

# WEBSITE 101

SEVEN BASICS VITAL TO A  
**GOOD** SITE

churchjuice<sup>o</sup>  
energizing church  
communications



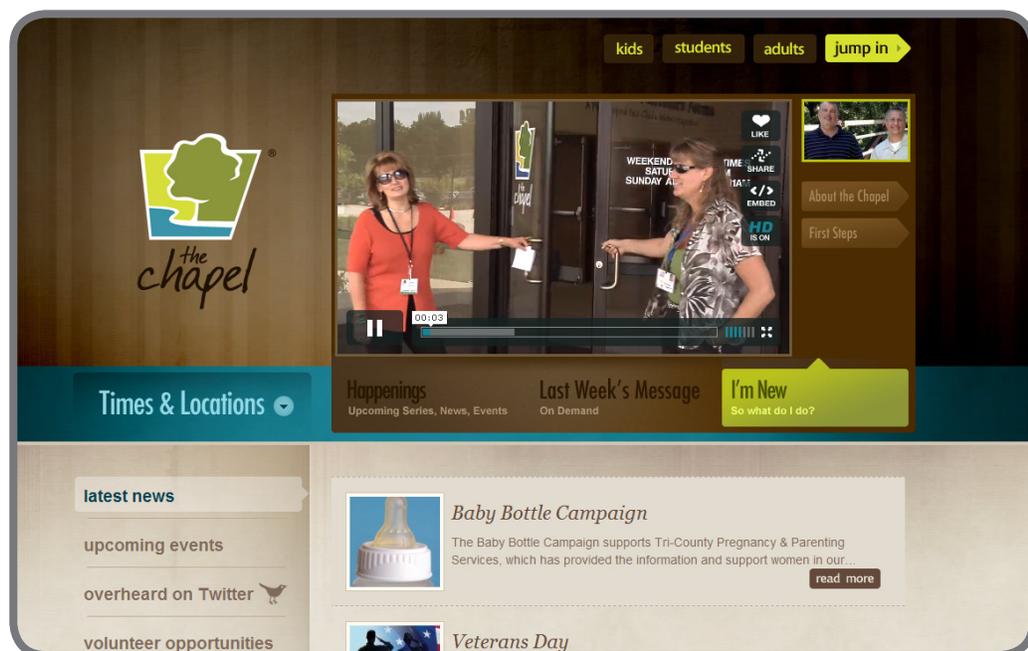
## websites matter

A good website is important now more than ever. More and more people first visit your church through your website -- not through your front doors. Visitors will likely evaluate six to 12 websites before they make a decision of where to physically visit, according to Richard Reising author of *Church Marketing 101*. That means a plain billboard page of benefits and features isn't enough.

In this white paper we want to look at seven basic principles that can help make your website be the best it can be.

### 1. cater to the guest

- This is the most important thing you can think about when designing your website. As a church, we're called to bring people to Christ and as we mentioned in the intro, your website is where you'll be making your church's first impression.
- Answer the questions you had when looking for a church. What are the service times? What's the service style? What do I do with my kids? Where do I park? How do I find the sanctuary? What does the church look like on the inside? Can I wear jeans? Can I wear jean shorts? All of this information shouldn't be more than one click away.



[www.chapel.org](http://www.chapel.org)

The Chapel's homepage has a clear path for visitors. There's an easy to see "I'm New" tab on the right. Once you click on that tab, there's a welcome video to watch. The video shows the church building, people in action and a welcome message from the pastors. Plus it's easy to find other information, like service times and what's happening at the church, as well.

## 2. remember your regular attendees too

Your members and regular attendees have much different needs from your website than visitors do.

- Figure out what goals ministry leaders want to achieve with members online. Do you want members to use the website as a way to learn how to get connected in various ministries? Do you want to cut down on paperwork by letting members sign up online for classes or kids vacation Bible school?
- Take a poll or talk with your members to see what they want from the website. Maybe all they want is to be able to check out the calendar and newsletter online. Or maybe they want to take another listen to a sermon.
- Anywhere these two groups, visitors and members, overlap is probably a no-brainer thing to have on the website.

## 3. clean front page

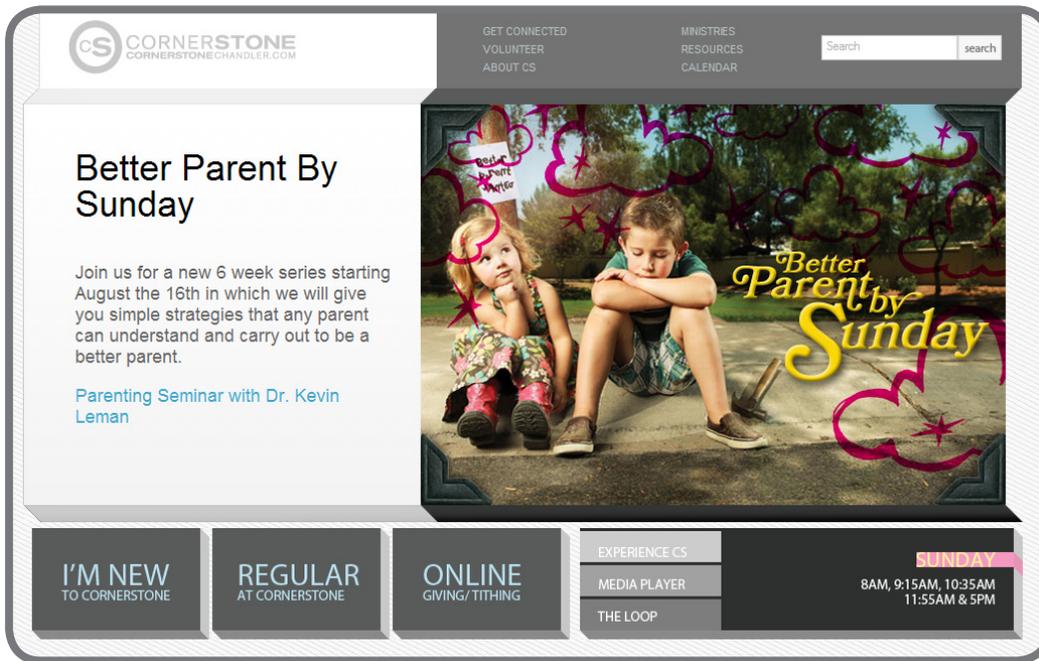
- We always want to make sure people have all the information they need, but it doesn't always have to be on the front page. Text heavy front pages can be a big turn off. Folks just don't want to filter through a sea of words to find the one thing they're looking for. People are visually orientated. For example, provide an area for info for visitors and then link to other pages. The same can be done for members.
- Service times, styles and location should be easy to find on the homepage.
- Below is an example of a wireframe. This lets you take your list of content, a sitemap, and give it some life. Not only does wireframing force you to decided how much real estate should be given to a particular topic, it also help you create navigation paths for various groups of people who may come to your site. If you create paths where people can find more information easily, then your homepage will stay looking clean.



How will people navigate your website? If I'm a visitor, what's my path? Where should I look? Where should I click for more information? Do the same for members or anyone else you think will visit your site. Wireframing helps you take your list of content and organize it.

Do this for other pages too. What does the "about us" page look like in terms of layout and navigation?

This isn't a template. Every church has different priorities for their websites.



[www.cornerstonechandler.com](http://www.cornerstonechandler.com)

Cornerstone keeps their front page simple. The current sermon series is featured and the service times are easy to find. There are clear navigational paths for everything else -- visitors, members, giving, media player, etc.



[www.churchoftheking.net](http://www.churchoftheking.net)

Information is well organized on this site as well. The navigation is clear and the home page isn't overflowing with information. This is a template site. While that isn't always the best option, this is a good example of how it can be well done with a tight budget.

#### 4. staying up to date

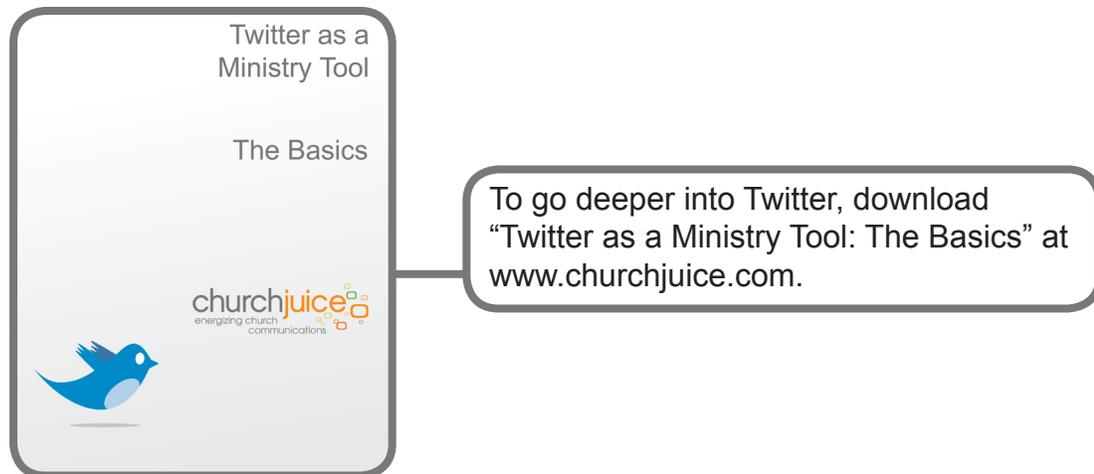
Commit to keeping things up to date and your website will better appeal to visitors and may become a place your members regularly visit. Your church won't look relevant if Christmas information is still there in March.

Some churches have found success is decentralizing website content updating. They've put specific ministry leaders or rock star volunteers in charge of updating certain areas of the website. If you do this, make sure to have some sort of approval process before the information goes live. Quality control is a good thing.

#### 5. embrace existing technology

Your church members are already using social media, so why not meet them where they're already at? You can always use these tools as a way to push people back to your website for more information. Here are some very basic ideas for using various online tools.

- **Facebook:** Create a fan page for your church where you share news about what's going on in the church. Encourage various ministries to have their own groups as well.
- **Twitter:** There are multiple ways you could use Twitter as a ministry tool. Your church can have an account that sends out updates, requests for volunteers and more. Alternatively, maybe one or more of your pastors can start tweeting. That way church members who are on Twitter can feel a closer connection to their pastors.



- **Flickr:** If your website content management system doesn't let you post all of the pictures you want, use Flickr or a similar online source. This actually makes it much easier to share pictures as well. Remember, this is a public forum, so it's best to have permission to post pictures of children and don't give out their names. There are some privacy settings where you can restrict who has access to the pictures.

- **YouTube:** Why not use YouTube or Vimeo to host sermon videos. It'll save you server space and will make your content more accessible to people. Even if server space isn't an issue, this is a good way to reach people who may not know your church and it makes it easier for your members to share videos with their friends.

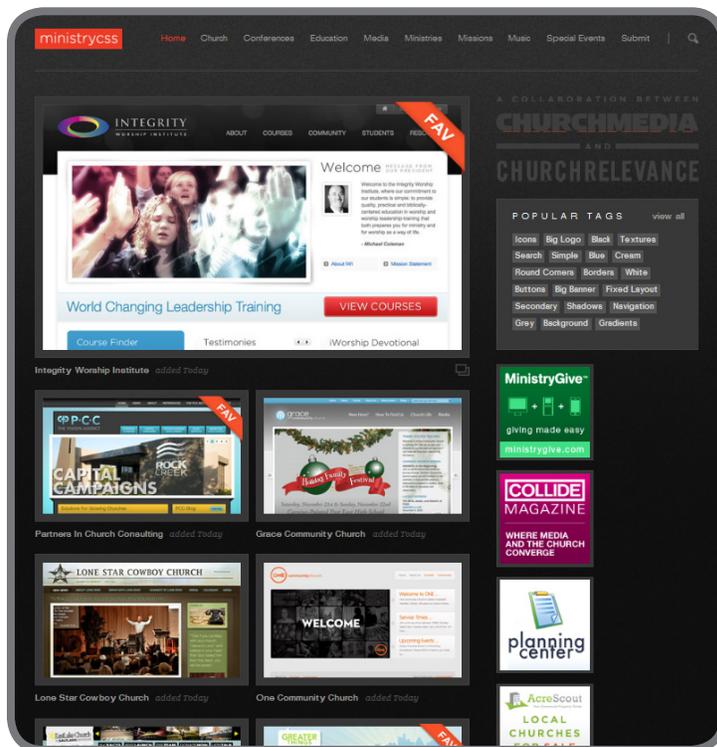
## 6. be authentic to who you are

Like any sort of communications, don't pretend to be something you're not. A church that's more traditional probably shouldn't have a website that has a grungy look. Along the same lines you shouldn't use pictures that show a racial rainbow of people if your congregation is not multicultural. You can't fake who you are.

## 7. graphic design counts

If you're putting all of the work into planning and organizing a website, it's a shame if it all goes to waste in bad or rushed design. There is no magic equation for what makes a graphically well designed website. But think about your own experience. How do websites today look different than they did five or ten years ago?

Find sites you like and use them as inspiration. No copying. And don't just limit yourself to churches or religious organizations. When we designed the Church Juice website, we looked at a lot of secular sites for inspiration.



[www.ministrycss.com](http://www.ministrycss.com)

This website is a great place for inspiration. It's a gallery of Christian websites where users can rate how much they like each one. One of the most beneficial things about MinistryCSS is you can see the latest design trends for Christian websites.

## final thoughts

These seven elements aren't a guaranteed formula for a successful website, but they are areas that need to be thought through.

These are also areas where research shows there are links for success. Dr. Dave Bourgeois is doing research on what makes a successful internet ministry. He surveyed more than 240 ministries and churches about their websites. Here are some of his findings. During the development of their website, successful internet ministries 1) wrote out goals and/or a mission statement for their website, 2) did surveys of what should be on the site and 3) created a profile of who their user would be.

Still have questions? Check out [www.churchjuice.com](http://www.churchjuice.com) for more conversations about how to energize your church communications.

## credits and reuse policy

*Website 101: Seven Basics Vital to a Good Site* is written by Jerod Clark. He's the project leader for Church Juice, a ministry of ReFrame Media, that helps churches use media better. For more information, visit [www.churchjuice.com](http://www.churchjuice.com).

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