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Great Church Websites *Helping churches fulfill the Great Commission through excellence in their internet ministries*

THE CRISIS IN CHURCH WEBSITE DESIGN

By David Gillaspay

Great Church Websites (www.greatchurchwebsites.org) was launched in April 2004 to discover and showcase examples of well-designed church websites. I believe excellence in church website design serves the Kingdom by helping to draw non-Christians to churches. For this reason, I want to see every church develop a great website — “no church left behind,” so to speak.

Of course, a “great website” is achieved not just through excellence in graphic design but also through excellence in other areas such as content, navigation and accessibility. However finding even well-designed church websites turned out to be difficult.

Since April 2004, I have reviewed nearly 10,000 church websites in a handful of states, with many states yet to go. Unfortunately most church websites today are poorly designed. Primarily this is because most still use outdated website design techniques that were “cutting edge” only a few years ago. These outdated techniques include animated gifs (of doves, crosses, etc.), tiled or patterned backgrounds, rainbow colors and visitor counters. Website design has changed dramatically since its early days and the secular world has kept up (or led the way); church websites, by and large, have not. Most sites will appear to visitors as stuck in time.

www.greatchurchwebsites.org offers a searchable “virtual gallery” of the best church websites found during my research. As I reviewed more and more church websites, the percentage I could include in this online gallery of home page screen shots remained remarkably stable: about 5% to 6%. A similar percentage of church websites reviewed were satisfactorily designed, but didn’t quite make the cut for the virtual gallery. Another 5% of church websites were ineligible because they used pre-designed templates.

Based on that information, I would estimate that the remainder — about 85% — of church websites are poorly designed or dated in their appearance. That’s troubling because I believe a poorly designed or dated-looking church website reflects badly on a church and on the Kingdom.

Terrell Sanders, writing about technology in the January 2005 issue of *Church Executive* magazine, talks about the importance of a church having a website (at all). When speaking of outreach to young families (in particular, because they’re a primary target for churches), he says: “If you’re not on the Web, you don’t exist.” He adds, “A poor website can actually deter visits from young families.”

Conversely, a well-designed and implemented church website has the potential to attract people to a church. Consider the words of Jon S. Trainer, pastor and teaching elder of New Hope Bible Church, New Albany, Ohio: “In the last 3-4 months, fully 100% of visitors either found our church via the web, or visited the web before they visited the church. Our site has been an amazing tool.”

If you are a church webmaster, how can you improve the design of your church’s website? I’ve listed ten major suggestions below. These tips address the worst problems found during research, including a number of outdated website design techniques such as those mentioned above.

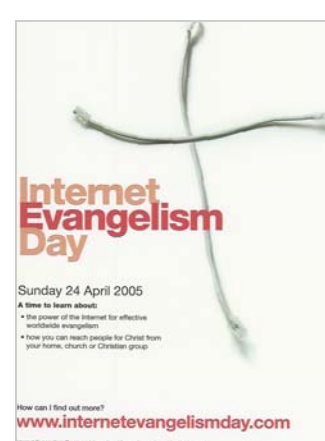
For design inspiration, browse the virtual gallery of more than 500 (to date) well-designed church home pages on my website (membership fee now required). The website also includes lists of church website design do’s and don’ts, a “seen and noted” page (interesting or helpful features discovered on church websites around the country), information about making your church website accessible (to blind people, motion-impaired people, etc.) and The Church Webmasters’ Forum.

Top 10 website design tips for church webmasters:

- Make sure your site loads quickly in browsers.
- Don’t include a splash screen or an intro page on your site.
- Don’t use frames.
- Don’t use patterned or tiled page backgrounds.
- Don’t use animated gifs, rainbow colors or visitor counters on your site.
- Don’t put a photo of your church building on the home page; use photos of people instead.
- Don’t fill your home page with ads for ministries or church events.
- Include on your home page the following, in easy-to-find locations: church address (including city and state), phone number, weekend service times and email link to webmaster.
- Make sure every graphic has an “alt” text description for it in the underlying HTML code. (This helps blind people to browse your website.)
- Make sure users can access every link on your website, including links in drop-down menus, by using a combination of the tab key and up and down arrow keys. (This helps motion-impaired people to browse your website.)

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(Note: This article was originally published in the *Christian News Northwest* newspaper of Portland, Oregon, in February 2005.) David Gillaspay is president of Great Church Websites (www.greatchurchwebsites.org), a ministry he founded to promote excellence in church website design.



INTERNET EVANGELISM DAY APRIL 24, 2005

Who are the Internet Evangelists and what do they do? Is being technically gifted a prerequisite for ministry online? The Internet Evangelism Day web site introduces you to more than a dozen Internet Evangelists who share their stories of how and why they’re involved in online evangelism. [GO](#)



USING CYBER CAFES FOR OUTREACH IN THE 10-40 WINDOW

People in poorer countries are desperate to learn computing skills, get online and communicate by email. Cyber cafés can be used as outreach locations in those places where the ownership of a personal computer is out of reach for many. [GO](#) (Source: [Internet for Christians newsletter](#) from Gospelcom.net.)

Also, make sure you check out the CyberMissions paper on The Strategic Front-Line Use Of The Internet In Missions. [GO](#)



ANIMATED GOSPEL PRESENTATIONS

Check out this list of flash and animated presentations of the Gospel, on the North American Mission Board web site. [GO](#)

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INTERNET & CULTURE TRENDS, NEWS & LINKS

CNN: Study Challenges Stereotypes of Teen "Technowizards." [GO](#)

Charisma: Impacting the Video Game World [GO](#)

Web Site Friendly to Colorblind Users? [GO](#)

ClickZ: Reports of the Death of Email are Greatly Exaggerated. [GO](#)

ClickZ: Affluent Americans Fastest-Growing Online Group. [GO](#)

USA Today: Keeping Web Site Content Up to Date Could Be A Suing Matter. [GO](#)

IEC ENewsletter Information

Questions and comments regarding the Internet Evangelism Coalition ENewsletter are welcome. Email iec@webevangelism.com. To submit content for possible inclusion in an upcoming IEC ENewsletter, please email Naomi Frizzell at naomi@webevangelism.com. The IEC reserves the right to refuse or edit any submitted content.

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