



So You Want to Set Up a Church Webpage?

What Do I Need?

A Computer. Mac or Windows machines are fine; any computer made in recent years is more than adequate for basic Web usage.

An online connection. Many options are available from dialup connections to high-speed internet access via DSL and cable connections. Each of these brings its own hardware requirements.

An Internet Service Provider (ISP). The most well known provider is America On Line, but there are hundreds of others out there. Things to consider when choosing a provider:

- Will you need to connect when you are traveling? Does the ISP have local access points across the country, or will you have to make long distance calls to connect.
- How much does the ISP charge for access? Is it a flat rate, regardless of time online, or is it charged by the minute?
- Most ISPs provide e-mail service. What other services are provided? Web site hosting? Special interest resources? Online file storage?

A Web Host. Web hosting is available at reasonable prices. Hosting may include **domain name registration** (your own unique web address), or you can transfer an existing domain to the host. Additional charges may allow for additional software (chat, e-mail list servers, online store, tracking and analysis tools), larger storage space or other enhancements. Many ISPs offer web hosting as part of their package.

HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) Software. Many word processing programs (like Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect) now include the option to save a file in HTML format. These are O.K. for simple web pages, but for better control of layout and web effects, you will want to consider a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) HTML editor like Microsoft Front Page, Macromedia Dreamweaver or Adobe Creative Suite.

OR... You can contract with a website development firm to do the layout and formatting of your pages. This can be an expensive proposition. If you contract with someone (whether a professional firm or volunteer members of the church) be sure you have a plan for maintaining the pages and keeping them up to date. Neglected webpages are a poor representation of a church.

As You Lay out Your Site

Consider your audience. Your pages will be accessible by all kinds of people around the world. Consider whether you want your pages to be directed only to church members or people in your community, or whether you want to use the site for evangelization of a wider audience.

Keep It Simple! It's easy to be dazzled by all the special effects, multimedia and flashy animated graphics we see on the web, but remember that your primary purpose is to communicate your church to people who visit your site. Don't let the human message get lost in the techno-fireworks. Also, many church people are just getting used to the online world, and likely will not be running the latest software or know how to find that plug-in that will let them experience a fancy site.

Put the most important information at the top of the page. A site has about 30 seconds to convince a web surfer that it is worthwhile to spend time there. Many people will not bother to scroll down past the first screen of information.

Avoid large graphics. A large graphic can take quite some time to download (remember, you have 30 seconds to keep someone), and does not add useful information for the browser. If you do want to offer a large graphic, put a smaller version (thumbnail) on the page and invite people to click on it to see the full-size version. (By the way, don't just use the resizing capability of an HTML editor to do this. Even if a large picture is displayed in a smaller size, the browser still loads the full size picture. The thumbnail needs to be a smaller, separate version.)

Keep your pages up to date! If you don't have a definite plan for regular review and updating, don't put time-sensitive information on the website. The address and phone number of your church are not likely to change; Service times and the names of staff members may change, but are still fairly consistent. But announcements of special events need to be kept current.

Do tell people how to contact you. At the very least, the church's address and telephone numbers should be clearly provided. It is even better if you can offer an e-mail address, but if you do, be sure you check the e-mail box regularly!

Don't throw a bunch of hyperlinks on a page. Keep your links meaningful and related to your overall purpose. People can find a hodgepodge of hyperlinks almost anywhere on the web.

Teach your viewers, inspire them, encourage them! Make use of this new technology as another way to express God's love for the world.



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