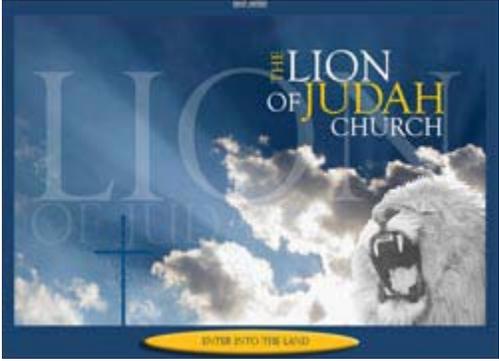


#	25 Church Website design tips
<p>1</p>	 <p><b>Don't include a splash screen or an intro page on your site.</b></p> <p>That is, don't have an intro page that requires or allows visitors to "Enter" or "Skip intro," such as the one shown at right. Splash screens and intro pages are outdated techniques that waste bandwidth and waste user mouse clicks. (The most important content on your site should be reachable in three mouse clicks or less.) Here's another, particularly audacious example of a splash screen: <a href="http://www.thehopeconnection.org">www.thehopeconnection.org</a>. (However, the designer of the site had the good sense to program a browser cookie to be set so that the splash screen is bypassed the second time someone visits the site.)</p> <p>There is one legitimate use for a splash screen, however, and that's when you need an inviting-looking home page that provides paths to several different related sites. One example would be a situation where a church runs a Christian school. The home page or splash screen, then, would include links to the church's website and to the school's website. Another example is the home page of <a href="#">Mountain Lake Church</a> of Cumming, Georgia. The church's home page provides paths to a "Visitors &amp; Newcomers" version of the site, a "Members &amp; Attenders" version of the site, and a third site for church planters. <a href="#">Pleasant View Baptist Church</a> of Port Deposit, Maryland, does something similar.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p><b>Don't make an all Flash website.</b></p> <p>Don't make visitors wait for your site to download every time they visit it. Don't make them scroll down to see the last three lines of a block of text. (That "dinosaur" — as one designer disparagingly called it — known as HTML has the amazing ability to dynamically accommodate any amount of text vertically because the webpage can expand vertically.) Don't make them squint to read text on your all Flash site because you set the text to 8 point font size and gave visitors no way to increase the size.</p> <p>Instead, make your site with HTML and embed Flash movies to do what Flash does best: animations and audio/video. (But see next item, too.)</p>
<p>3</p>	<p><b>Don't make visitors to your church website see the same animations over and over again in Flash movies.</b></p> <p>Figure out a way, using cookies and/or session variables, to turn off your fancy animations (once you've impressed visitors with your incredible skills and talent) and stop wasting visitors' time. They've come for information.</p>

4

**Don't use frames.**

Frames have fallen out of favor among website designers, and further, cause problems for the screen readers that blind people use to browse websites. Here's an example [website](#). Notice that the bottom right quadrant scrolls up and down, while the top and left stay put. That's done with "frames." Now, you might think there's some merit to this concept, and indeed there is. However, just trust me when I say that use of frames is out of date. Don't do it.

5



**In menus, don't use buttons — beveled, oval, square, arty, etc., especially buttons separated by some space (see example at right).**

This is an outdated technique. Use text links instead, as much as possible. Text links download quickly, and can be read by the screen readers that blind people use to browse websites.

<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>Don't use strongly patterned page backgrounds (e.g., tiled backgrounds).</b></p> <p>Strongly patterned, tiled backgrounds are an outdated technique that makes your site look dated. However, subtle background patterns have made a comeback. I think this is great—patterns exist everywhere in real life, after all. There's also a new trend of using large paisley or vine-like patterns or figures in the background. If you choose to do this, ensure that the patterns don't call attention to themselves.</p>
<p><b>7</b></p>	<p><b>Don't use animated gifs, visitor counters, or rainbow colors on your church website.</b></p> <p>(See examples below.) All three are outdated techniques that make your site look dated. Also, don't credit your hosting company. It's OK to give credit to the web designer, however — just keep the credit line subdued.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>
<p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>Don't include your denominational logo in the banner.</b></p> <p>Sorry, but denominational logos were created decades ago and simply don't reflect current graphic design standards. Because of this, it's difficult to include them in a banner in a manner that's appealing. I'm not saying don't include the denominational logo at all on your home page — just keep it small and away from the banner. In fact, your church ought to have its own unique logo, one that reflects the mission and purpose of your church. The church logo can go in the banner.</p>
<p><b>9</b></p>	<p><b>Don't put a photo of your church building or your pastor (or pastor and spouse) on the home page.</b></p> <p>Two reasons for avoiding the building photo: 1) photos of people are by nature more interesting than photos of buildings (even scenic photos are more interesting than building photos); 2) a church is a body of people meeting together in community — not a building. Therefore, use photos of people on your home page, not building photos.</p> <p>By "photos of people" I do <i>not</i>, however, mean photos of your pastor, priest, minister, or bishop.</p>

10



**Don't fill your home page with graphical ads for ministries or church events (and especially, don't allow ads for secular products).**

Advertise your ministries and special events to people who already attend your church, by putting ads in your worship folder/bulletin or including them in your projected announcements. Save the valuable "real estate" of your home page for communicating with people who have yet to enter through the doors of your church.

(I'm not saying don't use *any* ads; just use them sparingly and wisely.)

11

Add a "what to expect" page to your website.

Church is scary to unchurched people. Provide a page of information telling potential visitors what to expect when they visit. You'll certainly want to talk about your services (type of music, how long, format or typical order of service, what to wear) and provide information about childcare. But don't use churchy terms. For example, "contemporary worship" is meaningless to those who haven't experienced even traditional worship.

12

Include on your home page the following essential information (in easy to find locations):

- church address (including city and state)
- phone number
- weekend service times
- location of services (or link to the webpage that includes this information)
- email link to webmaster

	<p>Why make your visitors hunt all over your website for this information? The best church websites put this information in plain sight on their home page, with the exception of the email link. The email link to the webmaster is to enable visitors to report problems. You wouldn't believe how few church websites include this. This link (when present) generally is put at the bottom of the home page in small type.</p>
<p><b>13</b></p>	<p>Add Scripture to your home page.</p> <p>During the first half of 2007, during a period in which I was busy updating the directory, I added 100 churches to The International Directory of Church Website Design, of which I am the editor. These represent some of the best of church website design today. Only nine of the 100 newly added home pages included Scripture. Ninety-one didn't. For shame!</p>
<p><b>14</b></p>	<p>Include both an HTML submission form on your website and email addresses for individual staff and ministry leaders.</p> <p>HTML submission forms are harder to use — don't you get tired of entering comments or requests in those little 1 inch by 1 inch text entry fields that web designers provide because they don't know any better? Or entering your email address in a 1 inch wide email text entry field? (Emails are invariably twice as long as the space provided to enter them.) However, people browsing your site on a computer other than their home or office computer don't have access to an email program. For them, it is essential to include an HTML submission form on your site to allow them to communicate with your church or staff or ministry leaders of your church.</p> <p>If your site uses PHP, then try the Ultimate Form Mail script (<a href="http://www.ultimateformmail.com">www.ultimateformmail.com</a>) developed by Jack Born of Surefire Website Design. This script makes it easy for you to set up an HTML submission form that sends the collected data to the recipient as an email (and CC's the sender) and also saves the data, if desired, to a mySQL database. (Purchase the one-client license if you're a church; web designers may wish to purchase a multi-client license.)</p> <p>Now, having said all that, also include the email addresses of staff and ministry leaders on your site. Afraid of getting spam as a result? Get over it! Enabling visitors to your site to easily contact staff and ministry leaders is more important than your staff's personal convenience. But, you can do something to alleviate the problem: obfuscate (yes, there really is such a word), that is, disguise, email addresses on your site to lessen the possibility of their being collected by so-called spambots. Try the one provided on <a href="http://www.spamspan.com">www.spamspan.com</a>.</p>
<p><b>15</b></p>	<p>Make your website more than an online brochure.</p> <p>I've read criticism before that church websites are just fancy brochures. Never have I appreciated the wisdom of that as I do now. To be sure, a church website should be at the very least an excellent online brochure, with well-designed, easy-to-read, and easy-to-get-to pages. But take it to the next level, folks! A church is not a building, it's not even its many ministries. It's people. So use your website to tell member's stories through words,</p>

	audio, and/or video.
16	<p>Where possible, avoid dropdown menus and slideout menus.</p> <p>These popular navigation systems force the user to constantly revisit a menu to choose another submenu item. That wastes time. Moreover, so many dropdown (especially) submenus are hard to use: Items on the dropdown (or slideout) submenu are tricky to get to with the mouse, or the submenu disappears before the user reaches the desired link. The better websites that I have reviewed employ a static submenu display of some sort: The submenu (which changes according to which item on the main menu was clicked) remains statically displayed, making it easy for the user to see all the items or links on the submenu, and to reach them with his or her mouse at any time. For an example, go <a href="#">here</a>; notice the static submenu on the righthand side.</p>
17	<p>Don't confuse visitors with your interior navigation links.</p> <p>Let's say that in the Ministries section of your site, you list a number of links to various ministry pages. One of the links, however, takes the user out of the Ministries section and leads them to the Missions section, with its wholly different submenu. This is very confusing to the user. Therefore, provide some indication or warning that a link in one section of your site will take the user to another section of your site.</p>
18	<p>Use generic, easy-to-understand labels for links to ministry pages on your site.</p> <p>A church website I once reviewed included links to the following ministries on its ministries overview page: MA, Engage, The Stirring, Epic, and Point Blank. Would you know what these ministries are? Neither did I. It's OK to title your actual ministry pages with the real names of the ministries. But use generic links such as Men's Ministry, Women's Ministry, Teen Ministry, College Ministry, etc., to get your visitor to the ministry pages in the first place.</p>
19	<p>Underline links in text.</p> <p>Underline links in text even if you think it's ugly to do so (and it is). Web users expect links to be underlined — that is the web standard. I recently reviewed a website in which links displayed an underline only upon mouse over. Not very helpful! The user can't scan a block of text with his or her eyes to find the links but has to physically move the mouse over all the text to locate links. Also, because underlined links are the web standard, do not underline words or phrases that aren't links. There is an exception to the underlined links rule, however: links in a row under or over the banner, or links in a left- or righthand column, generally do not have to be underlined because web users understand these to be navigational links.</p>
20	<p>Show, don't just tell!</p> <p>I recently reviewed a church website with a wealth of information on the</p>

	<p>inside pages — but not a single photo of the different ministries offered by the church. With the ubiquity of inexpensive digital cameras, this is inexcusable.</p>
<b>21</b>	<p>Include captions (identifying information) with photos (except stock photos).</p> <p>It's not necessary (and possibly unsafe) to identify the people in the photo, as would be the case with a magazine or newspaper photograph. But you should include information for each photo identifying the ministry, the ministry event, the location, and date. The only exception for this would be if it's abundantly clear from the photo or by the context in which it's used what's going on in the photo. The reason you should add captions to photos is that, on a website, photos are seen by people who are not familiar with your church, its ministries, and its members.</p>
<b>22</b>	<p>Don't call your sermon audio downloads podcasts — even if your downloads use iTunes.</p> <p>Podcasting by definition means not having to download — manually anyway. Podcasting uses special software, including, for example, iTunes, to periodically check for the latest available files from a site and download any new files for the user in the background automatically. The key term is "automatically." So, if you put links to audio files on your website with the intention that users will click to hear or download files, then you're not podcasting.</p>
<b>23</b>	<p>Don't add an audio background song or tune to your website.</p> <p>Adding background music would probably violate copyright law, to begin with — and the audio usually is more annoying than beneficial. Unless you have a license (e.g., from ASCAP, the performing artists organization — your CCLI license won't help), the only music you legally can add as background audio to a site are songs in the public domain performed by a musician in your church, original songs, or so-called royalty-free songs created with Sony Acid (<a href="http://www.acidplanet.com">www.acidplanet.com</a>) or Sonicfire Pro (<a href="http://www.smartsound.com">www.smartsound.com</a>).</p> <p>You can't use a Michael W. Smith recording of a hymn, for example. The hymn may very well be in the public domain — though not all hymns are — but the recording isn't. Nor can you add a song by The Newsboys — both the song (melody + lyrics; two separate copyrights) and the recording are copyrighted.</p> <p>Regardless, if you include background music (or sermon) on your site, then provide a button to enable visitors to turn off the sound.</p>
<b>24</b>	<p>Include time zone information if you broadcast your services live over the internet.</p> <p>In order for someone on the other side of the country — or the world — to watch your worship service live from your website, they have to know when the service starts, right? Don't expect them to try to figure it out by themselves. Help your visitors by providing the name of the time zone you're</p>

	<p>in, including standard time or daylight savings time. But don't stop there. How would anyone in, say, the Philippines know how many hours ahead or behind Eastern Time or Mountain Time they are? Provide the time zone offset relative to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).</p>
<b>25</b>	<p>Include the alt = "[description of graphic here]" attribute in the underlying HTML code for every photo and graphic on your site.</p> <p>This is read aloud by the screen readers that blind people use to browse websites. (It also helps to increase your church website's ranking by search engines.)</p> <p>There are many steps you have to take to ensure your website is fully accessible (to the blind, motion-impaired, deaf, etc.). But this is one step that's easy to understand and easy to implement, which is why I list it here. See this <a href="#">site</a>, among many similar resources on the web, for information about how to implement this suggestion.</p>

From:

[http://www.greatchurchwebsites.org/my\\_top\\_25\\_church\\_website\\_design\\_tips.php?pageNum\\_SRs=4&totalRows\\_SRs=25&PHPSESSID=69c631f4f7bfa5249f255ea8c0777b28](http://www.greatchurchwebsites.org/my_top_25_church_website_design_tips.php?pageNum_SRs=4&totalRows_SRs=25&PHPSESSID=69c631f4f7bfa5249f255ea8c0777b28)