



digital strategy for churches

8 steps to help you reach more people online

chapter 1

**what does
a digital
strategy for
my church look
like and why
should I care?**

Let's start at the very beginning.

Why does your church even need to think about the way it uses its digital tools like its website, social media, mobile app and email list?

You probably have a website - and you might even be utilising Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or other social media platforms.

You probably have email addresses of all your members and email them periodically to keep everyone up-to-date about different events and news.

But have you ever wondered if you should invest in your church or ministry's digital presence? Are you doing all you can?

What's a digital strategy, anyways?

Let's start with a working definition for the phrase "Digital Strategy".

A digital strategy is all about being intentional in the way you use your digital tools to minister to your congregation and share Jesus with your community.

Simply put, the digital tools that should come to mind include:

- an effective, communication focused, mobile-ready digital presence (website and app),
- a great content generation strategy for things like blogs, podcasts and e-newsletters (content is king),
- a solid portal into your online giving and store revenue generation
- as well as various media to capture new visitors (email opt-ins), connect with your members (ChMS) and communicate your message through email, social, SMS and push notes.

As you are probably beginning to see, your church's digital strategy is a full time communication and creative ministry! It isn't a checklist of

things you need to set then forget. It is the catapult for creating and maintaining a successful digital campus: your church online.

Don't be scared off, though. The mere fact that you are reading this ebook is the first step you can take in a step-by-step process of planning or reworking your digital strategy. This ebook will walk you through several of those steps and give you some simple, tested ideas of how you can take action.

Now, why should I care?

Your Church and Your Website

Based on a recent LifeWay Research Survey, 78% of churches have a website. Whether it is a new, shiny, specially developed piece of technology or the leftovers of what a volunteer put together 5 years ago. You may think that, as long as you have something, that is enough. Sadly, that really isn't the case.

Even though 78% of churches have a website, 42% of churches barely keep their websites up to date! Here's why this stat is important to you.

A First Impression

For many people your website will be their first introduction to your church. Think of it as your virtual welcome mat.

Whether they are looking for you deliberately or just searching for churches in the area, many people will find your website long before they set foot in the building. In fact, a recent study by Grey Matter Research found "In the last 12 months, over 17 million American adults who don't regularly attend worship services visited the website of a local church or place of worship".

It is important to be sure of what sort of impression your website gives. To be clear, we are not saying that your website needs to look exactly like the mega-church down the street. Rather, it should be a unique reflection of your church, but will likely include the elements we discuss in this book.

Does it communicate your beliefs and values? Does it match the experience that people have when they come in the door? Is it something that gives you credibility in a modern culture or does it make you look dated and out of touch? Is your content up-to-date? Can they find what they are looking for?

And most importantly - does it tell people about Jesus?

What about Mobile Apps?

If your church website is your virtual address, a mobile app is the vehicle in which you get the word out. Traditional means of communication (“public transportation”) will get you there, but will consume your time, energy and resources. Mobile apps are ubiquitous these days and they are valuable digital tools to include in your church’s strategy.

One study shows that Americans are spending about 2 hours per day using apps and just 30 minutes “surfing the old-school web.”

This means that if you want them to follow content, such as videos and podcasts, read your latest blogs and newsletters or take general actions within and outside of church (like giving offerings, subscribing to your email list), then a well done mobile app is going to be your best option.

In fact, PocketPew.com discusses the 5 main reasons for getting an app, which include:

- allowing your audience to watch or listen to sermons and podcasts,
- helping you increase giving,
- allowing you to communicate easily through push notes,
- building engagement through social features
- giving easy, click-to-connect options (click-to-email, click-to-call, click-to-text, click-to-locate).

If you don’t have an app, then now may be a good time to start thinking about this.

A Place for Your Visitors

Here's a quick test. Does your church website say "about us" or "I'm new"?

What is important is that you adopt a visitor-focused strategy.

Let's be honest

- your existing members will probably visit 2 or 3 links on your website. Your website is primarily for people who found your content but don't know who you are. Making it easy for that person to find what they are looking for or leading them to important information can be the best thing you can do with your website.



TOOL TIP:

Go to your church website right now and check the news or blogs section. Is the content more than one month old? Check the church's staff and leaders section. Is it up to date?

Then what? Once they are engaged in reading your content or finding what they need, is it clear what next steps they can take?

Can they make a call, subscribe to a newsletter or find out which social networks you are on?

A Place for Your Members

In addition to being a major public face and an outreach channel of your church, your website can be a great communication tool for the existing members of your church.

Treating your website as a static brochure overlooks many powerful (and time saving) opportunities for communication and connection with your existing church members.

Your Church and social media

Social media usually gets a bad rap these days, labelled as a time-waster, an encourager of self-involvement and one of the reasons for the dumbing down of our culture.

The truth is it can be a really powerful tool, not only to gather your church together, but to help and equip your members with the ability to share the gospel and to connect with the community around you.

The New Town Square

Gone are the days where people would gather in the town square to chat, catch up and share ideas. The fact of the matter is that social media, like Facebook and Twitter, are now the place where people are doing those things.

In fact, **more than 52% of adults now regularly use at least 2 social networks**. In the same way that Jesus went to people where they were, it is up to us to spread the good news where people gather.

Like print, radio and tv before, it's up to churches to figure out how social media can be used as a medium to share the great story they have to tell.

It isn't only the church who can use social media as a powerful tool. For our members who use social media it is a massive, new mission field. They are there every day, sharing their lives and interacting with their friends and family.

We need to figure out how to encourage and equip them with the ability to use it to spread the gospel.

Your Church Email, SMS and more

One form of communication that is often overlooked by churches is good, old email. It can sometimes be seen as little outdated, but email isn't dead. It is a great way of connecting with people on a regular basis, knowing they have already expressed interest in hearing from you.

Email can be a great tool for keeping people updated about upcoming events and other news, but it can also be so much more.

Beyond email, SMS text messaging and mobile app push notes can be valuable tools in your digital strategy. Most people have their phones with them at all times, so there isn't a better way to speak directly to your audience than through a mobile.

Having a Strategy

If your church's website and social media have such great potential, it makes sense to be intentional in the way that we use them.

That is exactly what a Digital Strategy is - it's the plan of how your church is going to use your website, social media and email to connect, communicate, and convert.

The whole point of this book is to work through the process of putting a plan like that into action.



Take Action

The first step to making progress is your first step. Let's take action right now.

- Go to your church website right now and check the news or blogs section. Is the content more than one month old? Check the church's staff and leaders section. Is it up to date?
- Join our Facebook Group.
- If you cannot complete the other chapters now, schedule time to do so. When you do, you will be well informed and more valuable to your church's communication efforts.

chapter 2

taking a digital audit

The background of the page is a solid green color with a faint, semi-transparent image of a laptop keyboard and a pen resting on a surface. The text is overlaid on this background.

In the previous chapter, we clarified why it pays to have a strategy for your church's website, app, social media and text and content communication. Now, it's time to get started and we're going to do that by taking a step back.

Before you start making plans to revamp your digital strategy, it makes sense to stop and see where you currently are.

It's time for a Digital Audit.

Auditing your Website

First up, let's take a look at your existing website. To begin with, **make a list of all the things about your current site that you are happy with.**

Things you may wish to think about include:

- the appearance of the site - how easy is it to update and manage?
- how are things organised?
- how well do technical elements like calendars, news and audio/video function?
- Is it mobile friendly? [Click here to run a quick test.](#)

Next, do the same thing - but in reverse. Make a list of all the things about the current site that are frustrating or annoying.

You may want to look over the same list.

These lists become valuable when we start to talk about how you would like your website to work for you in the future.

You already have an idea of the things you want (and don't want) in a website.

Taking a Content Inventory

Next, it is time to carry out a Content Inventory.

This may sound a little scary, but it's basically an overview of ALL the content in your website.

Start by opening a spreadsheet and listing EVERY page of your website. Your content management system might make it easy to find a site map, listing all the pages. Otherwise, there are a lot of tools online to help.

Now, for every page in the site, add some more details to the spreadsheet. There are all sorts of things you can include, like search keywords, last edited date, but let's start with some simple ones:

- page title
- the web address of the page
- what section of the site the page is in
- the main message of the page
- a summary of the content
- any images included in the page

What this does, is allow you to see the lay of the land when it comes to the content in your site.

It makes it easier to see sections/pages you may not need anymore, pages that send the wrong message, and reveals gaps in your content you might want to fill.



TOOL TIP:

Using an online tool like www.xml-sitemaps.com/ will get you started listing out all the pages in your website

Auditing your Social Media

It's important to take a second to figure out what social media accounts your church (and ministries) have. This will help you in the future, when you start planning the way you're going to use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and any other social networks.

It's time to make another list...

Write down all of the Social media accounts your church has. Don't forget to think of accounts that may have been set up by ministries or other groups in the church.

Now for each of these - briefly write down a few additional things:

- the person/people responsible for the account
- the group of people that account talks to
- the estimated amount of time spent managing the account every week.

Now you've got a good overview of where your church is represented around the web and how much effort is applied.

Auditing your Email List

It's likely that, over the years, you have gathered a list of your members' email addresses. If you're organised, this might be in a spreadsheet or a mailing list application. If you're not, it could just be that email you keep 'replying-all' to (please don't do that).

Start by placing all the email addresses into a spreadsheet, if these have not been organized at least to that level so far. Set up columns for other details, like the person's name, and anything else that would be useful.

Fill in as much information as you can in the spreadsheet, and more importantly - get rid of any email addresses that are no longer relevant.

Now What?

From these short exercises you now have a much better picture of how your current website, social media and email list are working for you.

This is a great starting point for considering what you need to do to make your church more effective online!

Further Reading

How to conduct a Content Audit

<http://uxmastery.com/how-to-conduct-a-content-audit/>

Sitemap Generator

<http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/>

Affinitive's Social Media Audit

<http://www.beaffinitive.com/social-media-audit/>



Take Action

Keep your momentum going - and take same time to action these items!

- Complete a digital audit for your own church. Sit down with a pen and paper and work through a website audit, content inventory and social media audit!
- Join our Facebook Group.

chapter 3

target market & personas

Hi there. In this lesson, we're going to take a look at the people that your church is going to try and reach with its digital strategy. It is, of course, tempting to say that your target market is everyone - after all, we're commissioned to tell the whole world the Good News. The reality is, however, that your church is perfectly suited to reach particular sections of that 'everyone'.

Having a focus on who you are reaching allows you to put in place a much more effective strategy for your website and social media presence.

Who is your Target Market?

'Target Market' is a horribly commercial kind of a concept for a ministry, but it's actually a helpful way to think about things. As a church, you hopefully have some idea of the type of people you are trying to reach. In order to figure out the best way to talk to those, reach them - we're going to take some time to formalize that.

You could consider your target market from two perspectives:

People We Reach Naturally

As a church, there will be certain groups of people you are naturally predisposed to attract and reach. This may be due to factors like the existing makeup of your church demographics, specific location within a city or suburb and the times at which your services are held. If you are suited to reaching a particular group of people (say, young families), then embrace that.

People You Should be Reaching

In addition to the people your church reaches naturally, there may be groups of people in your community that you have a particular heart for. These are the people who you may not reach naturally (even though you want to) and you will need to do extra work to communicate with those.

From those two groups, you should now be able to form a picture of the target market of your church. **Take some time to list the different groups of people your church reaches.** You might even be able to prioritize them in order of importance.



TOOL TIP:

Ensuring that you have the ministry, time and resources to support this potential new reach, is important. In your planning, ensure you match your expectation with the reality of your local church.

Some examples of groups of people in your target market might be:

- Retirees in the local area
- Young couples with no children
- Homeless and mentally ill people in the local area
- School leavers & Uni students

Personas

Now that you have your target market in your head, we're going to dive a little deeper and create some personas or Avatars. Personas are fictional characters you create as representations of your particular target market.

They can vary in the level of detail, but their purpose is to give your audience a face and to clarify its wants, needs and limitations.

A persona/avatar can contain all sorts of information, including:

Profile

This includes such information as demographics, geographic and psychographic details, age, sex or social class.

Personality

Personality can be tough, as it can be so varied, but the profile information should be able to give you some clues as to the personality of your target market.

Think of things like their openness to change, introversion/extroversion, general attitude, and outlook.

Work & Play

What does the person spend his/her time doing? What is their occupation and what do they do for recreation?

Technical Aptitude

How comfortable is the person with technology in day to day life, and how often would they use different technologies and devices.

Do they have any physical, emotional or cognitive limitations?

Wants & Needs

What does the person want or need from you as an organization?

These may be things they deliberately come to you for or other life needs they have that your organization could fulfill.

Ideally, the information related to your personas should be based on real data. A persona shouldn't be a real person, but more a representation of a number of people that fit the same profile.

Spend some time creating personas for the target markets of your church.

Now What?

Personas become really handy as you start to make strategic decisions about your website and social media presence.

Each decision can be looked at in terms of how it will affect each persona - **this way you address the wants and needs of your target markets** as you plan and implement your web presence.

Further Reading

Mailchimp's User/Persona Research

<http://blog.mailchimp.com/new-mailchimp-user-persona-research/>

Personas (info from usability.gov)

<http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/personas.html>

Introduction to User Personas

<http://www.ux-lady.com/introduction-to-user-personas/>

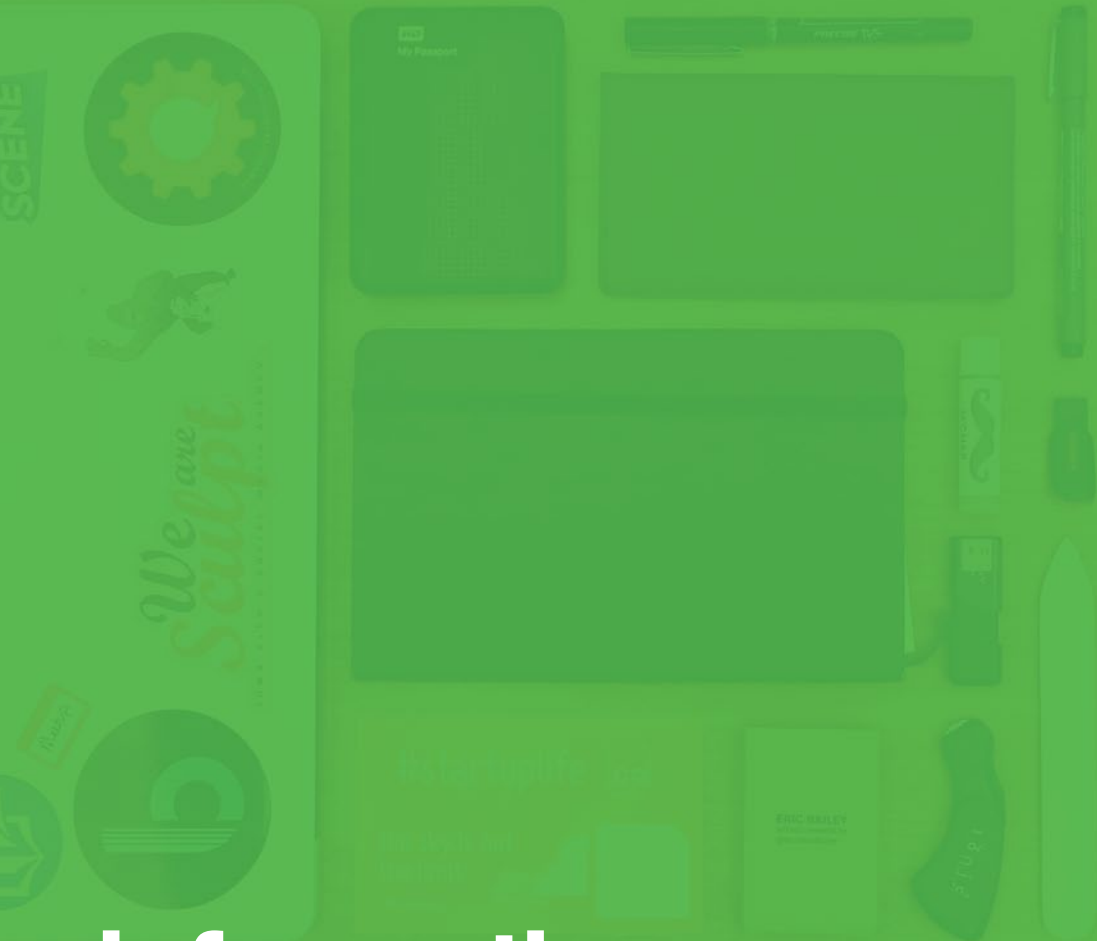


Take Action

Crafting personas/avatars for your audience is a great step towards a strong digital strategy!

- Work out your church or ministry's target markets and come up with persona/avatar for each group.
- Join our Facebook Group.

chapter 4



information architecture

What good is an amazing looking website if no-one can find what they're looking for?

It is vital that, behind the scenes, the content is planned, organized and thought through. That's what we're going to look at in this lesson - Information Architecture.

To be fair, Information Architecture is an entire field on its own, so we are only touching the very surface, but it will be a great exercise in organizing the content of your site, to make it easier for people to use.

A great way to organize your content is through an exercise called 'card sorting'. It's best undertaken as a group, particularly if you can form a group of people with different perspectives in regards to the website: staff, members, different age groups, etc.

If you cannot get a group together, you can still do this on your own, but the wider range of people involved in the exercise, the more the result will represent your website's users.

All The Content

The first step is to gather all of the content you'll need for the site. For the purposes of this exercise, we're going to write down the different bits of content on index

cards. If you don't have index cards, simply chop an A4 sheet of paper into 6 pieces and use those. Alternatively, you can use sticky notes.

Now, we're going to list out every page or piece of content for the site. The content may come in various different forms:



TOOL TIP:

You can check out this video for an example of a card-sorting exercise in action.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Y2w3yX0EkA

Content the User is looking for

Start by thinking about your target market - maybe even the personas you came up with in the previous lesson. Each of these types of people are going to have certain wants and needs when they visit the site and it is important that we make sure there is content to fill those needs. You may need content that answers questions like:

- Where can I find you?
- What time are the services?
- What can I expect if I visit?
- How can I serve in the church?
- What small groups can I join?

Write down names/titles of the bits of content that answer these questions on cards and group them in a pile.

Content they don't know they need

There will also be content you want people to read, even when they are not intentionally looking for it. This may be the bulk of your other content, including things like:

- Introducing coming-up events
- announcing coming-up series
- vision and mission statements
- practical info for committees and members

Once again - write down names/titles these bits of information on index cards/slips of paper. Add them to the pile.

Other Content

You'll also need to fill in cards for sections of content that will recur, like events, sermons, blog posts, and the like. No need to have a card for each sermon or each blog post - just a card that represents the section.

Start Sorting

By now, you should have quite a sizeable pile of cards. It's time to give them some order.

Start sorting the cards into piles, based on content that feels like it should be grouped together. As a group exercise, this can be quite interesting as people are likely to have different opinions on how the cards should be grouped.

It is important at this stage to keep your users in mind - remember they are the ones who will actually be looking for content on the site.

Try and put yourself in their shoes, as though you were arriving at the site looking for the things they will be. Where would you look for that information?

First Pass

Try and sort into between five and nine piles on the first pass - it doesn't matter if some of the piles turn out to be quite big.

Research has shown that people make a much quicker decision when selecting from this range of numbers, so grouping the content within this range helps to make quicker (and easier) decisions.

Now, go through each of the piles and double check if every card in the pile belongs or if it would be better suited to another pile.

Second Pass

On the second pass, work through each pile. If there are cards that represent information which would be displayed on a page together, make a new card containing both of them (and discard the old ones).

Through this part of the exercise, we start to decide which pages the content will be displayed on.

If any of the piles have a large number of cards, you may need to organize these into sub-piles of cards that can be logically grouped together. In your eventual website, these will represent second-level pages (that might appear as drop-down items in a menu).

All in a Name

Now that you have all your different piles representing different sections of the site, it's time to give these sections titles/names.

Titles and names are very important, as these are the things that people will see upfront in the menu. They are the words they will be using as the first step towards finding what they are looking for.

Try and think of names that neatly represent the whole pile. Write these down across the top of a sheet of paper.

Then, underneath each of the names at the top, write out names/titles for each of the cards in the stack. If you have sub-piles, then you might need to branch them out a little.

Guess what? As you do this, you're creating the sitemap of your site.

You should now have a visual representation of all the content for your site, how it is grouped and how each bit relates to the others.

Now what?

Now that you have your content grouped in a sitemap, it is worth looking over it again, to see if there are any things you would need to tweak or change.

It's totally okay to keep tweaking this, but you've done the bulk of the work organizing the site and where everything needs to go.

Now, you're ready to create the content, which we'll cover in the next chapter.

Further Reading

Webmonkey guide to Information Architecture

http://www.webmonkey.com/2010/02/information_architecture_tutorial/

Card Sorting (info from usability.gov)

<http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/card-sorting.html>

Card Sorting (info from Boxes and Arrows)

<http://boxesandarrows.com/card-sorting-a-definitive-guide/>



Take Action

Setting out a robust Information Architecture for your website makes it easier for people to find things!

- Do a card sorting exercise for your church or ministry and create a sitemap. Check out the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Y2w3yX0EkA.
- Join our Facebook Group.

chapter 5

A pair of glasses with dark frames and thin temples is lying on a light-colored wooden desk. To the right of the glasses, a portion of a silver pen and a white computer mouse are visible. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

**your
content**

Now that we've figured out the structure for your site, it's time to start fleshing it out with actual content.

The primary content will be found in the pages you organized in the previous step, but also in other types of content, like sermons, events, blog posts, and more.

Who is your content for?

It is important, when you are writing your content, to remember who the content is for. If your website is a tool for outreach and connection, then it stands to reason that your content is actually being written for them (not for yourself).

Think back to your Personas from lesson 3 - these are the people your content is for. **As you are writing and preparing content, try to keep them in mind and write in a way that will communicate with them.**

Pages

The main building blocks of your site - the pages - will contain information that probably remains fairly consistent over time and won't change regularly. Remember to keep the information in these pages relevant to your target audience/personas and focused on information they would be looking for.

The types of pages that could be helpful might include:

I'm New / Visit - a page for potential first-time visitors, covering the basics of when/where to come along, what to expect and other important information.

Next Steps - information for people who may have visited a few times and are looking to become more involved, perhaps in study groups, by serving or becoming members.

Staff/Pastor Details - information about the minister/pastor and some of the staff who they are likely to meet if they come along.

What We Believe - nothing too in-depth, but a bit of information about your beliefs and what makes your church unique.

Giving/Tithing - Information about how to support the church financially.

Sermons

Chances are that your church is already recording (either in audio or video) your sermons, each week. If you're not already sharing these on your website, let me encourage you to start doing it now.

Sermons can be a great resource, whether to church members who might have missed it or to people all around the world.

Put your sermons online

As a minimum, you should be making your sermons available for download on your website. It doesn't have to be a highly technical or difficult exercise.

Most content management systems should allow you to upload an mp3 file and attach it to a news or blog post. Each week, you simply need to write a little item, letting people know it is there, and maybe a brief summary of what this week's sermon was about.

Sorting your sermons

Once you start to have a large number of sermons, it can be handy to have some way of sorting them, so it is easy for people to find what they are looking for. This is where having a content management system, like WordPress, comes in handy.

Many content management systems will have ways to add metadata to your sermons - things like the sermon series, who the speaker was or even the bible passage spoken from. These will mean that people can do such things as view all sermons in a series or those given by a certain speaker.

It can take a few extra moments to add this information, but is valuable in the long run.



TOOL TIP:

There are some great WordPress plugins that allow you to add metadata to sermons:

- Blurberry PowerPress
- Church Theme Content

Podcasting

Once you are uploading your church's sermons, the next logical step is to podcast them. Podcasting is actually much less scary than you might think.

Most content management systems (WordPress included) will automatically output a feed of the most recent sermons.

When you share the link to that feed with your visitors, they can add it to iTunes and automatically get new sermons as you add them.

If you want to go a step further, you can even submit your podcast to Apple, to be included in the iTunes store.

Events

Details of upcoming events can be a great way to connect with potential visitors and the community around you. **Your website can be used as the central hub for information about upcoming events, to draw people in and inform them of what is happening.**

Generally, you want to focus on events that are public (those that potential visitors and the wider community can attend), rather than internal events. Internal events (particularly administrative ones, like meetings and committees) are best kept to other methods of communication.

It's also great to highlight BIG upcoming events that might be one-off or annual events, rather than the regular weekly ministries, which could be highlighted elsewhere. **A calendar full of weekly events might make it look like your church has lots on, but it also makes it harder for potential visitors to see what they should attend.**

Try and feature images with your events and make sure you have all the important information (What/When/Where) up-front and easy to find. Make it as appealing and easy for people to attend as you possibly can.

Blogging

Blogging can be a really powerful communication tool for churches, yet it is often overlooked. The term 'blog' really just refers to any sort of content that is regularly updated, rather than remaining static. A blog can be a great way of engaging with people and is a very clear sign of a church that is active and vibrant.

Some ways, in which a church might blog, could include:

News

You can use a blog to keep you existing members (and potential visitors) updated about the latest news you would like them to know. It might even be able to replace some of the weekly news items you usually mention at the Sunday service.

Articles for Members

Perhaps a blog could include articles written specifically for existing members of the church. You might want to publish articles encouraging

them in their walk through the week or to prompt them to think of ways in which they can be serving the church. Either way, it is a great way to engage your members during the week, between services.

Articles for Visitors & the Public

You can also write articles that are designed for people from outside of the church. One example of this might be to write an article demystifying what happens at a service on Sunday, to make things more accessible for people. It can also open you up to visitors from around the web, who are searching for topics you write about.

Blogs can be an incredibly useful way to communicate with people and show that your church is an active one. The problem occurs when the blog stops being updated.

Once the enthusiasm for the blog is over, it can start to go for weeks (or even months) without anything new published.



TOOL TIP:

For users visiting your website it is FAR worse to see a blog that is six months old than to have no blog at all.

Here's the rub: if

you're going to embark on a blog for your church's website, you need to commit to it. You need to look after it and keep it updated. It's quite a big commitment of time and energy, so you'll want to be sure.

When you decide to put in the time and effort, though, it can be an amazingly powerful tool for you and your church.

Now what?

Your website content is the main reason for its existence. As such - it is worth taking a considerable amount of time and energy in writing, recording and creating it.

Start working through your sitemap - preparing content for everything you've mapped out.

Further Reading

Creating a Content Strategy for Your Church Website

<http://churchm.ag/creating-a-content-strategy-for-your-church-website/>

Tips for Creating a Church Podcast

<http://blog.shure.com/tips-for-creating-a-church-podcast/>



Take Action

It's time to up the ante with your content. Take whatever you are already doing - and build on it.

- If you don't share your sermons at all, get started. If you're already sharing your sermons - great! Have a think about how you might be able to make them more useful by adding extra info or podcasting them.
- Start sharing your upcoming events if you don't already. Think about your blog strategy. Start mapping out a plan for content to inform and empower your readers.
- Join our Facebook Group.

chapter 6

content tone & voice



We've talked about what content you should include in your site. Now, we're going to look at the way content on your site should be written.

When it comes to the content for your website, it has probably come from all over the place. Sourced from old documents, supplied by different ministries and different people, maybe even liberally 'borrowed' from other places.

When that all comes together, it can feel like a bit of a mishmash. Reading the words on one page compared with those found on another page of the website can feel like you're somewhere else entirely.

For that reason, **it is important to try and maintain a consistent voice and think about your tone when it comes to your website.** Let's dive a little deeper.

Finding your Voice

Put simply, your church's 'voice' can be described as its personality and the way it is communicated in text. The way you use words can say a lot more about your church than just the information being conveyed. They can be used to show people what is unique and different about your church.

Do you speak casually or with formality? Are you friendly, authoritative or aloof? All of these things are conveyed by the way you say things, as well as by what you say.



TOOL TIP:

Take some time to think about the 'personality' of your church. What makes it tick? How would you describe it to a visitor? How would it act and talk if it were embodied in a person?

This should give you a good idea of the way your church would talk. Why not come up with a few examples of how your church would talk about the following basic facts:

- Telling people about service times and location
- Announcing an upcoming event
- Sharing a piece of sad news
- Giving insight to a passage of scripture

These examples can give you a guide as to how your church can talk about things, in a way that reflects its unique personality.

Using the Right Tone

Now it is time to talk about the tone of voice you use on your website, where your voice is your church's personality (and remains consistent). Your tone will change, depending on the timing, audience and information.

Just as in real life, you would speak differently when conveying information to a child or to an adult - **the way you use words on your church's website should be tailored to address the audience and situation.**

Looking back at the personas you created in a previous lesson, have a think about the way you express yourself - it might differ, depending on which of the personas you were speaking to.

You may want to make another list of those personas and the way you would communicate with them.

Keeping it Consistent

Why do we care about figuring out your church's voice and tone? The main purpose is for us to take that mishmash of content and give it some consistency. Editing the content to fit with your church's voice will ensure that people feel comfortable as they navigate around your website - like all the information is coming from one place.

Thinking about your tone means that you can edit the content of different sections (say, for example, the youth group's page), so that it is written in a way that suits the audience.

The end result is a website that communicates much more clearly and personally with your visitors.

Further Reading

Tone and Voice: Showing Your Users That You Care

<https://uxmag.com/articles/tone-and-voice-showing-your-users-that-you-care>

Mailchimp's Voice & Tone

<http://voiceandtone.com/>

A simple tool to guide tone of voice

<https://gathercontent.com/blog/a-simple-tool-to-guide-tone-of-voice>



Take Action

Take some time to review the content you have in your current website (or have collected for your new one).

- Think about the voice of your church and the tone with which the different bits of content should be communicated. Make a list of the bits of content that need editing and rewriting - then, get cracking!
- Join our Facebook Group.

chapter 7

connecting with your audience

As well as a way of sharing information, your website (and the tools associated with it) can also be a powerful way of connecting with people.

Social Media

In modern society (especially among churches), social media can get a bit of a bad rap. It quite easily gets written off as self-indulgent time waster that encourages people to focus on themselves. This can be true, but I'd like to suggest there can be a lot more to it.

The modern town square

It can be helpful to think of social media as a modern form of the town square (or, for a more recent example, the watercooler). It is a place where people gather to converse and share their lives with one another. By very nature, they are there to be social: to interact with one another.

This is a place your church cannot afford to ignore. **Not only are people increasingly turning to social media for information and advice, but your own church members are spending more and more time interacting with people on social media.** How can you equip them to use it wisely?

The big players

Facebook

I shouldn't need to elaborate too much here - everyone knows Facebook. Originally planned for personal connections with people you know, it has now become a way for people to stay connected with other people (both known and unknown), as well as to connect with brands and organizations they like.

Facebook fosters person to person connections (where the connection is mutual), but does allow for one-way connections, where the person being followed can control the amount of information available publicly. It allows brands and organisations to set up 'pages', to gather people who are interested in what they have to say.

Twitter

Twitter is a service that allows anyone to broadcast short posts (limited to 140 characters). Connections are one way, which means anyone can follow anyone else's

posts, without the need for reciprocation. It's great for broadcasting information, but can be useful as a conversational medium, as well.

Instagram

Technically owned by Facebook, Instagram is a service for social sharing of photographs. Again, connections can be one-way, making it a great broadcast medium. Instagram enjoys great popularity, due to the emotional engagement and power of images.

Pinterest

Pinterest has been gaining recent popularity and is something like an online scrapbook. People use it to collect and share images they like.

Periscope

The new kid on the block - periscope allows you to share live video streams to your followers. Great for giving people a behind-the-scenes look at how your church works.



TOOL TIP:

Don't spread yourself too thin by trying to use every social network. As a start, just select one or two where you know your audience hangs out - and concentrate on them.

Using social media in your Church

Let's take a look at some guidelines and suggestions as to how social media can be useful to your church.

Be Intentional

As mentioned above, social media can be a big time-drain and it's easy to get off-track. It pays to be deliberate and intentional with your

use of social media, in order to get the best results. **After finishing this lesson, why not sit down and formulate a plan for your social media use?** What will you talk about, to whom and when?

Point Back to the Hub

Social media can be a great way for you to get your news and information out there. It's a great way to keep people updated, but a terrible place to store that information permanently. **Make sure you point people back to your website, where the information can be stored in a central place and kept up to date.**

Gather a Tribe

Facebook particularly helps you to gather a group of people together. This can be great for drawing your existing congregation together and getting them to engage with (and encourage) one another through the week. It also allows you to share and give insight to some of the 'behind the scenes' activities at your church, helping people to connect.

Be prepared to 'Pay to Play'

Facebook used to be a fertile ground for free publicity, but those days are now gone. The result of this is that **you may have to consider financial investment into your social media**, but the good news is that Facebook Ads (when used properly) can be a really powerful way of connecting with very specific groups of people who might be interested in your church.

Use images to stir and inspire

Images are powerful, as they create an emotional response in us, as well as a rational one. Photos and other images can be used to great effect when communicating with people on social media, particularly through Facebook and Instagram.

Equip your Members

The members of your congregation are probably already heavy users of social media. They are interacting with their friends, acquaintances and even strangers, on a daily basis. Imagine if they viewed social media as a massive mission field? **Every interaction they have with people (whether they know them or not) is an opportunity to share their lives (and the Gospel) with others.**

Spend some time figuring out the best way to encourage and equip your members to do this. It may take training or just some helpful conversations, but quite possibly you will be able to get them to see social media as a place for sharing and spreading the Good News.

Email & Mailing Lists

We've mentioned previously the value of email as a communication tool, not only with your existing members, but also with the wider community. Let's take a closer look at how you can utilise email as part of your digital strategy.

Capturing Email

The first step is to gather the email addresses of people. To start with, you should have addresses of most of your existing congregation. You should also collect email addresses from people who walk in the door to visit and from those who visit your website. **Getting email addresses from potential visitors/members is a great way to keep in touch with them and encourage them to come along again.**

There are lots of great ways to encourage people to share their email address with you through your website - we're going to cover this in more detail in another eBook.

Managing your list

Once you have a bunch of emails in your list, you might want to get it organized. We suggest using a mailing list tool, like Mailchimp, Campaign Monitor or Aweber, to not only manage your list, but to facilitate sending emails.

One thing that can be good to do is to ‘segment’ your list - or break it up into smaller groups. These might be segments for ‘visitors’, ‘website contacts’, ‘existing members’, ‘staff’, and more.

What this does is it allows you to send tailored and targeted emails to those specific groups of people, as well as send general emails to the whole list.

Think about someone entering your church for the first time.

Would you ask them straight away if they wanted to be baptized or immediately take them to an advanced bible class on apologetics? You wouldn’t do it in person, so you shouldn’t do it over email - use segments to tailor your emails accordingly.



TOOL TIP:

Mailchimp is an e-newsletter system that allows you to easily embed a form, so your digital audience can give you their name and email address.

It also allows you to send automated email follow-ups pointing them to the prayer request or staff page, social media accounts, app download link, or your sermons, and you can get started for free.

What to Send

There are all sorts of things that are suitable to be sent to your mailing list. You might want to notify them of upcoming events or ministries to attend. You may want to share exciting stories of what is going on in the life of the church.

You may even want to use it as an avenue to encourage people through biblical devotions or something like that.

Just remember that people don't like to be spammed. Make sure the emails you send them are relevant to them and interesting enough for people to be glad to receive them.

Never let an email to be an end point - always give people something to click on and take action. It might be a link through to a recent sermon, or a blog, or a Facebook post, or it might be a prompt to reply with information. Whatever it is, make sure it engages the readers and gets them to respond in some way.

Take the Opportunity

There you have it: social media and email are great ways of making a connection with not only your existing members but also potential visitors. How are you going to use them?

Further Reading

Email Marketing for Churches

<https://blog.aweber.com/guides/email-marketing-for-churches>

21 Social Media Tips For Your Church

<http://www.stevefogg.com/2015/11/12/social-media-tips-church/>

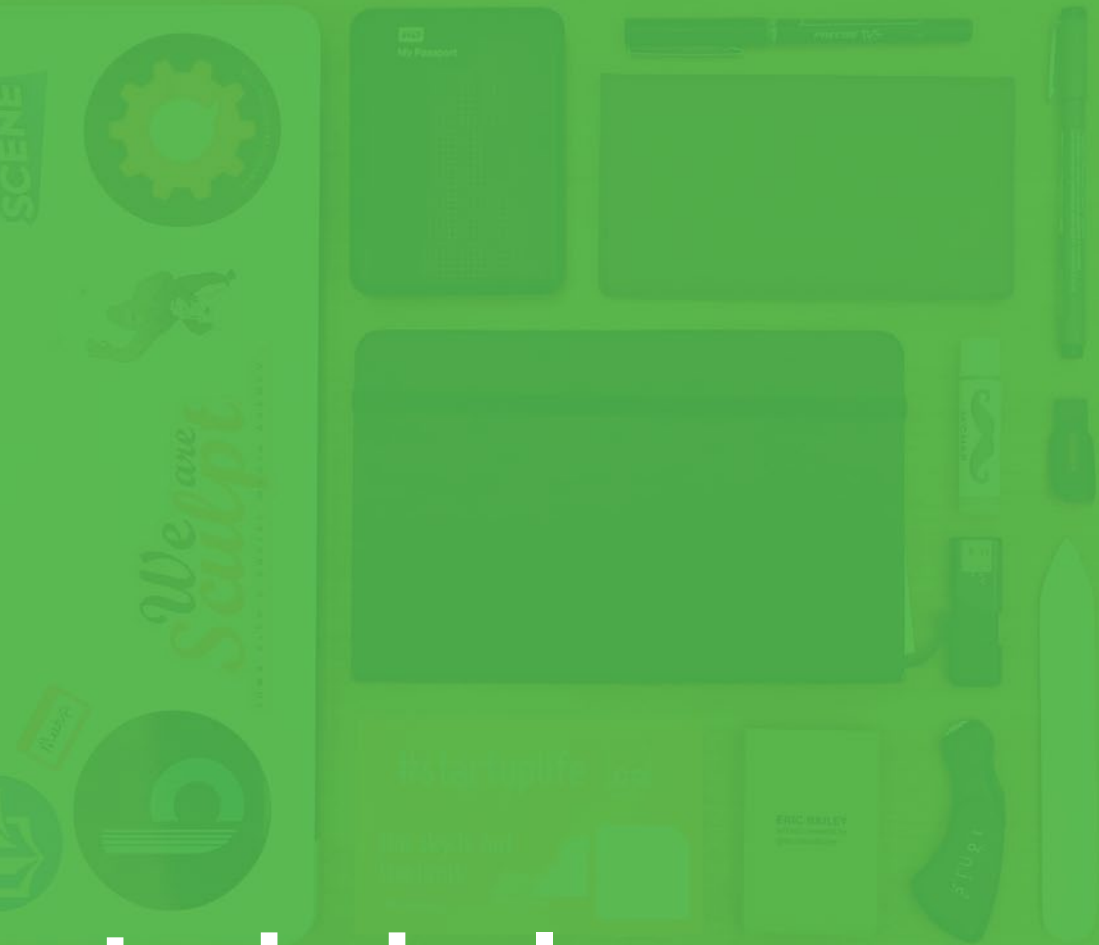


Take Action

Take the first steps connecting with your audience online!

- Review your email address list and start to organise it.
- Do some research to find out which social networks your congregation and community use - so you know where to reach them.
- Join our Facebook Group.

chapter 8



technical considerations

When it comes to a website for your church, there are a whole range of technical and technological decisions you will need to make. These can sometimes seem a little bit daunting, but they don't need to. Let's take a look at a few and try to demystify them.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

It's time to talk about what is often considered to be some kind of magic on the web - Search Engine Optimization. If this is a term that is new to you, it simply refers to the act of making your website appealing to search engines so it appears higher in their results.

The big picture

At the end of the day, search engines (let's be honest - we're only talking about Google and Bing here) have gotten really good at giving people the content that will help them, so any attempts at 'gaming' the system to appear higher in the results is going to be fairly ineffective.

The best thing you can do to appear higher in the search results is have a site with content that helps people find what they need. But how does this work ?

Who is looking for you?

The first question to answer is: what are people going to be searching for when you want to be found? A simple example might be 'church' and your location, but maybe they would be looking for other things, like parenting courses, places of worship, support meetings, and more.

If you can offer topics that people are looking for, then your website should reflect that. Otherwise, would they know how to find you?

What words are they using?

The next step is to think about the particular words and phrases people might use when they search for your church or what it offers. Sometimes, the words we use internally don't match the words people in the outside world would use.

If we want people to find our site/content when they are searching for things, it helps a lot to use words that they would use.

Be Helpful

As I mentioned earlier, search engines have become very good at matching people to the content they are looking for, so in terms of what you can do yourself **as far as SEO is concerned, the name of the game is to be helpful to people.**

Have great content that gives people the answers they are looking for. Have content that is kept relevant and regularly updated, so it appears current. Also, have content that speaks to people in the same terms they would use.

It's also helpful to write content regularly, publishing blogs and sermons that people will continue to find useful.

Mobile Friendly / Responsive Websites

Current statistics on mobile phone usage around the world are staggering. People now spend substantially more time on mobile devices, rather than on desktop or laptop devices. In a recent Techcrunch article, Google's Search Chief, Amit Singhal, stated,

“for the first time this summer, more Google searches were completed on mobile devices than desktop computers.”

In such environments, you have to assume that people are going to look at your church's website on a mobile phone or a tablet device.

What would they see if they did that? For many older sites, you would get a website that has to be shrunk down to a tiny size to fit all content, or you'd see a tiny corner of the full site, and you'd have to zoom in/out and swipe around.

The answer is a website that is mobile friendly, usually using a technique known as Responsive Design.

This simply refers to websites that are built in such a way that they adapt to display

the content in a way tailored to the screen size of the device they are being viewed on. This means that people on mobile and tablet devices can view your site naturally, without having to zoom or scroll around.

An added bonus is that Google has started penalising sites that aren't mobile friendly, so making sure that yours is is only going to help with where you appear in Google's search results.



TOOL TIP:

Even worse, if your website is based on the Flash platform, your website just doesn't appear at all to people using Apple devices, like the iPhone and iPad.

Site Speed and Performance

These days users expect a site to load in two seconds or less (source). Any more than that and they think something is wrong or get bored, and move on. For this reason, it has never been more important to ensure that your website loads quickly. There are a few things that can impact the speed of your site:

Hosting

The quality of your hosting can have a direct impact on your website's speed. Cheaper isn't always best.

Platform/CMS

The platform your website has been built on (or the skill with which it has been done) can also impact the speed with which your site loads.

Images

the biggest culprit in slowing down sites are usually images. Images are important and can convey great emotion, but **make sure you only load images at the necessary size** (minimising the file size translates to download times) and only use images when they are helpful to the message you are communicating.

Hosting

Website hosting can sometimes be a bit confusing, with so many options out there at such varied prices. **My general rule of thumb is that cheapest is not always the best.** Here are a few things to consider when looking for a host.

Shared Hosting

Most base-level hosting involves your site being hosted on a server with a number of other sites. This is totally okay, but ask your host how many sites are usually on a shared server. The more sites they try to fit on a server the more likely you will notice performance issues as the resources are shared amongst the lot of you.

Downtime

Do they guarantee your website's uptime on their servers? You don't want your website to be down when potential visitors come looking.

Support

What sort of support do they offer? Can you call them 24/7 if something goes wrong or do you have to send an email and wait to hear back days later?

Backups & Security

Do they take regular site backups and do they make any guarantees on the security of their servers to block hackers and the like?

These are always helpful questions to ask when considering a host, as well as the obvious question of price.

Security

Security is something you need to be aware of when building and maintaining your church's website. The last thing you want is for your site to be taken down by hackers or to be overrun by unsavoury popup ads. The good news is that being careful about a few simple things can do most of the work of keeping you out of those situations.

First of all, keep track of who has access to make changes to your site. **As staff or volunteers change, remove their access to the site and only give them access to as much as is necessary for them to carry out their responsibilities.**

Secondly, make sure people use strong and secure passwords. One of the most common ways in which sites are hacked is by people guessing the passwords of users, so make them complex. **Never use simple passwords, based on names, dates or simple number sequences.** Try to use a range of characters and numbers, and make it unique.

Another way of maintaining the security of your website is to make sure the software/platform it is developed on stays up to date. As new vulnerabilities are discovered, most platforms will release updates to harden their system against them. Install these updates promptly, to make sure you are as protected as you can be.

Technically Speaking...

There you have it - these technical considerations are important, but they don't have to be scary. They are just little decisions you need to make as you consider your digital strategy and build your website.

Further Reading

Helpful Tips & Tricks for Choosing a Web Host

<http://www.wpsitecare.com/helpful-tips-tricks-for-choosing-a-web-host/>

10 Tips for a Mobile-Friendly Church Website

<http://www.churchmarketingsucks.com/2015/04/10-tips-for-a-mobile-friendly-church-website/>



Take Action

Take some time to review the technical aspects of your church's website!

- How does your web hosting perform?
- Are your user's passwords secure and strong?
- Do you need to update your site CMS or plugins?
- Join our Facebook Group.

chapter 9

mobile apps

A hand holding a smartphone, overlaid with a green gradient. The image is semi-transparent, showing the hand and phone in a lighter shade against the darker green background.

Why is a mobile app something you should consider for your church?

A typical smartphone user spends more than two hours each day with mobile apps -- that's sticky, and the two major mobile device platforms each boast more than 1 million apps that have been downloaded more than 20 billion times! -- that's ubiquitous.

Mobile devices are everywhere, literally. **According to Business Insider, there will soon be one smartphone for every five people in the world – that's roughly 1.4 billion smartphones for the world's 7-plus billion inhabitants.** Despite their relatively high cost, smartphones are even finding a home in the least developed regions.

Other types of mobile devices, including tablets and smartwatches, are also experiencing rapid growth. Indeed, as this figure shows, sales of laptops and desktops are on decline whilst sales of mobile devices skyrocket.

Spreading your message

Clearly, if your church has a message to spread, from the local populace to the foreign mission field, smartphones and tablets are an ideal conduit. If your church intends to utilize mobile devices, the most identifiable feature common to smartphones and tablets is a mobile app.

By definition, apps (short for applications) are Internet-connected software programs that run primarily on smartphones and other mobile devices. Apps simplify access to specific Internet programs. For example, with a few taps and swipes in virtually any mobile banking app, you can pay a bill within seconds, as opposed to mousing through several slow-loading pages in a web browser (mobile or PC) to complete the same action.

That's because any one app executes a handful of very specific actions. **Rather than browsing around aimlessly, app users generally know what type of content or functionality they're looking for** - no more, no less.

Five Essential Features of Church Apps

Based on our experience developing (and using) apps for churches, the following five essential features will deliver the necessary content and resources that will help your church to grow, and to connect and communicate with an increasingly mobile generation:

Shareable Content

Your church already produces at least one type of content, at least once a week. They're called sermons and, if you record it, you can distribute it through your app. Not just sermons. Blog articles, Bible study guides, recorded concerts, photos and songs all count as content that can be consumed, as well as shared via text messaging, email or on social media.

Offering such readily accessible content on a proven sticky platform is the number one reason why churches should have a mobile app. This is how a church can spread its message.

Online Giving

A 2012 survey in Christianity Today found that more and more church members are bypassing the offering plate and are giving their tithes, offerings and donations electronically, including through mobile apps.

The benefit of so-called e-giving is that anyone can do it, anywhere, and people tend to give more consistently and spontaneously.

Effective Communication

Perhaps the most critical feature of a mobile app is the "push notification" feature. It lets app users see the latest updates in their mobile device's notification window, without having to open the app.

When they do open the app, users should be invited to easily sign up for the church e-newsletter, respond to surveys and other data

collection requests, or access the church bulletin and other material discussing issues and events in the church.

Connecting & Engaging

Many churches now have a social presence, be it a Facebook page, or a Twitter or Instagram handle. These ministries are aware of the power of social media. Now, your fans and followers can engage with your church and with each other WITHIN your mobile app. That's convenience!

Users can also engage and share as they watch your services or other live events through a streaming app embedded in the church app. This allows those who can't make it to church for whatever reason, to still "be there."

Directions and Contact Information

Make sure your potential visitors or members can easily find the critical information they need to connect with you. Your mobile app can include: your address, which - when clicked - can open a navigation app; your phone number, which - when clicked - will call your church office; as well as your church email, which - when clicked - will deliver an electronic message.

Further Reading

[Mobile App eBook from PocketPew](http://Pocketpew.com/ebook-download)

[http:// Pocketpew.com/ebook-download](http://Pocketpew.com/ebook-download)



Take Action

A mobile app might not be for every church - but it's helpful to think about if it might suit you.

- Read the eBook above and think about whether your church could use a mobile app.
- Join our Facebook Group.

chapter 10

A pair of glasses with dark frames and thin temples is lying on a light-colored wooden desk. A silver pen and a white computer mouse are also visible on the desk, partially obscured by the glasses. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

**bringing
it all
together**

Well, here we are at the end of this little ebook. I hope it's been helpful to think through the way your church uses its website and social media presence to connect with people and share the Gospel.

If you've found the book helpful, I'd love to know about it - why not drop me a line at jordan@faithvox.com?

As we finish, I thought I would leave you with some tools and resources that I've discovered over the years. These will help you plan, implement and track your Digital Strategy. I hope you find them useful.

Trello

Trello is a great free tool I use for project management. It works a lot like a physical set of index cards.

Projects can be created - with lists in each project. To these lists you add cards - with notes, to dos, links and more. As you complete the tasks on cards they can be moved to other lists, or archived.

Its quite a simple concept - but I find it super handy for keeping organised.

[Check out Trello](https://trello.com/)

<https://trello.com/>

Buffer

Buffer is a tool used for scheduling social media posts. Now you should always rely on this sort of thing sparingly - but it can sometimes be handy to be able to schedule your posts for future events, or to stockpile posts for times you may be away. Buffer lets you connect to accounts like Twitter, Facebook and more.

[Check out Buffer](https://bufferapp.com/app)

<https://bufferapp.com/app>

Hemingway

Hemingway is a new web app on the block - basically, it helps to make your writing more concise and compelling. You simply paste your content in - and it gives you suggestions on places where sentences can be made shorter, or other words can be used. All the while giving you quick feedback on your changes as you type.

Check out Hemingway

<http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>

Canva

I love Canva! It's a web app that brings powerful, but easy to use, design and layout tools to everyone. You can search a huge set of free images, clip art, layouts and more to be added to your design. They've got an even bigger range of resources you can include in your design for only \$1. The tool is dead easy to use - and makes it a breeze to pump out high quality, professional looking graphics for your sermon slides, newsletter, social media or website.

Check out Canva

canva.com

Thanks

Thanks again for coming along for a ride with this course. I had a blast and I hope you had, too.

Best of luck with your churches and ministries.