

Seeker Sensitive Church Web Sites

A White Paper by ChristianHosting.Com



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DO YOU HAVE A SEEKER SENSITIVE CHURCH WEB SITE?

Can you hear them?

The unchurched calling out for answers to life's many problems? Calling out for food and shelter to feed and house themselves and their families? Calling out for help to be free of their controlling addictions? Does your church's web site relate or speak to them? Probably not. Far too often Christian web designers, whether volunteer parishioners or professionals, hear the same thing, "Make our web site tell all about how wonderful and caring our church is and the programs it has for the church family."

Traditionally, church websites have been geared towards the church's congregation, or viewers that have been brought up in the church. These sites do not and cannot reach those who are unchurched and really in need of God's unconditional love. Most of all, these sites do not offer anything to help these lost souls to first get out of their present situations which would then make them more receptive to the redemptive power of God. The last thing a starving person wants is a sermon, they want food.

I hope to show you in this message how to reach out to those lost, broken souls who do not understand Christian-eze, and have no interest – today – in seeking first the kingdom of God. It is my goal to show you how and why you should design your church's website to reach out to these people and offer them hope for themselves, and, ultimately hope through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Weekly Bulletin Board

Far too often, Pastor, Reverend, Father your church's site looks more like an extension of your weekly bulletin filled with what are great and wonderful programs and announcements for your congregation. Occasionally, you will insert a sermonette that is geared to spark the interest of or give theological teaching to those who attend a church on some level of frequency. You might

have an invitation to prospective members, or people new to the community to come and enjoy the church's fellowship. You may even have an invitation, prayer of repentance and instruction for those who want Christ in their life. But far too often nothing is included to draw in the unchurched – those of our society that have never (or in their mind will never) set foot inside of a church's front (or back) door.

Watch Your Language!

The unchurched do not understand church-eze and simply won't "fellowship", submit "prayer requests", or participate in "worship". To them, these are totally foreign terms that bring images of cult-type behavior and "blind obedience" to an illogical and impractical set of teachings.

The Amateur Web Site

Church web sites often look "amateurish" and cheesy. While churches are known to spend thousands of dollars on print advertising in the Yellow Pages, local newspaper, or community Christian guides, most web sites are the result of a collage of topics and pictures thrown together with a cookie-cutter program like MS FrontPage (FrontPage can be used effectively, but often is not.). The over-use of animated clips, up to seven different font styles and sizes, and huge image files that take forever to load, add to the unprofessional web presence.

Real Life Problems

When addressed on the web, the common theme is to "take a stand" and to inform the participant of the biblical mandates against sinful behavior. Little or no content acknowledges that the "sin" is merely a symptom of the participant's spiritual condition, their powerlessness over the addiction, and the recognition that God loves and WILL deliver them.

Does your web site offer help to those with addictive behavior without conditions? Do you invite anonymous questions or inquiry about drug, alcohol and sex addiction problems? Does and can your web site offer these people help in finding their way out of these additive behaviors, or does it preach condemnation for these activities? Can you help an unfaithful spouse to renounce this behavior? Or, can you advise and counsel a homosexual or a pregnant woman on abortion?

These people are most likely not ones that will submit a prayer request – because in their mind God has never answered their prayers. And, to attend a church service and be one of those foolish, mindless, blind masses being led around by the nose is absolutely out of the question. These people need help where they are and as they are. They are not interested in being told what they are doing is a sin and they have no hope unless they conform to the apostolic church's beliefs. They are in pain and need healing first, and then they might listen to the Word.

How about the fallen church member? Does the site reach out to them? What about the church member or occasional attendee that is dealing with homosexual tendencies or sexual addictions such as pornography and/or masturbation? Or the parishioner that is involved with an extra-marital affair? Or the woman who is fantasizing about the ideal man? Or the parent that has lost control of their children? Is the message given to them on your site one of condemnation or unconditional, non-judgmental help and love? Will they feel comfortable confessing their problems without fear of judgment or fear of their issues “getting spread around the church's congregation?”

A father who has lost communication and control of his children does not need the platitude, “You need to be a better father”, but the help of a caring professional to explain why this happened and how to resolve it. The teen who is ambivalent about his/her sexuality does not need to hear a lecture condemning homosexual behavior, but help in understanding who they are and why they have such feelings. Can they find this on your website or within your church body? These are real issues dealing with real people in real time. The church – yours

and mine – needs to be knee deep in them with help lines, referral web sites and/or a caring contact that can be “someone just to talk to.” We do not want to be preachy and aloof, we must be genuine in the Father’s love for everyone and forgiving. But, “How is this done?” you might be asking.

The Leadership Takes the Lead

The process must begin at the top with the senior staff. You, as the leadership of your congregation, must decide if you want to be redemptive when addressing sin and lifestyle issues in and outside of the church. This is a major undertaking and a decision that may require a great deal of prayer and discussion time by the senior staff. It is far easier to say you love the sinner and not the sin – or conversely, you hate the sin, but love the sinner than to actually do it.

All involved must realize that addictive behaviors are often the result of long-term bondage and/or lifestyles and will not be changed overnight. The tendency to think a person has to be saved “long enough” to be free of wrong behaviors is a misconception. The staff must fully understand that salvation is a journey, not a destination. You and your staff must understand and be willing to accept that a truly redemptive ministry and web site WILL change the complexion of the church. The web site will reach out to broken people who will arrive on your door-step with a mired of complex issues.

A True Story

Here is a true story that illustrates both the issues you might face and the real meaning of unconditional love for the sinner: A church pastored by a man with a “call” to minister to homosexuals had an effective, redemptive ministry. A young man whom God had led out of the lifestyle, decided to “evangelize” his friends. One Sunday the pastor was called from his office where he was preparing the Sunday morning message, to a commotion in the hall. The young man’s friend decided to come to church, but wanted to do so in a disruptive manner (tired of

his converted friend's preaching). He was in the hallway in a clear raincoat, shoes and no other clothing. The pastor extended his hand, welcomed the visitor and asked if he would mind wearing a choir robe during the service.

The genuine love and acceptance (of the person not the sin) was clear, and won the young man over. The service continued without incident, and a relationship was started that would later lead to effective ministry.

Point: The pastor was clearly interested in the young man, and refused to be drawn in.

Point: This church of a couple of hundred effectively ministers to a largely ignored segment in their community.

The Commitment & Planning

The senior staff will have to decide they want to address the needs of the broken or unchurched as well as the church community. They will need to completely understand the effort required and the commitment they are making. Once this commitment has been made, a great deal of up-front planning **MUST** take place to ensure success.

A budget must be determined to:

- A. Include a cost for Web Hosting.
- B. A cost for web design. (Sometimes resources are in-house for web design, but like anything else, it will be difficult to hold the designer accountable.)
- C. Site maintenance costs.

After you have committed to an amount of money to allocate for the web site, you will need to determine how you want the site to look. Always keep in the front of your mind that the site must be designed in a professional manner whether in-house talent is used or a professional designer is selected. Include the designer in the planning stages of the web site and listen to their input as to what can and cannot be accomplished within your budget.

The staff will need to commit to updating the web site weekly with new articles, testimonies, reports and so on. Remember that a stale web site loses its validity as a caring outreach. It gives the viewer the impression that if you don't care about keeping fresh information out there, then what would make them think that you will hang in there with them. It is also a fact that the more varied the presentation, the greater the opportunity in reaching the target audience.

Site Ideas

Please, in your messages, announcements, reports and witnessing, get rid of church-eze. Then lay out the web site starting with the main page, have content that deals with real life issues:

- A. Include weekly articles that speak to your target audience.
- B. Present vivid testimonies of those who have walked out of sin and destructive behavior through the redemptive and restorative work of the Holy Spirit. Be very careful not to have testimonies that simply say "Jesus saved me and I never sinned again." These testimonies ought to be true life sagas of the journey from sin to salvation including all the pitfalls. Real people telling their real stories.
- C. Determine the real life issues that exist in your community such as sex, drugs, adultery, finances, gangs etc. When addressing these issues, you must always recognize that a percentage of your congregation is secretly entrapped in the same or similar behavior. Therefore, you need to provide:
 - 1. A frank and open discussion of the behavior and its damaging affects on individuals, families and communities.
 - 2. A clear non-condemning guide to the redemptive power of Christ.
 - 3. Provide an anonymous "I have a question/problem" mail/form that will be directed to staff members for response. It is noted here that it is imperative that these requests get prompt professional attention.

4. Along with the form, you might want to establish an online forum or bulletin board where people can post questions, problems and opinions. A staff person needs to monitor the board closely to police for disruptive and/or vulgar messages, and to spot a seriously disturbed person that requires immediate intervention.
5. And, finally, you will want one or more photo galleries. These can go a long way in showing unchurched people that you are regular people just like them.

In your planning, be imaginative, creative and even bold in your design. To lead them to salvation, you must first get them to stop on your web site, and then scan the content to find something compelling that appeals to them. And always keep your web site fresh and up-to-date.