

Guide to: using church websites for evangelism

WHY WEBSITES ARE AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR EVANGELISM

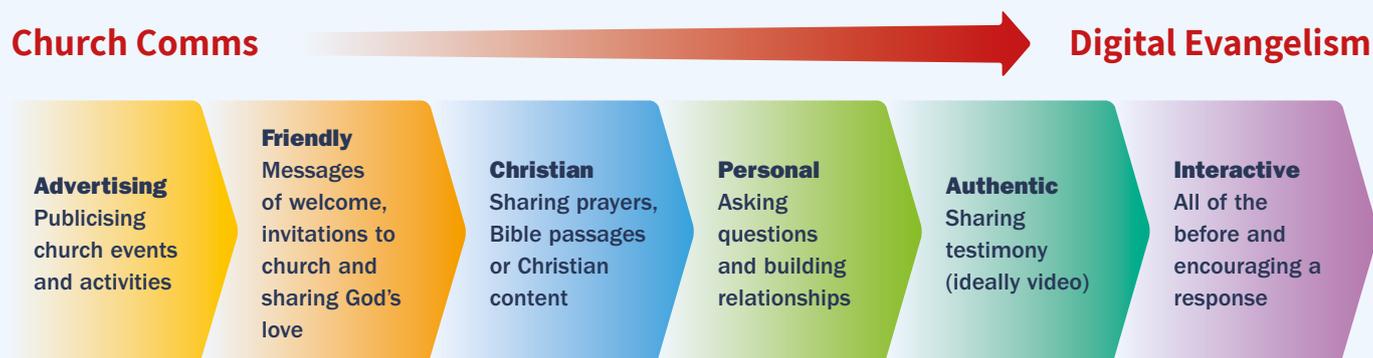
There are over 4.5 billion internet users worldwide in 2020¹ and so having a web presence for your church is more important than ever. This quote taken from *Church Online: Websites (CPO)* from their series 'Reach Out: Church Communications', sums it up well: "If our church is invisible online, those searching will assume it has closed down. We can expect very few visitors. If we have a website but it's woefully out of date, it looks as if we don't care, or stopped putting on events after Easter 2014. If our website is up to date but talks only about our building and activities, not about our people, our beliefs or our God ... do we inadvertently communicate that the church, rather than Christ, is the end point?"

This guide for those who already have, or help run, a church website provides tips on using this communication tool effectively for evangelism.

¹ www.wearesocial.com/digital-2020

HOW TO MAKE YOUR CHURCH WEBSITE MORE EVANGELISTIC

You do not need a whole new website in order to engage in evangelism online. Instead here are some small steps you can take to make your current church website more evangelistic. Be careful to avoid purely posting service information and events. A website is not a noticeboard for your church, but a platform you can use for meaningful and engaging content that builds relationships. It is not clear cut, and there isn't a line in the sand about what content is considered 'digital evangelism'. However, the spectrum below may help your church to increase the effectiveness of the content on your website.



These suggestions are not exclusive to each other and you can, of course, have Christian content, testimony and event publicity on your church website, but try to include more of the content to the right of the scale. So, if you usually just list church activities on your website, try also including quotes from your weekly service and/or the Bible passages or prayers, along with an invitation to church. Do you currently have a page that explains about the Christian faith? Why not also include info on the next step for someone to take (whether that is inviting them to church, getting in contact with someone, or promoting an upcoming Alpha course). Filming testimony stories may feel like a challenge right now (although it can easily be achieved), but why not try to take the next step?

The categories listed along the bottom are not to give a fixed label, but to help explain the motivation behind each example and ideally you should aim for a mix of all of them. We are also not suggesting that 'livestreaming your service' is inherently better than 'explaining our faith', as it depends how these are used, and it is not always a linear scale from 'worst' to 'best'. Nevertheless, if we are aiming to be more intentional in digital evangelism, then sharing testimony online is nearly always going to be more effective than just publicising a church event.

What content to include

Suggestions for content to include on your website:

- ministers' blog
- resources that your church members can share with their friends
- information on the Christian faith and how this looks in your church
- daily, weekly or monthly prayers and Bible passages
- invitations to your church services
- sermon recordings (podcast or video)
- provide next steps for those looking for faith
- quotes from church members (what does your church mean to you?)
- testimony and faith stories from your church.

How to convey our message?

As well as thinking about 'what' message we communicate online, it's also important to consider 'how' we communicate our message. Use the following scale to try and improve the effectiveness how you use your church website.



These are also not exclusive to each other and you can, of course, include text, audio and images on a single webpage, but try to include more of the content to the right of the scale. So, if you have a webpage with just plain text, try including an image or graphic. What do you currently have on your website? Why not try to take the next step?

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

Even if very few people outside of your church see the posts on your church website, remember that you never know what impact you may be having. As well as reaching people outside of your church with your message, through posting this type of content you are also encouraging, equipping and giving individuals in your church permission to share and post similar content themselves. It will help to give people confidence in sharing their faith and make it as easy as possible to do this online.

Don't measure 'success' in digital evangelism by the number of website views but remember that you could be planting the seed that will eventually flower. There is no measure of 'success' with digital evangelism, and we do not necessarily seek to just bring more people to our physical church on a Sunday. Rather we hope to demonstrate a set of practices that enable us and others to enter the fullness of God's kingdom.