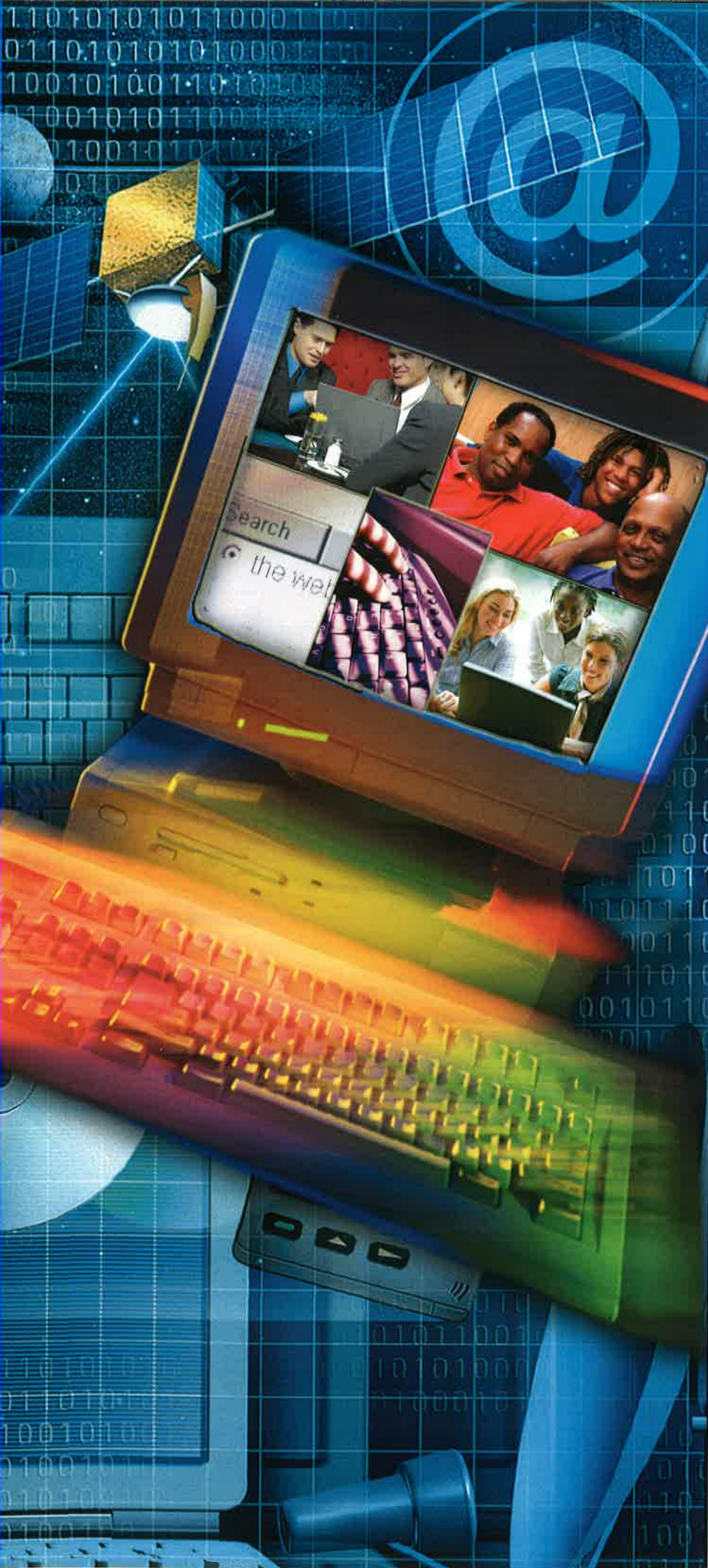


*A Quick
Start*
GUIDE



WEB MINISTRY
FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

DAMIAN "CHIP" DIZARD

Available from:

AdventSource
5040 Prescott Avenue
Lincoln, NE 68506
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www.adventsource.org

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Version 1.1

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INTRODUCTION

You have been given the task of coordinating a website for your church. Though you may not know much about graphics, HTML, or technology in general, the good news is that you can easily learn what you need to know.

A good church website contains the information members need and visitors are looking for. It's an electronic brochure for the world to see. What will their impression be? That all depends on your website. Your site should explain what makes your church special and why people should attend.

JOB DESCRIPTION

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* calls for the formation of a communication committee when church officers are elected. This committee can include your pastor, a webmaster, a communication director, a newsletter editor, and any other positions your church chooses to create.

As a member of this committee, you will need to attend meetings and discuss the website. Give other committee members a chance to present their ideas and suggestions for improvement. Different perspectives will result in a better final product.

Your duties include:

1. Research website options. Check into web hosting, content management systems, templates, and designers. Bring your findings to the communication committee so they can help choose the best option for your church.
2. Oversee site design. This process will vary depending on whether you are using a designer, designing it yourself, or using a template. Along with the pastor, make executive decisions regarding website layout, navigation, etc. It's better to have a simple, clean, well planned website than one that is unattractive and unorganized.
3. Recruit website team members. Find people who will take pictures, write content, copy edit, update the calendar, and perform other duties.
4. Keep your team motivated. Talk with team members and affirm their accomplishments. Answer any technical questions they may have, or help find answers. Let them know that you support them and you're here to help.
5. Visit the site. Check frequently to make sure the site is running smoothly, it loads quickly, and that all content is fresh.
6. Plan for the future. Reevaluate the site frequently to make sure it still fills the church's needs. Update the website's appearance as necessary.

This Quick Start Guide gives you the basics you will need to start a web ministry in your church. There are many more resources available to assist you in this ministry. We have listed some of them at the end of this booklet. For a more complete listing of resources, go to www.adventistchurchconnect.com.

SECTION 1: DOMAIN NAME BASICS

Choosing a domain name

One of the first things you will need to do is select a domain name. A domain name, such as www.google.com, identifies an Internet site. Your church will need its own unique domain name so people can find it. When the Internet was in its infancy, many simple domain names such as www.mychurch.org or www.myadventistchurch.com were available. Today the obvious options are taken and you must be more creative in choosing your domain name.

I have seen many churches come up with creative domain names. One example is New Hope Church in Fulton, Maryland, whose domain name is www.lookingforachurch.org. Some churches use their mission or focus as their domain name. For example, Cherry Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Baltimore, Maryland chose www.preparingforglory.org.

Whatever you choose as your domain name, you should follow these few rules:

1. Choose a domain name that suits your church.
2. Make it easy to remember. People more often remember easy names and can tell their friends and family to visit the website.
3. Make it relevant to the church.

4. Remember that many church names contain words such as New Life. When choosing a domain name, reduce confusion by picking a unique name.
5. Remember that abbreviations such as "SDA" will not mean anything to people in your community. "Adventist" is the abbreviation I would recommend for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Registering a domain name

Once your church has selected a domain name, you will need to register it with an approved registrar. Popular registrars include Network Solutions, www.networksolutions.com, and Go Daddy, www.godaddy.com. To find a list of approved ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) registrars, go to www.icann.org/registrars/accredited-list.html.

Registration fees may vary because many companies will offer add-on services and other products to go with domain name registration. Many churches or ministries register just the .org name, but there is no rule that you must use that extension. The best solution is to purchase a .com, .org, and .net domain name and forward the .com and .net to .org.

Domain name forwarding

If you have multiple domain names, you may want to forward them to the primary domain name. You may want to register www.mychurchname.org and www.mychurchname.com, but have the .com address always forward to the .org address. Most registrars offer this service, though sometimes for a fee. Research available domain name registrars for pricing and more information.

Protect your domain name

It is important that you keep the login information for the domain name in a secure place, preferably in the church office, and that you keep the email address listed with them current so you will always be able to receive notices about your domain name expiring. Failure to keep your email address current may mean that your domain name may expire without your knowledge. Protect your domain name as you would protect the title to your property.

You may want to use a generic office email address, such as office@yourchurch.org, on the domain name registration, rather than a specific member in the church. Members can move and you may have difficulty gaining access to the site when you need it.

Web hosting

A web host is a business that provides the storage, connectivity, and services necessary

to serve files for a website. Web hosting is important because without it, your site would not be available for public viewing. Every website must have a web hosting plan, with the exception of sites powered by some content management systems (CMS), which can provide hosting.

There are many ways to choose web hosts and web hosting plans. First you must consider how much money you would like to spend and what you intend for your site to accomplish. Hosting prices can range from a few to hundreds of dollars per month based on your goals.

There are different hosting types that you can choose from. The most popular are Windows and Linux. Windows web hosting means that your sites will be compatible with Microsoft Windows technologies such as .NET and SQL Server. Linux, on the other hand, will work with MySQL and an open source web system.

What is a control panel ?

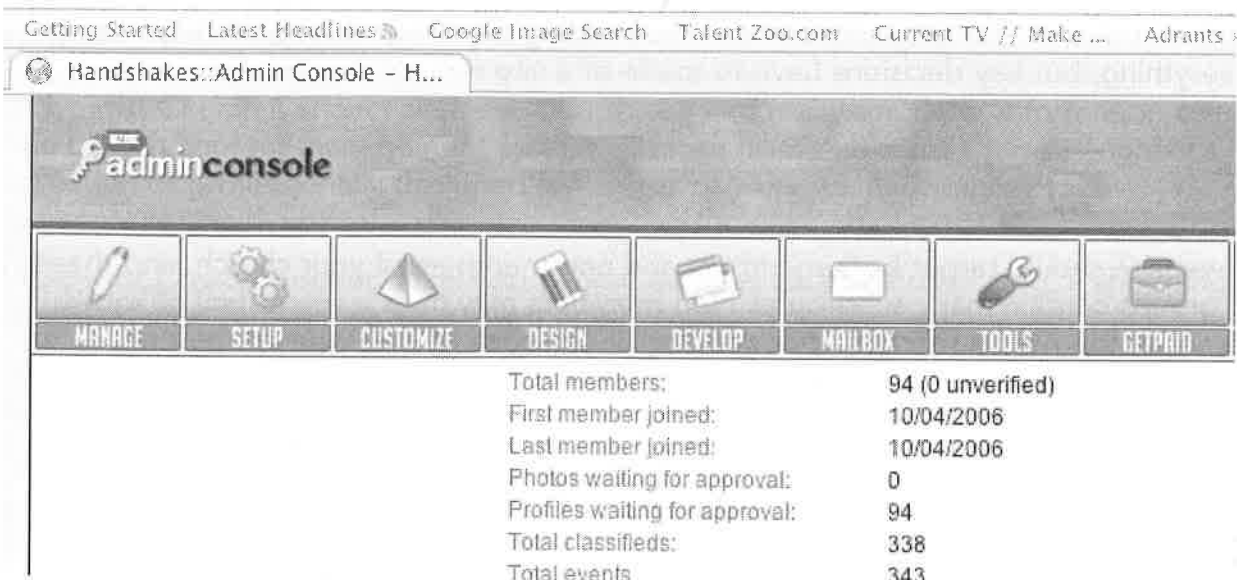
A control panel in web hosting refers to the interface provided by the hosting company for the maintenance and monitoring of the hosted website.

Some of the commonly available modules in control panels:

- Visitor statistics using web log analysis software
- Details of available and used web space and bandwidth
- Web-based file manager
- Email account configuration
- Managing database
- Maintaining FTP user accounts
- Access to server logs

Tip:

Any good hosting provider can give you detailed instructions on how to register a domain name in the provider's system, or attach your domain name to your website on its computers. If you're changing from one hosting provider to another, your new provider should help you transfer your domain. Most providers either give you this information up front or have online help that will walk you through the process. If it isn't clear how to set up your domain, ask for help.



SECTION II: PLANNING

Before getting too far with your website, it's essential for your team or committee to meet, submit ideas, and look at the future of your church's website. Start your church's website with an outline of what you want. The site will grow as your church grows, and you will have a great starting point. Do yourself a favor and spend as much time as needed on planning. You will thank yourself later. Many sites need a redesign within six months because they were not thought through in detail in the preproduction meeting.

Should we form a committee?

If your church forms a web committee, make sure that there is one person, such as the pastor or an elder, with the authority to make final decisions. While it's great to have a group of people adding to the site's content, a group of people trying to design a website often leads to a clash of opinions. It takes more than one year to design websites for some churches because the committees can't agree on a certain navigation structure or design. Building a website is like building anything—everyone may not agree on everything, but key decisions have to be made or a site will not be complete.

Your target audience

Your website should target both members and non-members of your church, and these main groups contain many subgroups. Non-members may have a great deal of knowledge about the Adventist church, or none at all. Because of this, your content needs to present information that is relevant to members and non-members in terms both groups can understand.

Some churches solve this problem by offering two websites—one for members and another for "seekers" that is strictly evangelistic in nature. Most churches have one site

that contains a mixture of elements aimed at members and visitors. Another option is to offer a log-in section for members to keep church business separate from evangelistic content. Remember that you don't want to confuse visitors by making them wade through information from your last church business meeting to find what they're looking for. Content management systems may have the log-in option built into the system.

Tip:

There are thousands of church websites. Look at a wide variety and identify features and elements that you would like to see incorporated into your site.

Your church's mission

Many churches convey their overall mission through their website. For example, the Minnetonka Church in Minnesota uses their mission statement as their URL, www.knowgodmore.com. This was strategic, and their website and church are built around this theme. There are many options for your website's theme, but you should focus on your church's strengths. For example, if your church has a vibrant young adult ministry, you could featuring this.



Adventist Church Connect, an initiative of the North American Division, provides free websites for Adventist churches in the United States, Canada, and Bermuda. Sites include free hosting and unlimited space.

Features include:

- *News*
- *RSS feeds*
- *Calendar*
- *Daily devotional*
- *Professional designs*
- *Templates*
- *Online giving*
- *Prayer ministry module*
- *Easy text editor*

Adventist Church Connect sites are easy to use and maintain. Enter information using the built-in content management system. Choose from Adventist Church Connect's selection of professionally designed templates or work with a designer for a personalized appearance.

Adventist Church Connect offers additional features such as Podcasting, a shopping cart, and chat capabilities for a low monthly cost.

Visit www.adventistchurchconnect.com for more information, to view a demo, and to sign up.

Tip:

It is recommended that the system not be written in an open-source language, as it may be more vulnerable to hackers.

Visit

www.adventistchurchconnect.org
for more information.

SECTION III: DESIGNING YOUR SITE

Content management systems

Content management systems (CMS) are ideal for webmasters with little experience, as well as simplifying the process for those who are very experienced. A CMS provides all the coding for a website, so you don't need to be proficient in HTML. Once you have selected a layout, all you have to do is add pages and fill them with content using software that is similar to Microsoft Word. A CMS allows multiple people to work on the site with different levels of access. You can grant people access as administrators, authors, and editors, depending on what they need to accomplish.

A content management system will make updating content much easier. You can search the Internet for CMS options, many of which are free. Visit www.cmswatch.com to find a list of systems and reviews. Open-source systems, which mean they are built on platform other than Windows, ASP, and other solutions, are available. See what other churches are using and ask them why they like their particular system.

When selecting a content management system, make sure you can add an unlimited number of subpages under each main navigation area. A good system will automatically generate a dynamic outline or sitemap of your site as you add or delete pages.

Features you may want to look for in a CMS:

- Multiple levels of login for the administrator as well as the church members
- Automatic sitemap generation—*the ability to add content in an outline format*
- Calendar—*with the option to add recurring events*
- Easy text editor
- Photo resizing and cropping ability

- Prayer ministry module—allows site visitors send prayer requests to the pastor or prayer team
- Daily devotional—automatically updated content that will give visitors a reason to return to your site
- Online giving—allow church members to securely submit donations online
- Photo galleries
- Online member directory (password protected)
- Polls
- Podcasting or video streaming
- Ability to email newsletters
- RSS feeds
- Shopping cart—can provide a way to do fundraisers for your church projects
- Chat
- Forums
- Ability to easily change templates
- Flexibility to create your own layout
- Ability to automatically pull content from one portion of the site to another

Working with a designer

Content management systems usually provide some standard designs or templates. However, you may choose to have a customized design. If you are choosing not to use a content management system, you will need a designer. There may be someone in your church who has web design experience and is willing to volunteer. If not, you may choose to contract a designer for the website. If you don't know of any designers, ask people you know for recommendations. You can also do Internet searches or check the phone-book for designers.

If utilizing a content management system, it may be helpful to use a designer who is familiar with the system to ensure that the design is optimized for working well in the system.

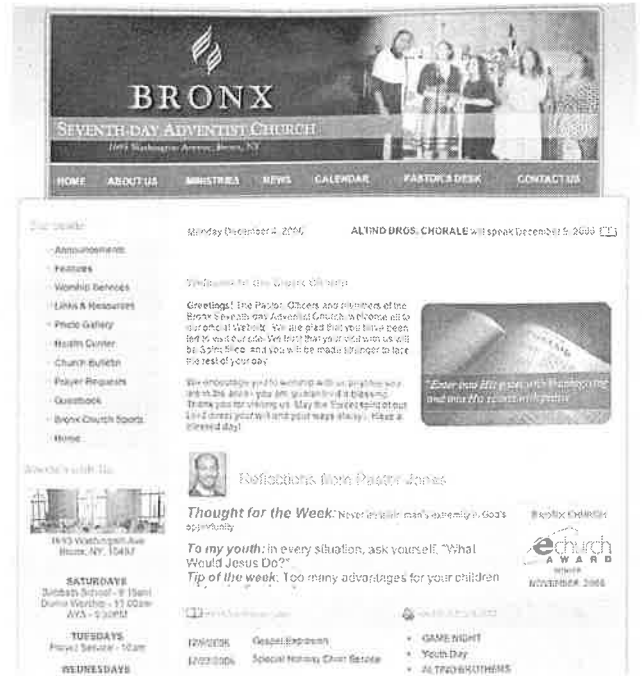
Ask designers for their credentials and view websites they have done. If they don't offer testimonials on their website, contact at least one business they've worked with in the past and ask for a recommendation. Ask how cooperative the designer was, and if they were pleased with the overall experience.

A web designer will take your vision and make it a reality on your computer screen. Here are tips for dealing with a designer and making everyone's life easier:

- Communicate what look you are seeking
- Show the designer samples of sites that you like



www.oklahomacitycentralsda.org



www.bxsdachurch.org

Good examples of what to do, featuring two award-winning websites: the Bronx and Oklahoma City Central Seventh-day Adventist Churches.

- Provide photos
- Offer as much information as possible
- Rather than telling the designer that you want a green background, provide them with a hexadecimal color number. To see a list of hexadecimal colors and their corresponding numbers, visit: www.webmonkey.com/webmonkey/reference/color_codes
- Set deadlines and stick to them

Remember that designers' costs vary, depending on what exactly you want your site to contain. Features such as video, audio, animation, and other interactive options will cost more.

No matter how wonderful your church may be, a poor website won't convey that fact to visitors. You want your website to look modern, professional, and attractive. If you are designing the site yourself and don't have much experience, here are some items to consider:

- Select colors that compliment one another
- Make your site readable by choosing contrasting colors for text and the background, such as black and white
- San serif fonts are more readable than serif fonts on a computer screen
- Flashing and moving items can be annoying and remind people of banner ads or spam
- If anything is animated, make sure it loads quickly
- Make the location of all buttons and links obvious, and test to make sure they work

Your home page

When someone visits your home page, they will want to know whose site they're viewing. End confusion by posting your church's complete name, address, and the words "Seventh-day Adventist" on the front page. Your church's name alone isn't enough. With about 5,000 Adventist churches in the United States alone, there is bound to be overlap in the names of churches and cities where they are located. If people can't easily find enough information, they won't visit your site again, and probably won't visit your church either.

Your home page could also contain a tagline about your church. This could be your church's mission statement, if it is short and concise. If it's long, condense it into a short sentence or phrase.

Keep the home page simple. You don't need to list every announcement and every pertinent link on the homepage. That's what the rest of the website is for. Just pick a few pertinent items. Show what's most important on your site through prominence. Where you place an item, its size, and its appearance will determine what the viewer perceives as important

Content

Because your site serves both members and visitors, you need content that is meaningful to both groups. Your navigation bar should contain self-explanatory options that are listed in a logical order. Possible sections include:

- About Us
- Calendar
- Ministries
- Bible Study
- Devotional
- News
- Media
- Links
- Contact Us

Try to fit everything so site visitors don't have to scroll down to read the entire menu. And keep the main menu simple—you can offer subgroups under each item. For example, under ministries, you can have another menu and a separate page for each ministry. Ask ministry leaders to submit photos and content for their section of the website. Consider giving them the capability to log into the site and add their own content, or work out a smooth system for how they will submit content.

Rules for good writing

Please find and use a copy editor. It's important for one person to read all the content and make sure it has a consistent tone and is error free. Nothing makes a site look unprofessional faster than incorrect grammar, misspelled words, and misused punctuation. Readers will notice.

Remember that you will need to write for people in the community. Visitors, and even some members, will not know the meaning of such terms as ingathering, ASI, and ABC. Anyone could view your website, and you want them to understand what they read.

It's important to correctly write the name of the Adventist Church.

(See: www.adventist.org/world_church/name/index.html)

Correct:

- Seventh-day Adventist (first reference)
- Adventist (subsequent references)

Incorrect:

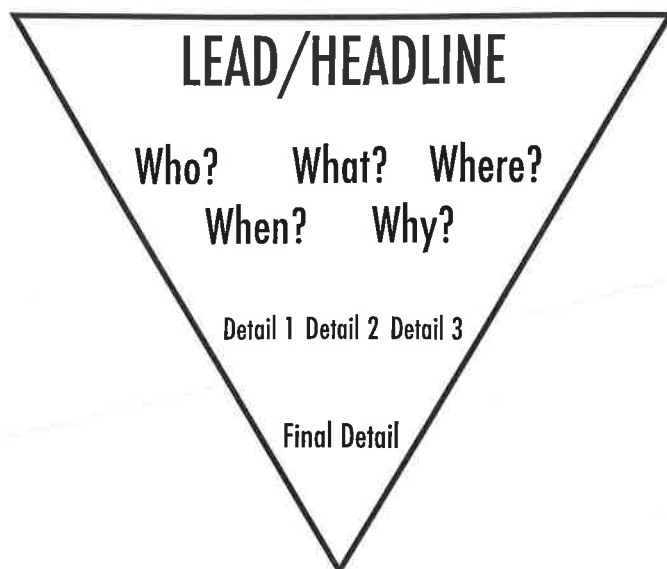
- Seventh-Day Adventist (do not capitalize D in day)
- Seventh Day Adventist (make sure to put a hyphen between Seventh and day)

It is my recommendation that you not use the initials SDA. This is "internal language" and will not mean anything to people visiting your site.

The rules for good writing are just as important online as they are in print.

- The simple word is the best word.
- Keep headlines short and present tense. Study newspapers for examples.
- Avoid excessive "to be" verbs: is, are, was, were, have, has, and had.
- The simple sentence is better than the complicated sentence.
- Cut needless words, sentences, and paragraphs.
- Don't editorialize. Never write, "A good time was had by all." Instead, get a quote from someone who had a good time, and what made it a good time.
- Get lots of quotes and identify the speaker.

Inverted Pyramid Format



- Be culturally sensitive. For example, instead of using “crusade,” consider “evangelistic event” or “evangelistic meetings.”
- Spell out abbreviations.
- Don’t use exclamation marks.
- Revise and rewrite.

Writing news

You will probably want to post news about recent events at your church. If you have not had any news writing experience, you will want to become familiar with the basic structure for news writing, called the inverted pyramid. Stories written in the inverted pyramid format begin by answering the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how, and follow a logical course throughout the story. The opening sentence, or lead, tells your readers why they want to read the rest of the article. Stories written in the inverted pyramid style start with the most important information and work their way to the less important details.

Tip:

Adventist Church Connect allows for you to resize photos without using other editors. Just load and paste onto your site!

Visit
www.adventistchurchconnect.org
for more information.

Evangelistic content

Because some people who have never been to an Adventist church, or perhaps any church, will be visiting your website, you’ll want to include information that they will find meaningful. Here are some suggestions for increasing your site’s evangelistic potential:

- Provide Sabbath school lessons
- Offer links to Bible studies
- Consider offering online sermons
- Include a section where visitors can email prayer requests
- Provide links to Adventist media
- Include information about Adventist beliefs
- Encourage ministry leaders to update their pages

Posting pictures

Photos are crucial for making your site interesting. Members love to see pictures of themselves, families, friends, and especially children. High-quality photos will also tell visitors a story about your church, who attends, how to dress for events, and provides an idea of what to expect.

You have two options for getting photos on your website. You can either use a film

camera and a scanner, or invest in a good digital camera. If you do not particularly enjoy photography or don't have the time, seek website photographers. Some churches have designated photographers, while at others, it's easy to find people who take pictures at events. Let the photographers know what types of photos you need for the website. The more pictures everyone takes, the more likely you are to find at least several that are web quality. Make necessary edits in a program like Adobe Photoshop, Photoshop Elements, or a similar program, or use the software that comes with your digital camera. Remember that you can't increase the quality of a photo through editing, but you can always decrease it. Some content management systems include the ability to resize and crop your image online, not requiring the purchase of photo-editing software.



This is a poor picture due to the distracting background, distant subjects, and the inability to see what they are doing.



No, that is not a hat. It is a wall decoration. Be sure to avoid background elements interacting with your subject in not-so-amusing ways.



This is an excellent picture. You can see the subjects' faces and what they are doing. The lighting is also good and the background is not too distracting.

Tips for photos:

- Look for subjects who are smiling.
- Make sure the subject is in focus.
- The more people you can get pictures of, the better.
- Aim for simplicity. Look for ways to give the center of interest in your pictures the most visual attention. One way is to select uncomplicated backgrounds that will not steal attention from your subjects. Don't let a busy background obscure your subject.
- Action shots are better than "grin and grab" shots where someone is receiving an award. Instead, show an action shot of what someone did to earn that award.
- Watch where people are standing so it doesn't look like a flagpole is growing out of someone's head.
- A few far-away shots are okay to show the scope of an event, but pictures in which the subject(s) fill most of the frame are more interesting.
- Remember that you usually need to be 10 feet or closer to your subject in order for your flash to work, so you'll need to move in close for indoor photos.
- The face of your subject shouldn't be tiny and unrecognizable, unless this photo is for a situation where you can't show the subject's face.
- Always carry an extra set of batteries.

Privacy policies

Remember that anything you post on your site can be seen by anyone, so exercise caution and don't reveal too much personal information about church members, and especially children. For example, it's a good idea not to list last names, especially children's, on your site, and especially not in photo captions. Whether or not you choose to post a church newsletter online will depend how much information is revealed, and whether or not unknown viewers should see the newsletter. You never know who will read what you post.

If your website has a section for prayer requests, you'll need to decide what will happen with submissions. Some churches have all requests first forwarded to the pastor, who make sure that all identifying information is removed before passing the requests along to the prayer team. Others allow requests to be sent directly to the prayer team. Either way, be careful of what you post or pass on. If you received secondhand information about someone else's physical or mental health, marital or financial problems, etc., do not share that information. It's a good idea to ask that no last names, company names, or other identifying information be submitted. Remember that many people submit requests on behalf of others without permission. Forwarding such information can constitute an invasion of privacy. The same goes for printing prayer requests and members' health information in newsletters, bulletins, and other communications. Don't share anything personal without permission from the person in question.

Also be careful about posting specific information about missionaries in certain countries. Depending on the political climate in the country where they're located, they could be in danger of arrest or persecution if the wrong person found that information. If there is any question, don't post any information, including names, organizational affiliations, email addresses, location, or photos, without the missionary's permission.

Website media

Many churches now offer various types of streaming media on their website. Years ago it was very cumbersome to put media on your website, and not everyone had high-speed Internet connections. Now it is easier to put media on your website in user-friendly formats.

You can offer audio and video podcasts using options such as Windows Media, Quick Time, and Real Media Player. Podcasting is one of the most popular media technologies available. This is because users download MP3s to their computer or MP3 player. Visit <http://radio.about.com/od/podcastin1/a/aa030805a.htm> to learn how to create your own podcasts. Some content management systems have Podcasting built into their system.

Technologies you need to know about

Though many technologies are available, some could be more beneficial to your site than others. Perhaps your church wants a simple site with mainly text and photos. Or perhaps you would like to feature streaming video and audio of your pastor's sermon each week.

Look at your church's budget and needs. Here are six technologies used on many church's websites. Don't worry if these technologies sound imposing. They are not necessary for a basic site.

1. Adobe Flash is one of the leading ways to provide animated, interactive content to your site. You can also record movies as a Flash file. If you plan to use a content management system and want to incorporate flash elements into your site, make sure the CMS has the capability of adding Flash into a page.
2. JavaScript, similar to Adobe Flash, is a programming language that adds interactivity to your website. It is imbedded with HTML to make it functional.
3. Adobe PDFs (portable document files) are useful because they can be read on every major computing platform, such as Windows, Apple, and Linux. PDF files are tamper-proof and are especially useful for preserving the original graphic appearance of documents such as newsletters and flyers. Rule of thumb: if you intend for a document to retain its original layout for all users and its primary need is for printing, use a PDF. If the document is intended for reading online and the exact layout is not critical, don't use a PDF. PDFs tend to load and print slowly.
4. DHTML (dynamic hypertext markup language) allows you to change data or information on different parts of a website without having to reload the page from the server by clicking on the refresh button.
5. CSS (cascading style sheets) control the look and feel of your site by allowing you to put tags all over your site. It gives you the ability to make one edit, and the CSS tag will work everywhere on your site.
6. RSS (really simple syndication) gives you the ability to subscribe to content from another site, either for your personal use or to be placed on your website, or for others to subscribe to content from your site. A good Content management system will have standard RSS technology built in.

SECTION V: PROMOTING YOUR WEBSITE

Search engine optimization

You'll want people to be able to easily find your church's website on the Internet. To accomplish this, you'll want to add your domain name to Google. Visit www.google.com/addurl/?continue=/addurl to add your URL to Google. Choose keywords that effectively describe your site for people to see when it appears on a search. The better your site is designed and arranged, the higher it will appear in search engine rankings.

Having your church's website linked to from other websites will also increase your ranking. Make sure that your church or conference clerk updates www.eAdventist.org with your domain name so it will automatically be linked to from the official Adventist website.

Marketing to members

You'll want members to know your church now has a website. When the website initially launches, you print bulletin inserts and post announcements in all of the church's media, such as on the bulletin board, in the newsletter, and in membership-wide emails. Let members know the site's address, an overview of what the site contains and why they should visit, and whom to contact if they are willing to contribute or if they have suggestions. Let ministry leaders know how they can post schedules on the pages for their ministry. They will in turn direct participants there for more information.

Print your church's website on all official communications. Find a permanent place for the address on your church's newsletter and bulletins. Have it added to church stationary and

your pastor's business cards. Let people leaving messages on the answering machine know where they can go on the web to find more information.

Promotional announcements

Run this announcement in the church bulletin as soon as you decide to launch a new site:

Coming soon! We are preparing a new church website! If you would like to include your ministry or department on the new site, please contact (name, phone number, and email).

If you are using a CMS, run this announcement in the church bulletin before you launch the site:

The web ministry team is looking for volunteers to assist us in keeping our website up to date. Knowledge of computer programming is NOT required in order to help. All you will need to do is log in and cut and paste an article or photo. For more information, please contact (name, phone number, and email).

Run this announcement in the church bulletin once you launch your site:

Visit the (church name) new website! We have a professionally designed site that includes church news, Bible study helps, our calendar, and pages for the ministries and departments in our church. Go to (web address).

Run this announcement in the church bulletin 2-3 weeks after you launch your website:

Are you interested in writing or photography? Share your talents by joining the web ministry team. We are looking for authors to write short articles and photographers to take photos of our church's activities. All you need is an email account and knowledge of Word or WordPerfect. For more information, please contact (name, phone number, and email) or visit (website).

Send this email announcement as soon as your site launches, ask everyone involved with your church's new website to send this email to all church members in their email contact list:

(Your church's name) has a new website! Visit (address) for the latest church and ministry news from (your church's name). Use our Bible study and media resources, send a prayer request, or check the date of an event on our church calendar. Please let your friends know about our new site by forwarding this message.

Fliers and bulletin inserts

Announcement to ministry leaders:

Feature Your Ministry on the Web!

- Make sure your ministry is on our church's new website.
- Go to (web address)
- Check to see what ministries are already listed. If your ministry is not already part of our website, we can add it!
- If it is listed, you can add articles and pictures to your pages.

For more information, contact (name, contact information).

Announcement to recruit helpers for a content management system site:

Needed: Web Ministry Volunteers

- Have you visited our new church website?
- Go to (address)
- We need volunteers to assist in updating information about what's happening in our church. You don't need to be a computer programmer—just log on and copy your article or photo to the web page!
- We are looking for:
 - Authors to write church and ministry news.
 - Photographers to take pictures of church activities and post them on the site.
 - Editors make necessary edits and publish articles on the site.

If you are interested in joining our web ministry team, please contact (name, contact information).

Announcement to members:

Visit our church's new website!

- Professional design
- Frequently updated content
- Bible study helps
- Prayer requests
- Church calendar
- Ministries and departments
- Church news
- Pictures
- Online sermons and media
- And more!

(Your church web address)

Using statistics to evaluate your site

Even if you do everything right, it can still be difficult to tell if your efforts are as effective as you hope, until you collect some information. No one piece of data can tell you the whole story, and even a slew of web server statistics can only tell you part of the story. "Thirty visitors a day" doesn't tell you if they are members or visitors. Anyone can look at anything on your site that isn't available on a log-in-only basis. In order to judge the effectiveness of your site's outreach, you'll need to research to know where your extra effort should be placed.

Here are some ideas that will help a picture to emerge:

1. On Sabbath morning, ask several visitors if they have seen your website. If they did, ask what they specifically found helpful.
2. Ask new members when, and if, they visited the site, and what they viewed. Again, ask them what they specifically found helpful.
3. Many sites will allow you to see how many times different parts of your site are viewed. See what is most and least popular with your visitors.
4. Create one page on your church's site that contains only a map of your church's location and worship times. Google Maps (www.google.com/maps) or Map Quest (www.mapquest.com) are options for obtaining a map to your church. Make it purely functional and don't change it. In theory, your church members and staff will look at it once and never need to view it again. Track the number of times this page is viewed. After about a year, you'll get a feel for the number of times a month people try to find your church.
5. One church placed the following coupon on their church's online map: "Visitors: Bring in this map on Sunday and receive a free copy of our popular booklet, *Our Favorite Local Places to Eat—As Discussed and Rated by Our Members.*" An average of two visitors each month redeemed the coupon. You could try something like this and see how many people redeem your offer.
6. Create a member log-in area to access special information. Then you can compare the member log-in totals to the number of total visitors. Of course, not every member will log in, but over time and combined with other measurements, a general picture of visitors using your site will start to emerge.

Criteria for evaluating your website

1. Does the home page load in a timely fashion? Less than 10 seconds is excellent. If it takes too long, visitors won't wait.
2. Is the home page understandable? Are the features easy to find and well presented? Are there many broken links, missing sections, or spelling errors?
3. Are the navigation options logical? Do all pages include well-designed navigation, with little scrolling required? Are the navigation links adequate?
4. Does the website contain information about your church? Does it include ministries, events, and the pastor's bio? How much information does it offer potential visitors?
5. Is the content up to date? Are future events announced? Is the news new, or more than two months old?
6. Is contact information available? Can visitors find the address, phone number, email address, and map link? If they can't find this on your website, they won't be able to find your church.
7. Are meeting and worship times clearly posted? Are they easy to find? Are special events listed?
8. Do the colors and overall design compliment each other? Are they pleasant? Do they look professional and give a positive impression of your church?
9. Does the site include an evangelism component? Is it warm and inviting, with Bible study information? Does it encourage cyber visitors to become Sabbath morning visitors?
10. Is the content easy to read? How are the grammar, spelling, and punctuation? Poorly written content is hard to follow and will not make people want to revisit your site.
11. Does the site help eliminate confusion about Adventists? Does it present mainstream Adventist theology? Does it avoid using "SDA" and other jargon that would confuse visitors?

RESOURCES

Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability by Steve Krug.

As the world becomes more and more adapted to digital communication, churches and religious organizations are starting to realize the importance of having a web site that is attractive and easy to use. Don't Make Me Think is a guide to creating a site that is professional and intuitive. An expert in web usability, Krug provides practical, humorous, and highly valuable advice for everyone involved in the website creation process. The book is equally valuable for technical and non-technical participants in the process. It is an enjoyable read that will make a huge difference in how visitors perceive your organization. New Riders Press, \$35. Available from AdventSource at www.adventsource.org or 800-328-0525.

Homepage Usability: 50 Websites Deconstructed by Jakob Nielsen.

You have 10 seconds to show your face to the world. What does your homepage say? In a world of information overload, your homepage must grab the attention of visitors, tell them where they are, and let them know where they can go. Does your site pass the test? Homepage Usability is about making the first impression. Is your tag line effective? How difficult is it to navigate your site? By putting 50 of today's top sites to the test, this book shows what makes for good-and not so good-first impressions. Find hundreds of examples that you can use on your own homepage. New Riders Press, \$39.95. Available from AdventSource at www.adventsource.org or 800-328-0525.

Design Basics Index by Jim Krause.

Learn everything from typography and color to layout and business issues. Understand the three elements every successful visual design must have. 1.) Components: learn how to get the most out of photos, illustrations, icons, typography, linework, decoration, borders, and backgrounds. 2.) Composition: practice combining the components of a design in a visually appealing way by using the principles of placement, grouping, alignment, flow, and spacing to create a pleasing, cohesive design. 3.) Concept: utilize the intangible elements of theme, connotation, and style to present and deliver your message. How, \$24.95. Available from AdventSource at www.adventsource.org or 800-328-0525.

Church Communications Handbook by Wanda Vassallo.

The perfect handbook for anyone with a leadership role in church communication. Use this book to develop an overall plan for your developing your church's public image. Provides examples of ways farsighted churches are communicating effectively with their members and reaching the unchurched. Look for solid advice on advertising, media relations, use of websites, and other types of technology. Kregel, \$14.95. Available from AdventSource at www.adventsource.org or 800-328-0525.

Photo Idea Index by Jim Krause.

Whether you are an amateur or a professional, this book will expand your vision of the world and provide you with hundreds of ideas and tips designed to strengthen your ability to capture and create images that are intriguing, technically sound, and aesthetically attractive. Every image in this book was created using modestly priced cameras and equipment. How, \$24.95. Available from AdventSource at www.adventsource.org or 800-328-0525.



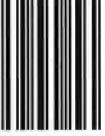
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ISBN 978-157756231-3



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