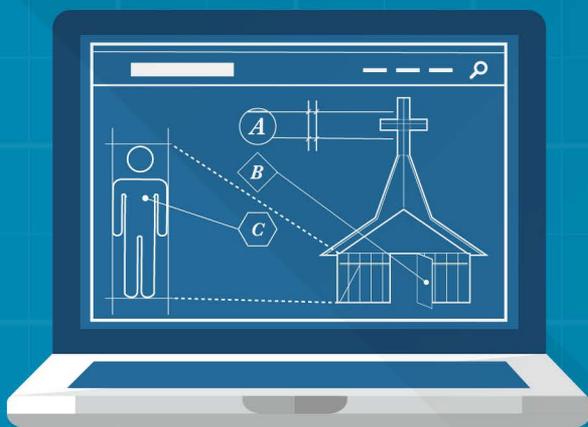


# THE ULTIMATE CHURCH WEBSITE BLUEPRINT

HOW TO BUILD A WEBSITE THAT  
ATTRACTS MORE VISITORS



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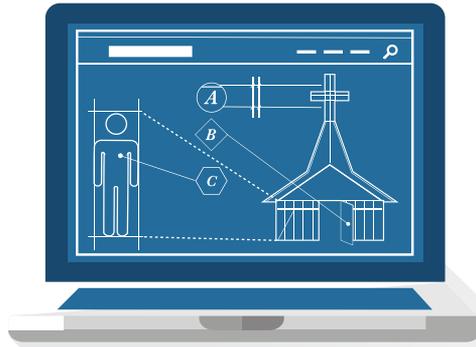
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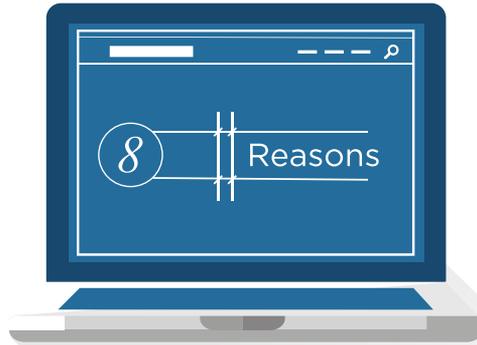


## INTRODUCTION

There's no reason for a church not to have a website, but you'd be surprised at the number of churches that don't. In one [2012 survey](#), more than 40 percent of churches didn't have a web presence.

Since most churches in the U.S. have an attendance of fewer than 100 people, I can understand how a church might believe that a website is a luxury for larger congregations, but it's simply not true. If you're interested in growing, a website is non-negotiable.

When you think about the ways a church's mission is augmented by a good website, it's nearly impossible to think of a reason not to have one—not to mention the fact that websites are getting easier to create and manage.



## 8 REASONS YOUR CHURCH NEEDS A WEBSITE

### ***1. A church website is your first touchpoint***

As early as 2013, a [GE Capital Bank study](#) showed that 81 percent of consumers go online before making any large purchase. With the growth of mobile computing, this number has only increased.

If people visit websites before they purchase a barbeque or microwave, how much more vigilant are they going to be when looking for a new church?

### ***2. A church website fosters online community***

The rise of social media has enabled people to create and enjoy online communities. While this should never replace physical community, it's important for the church to recognize and nurture other forms of community when it can.

Twenty-eight percent of Americans have visited a church's website in the last thirty days—44 percent in the last six months. If nearly half of your church is visiting your website every month, it definitely can (and should) be the hub of your congregation's online community.

### ***3. A church website keeps your people organized***

People visit their church website to stay up to date about things like service and mission opportunities, birthdays, softball games, and outreaches. But more than that, your calendar of events is a wonderful way to communicate to potential visitors a little about your culture and priorities.

#### ***4. A church website informs potential visitors***

People check out your church website before they visit for two reasons: they want to know who you are, and they want specific information. Your website not only communicates your culture, values, and beliefs, but it also shares practical information about things like service times, locations, and family ministries.

#### ***5. A church website is a content library***

Your church website should be a place that people can go and find the sermons, blog posts, and class materials they need to grow with you. This is also important for potential visitors to develop an understanding of your focus, vision, and theology.

#### ***6. A church website increases giving***

People aren't typically carrying cash and checks to church services, so [focusing on in-service offering times](#) as the best way for people to give is no longer ideal. People are used to making online payments, and using a giving form on your website (with an opportunity to set up recurring giving) has the potential to greatly increase your giving.

#### ***7. A church website diminishes waste***

When I think about how many church bulletins are sitting in the garbage cans of foyers or on the dashboards and floors of congregants' vehicles, it makes me cringe. Not only is it a waste of expensive church resources, but it's also a waste of natural resources. Your website can keep people just as informed— with a lot less clutter.

#### ***8. A church website is a natural expectation***

We're long past the days when having a website meant you were a cutting-edge church. People expect you to have a website, and if you don't, they'll look elsewhere. A website now rests on the lowest rung of visitor expectations. A church without a website has no idea how many potential visitors it has lost.



## OTHER WEBSITE CONSIDERATIONS

### *Considering the mobile component*

As the proliferation of mobile tech continues, it's becoming clear that people have moved beyond simply expecting a website that scales for mobile readers; they're looking for your [church's app](#).

As you read through the rest of this guide, be thinking about how your website and mobile app can work hand-in-hand to clearly communicate your culture and vision.

### *It's not enough to have a church website*

So far, we've talked about reasons churches need their own website. But just because you have a church website doesn't mean you're out of the woods. If your website hasn't had an update in eight years or isn't designed with the user in mind, you could be undermining its value.

Nearly half ([46 percent](#)) of Internet users say that a company's website design is one of their primary criteria for judging an organization's credibility. That's a pretty important statistic for churches to consider.

Regular audits of your website's design and usability is as important as upkeep on your church grounds. You want people's first impression of your church to be that you're invested in their experience and needs—and the same is true of your web presence.



## WEBSITE BEST PRACTICES

We've laid out some of the important elements you want to consider as you're designing your website or auditing an existing one. If you work these tips into your website, you'll be well on your way to having a website that communicates the most important things about your church—and most importantly, converts curious website visitors into newcomers!



## IMAGES, LOOK, AND FEEL

### *How to communicate your culture with images*

I'm always surprised when I visit a church website and I'm met with stock photography of happy churchgoers or church buildings. Churches need to realize that the images they have on their websites are just as important as the textual information.

Your goal should be to create an attractive website that features elements people will recognize when they actually visit your church. You also want to use images of your own people to help communicate vital and valuable impressions of your church culture.

If your congregation has a professional photographer, solicit his or her help in getting some images together. Otherwise, you may need to hire someone. You don't want poorly lit, unprofessional, or awkwardly posed photos. You're going to want to fill your website with beautiful and candid photos of church life.

You'll also want to include pictures of your church location. When people do show up after visiting the website, it's helpful if they have some idea what to expect. Including some photos of the building and grounds helps people feel like the church is already familiar to them when they show up.

Many churches use images of their city or a prominent geographical landmark. This can be a helpful way to communicate that the church is not only located in this city, but it's also invested in the region and people as well. [Hillsong Church in London](#) does this well.

## *Feature your target demographic*

One important factor for churches to consider is what target demographic they want to focus on. (This is point #13 in our post [How to Grow Your Church: 20 Strategy Ideas](#).) Once you've figured out what your key demographic is, feature images of congregants on the homepage that fit this demographic.

Whether you're looking to attract professionals, young families, members of the military, or any other under-represented group in your community, you'll want to feature images of people they can identify with on the homepage.

## *Display your diversity*

As you branch out to other pages on your site, feature more images that display your church's diversity. Make sure you have plenty of images that reflect all the ages, races, and lifestyles of the people in your church. As website visitors get deeper into your site, they should be experiencing more of the people that make up your church.

## *Keep staff photos up to date*

One of the areas that will require some regular upkeep is your staff photos. You want these updated as often as you have staff changes. This helps new people get to know your leadership and know who they might want to connect with when they visit.

This doesn't have to be limited to paid staff. It would be wise to include pictures of anyone in charge of a ministry or department.

Lastly, you'll want to give some thought to how the photographs are staged. If you hire a professional photographer, make sure you've planned ahead for what you'll do when you don't have that person around. Often, when churches hire a professional, that photographer will bring in the perfect lighting and backdrop. The images look sharp when the website first goes up, but because you aren't going to bring in a pro every time you need a new staff photo, they start to look shabby and inconsistent when you add new images.

It's good to locate a place in the church where the lighting is good and pictures turn out great, and use it when you have to add a new staff picture. This way, you can have some consistency in your staff's profile pictures. Another suggestion would be to have the same photographer come back for a quick shoot once a year. [Park Street Church](#) in Boston has done a great job keeping their staff photos really consistent—also note how easy it is to contact anyone on staff.

## ***Don't show a church; show YOUR church***

It's extremely helpful to include pictures of your services on your website, but it's important to go beyond the generic. While a close-up image of communion elements might make for an incredible photo, it lacks the emotional impact visitors might feel actually seeing a community taking communion together.

You can apply this principle to other elements of your service. A photo of your worship leader bathed in stage lights might make for a dramatic image, but an picture of your congregation worshipping together may leave website visitors with a more inviting impression.

Remember to bring a photographer out with you when your church does outreach and service projects. Featuring images of your church in the community is a helpful way to communicate important information about your values and priorities.

In the end, you want to go beyond the quality of the image and really think about what it evokes. Does it communicate something valuable about your church?

[Fairhaven Church](#) (located across three Ohio campuses) does a good job revealing who they are in images as you peruse their site.



## HOMEPAGE MUST-HAVES

### *Your church website's first impression*

Before you begin putting your actual website together, you're going to want to sit down and think through a user's experience. Imagining that they have no agenda, where would you want them to go once they land on your homepage? Asking this question really helps solidify what you want (and don't want) on each page of your site.

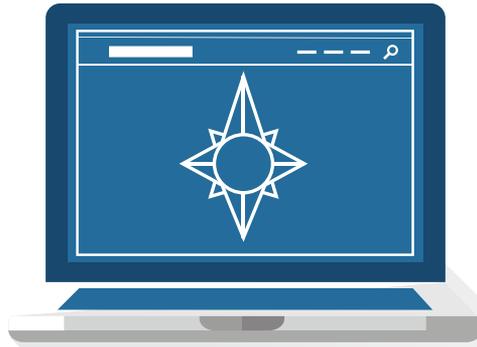
It's pretty easy to recognize churches that haven't considered the user experience when putting their site together. Every page of the website is full of buttons, links, and options. I've seen church websites that have links to services and ministries on their homepage that immediately send people away from their site (hint: you don't want to do this).

You want to keep the options as simple as possible and make the next action you'd like visitors to take more prominent.

Here are some things you will want to include on your home page:

- ▶ **Service times:** Make this information as conspicuous as possible. The number one goal of your website is to bring visitors to your church, so clearly communicating when you gather is important.
- ▶ **Photos of your people, pastor, and environment:** You want to give a clear picture of your church and its culture. An image slider can be a good way to add images without burying your homepage in too many photos.

- ▶ **Current sermon series:** If you have a sermon series that you're working through, tease it on your homepage. You can also link to other messages from that series on your media page. If you don't have a current series, at least promote next week's message.
- ▶ **Email signup:** Making a concerted effort to grow your email list is important. People might not be ready to visit your church the first time they come to your website, but if you can get their email address, you can keep the engagement going!
- ▶ **Link to download your church app:** If you have a [church app](#), make sure the link is obvious to website visitors. This is another incredible way to keep them engaged.
- ▶ **Link to online giving form:** Make it as simple as possible for your existing members to give. They shouldn't have to search for a way to give on your home page. In fact, from your home page they should be able to get to your online giving form with one click.
- ▶ **Social media links:** People often visit your website to find links to your social media platforms. Make sure they're easy to find.



## HELPFUL NAVIGATION TIPS

### *Helping visitors negotiate your church website*

Keeping your website navigation as simple as possible is important. You don't want to send website visitors on a scavenger hunt. You want them to find what they're looking for—and what you want them to see—with as little trouble as possible.

The key is keeping your header navigation simple. Ideally, you want to limit your choices to five (or fewer) navigational options—you definitely don't want to exceed seven.

Check out the header navigation on [Christ the King Community Church's](#) website. The navigational options are broken into five (six if you count the home icon) simple elements: I'm New, About, Connect, Grow, and Share.

The "I'm New" section is pretty standard fare on church websites. It's a great way to introduce your church to website visitors, show what you're about, and let them know that they're important to you. You'll notice that the "I'm New" section is almost always on the left.

Always prioritize your navigation left to right. Unless it stands out better on the far right, your most important elements should be on the left. Always base the importance of your header navigation on what you want a new visitor to see first.

## ***Common navigational options***

Typically, you don't need "home" navigation. Web users are quite used to clicking on your name or logo to get back to the homepage.

Here is a list of some of the most popular navigational options being used by church websites. Beneath each one, I include some of the content churches often put in each respective section.

### ▶ **I'm New**

- Service times
- Campus tours
- What to expect
- Ministries
- Introduction to Jesus

### ▶ **About**

- Mission/Vision
- Staff
- Origin story
- Ministry partners
- What we believe
- Employment

### ▶ **Community**

- Any church management software you use
- Membership process
- Small group locations and times
- Calendar
- Baptism information
- Classes and spiritual formation opportunities
- Service opportunities
- Events

▶ **Give**

- Online giving form
- [Giving methods](#) and opportunities
- Supported ministries
- [Verses about tithing](#)
- [An explanation of Christian generosity](#)

▶ **Resources**

- Sermons
- Blog
- Podcast
- Bible reading plans

***Take advantage of the footer***

Your website's footer is a great place to put links to important things that don't make it into your navigation menu. This can include prayer requests, contact information, a severe weather policy, employment opportunities, or anything else you want to share.



## SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

### *Making sure people find your church website*

If you've been around the Internet a while, you've probably heard the term SEO. It stands for search engine optimization, and it encompasses the things you can do to help your website show up in search engines. Google is constantly scanning websites for specific information to prioritize how it ranks websites when people search for specific information online.

If you pastor a Southern Baptist church called New Hope located in Phoenix, Arizona, you want to make sure your site shows up when people in the Phoenix area search for terms like "churches in Phoenix," "new hope," "baptist churches," and especially "churches near me."

Here are some things you can do to improve your church website's SEO:

- ▶ **Make it mobile-responsive.** This isn't even a question anymore. With so much Internet traffic coming from phones and tablets, your site needs to be as easy to use on a smartphone as it is on a laptop. It just doesn't make sense for your site not to adapt how it's rendered for different viewers. Google penalizes websites that give mobile users a bad experience. But you're in luck! Most web templates are already set up for mobile responsiveness. Want to see if your website is mobile-friendly? You can run a [quick \(free\) test on your site here](#).

- ▶ **Set it up to load fast.** One of the things that causes Google to rank your site lower is if it's slow to load. Some of the things you can do to increase load times include making sure your images are optimized and compressed, making sure you aren't running unnecessary plugins, and making sure your site is caching correctly. These are just the tip of the iceberg. Have someone with some experience help optimize your website for speed.
- ▶ **Put the right information in your title tag.** One of the most important things you can do for your SEO is to ensure that the right words are in the HTML title elements. This is the part of your web page that gives Google (and Google users) a concise description of the page's content. You want to make sure it includes your city and church name.
- ▶ **Insert your physical address and phone number on every page.** When Google recognizes your physical address all over your site, it will bump you up in local search results. This information can be placed in the footer of most pages. For more information, check out these [3 Key Local SEO Tips for Churches](#).
- ▶ **Sign up with online services.** Claiming your business listing with services like [Google My Business](#), [Bing](#), [Yelp](#), and [Apple Maps](#) will help Google prefer you.
- ▶ **Choose wise URL conventions.** If your website is NewHopeAZ.com, you're going to want your URLs to make sense. Your about page should be simple, like [NewHopeAZ.com/about](#). Nobody wants to see a URL that looks like this: [NewHopeAZ.com/about/?ts=31232872&st=22323&page=32&ap=jesuslovesyou](#).



## OTHER TECHNICAL WINS

Here are some final suggestions that will greatly improve the usability and value of your website:

- ▶ **Choose your content management system (CMS)** carefully. Your CMS is what allows you to create, edit, and store content on your website. You don't want the most technical person on your staff choosing which CMS you'll use. You want to make sure it's as easy as possible for anyone to use. Here are a few things you should look for in your church website's CMS:
  - Quick and simple installation
  - Intuitive interface for administration
  - Easy-to-use templates
  - Helpful user community
- ▶ **Install the Facebook tracking pixel.** The [Facebook tracking pixel](#) keeps track of people who have visited your site and allows you to target them through Facebook ads. No church should be without it.
- ▶ **Get set up with Google Analytics.** [Google Analytics](#) might be the most important tool you can install on your site. In fact, it's well worth it to train someone on staff to learn their way around it. You really can't put a pricetag on the kind of insights Google Analytics will give you about how your site's performing and how people are using it. (Fortunately, you don't have to—it's free!)

- ▶ **Integrate event registration.** Having a way for people to reserve, register, and pay for events on your website cuts down on a lot of hassle. Even if you don't think it's something you need right now, it's something you're eventually going to want.
- ▶ **Integrate a mobile giving software.** [Mobile giving](#) is becoming the standard in most ministries, charities, and churches. I can't emphasize the importance of prioritizing mobile giving in your church as soon as possible and ensuring that it's integrated with your website.

Event registration and mobile giving are both features that you can get through an eChurch app. It's the perfect accent to your new website and will allow you to share your content more widely and engage people more efficiently. [Sign up for a free demo today!](#)

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