

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a church website that works.

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Introduction

Hello Website. Meet the Pastor & his Staff. Pastor, Staff, meet Website. You know the two of you could be really great friends. If you would just take the time to get to know each other and learn to work together, you guys could produce some pretty great results.

It's true, most Websites are overlooked and under appreciated. As a busy church, you most likely aren't treating yours right. Even worse, if you don't have one yet, you're missing out on working with the best ally your church could have. Allow me to introduce the two of you.

A Website can be a beautiful creature. Yes, it can be physically pretty but I actually am speaking of a different type of beauty. A Website can be a beautiful asset to your church. However, like most people and

even animals, it won't work for free.

In this book we will not portray your Website as most people think of a website, a jumble of HTML code or a tight little package of bits and bites floating out in cyberspace. No, we will portray and envision your Website as a living, breathing team member of your church. Not so much as pet, but more like a work horse.

And to get this horse to work, you will have to take care of it, treat it right, feed it and give it the attention it so desperately craves. This book is based on the hard lessons I've learned since 1999, the heart of the internet boom.

I have learned the in's and out's the ups and downs of Website design and marketing. I know the natural personality of Websites. I am an 'expert breeder' so to speak. We have successfully nurtured hundreds of Web

sites. Some from creation and sadly some on the brink of death.

The wonderful thing is that Websites are not born, they are created. What the heck does that mean? It means that you hold in your hands the very power of life and death. Hope and despair. Victory and defeat.

In direct proportion to what you put in to it, is what you will get out of it. Actually, when you and your Website really get to know each other, when your Website can truly trust you to take care of all of it's needs, it will produce for you exponentially more than it requires. That is where it really gets fun.

The bottom line is you'll get to understand how to make your Website work!

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Put Up Or Shut Up

I discovered something today as I sat in a meeting with a potential client.

A Website can be a great tool. It can be the work horse you dream it to be. It can put quite a few dollars in your pocket. It can make your phone ring.

There is one thing it can't do though. It can't make a bad product good. It can't make a boring church great. It can't make an angry visitor happy. The bottom line is that you **MUST** deliver the goods.

If you are reading this book and you know your church is poorly run, your team members are rude and you treat your people just like your products.....well good luck, that is all I can say to you. No Website in the world can make up for all of that.

If you ain't got the goods, you better find some real quick because if you don't, no amount of marketing is going to cover it up. Visitors may try you once but if they feel tricked or cheated or used, you can forget about them coming back to you.

Before you look at new ways to redesign your Website or research your new marketing plan, make sure you actually have something to advertise. No fluff, no gimmicks, no tricks. Either you have an excellent church environment or you don't.

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Does My Church Need A Website?

How many months has it been since you went looking for information in the yellow pages?
How many minutes has it been since you asked your favorite search engine?

I think you just answered the question about whether or not your church needs a Website.

Without a doubt, Websites are the most overlooked vehicle of advertising for churches. Everyone needs one. Every dentist, lawyer, accountant and minister needs one. Every café, restaurant, coffee shop and nightclub needs one. Every wholesale supply company needs one.

Everyone listed in yesterday's yellow pages needs to be available on today's internet. It's where your members expect to find you.

Properly constructed, a Website allows your

prospects to gather information from the privacy of their computer monitors. What are the questions you answer every day? And what, exactly, do you say to church members when you're speaking to them face-to-face? This is exactly the information that needs to be available on your Website.

The internet is heaven-on-earth for the 49 percent of our population that's introverted.

Introverts prefer to gather information anonymously, unlikely to dial your telephone number except as a last resort. Even more unlikely is that they'll choose to walk into your store and engage a chatty salesperson.

49 percent of your visitors prefer to know what they're coming to buy before they walk in your door. And even the extraverted, chatty 51 percent will appreciate an informative Website that functions as an expert greeter during the hours when the church is closed.

Don't think for a moment that your members and visitors aren't already online.

Every time a client tells me their customers are too old, too rich, or too traditional to be online, I immediately gather a crowd of them and ask, "How many of you have used a search engine in the past 7 days to research a product or service you were considering?" I raise my own hand.

Launch a Website. Make it interesting. Make it look good. Feed and care for it regularly and watch your sales begin to climb.

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1966 Plymouth Belvedere

You can tell me that stories don't matter. You can tell me, but I won't believe you. Stories are what can set your church apart from the noise. Stories are why Americans spend about 30 hours a week watching TV. Please allow me to illustrate.

The 1966 Plymouth Belvedere was an overall decent car. A midsize sedan, it was somewhat spacious, stylish and dependable. Not a bad car. Not an amazing car, especially against today's standards. So would you buy one for \$160,000?

Last January in Arizona hundreds of people wanted this 1966 Belvedere. The bidding started at \$5,000. After several intense minutes of hopeful bidding, one lucky man placed the top bid for \$160,000. Why? That car cost less than \$5,000 when it was first made. Even in mint condition today it might sell for

\$50,000 at the most. Why did this man easily pay triple the market price?

Because this 1966 Plymouth Belvedere came with a story.

"This car is well known nationally as "The Bank Robber Car" because of its fascinating history. It was originally owned by Chicago police officer, Clem Messino of Harvey, IL.

In an effort to subsidize his income, Mr. Messino was using this car to escape the authorities in several successful bank robberies in both Illinois and Indiana.

Eventually the police were on the lookout for this elusive and swift white Belvedere so Mr. Messino painted his car black. Though a clever idea, Mr. Messino was eventually apprehended and is currently incarcerated for his crimes."

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Secret Hidden Bonus

Today I opened up a brand new package of Glad Force Flex garbage bags. I love those bags, they stretch without breaking no matter what you put in them! We have used them in our kitchen for almost a year now and they work great! As I opened the box I received a delightful hidden bonus. A free "Big Bag"...a sample of the big force flex bag...free!

I know you probably are thinking, "What is the big deal? This guy needs to get a life!". However small and insignificant that free bag was, it actually had quite an impact on me. The reason was not the bag...the bag in and of itself is nothing truly amazing. The thing that really "hit" me was that no where on the outside of the original box was there any indication that I would find a free "Big Bag" inside. No fancy artwork, no hyped up "Free Bonus Bag" copy. Nothing.

That impressed me. Why? Because they could have (like most churches) tooted their own horn. They could have told me before I bought the bags that they were giving me a nice bonus inside. They could have used the "freebie" to sell more boxes of bags. But they didn't.

I felt like I had received a secret little bonus for being a good customer. Instead of advertising, it felt like a reward. I know it probably cost them very little to give me that free bag and I know it benefits them as well because after I try and love the "Big Bag" I might start buying them for around the house.

But I felt like they touched on something important, even though they may of done it accidentally. They promoted their products, advertised their business, and got my attention in a way that I welcomed. I was please to receive it. I was actually thankful. How often do you hear that about advertising?

The moral of the story? Sometimes it might be a good thing to throw in a little extra bonus. Don't announce it, don't advertise it, don't promote it. Just quietly give it to your visitors and members and watch them be amazed.

Your Website is the perfect vehicle to do just such a thing. You can send a free coupon through email to a new prospect. You can feature an event or concert on your Website. You can offer a little extra something for a little extra nothing.

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What's In It For Me?

That is the question every potential person that stops by to visit your Website is asking. Consciously or not, the thought goes through their brain every time they read your bulletin and every time they visit your church or log on to your Website.

To be successful in church marketing you **MUST** answer that question for your customers. You need to clearly and quickly present it to them on the home page. Your website should gently whisper this potent message over and over and over again. On every page of the site. Let them know what's in it for them.

To do this in a meaningful way for your visitors you must translate features into benefits. For example instead of saying, "This airplane has 2 Rolls Royce Super Turbine engines which produce 40,000 pounds of thrust", you would say, "You can go from Dallas to Los Angeles

in under 2 hours which will save you valuable time and enable you to be home for dinner with your family."

That is translating features into benefits. Do this throughout your website when describing your church and watch your attendance go through the roof.

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I Don't Mean To Brag

I honestly do not. That is not the point. I simply want to encourage and inspire you to make your church succeed.

Last month I wrote an article about Website marketing. It was a decent article that hopefully offered helpful information to those who read it. It was published and sent out in a newsletter that reaches almost 1 million readers.

The article took me about 1 hour to research and write.

As a direct result of that 1 article we received \$4750.00 in work from two new clients.

Not bad for 1 hour. Not bad for spending \$0.00 on advertising to those clients.

A simple free article was all it took to attract and engage those clients. You can do the same

thing. I want to encourage you to take advantage of free publicity. There are thousands of e-newsletters and Websites out there that are absolutely starving for content.

Take one hour out of your busy month and research and write an article about everyday Christian life. It can be about anything you think your visitors would find interesting.

But the key is for you to write it. Don't copy it, don't steal it, don't take the lazy way out. Use your brain, start the juices flowing and write it yourself (It's very easy once you get started). And don't push or plug your church or services. It should be informative and interesting not full of underhanded "sales pitches".

Readers will smell that 47 miles away!

Then simply send it to Websites that you think might find it interesting for their audience. You will be flabbergasted by the results. Read-

ers will be informed, and will see you as the informer, the authority in your industry.

I made a commitment to my business to write one article every month. You should do the same.

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Oh Go Join A Club!

Yeah, you can spend \$80,000 on an ad in Time Magazine or you can go join a club which is usually free and probably offers more opportunities for growth than shelling out all of those dollars. It's a lot less painful too!

Joining a club or becoming a member in an organization is a great way to market your church and your Website. I decided to join my local chamber of a few months ago. They offer meetings and mixers at least once per month which will put me in contact with plenty of new clients and churches that need our services.

No matter how many mailers you send out or ads you run, nothing can replace a good handshake and a face to face relationship. People connect with people they like. It's that simple.

Your Website should be a mirror of your personality. (Warning: You must have a half way

decent personality for this to work in any sort of positive way!)

It should reflect your charm and charisma and character. It should speak to your visitors in your voice. Every page should contain a little bit of you. Making it personable makes it better. Training your Website to speak and act like you takes time but believe me the benefits are worth it.

Okay, back to the club thing. Not only will you meet loads of new contacts, you usually will have the opportunity to be a speaker and educate your fellow members.

There are tons of choices....industry organizations, your chamber of commerce, community groups, booster clubs, biker clubs, sports clubs, political groups, etc.

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Your Website Is A Plant (Water It!)

Can a church website really be a useful tool? That is a great question and I hear it all the time. From small churches to large corporations, everyone wants to know. Really, it is the only question that matters if you are a church paying for a Website every month.

What is the point of having some billboard out in cyberspace?

In my opinion the answer is yes. A huge screaming yes! I have worked with clients in the past that want a Website created and published to the Internet as soon as possible. When we tell them about things such as search engine positioning, keeping their site up to date and interesting, blogging, researching the best way to advertise online and analyzing competitor's Websites, they don't want to hear it.

That is where I see the problem enter the

scene.

Not because those clients don't purchase services from my firm, but because I know how disappointed they will be in 6 months to a year when their site is doing nothing, selling nothing, and informing no one. I have seen it happen about 58 times.

The simple truth of the matter is that a Website is a living, breathing creature and in order for it to succeed it needs a huge amount of attention (visitors), plenty of watering (content updates) and tons of sunlight (marketing).

I know from past experience (my own included) that without one of these critical things, a Website will not survive, let alone be useful.

After all is said and done, isn't that why you would want a Website, because it is a useful tool for members and potential visitors to your church?

So let's review how you can make money online.

1. You need people to come to your Website. The way you get them is.....
2. You need excellent marketing to a very targeted audience. The more targeted and focused your marketing is, the more successful it will be.
3. You need to keep your site informative, interesting and fresh. You need to become the authority in your industry. I believe that 80% of Websites fail to keep visitors because the information on the site is dull, boring, and anywhere from 3-4 years old!

Start watering. Your Website is so thirsty!

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Listen Up!

Knowing the thoughts of your members and your potential visitors can yield invaluable results. This week my team and I conducted surveys of local businesses that have Websites. We called them up and asked them about 12 questions each. All but one were very excited to help us out.

Half of what they told us we totally expected. The other half shocked us! They had excellent ideas that we had never even thought of!

What I have discovered (more than a few times) is that a good majority of the time our customers want something completely different than what we thought they wanted. I've seen it and heard about it in all kinds of industries.

Sometimes as a church it is easy to get so far inside our own "universe" that sometimes we can't see clearly when we step outside of it. Its'

like waking up in the middle of the night when someone blasts on the lights. You can't see clearly. We can come to know our church so well that we lose sight of what our visitors think or want or know or hate.

It can be a great thing to conduct a simple survey using your Website. You will learn things that will have you scratching your head and reworking your services and especially your marketing.

Find out, take the time to simply ask them. You might end up being the only one that actually takes the time to do it.

Do you think there could be a reason God gave us two ears and only one mouth?

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You Got What?

Giveaways can be great marketing tools. Especially around holidays and birthdays.

Think about this for a minute. If you give something away to visitors that they are interested in, that will probably make them happy, right? Happy people usually tell someone why they have such a big smile on their face. You'll have GOOD word of mouth advertising coming from a happy visitor to a potential visitor.

As Mastercard says, That is priceless.

There is one important thing in this equation. Something that must never, ever be overlooked. I mean never. You can't give away crap. (sorry, I had to use that word!)

You can't give away something that nobody wants. The secret power of giveaways lies in the giveaway. The more the "perceived value" is

to the customer, the more impact and effectiveness your giveaway carries.

A great example of this is the website called "In Bubble Wrap". Everyday they give away some kind of great giveaway, something their target audience really wants.

If you want to give away junk, save it, you will actually probably do more damage than good. But if you want to spend "a couple bucks" on an investment in your future, give away something with a huge amount of "perceived value".

Make their friends ask, "You got what?"

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Do It Like Horatio

In the spring of 1903 on a whim and a fifty-dollar bet, Dr. Horatio Nelson Jackson set off from San Francisco in a 20-horsepower Winton touring car hoping to become the first person to cross the United States in the newfangled “horseless carriage”.

At the time there were only 150 miles of paved roads in the entire country, all of them within city limits. There were no gas stations and virtually no road maps as we know them today. Most people doubted that the automobile had much of a future. Sixty three days later Jackson would prove them wrong.

Now I have to agree with you, that sounds nuts! You're probably saying that this guy was out of his mind. Well he very well might have been, but I can tell you one thing, he had guts. He was bold and he stepped out of the “safety” of normality and is now recorded in history

forever.

The point is to do something different. There are a million alternative choices to advertising with banner ads or through pay-per-click. Take some time and sit down with your staff and BRAINSTORM. Yes, I know it takes time and it can be difficult, but the results will be beyond your wildest dreams.

Brainstorm how to make your Website better. Improve your content. Redesign your home page. Change your button names. Update your error pages. Add a toll free number. Make your site only 1 page. Add descriptive photos. Add video. Do something!

Don't get stuck in the “rut” of doing the same things you've always done. Break out of the box and make some noise. Market outrageously! Your Website will thank you, it will finally have some visitors stick around for more than 4 seconds!

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You Need A Website

This is chapter for those of you reading this book who still do not have a website. You need a Website! Think about it. You may not have a huge staff or a magnificent building to meet in on Sundays, but you can have a Website just like the big boys.

The Internet has completely leveled the playing field.

According to a recent report from web hosting church Interland, 56% of US small businesses can attribute some portion of their annual sales to having a presence online.

In fact, 78% say they benefit from having a Website. Particularly, over one-half think their site gives their business more credibility, while 33% say it is their strongest marketing tool.

The same is true for churches. It gives you a

ton of credibility.

All of the businesses surveyed had some sort of online presence, but for an idea of just how many small businesses in the US are online, the US Small Business Administration found in June that 81% of US small businesses have Internet access, and yet just 30% have Websites.

That statistic absolutely shocks me. Every business and every church should have a Website. If created properly and nurtured faithfully it can add credibility and increase trust without you having to lift a finger. And it works when you can't.

At a conference a few months back an auditorium of millionaire business owners was asked to, "Raise your hand if you've used the Internet to research a possible purchase within the past seven days." Their upraised hands and arms made that room look like a wheat field at harvest time.

The Internet is rapidly becoming the number one medium for business and for churches. It has become the ultimate product catalog, information visitor pack, Sunday bulletin, and weekly announcement.

I don't know how much louder I can bang this drum.

My goal is not to kick a dead horse, but if you are reading this book on how to care and feed and maintain your church Website it just makes sense that you should have one!

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A Mind Like A Teeter Totter

It's a fact. From the time we wake up in the morning to the time we rest our little heads on the pillow, we are judged based on the way we look, speak and carry ourselves. It may not be right but it is the truth.

The same holds true for your Website.

From the first second that a potential visitor sees your Website they have already starting forming impressions about your services, what type of atmosphere you offer and whether or not they will be comfortable at your church on Sunday. I know, it doesn't seem all that fair but it happens all day, everyday.

The exciting part about the whole process is that you have a pretty good say in what those first impressions might be. Good or bad, it is up to you. Design, words, quality and clarity are all tools you can use to kindle that first

impression in your customer's mind.

And it's not just Websites. The same holds true for church post cards, brochures, mailers, postcards, TV ads, newspaper ads, whatever means of marketing you use.

Most churches don't realize or even care about this. That is why they continue to pump out the same old, boring, unprofessional garbage year after year. It is a sad thing to witness when you know that with just a little extra effort and professionalism their results could be much higher if not through the roof.

A business card is not just a business card.

A Website is not just a Website. They are the launching pad for first impressions and it's up to you which way you wish to send the shuttle.

Show your Website that you care....design it so that it is simple, clear and beautiful.

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You Shall Be Known By Your Deeds

There is story in the bible about King David's Mighty Men. These guys were the toughest, strongest and fiercest fighters on the planet. One of them took on over 300 enemy soldiers by himself. Let's just say you would've definitely wanted to be on their good side!

This story got me thinking about church and Websites. There is a line in this story towards the end that says, "And they were known by their deeds." Isn't that something? To think that someone might actually be known by what they do instead of what they say.

"And they were known by their deeds."

Isn't that the exact same way that your visitors feel about you? That is a powerful statement. It means that the Mighty Men had a great reputation because of what they did not because they "talked the talk".

The same goes for you and me. No amount of fluff or fancy words is going to increase your attendance or spread your message if your service is boring or your people are rude. It just can't happen.

Think of it like this....No matter how many times you tell me that your boat is unsinkable, that it is the safest boat in the harbor, I am not getting into it if I can see fish swimming through the holes in the bottom.

The bottom line is to improve your team members, improve your service, improve your marketing, improve your attitude, improve your Website; then sit back and watch what your visitors say about you.

It will spread faster than any traditional marketing campaign you could put together. Talk is cheap...You shall be known by your deeds.

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Warning: Hot Air Alert!

Show me 99% of writing on the internet and I'll show you a huge jumble of hyperbole, fluff, platitudes, and yawnably unbelievable, black hole nothing words.

Words like cheapest, excellence, service, quality, quick, convenient, and best are promiscuously thrown about advertising with reckless abandon.

These empty words are the tools of the lazy communicator.

They build no believable case for your church. They just get lost in the mumbo jumbo of marketing...trust me, you and your wallet do not want to go there, it's a scary, barren and yet very well trodden path!

Regardless of your the style of your church, you must build a case. But the fact is most churches

go on year after year churning out the same junk that does nothing more than get their name out there, if that.

They create Websites that are simply brochures. Websites that are malnourished and poor designed.

They just create NOISE that adds to the confusing mass of information flooding consumers.

Take some time out of your busy schedule and write good copy for your Website. Write in a way that communicates, inspires, and educates people about your church. Write to tell a story. Use words that have some meat and meaning.

Don't wrap your Website up in "jargon". Write like you speak, like your talking to a real live person standing 2 feet in front of you.

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The Proof Of Desire Is In The Pursuit

I was involved in a meeting today with a few event planners and one of our clients. The discussion centered around an upcoming promotional event that we are conducting for this client. The ideas were flying around the room like teradactyls and the planning was progressing very smoothly. We were all getting very excited.

Then all of a sudden...bump...bump....bump

That is the sound of us hitting one major roadblock after another. You see, our client (a church) was being stingy. Yes, that's right, I said it. This person just could not get over saving a few pennies here and a few pennies there. Time after time they would come up with "ideas" that would save them what would amount to about a whole nickel!

What blows my mind is that this event is for

promotional purposes. Newspaper ads will be run. Postcards will be printed. Posters will be plastered. Websites will be created. The goal of all of this is to attract people.

And I know that thousands of people will come. And when they do they will find that the client decided to cut corners. Yes, just in the little things, but what you've always heard is true, 'It's the little things that make the difference'. Poor quality food here, not enough lighting over there. For the life of me I can't figure it out.

The proof of desire is in the pursuit.

This client says that they want visitors. They say they want to increase attendance. Talk is cheap. I say take out your wallet and let IT do the talking.

Of course I don't mean you should blow the entire years budget on a new BMW for your

newest member. No, what I am saying is that you shouldn't pinch pennies and cut corners in rewarding your visitors or promoting your church.

Your visitors will notice.

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How Tall Are You?

Are you 5 feet tall? Maybe 6 feet? Maybe even 7 feet tall?

How do you know? Because you measured right? Well, you just made my point for me. Thank you!

You see Websites are very much like height. If you don't measure it, you don't know it. Sure you can guess and try to come up with something, but in business and sometimes church that means guessing with your money. Not many people like to do that. (I don't blame them!)

I have recently spent a lot of time researching the Restaurant church. Let me tell you, that is a tough business. I always wanted to someday open a restaurant but after discovering the facts, I don't think I ever will.

According to the National Association of Restaurants, the average profit margin for an American restaurant is 5.6%! No that is not a typo! I was shocked to learn this.

The point I am trying to drive home is that I would never have known had I not done the research. Spending a little bit of time in the beginning can save lots of headaches later on. Whether you are starting a new location, launching a new Website or considering purchasing a new business, do your homework!

Measure and track and analyze every single penny in your marketing efforts. If you want to see any results from your Website it is absolutely imperative that you have some sort of web statistics program. You have to find out what pages are being viewed, what links are sending you traffic and where people are leaving your site.

If you don't measure it, you don't know it. If

you don't know it, you can't improve it. For the record, I am 6 feet tall!

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Into The Deep Blue

Today I was able to attend a local networking meeting and meet quite a few nice people. Little did I know I was about to go deep sea diving.

Let me explain. The meeting was really upbeat and enthusiastic. At one point during the meeting 2 business owners were give 7 1/2 minutes each to tell the group (about 40 of us) about their business and what they do.

It was 7 1/2 minutes each of inside details, little nuances and industry specifications. I kept thinking to myself, what are these people talking about? To be honest I didn't really care about their topic to begin with but when they dove in so deep, the water was way, way over my head.

These speakers had 40 people giving them their undivided attention and they almost put

us all to sleep. I took notes as they spoke. Here is what I wrote: "Speakers---Too much inside information, way too complex-----Talk about the audience!"

Get me involved. Make me laugh. Tell me how your church relates to me and how I can benefit from what you do.

Seth Godin had a good post on his blog a few weeks back about this. Though it was in the context of writing, the same thing applies to speaking.

He said, "If you're writing for strangers, make it shorter. Use images and tone and design and interface to make your point. Teach people gradually. If you're writing for colleagues, make it more robust. Be specific. Be clear. Be intellectually rigorous and leave no wiggle room."

Here is the point:

When you write text for your Website, keep it

simple and focus on your visitors. Let them lead themselves into the depths of the deep blue. If they want to go there, they will ask to go there (through their clicks).

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Cheapskate Alert!

Yesterday I spoke with a good friend of mine in the construction church. He was telling me how his business had lost a bid on a recent project. His bid was about \$500k and the business that won the bid was about \$330k. That is a huge difference!

He was stunned because he could not imagine how the business that won the project could possibly pay for materials, pay it's employees and still have money left over for profit.

At the price they charged they would have to do the job in half the time my friend expected it to take. Maybe they can do it, maybe not. We will have to wait to see.

This got me thinking about the mind set of consumers. So often we are apt to choose the least expensive route. Whatever will save us the most money. Whoever says they can do it

cheapest.

I've been down that road myself and for some products or services, yes, cheapest is best. But for most, cheapest is not best and in fact (I have learned) is not usually the cheapest.

"You get what you pay for", the old saying goes and you probably know it's true. Does a Hershey Bar taste exactly like a Ghiradelli chocolate bar? Does a Saturn run exactly like a Infiniti? Does McDonalds taste exactly like a Ruth Chris steak? Is your experience at Days Inn exactly like the Waldorf-Astoria?

I think not.

All of these examples provide the same basic product or service. However the second company in the example goes way beyond the basics. They provide the greatest services, excellent technical achievements, superior performance, extra attention, and extraordinary

quality. Do they cost more? Sure. Do you get more? Absolutely!

And think about this: I have purchased products and services that appeared to be the cheapest but had to replace them or actually go out and buy their competition because their quality was so poor.

Think about it. If it sounds too good to be true.....

You actually do get what you pay for. My Mom was right!

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Just Sprinkle The Pixie Dust

Passion, desire, integrity, drive. These are a few of the traits necessary for success in any endeavor. These qualities are difficult to teach and can be even more painful to learn.

When most people see a thriving church or a successful entrepreneur, the usual assumption is the owner came up with some new scheme, a fresh new angle or a fancy gimmick.

Most people would say that he got "Lucky". Forget about the trials, mistakes and countless battles fought and lost. He was simply "Lucky".

The churches that have the hardest time succeeding on the web are those that are looking for the latest gimmick or new angle. They think there is some sort of secret formula or pixie dust that they can sprinkle over their Website and their church and "Kaboom!", instant success, instant sales, instant people.

The only real secret power is to find your special and unique story and convey that to the world as convincingly as possible. If you are looking for magic pixie dust, that's where you can find it.

Let's use an example of a local restaurant. If the place is known for lousy food and dirty dishes, good advertising would never be enough to save it. However I can hear the chef proclaiming, "Your job is to bring more customers through our door, if you bring them in, we can feed them." Can you see how stupid that sounds?

If you drive visitors to your Website but you disappoint them as soon as they enter, it was all for nill. They will not return. Worse yet, they will probably tell a few people who also won't return.

For a more successful Website you need to do one thing only: tell your unique story in a

convincing way. Be true to who you are and the people will come.

You will be shocked at how it will impact the success of your Website and your.

Focus on that and let someone else play with the pixie dust!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a church website that works.

Go Get Tested

It's a proven and documented fact. When customers enter a retail store like Best Buy for example, most people go to the right instead of the left. Would that be important information to you if you owned Best Buy? It would to me. How do they know that information?

They tested!

In the same way, Website testing and evaluating is critical to success on the Internet.

In order to know what your people want, what they don't want, what works on your site, what doesn't work, what confuses visitors, what increases sales, etc....you need to test. Period.

How do you do that? Well, I will tell you how we do it.

We recruit 10-15 people who are representative

of our clients target customers. We show them the clients Website and ask them to do some of the tasks like add things to their cart, perform a search, find the contact info, etc. While they are doing this, we take really really good notes.

The information we collect is priceless. We know what works, what stinks, what colors are best, what phrases are best, which buttons get clicked (and which ones that don't), how long visitors remain on certain pages, what "path" most visitors take through the site, etc.

Is it time consuming? You bet.

Is it worth it? You bet.

Not only will it keep you from losing visitors due to poor layout and design, testing actually reveals how to increase results substantially.

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Extra, Extra, Read All About It!

Did you hear the big news! We just signed on Willis & Taylor Construction as our newest web design client!

Who the heck cares!?!

(Besides us of course) Who really gives a flying hoopala? Is that the kind of news you want to read about? Do you want to receive that little nugget of info from us in our newsletter? Probably not. Unless you're my Mom.

The point is this: When you update your Website or send out a newsletter, make it useful. Here is a little hint we can all write down and try to remember: No one really cares as much about your church except you and your staff. People only want to know what's in it for them.

When you update your Website put something interesting on it. Make it useful to the visitor.

When you send out your newsletter, spend some time researching and write something worth reading. That is the only way you will reap anything of value from your internet endeavor.

The first step is to find out who is likely reading your newsletter and visiting your Website. Then jam pack both of them with good, original, interesting content. Visitors will return. Subscribers will be happy. You will be known for your wisdom and knowledge.

Here are some ideas: Conduct and publish the results of a survey, write an article, conduct an interview, create a contest, give something away, offer a discount.....the list goes on and on.

Talk to your people in their own language about them, not you. Honestly, no one really cares that much about you. Sorry.

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Summer In My Back Pocket

This was the summer it had finally happened. My dream realized after so many long summer days wishing and longing for a taste of freedom. This year I was armed with my Boaters Safety License.

That summer was one of the best vacations of my life. I was free to drive the family boat anywhere I darn well felt like (as long as my mom could see me from the shore!). Freedom called my name with every wave and I answered the call boldly. I cruised around like I owned the place while "Whoop! There It Is" blasted through the radio.

Those are the days to remember. The great days of years gone by. I bet you have stories just like mine. There are times that if you close your eyes and concentrate really hard, you can sometimes see it.

That was a special time in my life. I guess that's why I keep this old, torn, faded paper card in my wallet even to this day. It helps take me back there and remind me of the wind in my hair as I whip across the lake.

Does your Website carry this type of emotional weight? Statistics show that almost 95% of paper advertising through the mail gets pitched. Almost 70% of visitors to the average Website leave within 5 seconds. It doesn't connect. It doesn't mean anything to the visitor and therefore it doesn't matter.

Getting more visitors from your Website is simple. Tell your story. Be real and authentic and genuine. Stop screaming and start talking with your people like they're your friends.

Take the time to connect with people not through fancy vernacular but through real conversation. Tell your unique story and you will have more visitors than you can handle.

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Ransom Note

It is probably the last thing you would ever want to receive. It brings bad news and usually nothing good can ever come of it. It's the dreaded ransom note.

A hodge-podge of different letter styles and fonts meant to conceal the author and to evoke fear and confusion to the reader.

Thankfully you'll probably never receive one.

I on the other hand get them all the time. Intimidating messages. Angry tones. Fearful styling. I'm talking about the 3 metric tons of junk mail and advertisements I collect from our mailbox every day.

99% of these ads are so ugly, so unimpressive and such an eye sore I can hardly stand to look through them. There is absolutely no continuity. No sense of professionalism. The ads

scream and shout as they each try to out do each other with bigger logos and even bigger discounts. It is an utter mess.

Please don't send ransom notes to your community. If you want your church to grow, don't do it. Focus on keeping a continuity to the look and feel of every ad, every letter, every piece of marketing that you create. Great companies and churches do this.

Consider Starbucks. Even though each store is unique, they all have a very common thread. You instantly recognize the logo and the warm feeling of the interior.

The one sure sign of an amateur small business who probably won't be around much longer is it's "ransom note" marketing material.

It appears as if the brochure and business card and Website could be from a separate company.

Avoid this mess. Establish a clear and consistent "voice" and style. Don't make it hard for your community to recognize you. Help them identify your church. Help them remember you by presenting the same image over and over, time after time.

Consistency is the key. No more hodge-podge, run of the mill, crazy fonts, wacky colored paper, mysterious messages. No more. It ends today.

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About The Author

The year is 1999. I decide to leave Eastern Michigan University and head west....to follow my dreams.....not dreams of hollywood stardom....dreams of internet riches! It was the middle of the internet bubble! My brilliant idea was to start selling cactuses online. Needless to say, that didn't work out so well.

However, I did learn to create my first website. After that, I created my second site, selling Christian CDs and books. That also wasn't the home run I was hoping for, but I was really starting to enjoy this website thing.

From there I started designing small sites for friends, family and local businesses. I knew I had found my passion. Within a couple years we were designing web sites for Fortune 100 companies in my parents garage.

Yes, it's true, we painted the entire garage an

ugly lime green for creative inspiration!

We've come a long way since then. We've added team members and worked for hundreds of clients but creating amazing websites is still what we love to do.

My name is Sean Alsobrooks and at my web design company, ChurchBrilliance, we guarantee results. If you don't love your website, if we don't deliver on everything we promised then you don't owe us a dime.

When we accept a new client it's because we know we can deliver a solution that will increase their bottom line. With years of hard learned experience, we only provide the highest quality craftsmanship on every single project.

We have a talented team in place to create beautiful design, deliver websites quickly, and dedicate extraordinary attention to your church

goals.

We truly believe we are the luckiest people on the face of the earth. Everyday we get to dive face first into our obsession: Designing beautiful web sites for growing churches.

We love this stuff! This is our passion and we hope you'll agree that the results show in our work.

www.churchbrilliance.com