How to …

Create a great church website

10 Top Tips

1. Be intentional in creating a website, work out what you want it to achieve. This will help when it comes to deciding what content to include, such as resources and events.

2. A website is like a shop window – people will visit your website before they visit the church itself. This is a chance to tell them all the pertinent things such as who you are, where you are, the times and forms of services, and the people they will meet.

3. Less is more – the website does not need to be a database of every possible piece of information about the church. Be concise in what you share. Visitors may want to know things like which services are suitable for children; they are less likely to be interested in who was on the flower rota last month.

4. On the internet, pictures really do paint a thousands words. Use photos of events to show off the church. Don't forget that people can make a picture – visitors to the website will engage more with friendly, smiling faces than an empty room.
   Why not also consider adding a fully immersive internal 3D virtual tour of your building to your website as in this example: http://wyvern3d.co.uk/projects/dauntsey-church

5. FAQs can be really useful. Think about what people want to know (What is the style of worship? Are there toilets? Is there parking? Are children welcome?) These can allay any fears they may have about visiting you. Create a site map to help make sure that it is easy to find the answers.

6. Even if your church doesn't have a website, it is good to get your details on to A Church Near You. This offers key information about your church so do make sure it is up-to-date.

7. One of the hardest jobs is ensuring that the website is up-to-date. You don't need to put up a new front page story every day, but do check that things like contact details and service times are correct. There is nothing worse than having somebody arrive at a service 30 minutes late because the information on your website was wrong. Discuss who will update the site and make sure that any key information such as passwords have been given to a second person for access if necessary.

8. People do not want to spend a lot of time looking for key information. Make sure details such as service times, contact details or the location of the church are easy to find from the front page.

9. Visit the website through the eyes of a new person. Imagine it is the first time you have come across this church – does the website easily tell you what you need to know? Why not ask a non-churchgoing friend to give you some constructive criticism.

10. Explore the internet yourself. Every church is in the same boat as you so take a look at their websites; make a note of what works well and any aspects you strongly like or dislike. Use websites such as www.churchmarketingsucks.com for more handy tips.

Website Providers

There are lots of church website services available. The key is to find the provider that offers a product that does what you want it to at a cost that you can afford. Before you begin work out how you will use your site and therefore what functionality you will need. Some providers may offer you lots of bells and whistles that you don't need and will never use, but will have to pay for.

If you would like further advice about how to choose a provider, or would like a recommendation, please contact Ben Evans, Diocesan Communications Officer, at ben.evans@bristoldiocese.org.

A Church Near You (ACNY)

One thing that can really help people to find out about your church online is to keep your information on the Church of England's ACNY website up-to-date. This is a central database of all the churches in the CofE and as well as being publicly accessible, the information is publicised by your diocese as well as nationally. If you are stuck, please contact Ben Evans, Diocesan Communications Officer, at ben.evans@bristoldiocese.org.

Thinking Further

This following section of the guide has been written by DEV, a digital design and development agency who have been working with the Church of England for many years. Here we have asked DEV to share with us their thoughts on how to create a great church website.

Introducing Blanc

It's been our privilege to work with and serve the Church of England for a decade. In that time, we have built websites for parishes, dioceses and cathedrals, as well as national projects and campaigns such as *Just Pray* in 2015 and 2016's *A Christmas Near You*. Our heart has always been to help the Church go further and achieve more.

Why is a church website important?

Having a website isn't just a checkbox exercise. It's one of the key ways a church can now communicate with the community around it, and with more and more people using the internet as their first port of call for information, it's no longer a luxury. It's a necessity.

What makes a great church website?

A great website helps people easily find the information they are looking for. It presents information in an easy to digest and interpret form. At the homepage, it present snippets of things people might find helpful – like a shop window, enticing people to step in and take a look around. A great website will often put the needs of the user before a desire to communicate its own message.

In practice that might mean putting information about your service times, christenings and weddings before your AGM minutes or flower rota's. It might mean changing the words you use to label things to make them accessible to people unfamiliar with ecclesiastical language.

It's not that you should ignore your church members, far from it. But the shop window metaphor is really helpful here. The people in the shop (or 'sat in the pews', so to speak) have already committed to you; they are browsing the aisles and will find the information they are looking for.

It's the people walking past your shop, pondering whether you offer something they might want, who your window displays needs to appeal to.

80/20

Consider an 80/20 split. On the homepage, 80% of your content could be focused on the passer-by, presenting them with snippets of who you are, where and when you meet, a friendly face and possibly ways to travel deeper into both your church body, and the website itself. The other 20% then gives your congregation easy access to the content they are looking for, the nuts and bolts of church life which passers-by would not be so concerned with.

Once you get past the homepage the split flips-over; 20% of the depth of your content deals directly with the core of the gospel and the needs of people outside your Church, while 80% deals with notices, meetings, downloadable rota PDFs, information, activities etc.

Choice paralysis

A common issue encountered when developing websites is driven by the laudable desire to be really, really, really helpful. The administrator of the website wants to make sure that, no matter who you are or what you've come to the site to find, that content is never more than a click or two away. It's a good aim, but one expression of that desire is to dump all of those options onto a very over crowded, complicated homepage, allowing users to pick their way through and find the one option they need.

Interestingly, this approach actually works against the ultimate goal. It results in something we call choice paralysis. Studies have shown that, when asked to make a choice between a given number of like items, a threshold is reached where-by more choice ceases to be helpful and actually reduces the likelihood that an individual will choose anything at all.

In the context of structuring a website, presenting a user with too many options is likely to result in them making no choice at all, save one; to navigate away from the site and find what they are looking for else-where.

If a user doesn't know what they are looking for, it's often better to present them with a series of ever-narrowing choices - each leading them closer and closer to their end-goal, rather than have all of those options available simultaneously at a higher level.
Equally, if there is one piece of content that lots of people are often navigating to your site to find, service times for example, then making it easy to get to that page is a must.

Conclusion

These are just a few of the things you might want to consider when creating your church website. The best solution is likely to be specific to you, your church, your needs and your context.

At every step of the process – original planning, draft designs and draft layouts, get feedback. Ask people to give you honest feedback, as outsiders from the process, to help you make sure that what you create does indeed serve the end user.