



Why Technical Expertise isn't Enough for a Church Website

By Yvon Prehn

Though technical expertise is important in the creation and administration of a website and though there are many technical experts in churches who also have great hearts for and an understanding of ministry, there are many instances where relying on technical expertise alone can have some negative effects on a church website. From the many interactions my ministry has with church website creation and function, here are some cautions to prayerfully consider.

Technology goals don't always align with ministry goals

Why does your church exist? What are the driving values, the key ministry issues and concerns? What are the major ministries at your church? What is available for kids, seniors, singles, or seekers? Do you have a specific audience you minister to and if so, who are they?

Can a visitor to your site answer these questions, or know where to find the answers to them from their first few minutes at your site? If not, why not?

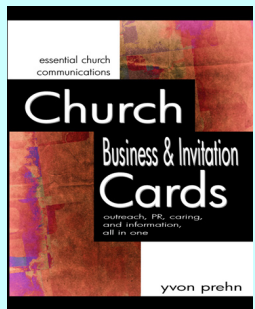
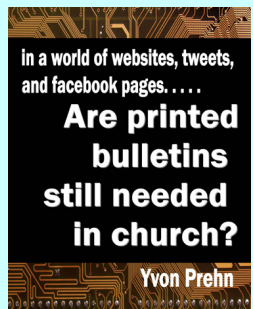
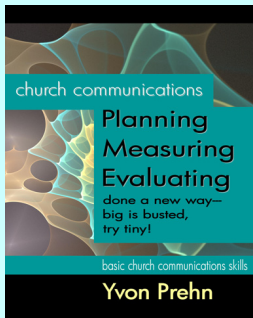
Your website might function flawlessly in load times and be technically perfect, but if it doesn't immediately let people know the purpose, goals, and components of the ministries of your church and have places where they can

go on the site to find out more information and connect with the ministry—you have work to do.

Technology cautions aren't always volunteer friendly

If a church website is to be useful, or to have the most basic credibility for people to look at it and trust it, it HAS to be up-to-date. If your website isn't up-to-date (every week, every day, on a continuing basis) it probably isn't the fault of the system used to create your website. More often than not, in many churches, the problem of a continuously outdated website lies on the shoulders of a tech-savvy individual who is the only one allowed to update the system.

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No church website can serve its people if all the content has to be entered by one person. The systems used to create websites are all (or should be) cloud-based and any volunteer or ministry leader at your church should be able to create content, recruit volunteers, explain programs, and keep times and events updated. Volunteers in various ministries should be in charge of keeping all these things up-to-date. Once entered, then a person in the office can skim over them to make certain all is ok and publish them on the website.

Yes, it will take time and training to do this, but for technology to be the servant of the church, expertise in it has to be shared.

Technology and design values aren't always the same as pastoral values

Why did your church design and built your website the way you did?

Was it designed to primarily to serve your people or to reflect a cutting-edge, latest and greatest design trend that a tech person told you was the way websites were being designed today?

A lot of current web design is created for one purpose—to sell something. Sites like this start with a big scrolling header with splashy, upbeat images and then more images

in smaller boxes. This might be eye-catching, but much of it is ultimately cold because there is little behind the pictures.

Pastoral values on a website make important content obvious. They explain; they serve; they are more concerned about meeting needs than trying to impress. There is a depth of pastoral content behind the images.

No matter what the technology used to build your site or the design of it, this is the important question to ask: “Is your website meeting pastoral and ministry needs of your congregation?”

It's an easy question to answer by simply looking at your website statistics.—do your people come to your website often? Do they spend time on the site? Do they recommend it to their friends? Your website visitor numbers are readily available (if you are a pastor or staff person who doesn't know where to find them, ask the tech person who created your site).

Your website numbers don't lie. If people aren't coming to your site or interacting with your social media, it is because they don't find them useful. Advertising the website more or talking about it more from the pulpit are necessary, but that won't help if there isn't content on the sites that people want.

What technology can't do

Technology can't create content. Lack of current content that ministers to the needs of your congregation and the audience you are trying to meet is what all the issues above have in common.

A ministry-oriented website needs lots of content and that means lots of people creating it. If one person is holding on too tightly, that won't happen.

Sometimes it's easier to rely on technology than on the hard work of creating content for a website. Many churches are still in awe that they have a website, grateful for anything online, and thrilled that anyone would work on it.

We have to change that attitude if we want to use our church websites as the extraordinary tool they can be. Challenge your people (and yourself) to create complete, Biblical, constantly up-to-date content. If you focus on this kind of continuous content creation no matter what technology you use to get it on your website, your website will be successful in what matters most—helping people find and follow Jesus.

For more information on creating communications that will help your church fully fulfill the Great Commission, go to: <http://www.effectivechurch.com>