons.<sup>8</sup> Armed with this knowledge, any Christian organization must first reflect on what their primary goal really is. The ultimate goal is not to have the flashiest website or most well-known church building; the goal is to fulfill the Great Commission. For the past two thousand years, Christians have been listening to the echo of that bold commission from Matthew 28:19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...”<sup>10</sup> This call asks each Christian individual and organization to complete a task that must have seemed daunting to those who first heard it. But they enthusiastically took up the banner of truth and

forged into their local synagogues and sailed oceans to reach out to all they could. Today's generation still needs to hear the truth. That truth needs to reach not only the corners of the world, but people down the street. Church's today use three main avenues as they work to fulfill their portion of this duty: outreach, in reach, and up reach.

While different groups may use different terminology, those really are fundamental to most churches. The first is outreach. This means relevantly engaging the outside community. Usually, most churches want to attract more visitors, and they use outreach to do just that. The Great Commission goes beyond just bringing people into salvation; it demands disciples. According to American Heritage Dictionary, a disciple is "one who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another."<sup>11</sup> To do this, churches and ministries must reach out to members and partners and encourage them in their walk with the Lord. This is most relevantly seen by improving communication amongst members to keep them not only informed but to increase their participation in ministry. Finally, to fully embrace the idea set forth in the Great Commission, ministry must be equipped to complete their different tasks. is, in effect, empowering church leadership to more ministry and healthy church life. When good is combined with an engaged membership, they are effective in achieving outreach and bringing more fellowship.

A church or ministry must fulfill these three in order to work towards the fulfillment of the goal of making Jesus known. It may seem off topic, but if a church first recognizes its goal, it can then begin to identify what tools are needed to achieve this goal. This is where having a good online presence shows value. A good website can become one of the most powerful worldly tools a church can utilize. websites have long been used in the secular forum, but they can be converted into a tool to propel any ministry. They convey to visitors who a church is, what they believe, and what to expect. This creates a bridge into the community that allows the church to reach outside the four walls and draw people in. As Eric Hernandez, a Deacon at Calvary Chapel El Alfarero in Perris, California, puts it, his church's website is "one instrument the Lord has given [them] to get out to the community."

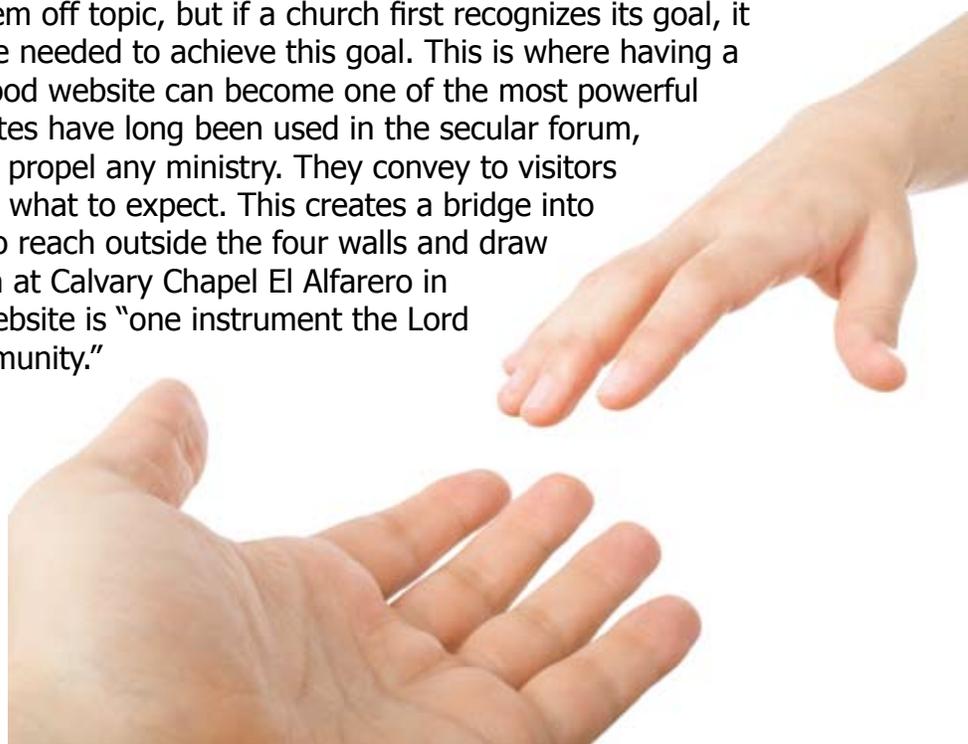
## Church Website Objectives:

- **Outreach** – Engage the outside community
- **In Reach** – Improve communication amongst members
- **Up Reach** – Empower church leadership to facilitate more ministry and healthy church life

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A good site keeps members informed on upcoming events, allows them to give feedback, sign up for events, and find small groups to join. It enhances the connection members feel toward the church and toward each other by providing a more in-touch community with online interaction. A good site can even affect the ability of leaders to minister more effectively. With everything from online prayer requests to secure pages that allow for the distribution of worship music to the praise team. A good website can become the favorite tool for meeting all of these objectives thereby achieving the most important one of all. To fully understand this tool in regards to these different objectives, it is time to take a more in depth look at each specific objective.

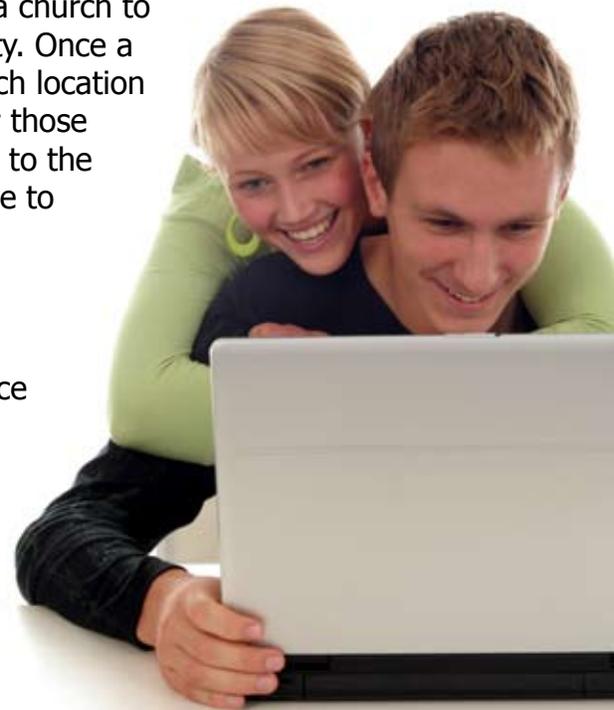
## Attracting Visitors to the Website

The Internet has become a powerful tool. More and more people are online for everything from shopping and catching up with old friends to searching for information and learning more. Everything from the "how to's" of Expert Village and the entertainment value of YouTube to the online sales through Ebay and Amazon are a testament to the growing popularity and usefulness of the internet. 88 percent of online Americans say the Internet plays a role in their daily routines.<sup>8</sup> With this growing online popularity, more and more churches are coming to the realization that a strong online presence is vital to ministry. People are also seeking spiritual answers and information about churches in their area. This is why it is vital for a church to have a website for maximizing its outreach potential. And knowing the vitality of this makes it very easy for a church to take advantage of this medium and put it to use in the community. Once a church has good web presence that tells not only about the church location and service times, but one that declares the message of truth for those seeking answers, the church must then find ways to drive people to the site to find that information. First of all, the site must be attractive to web crawling search engines.

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By utilizing search engine optimization, which is the deliberate, proactive practice of optimizing a website for the purpose of ranking at or near the top of search engines to increase the amount of traffic to the website, a church can create a site that

attracts major search engines. Pew Internet reports that over 60 million Americans use search engines each day.<sup>8</sup> A church which has taken the time to optimize its website, so that it is easily found, has a great chance of



achieving its objectives. Optimizing the website is most easily done through the content. According to Thomason's Usability Checklist, "Content is [...] the best way to boost your site in search engine rankings."<sup>5</sup> Nielsen recommends that "web content should [...] answer user's questions and use common language rather than made up terms (this also improves search engine visibility, since users search using their own words, not yours)."<sup>3</sup> In another article, Nielsen points out that "users are extremely goal-driven and look for the one thing they have in mind."<sup>4</sup> In fact, Kelton Research found that 65.4 percent of Americans say they've spent two or more hours in a single sitting searching for specific information on search engines.<sup>7</sup>

While online users are likely to be persistent in their search for online information, another great way to get people to the website is by incorporating various forms of advertising into the church's marketing scheme. In order to reach surrounding areas on a large

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scale, some great ways to advertise are through the radio, television commercials, and the yellow pages. As the church decides to focus in on the surrounding community, they could rent billboard space or even do targeted mail drops for special events

or hang flyers on community boards or leave door hangers in local neighborhoods. To get even more personal, the church could create wallet sized invite cards to give to members who in turn hand them out to friends. While these ideas have long been used, the Internet has made them even more relevant and effective tools in increasing outreach potential.

These methods allow a church to give some sort of hook to attract attention and to mention the website where people can go to find out more complete information. This was put into practice by The Gathering Church in Hackensack, New Jersey. Pastor Arthur Shadwick reported amazing results to some of their advertising attempts. They utilized advertising for their website just before Easter which led to a 50% increase in their attendance on Easter Sunday. Just as they found, it is impossible to cram every piece of information about any church in these small spaces, but a church can convey the relevance of the website and by using a combination of these methods, get visitors to the website with the ultimate goal of getting them to the church.



## Creating a Website Geared Towards Outreach

Once the visitor has been attracted to the website through one of the advertisements or random online searches, the church would then want to make sure they have a site geared towards making the online experience effective in regards to the goal of attracting new visitors to the church. As Pastor Duane Hoxworth from Praise Temple Assembly of God in Waco, Texas put it, "Several people have told me they visited the church because when they saw the site it looked like a church they wanted to be a part of, and they are now members." At Lifepoint Church in Zionsville, Indiana, Pastor Woodie Cumbie had a similar experience. He shared the story of one family who attended online for weeks by listening to his sermons before they actually came to the church. He has found this story to occur more and more frequently. This falls in line with what Jerry Bader points out in the article 18 Web Marketing Concepts That Make A Difference, "Now that we have this multimedia web environment, we can continue the tradition of real people who deliver creative audio and video presentation that capture the imagination and drive home the marketing message so your audience won't forget who you are."<sup>1</sup> Although the article is primarily discussing sites geared toward products, the effect of media on online users is consistent in both the church and business worlds. If churches want online users to remember them and be drawn to the church itself, there are specific elements and tools that work particularly well in creating a website that achieves the five keys to having a good website.

The first key to a good website is good visual design. While good may seem like an objective concept, it is important to look back to what this really means. Good design means that the site graphics are relevant to the audience and compliment the objective of the website.



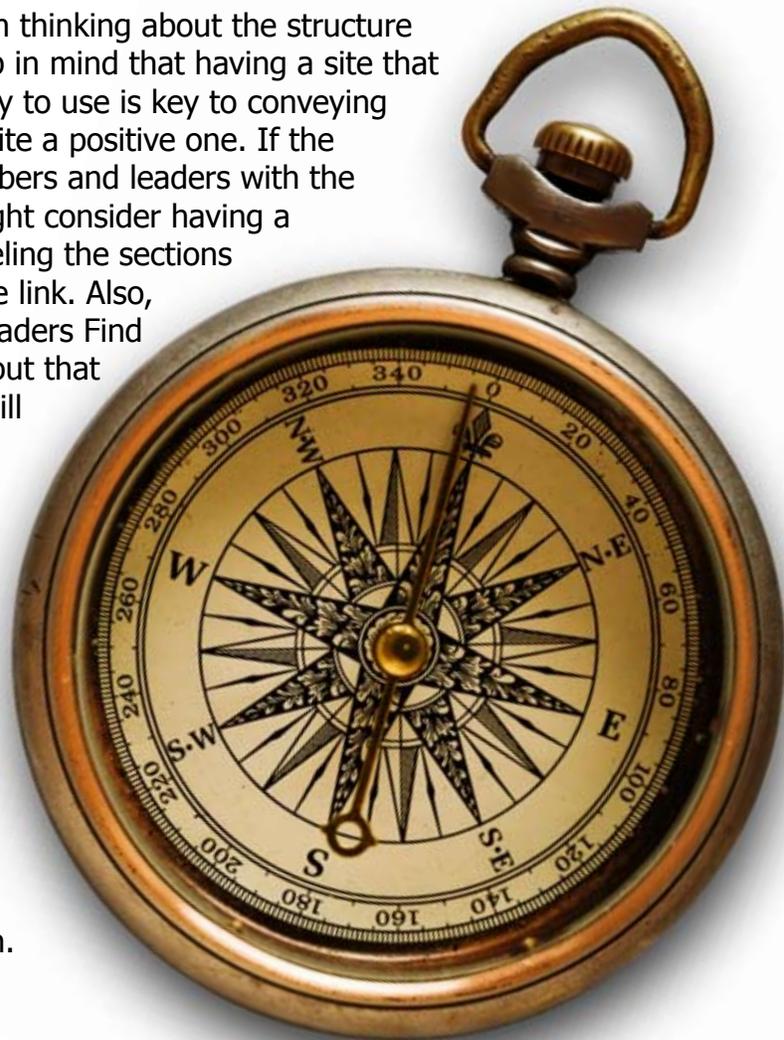
The objective of a website geared towards reaching out to the community is to convey information about where the church is located, what time they meet, what to expect on a typical Sunday, and what the beliefs of the church are. All of this has an end goal of getting visitors from the site into the church itself. To maximize the visual design elements for this goal, a church should remember that attention spans are often short online and

***"Now that we have this multimedia Web environment, we can continue the tradition of real people who deliver creative audio and video presentation that capture the imagination and drive home the marketing message so your audience won't forget who you are."<sup>1</sup>***

a website has only a few seconds to grab the user's attention. So, the imagery should be brief and enticing. It should accurately portray the flavor of the church but without overwhelming the user with information. The Web 2.0 design guide mentioned earlier goes on to say, "If everything is trying to attract the eye, then the eye just gets confused, and the site will feel confusing and chaotic."<sup>2</sup> By using imagery that keeps in mind the people who may rarely come to church or not even know what it is all about, a church can create a comfortable and welcoming site. Too many church symbols and imagery may only frighten away the skeptical users by making it seem out of touch or too strange. Instead of using images of crosses and fish, which have no meaning to an unbeliever, show them images that portray those meanings in a more secular way. This could be done by using a child about to open a present to convey hope or a family reunited to show healing. Finally, utilizing images of the community can increase the relevancy of the site, by showing that the church is in touch with the area and its people.

*"Make the links clear – don't try to get cute or use terms internal to your organization. Someone who has never been to your site before should know immediately where the link will take them."<sup>6</sup>*

Secondly, there are some elements to consider when thinking about the structure and navigation of the website. A church should keep in mind that having a site that makes sense to the user and that the user finds easy to use is key to conveying the information and making the experience on the site a positive one. If the site is rather complex, combining the needs of members and leaders with the goal of reaching out to the community, a church might consider having a separate site just for visitors, or at least, clearly labeling the sections that are for visitors with something like a new to site link. Also, the navigation should be simple. In *Helping Your Readers Find Their Way Around Your Site*, Jennifer Kyrnin points out that "if people cannot navigate through your site, they will quickly leave."<sup>6</sup> On that same line of thought, if it becomes too difficult to figure out where the information is, a user is likely to get frustrated and move on. Also, when labeling the navigation items, be sure that they are easy to understand and avoid vague or churchy phrasing. Kyrnin goes on to say, "Make the links clear – don't try to get cute or use terms internal to your organization. Someone who has never been to your site before should know immediately where the link will take them."<sup>6</sup> While it may seem like a good idea to label everything under what the church members will recognize, it is important to keep in mind that the target audience knows nothing about the church.



***By utilizing an easy to remember and well thought out domain name, a church's Website is much more likely to be found.***

Calling the Youth Ministry page Our Brave Warriors may work for members, but visitors will not know what that means and will very likely completely miss out on any information about the dynamic youth ministry. The same applies for labeling pages with long titles. It is important to be brief and to the point. According to Jakob Nielson, "Most sites have miserable information architectures that mirror the way the company internally thinks about the content and not the way users think about the content."<sup>4</sup> The whole goal in navigation is to have titles which make sense both in naming and in order. This will help keep the user's attention.

Another element in making the site memorable and useful for outreach is to choose a simple and accurate domain name. The domain name should not be so long that it is easily forgotten nor should it have a bunch of initials or abbreviations, as those are also hard to remember. The church should keep in mind that if potential visitors see the domain name on a billboard while commuting, it should be memorable enough that when they get to their home computer, they are able to recall it easily. Also, be mindful of the wording chosen. Time and again churches and businesses alike choose abbreviations or combinations of words that seem to make perfect sense for their purpose only to later realize they are misleading and, in some cases, completely misrepresent the intentions of the organization. By utilizing an easy to remember and well thought out domain name, a church's website is much more likely to be found.

With the proliferation of Web 2.0, the average user has become accustomed to, "a new level of technological interactivity between websites and services."<sup>2</sup> By incorporating good interactive elements into the website, a church sends the message that it is up-to-date on current technology and there-by relevant to the culture of the average user. It also provides an opportunity for a user to be engaged by the site and come to feel even more at home with the church the site is representing. "A site that conforms to user expectations makes visitors more comfortable and more apt to visit again and recommend the site to their friends."<sup>5</sup> This comfort level makes the transition into the church building itself much more natural.

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Jakob Nielsen makes a recommendation to business's about getting online users to remember them that applies to the church sector as well. "Do you want people to remember what you're telling them? If so, you'd better appeal to their senses, and we're talking about sights and sounds. Deliver your juicy, got-to-have content in an audio and video presentation that will stick in people's heads."<sup>1</sup> A great way to create this memorable interactivity to achieve a church's outreach goal is by making it possible to listen or view member testimonials. This puts a face on the congregation and draws away the mystery. The people of the church show potential visitors that they are human and flawed but also the reality of God's saving grace. Another great way to give visitors a peek inside the church is with flash photo galleries. These combine the design elements of flash photos with the interactivity of

*"Search is a fundamental component of the Web user experience and is getting more important every year."<sup>3</sup>*

giving users a virtual tour of the church. Also, by making sure a site's information is printer friendly, the church helps users to quickly print out the beliefs or map to make coming into the church that much easier. Since there is often a lot of information on the website, giving the user access to a site search, allows them to quickly find exactly what information they are seeking without having to filter through the navigation. As Nielsen found, "Search is a fundamental component of the web user experience and is getting more important every year."<sup>3</sup> Another great way to encourage interaction is giving users access to each ministry's contact information. Or if the church has small groups that help to connect members, make that easy to search as well. Some visitors may feel more comfortable in a smaller setting to start before they actually want to step into the crowded sanctuary. Also, the church should make sure that it is easy to access information about upcoming events or news items. A great way to do this is with signups for emails or e-newsletters. By sending this information to new users, the church makes them feel as though they are part of the community of believers. All of this interaction greatly increases the effectiveness of the website being a tool for outreach.

With good navigation and interactive elements, a church sets the site up for success, but it is also important to have a site that is functioning properly. Some more complex tools require a well functioning website. Such things as pod casts, flash videos, pop up windows, and flash photo galleries can be great ways to make a site more appealing, but it all becomes meaningless if it does not work.



Some of the obvious functionality items are to be sure that pages navigate the way they are supposed to and that there are no broken links. But there are some subtle functionality items that make a user's experience better. For example, in order for things to work properly, a church should not require a plug-in which is "an accessory software program that extends the capabilities of an existing application."<sup>11</sup> People online have learned to be suspect to any site that wants them to download something and this will often cause a new user to turn away from that section and miss information. Also, make it so the text and graphics are optimized so they load quickly, if it takes too long for either to load, it is very likely the user will leave the site.

***In order to create information that will then lead to the user visiting the church or at least learning more of the Gospel, a church must look to its content.***

Once the site is designed relevantly, navigates easily, encourages interaction, and works properly, a church is set up to have a site that is ready for users to enjoy moving through and finding information about the church. In order to create information that will then lead to the user visiting the church or at least learning more of the Gospel, a church must look to its content. Key elements to present in the content include information about the pastor as well as member testimonials. This puts a face to

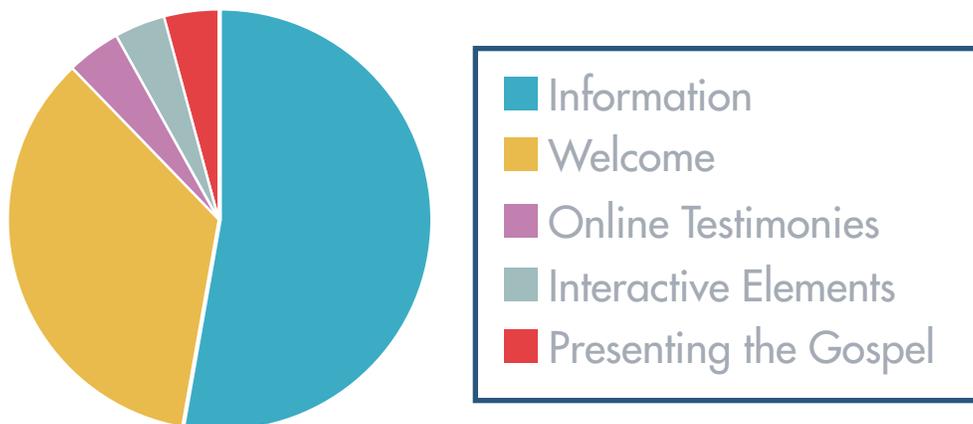
the church and makes the user feel like they can relate. Other things that the site must make easily accessible are contact information, easy to print directions, maybe even with a map, and service times. This information should never be cryptic or hard to find. After all, the whole point is to get them to the church.

Other good information to have is a section about what to expect at the service. With so many different denominations out there, it is important to let visitors know what kind of church they would be visiting. It is an awful feeling to show up at a formal service in casual clothes, and it is equally uncomfortable to arrive in Sunday's Best only to find the pastor wearing shorts. Situations like this do not encourage a second visit, so head them off by being honest about not only the dress style, but the type of worship, the church's beliefs, and anything else that will set the visitor's mind at ease. Another good thing to include is information about salvation. A church should keep in mind that although church growth and new members are important, the ultimate goal is to spread the Gospel. Even if a visitor to the site decides not to visit the church, at least they can gain information about God's love and forgiveness and the reality they face if they choose to walk away from Him.



## Real Goals from Real Churches

Recently, faithHighway surveyed different churches and ministries to discover how they are using their websites as a tool for outreach. The surveys showed that most churches and ministries view their websites as a tool for conveying information. 58% said that their primary objective for the website was to give information about the staff, service times, and directions to potential visitors. Another 33% said that they use the website as a way to welcome visitors into the church by trying to let them know what to expect in the church and make the site itself an inviting place. While these results seem fairly predictable in regards to good uses for a church website, a few shocking results also appeared. In regards to using online testimonies, interactive elements, and presenting the gospel, only 3% of churches said any of those was an objective for the site. So, while many organizations are telling visitors what to wear on Sunday and what time to show up, most are not fully embracing the potential of utilizing a website as an outreach tool.



Online testimonies make site-users feel as though they can relate to the church members. Interactive elements from blogs to prayer request forms can draw them into a true community, and presenting the Gospel on the site reaches all those online users who may not yet be ready to venture into the doors of a church but who are, nonetheless, seeking answers about the meaning of life and destiny of their souls. This survey showed that there is still a lot of untapped potential in online ministry. However, in the areas churches and ministries are focusing on, they have discovered some specific things that impacted the effectiveness of their websites.

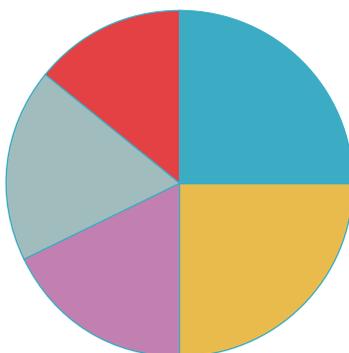
*“Make the links clear – don’t try to get cute or use terms internal to your organization. Someone who has never been to your site before should know immediately where the link will take them.”<sup>6</sup>*

# Successful and Unsuccessful Tools and Elements

These churches and ministries have utilized various tools and elements in their websites to try to make them effective tools for ministry. Over half the clients surveyed said that having online media, whether pod casts or audio/video streaming, was the most effective outreach tool. The leadership from The River Community Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma has received a lot of contact as a result of their online sermons. This is especially exciting for Chelsea Davey, the Media and Creative Director, because she has realized that even if these people do not end up visiting the church, the website has touched their lives. For the churches which had them, tools like online newsletters, integrated maps, and forms were also very effective. Danny Smith, the Minister of Equipping, with Chapel Rock Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, indicated that his church's prayer request forms were being used by random people not associated with the church and that this has provided an amazing way for the leadership to connect with more people. 30% of churches and ministries surveyed said that they have more visitors coming to the church as a direct result of their online presence.

While some elements have greatly enhanced these websites, there were some elements that actually worked against their goals. The element that most detracted from a church's or ministry's objective was out-of-date content. Without current information, any website quickly loses effectiveness. Churches and ministries were asked about the five elements to a good website and 80 percent said that poor quality in one or more of those areas had reduced the success of their website. At the top of the list was irrelevant visual design and lack of functionality with 23 percent each. Coming in with a rating of 20 percent a piece were those with uninformative content and sites absent of interactivity. Finally, only six percent of churches and ministries found poor navigation to be the cause of an unsuccessful site. No church found a particular tool to have been detrimental. It was more the lack of something that would have helped their ministry or the misuse of what they had access to.

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- Visual Design
- Functionality
- Content
- Interactivity
- Navigation

By looking at these statistics and real life examples, churches and ministries can learn valuable lessons about what does and does not work in the online community. In order to have a website that is good for using as a tool for outreach, it must incorporate the proper use and proportion of visual design, navigation, interactivity, functionality, and content. When these five key elements work in balance, any site can achieve the objective set for it.

## Conclusion

When Christian organizations can put these elements into practice, they will harness the power of the Internet. Every entity whose goal is to share the Gospel should use every tool available to do just that. When the pastors of New Life Christian Church in Warsaw, Indiana and Savannah Christian Church in Savannah, Georgia reported that their online sermons were being not only utilized by the local community but actually being accessed overseas and resulting in people coming to Christ, it becomes obvious that this tool could have a major impact for God. By tying in these simple, yet profound, concepts for creating a good site, a church can have a great website that draws users in, teaches them valuable lessons, helps them find a church home, and ultimately has the potential to bring them into fellowship with God.

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Pastor Bradley Spear from Southwest Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas recently realized that his website was not achieving these elements and decided to restart from scratch. He shared that before the new design no one ever visited their website or said that it was the reason they had chosen to visit the church. With the new site in place, every week he receives yet another visitor to the church because of the website. Testimonies like this show how exciting it is when a website enhances a church's outreach efforts. While outreach is a key component in fulfilling the Great Commission, it is equally important that members of the church are given a chance to stay connected and grow. The

next issue will explore the complexities of In Reach and how a church website can also be used as an effective tool in this arena.

# End Notes

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