

Decoding the Web



A series of handouts produced by the
Web Ministry Department of the Adventist Media Network. Used by permission. BUC Communication department & South
Pacific Division.

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Decoding the Web

Why should my church have a website?

The web is a great way to –

- share the gospel
- reach out to people who are searching
- share resources
- let people know the events happening in your church
- connect with your community regardless of time and location

Where do I start?

The key components in creating a website –

1. Sign up for your free BUC netAdventist website, *.adventistchurch.org.uk, *adventistchurch.ie (or create your own domain if you wish to develop your own independent product).
2. Choose your hosting environment. You can do a search on the net to find a range of hosting services available. With the netAdventist package, hosting will be included so you will not have to worry about looking for hosting services.
3. Choose whether you are going to use a content management system or use an application like Dreamweaver to maintain your website. A content management system requires no HTML knowledge to update content but you may require HTML knowledge to set one up. It is beneficial if you want different people in your church to update content on the website. Visit www.netAdventist.org to find out more about the content management system that the BUC Communication department is offering to the whole Union.
4. Define your audience and the type of content needed. Create a sitemap and outline the navigation process.
5. Design the look of your site. With the netAdventist system you can choose from a range of templates available.
6. Source, write and edit the content.
7. Source and edit the images for your site. www.sxc.hu offers good quality images for free, depending on their usage restrictions. It is important that you get professional images for your site as it helps build an attractive image of the church. www.churchphoto.org is an Adventist site that offers good images at low cost.
8. Create your web pages. Test site for usability.
9. Market your website – e.g. advertise in community newsletters, submit your site to search directories, local community websites and to the BUC Communication department.



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Seven tests for great web content

Do these quick tests* for all web pages you write or edit.

1. 3-second test

Do I get the gist of this page after looking at it for 3 seconds, and without scrolling?

Tips:

- Put the main content points at the top of the page.
- Bold keywords and key phrases.
- Use meaningful titles for links instead of "click here".
- Use a bulleted list for easy reading.

2. Identity test

Is it obvious whose site this is, and where the owners are located?

Tips:

- Have you placed the church logo on every web page?
- Do you have a "Contact Us" link or placed your contact details on the web page?
- Does your page clearly reflect the values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

3. Accessibility test

Can everyone get the essential information regardless of their ability, computer, modem, browser or preferences?

Tips:

- Make sure you insert the alternate text for any images on your page.
- Reduce the file size of your images so the web page loads quickly.
- View your web page in different browsers to make sure it is accessible. The most commonly used browsers are Internet Explorer, Firefox and Netscape.

4. The "so what?" test

Are you talking to me? Why should I care? Is it obvious what I'm supposed to do next?

Tips:

- Define your target audience. For example church members, employees, the general public, students or the media. So when you write the content, the needs of the user will be kept in mind.
- Put your contact details – email, phone or fax - where you have mentioned a service that visitors will need more information on.
- Use unambiguous names for buttons and links so people know exactly where they will be taken if they click on it.
- Spell out all acronyms in full. Do not use Adventist jargon.
- Do not use slang or clichés.



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5. The "yeah, right!" test

Can I trust you? How old is this information?

Tips:

- Regularly update your information. Old information reduces the credibility of your website and your church.
- Follow up visitor requests within 24 hours as this builds credibility.

6. Serenity test

Does the page look spacious, calm and orderly? Does its appearance make visitors feel calm?

Tips:

- Break up large amounts of text into sections by using meaningful headings.
- Create a style guide - choose a few colours that complement each other, select a font (Arial or Verdana is recommended for the web) and determine the font sizes for the headings - use this style guide consistently throughout your website.
- The colours you choose should reflect your content. Make sure there is a contrast between the text and the background of the page.
- Avoid using italics (except for large font sizes)

7. The "found-in-space" test

Can I find this page by using a common search engine or directory?

Tips:

- Insert Meta tags into your HTML code that lists keywords and a description of the page.
- Some search engines do not index your site using Meta tags but grab the text at the top of the page. So make sure the text at the top of the page is a good summary of what the page is about and uses plenty of keywords.
- Find out the commonly used search terms on the web at <http://inventory.overture.com>. Use these terms in the content to optimise your pages for search engines.
- Flash introductions to your website and dynamic content tend not to be indexed by search engines. A way around this is to create a separate static html page and submit it to the search engines.
- Common search engines to submit your site to are:
 - Google – www.google.com
 - Yahoo - <http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html>
 - Zeal – www.zeal.com
 - Open Directory - www.dmoz.org

**The tests were created by Rachel McAlpine, www.webpagecontent.com*



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10 Easy Ways to Keep Me from Visiting Your Church Because I Visited Your Website

by Tony Morgan, Executive director of WiredChurches.com

1. **Avoid telling me what's going to happen at your church this weekend.** I found churches that had weather reports but nothing about their upcoming weekend service. I found two churches that had prominent information about upcoming golf scrambles (which I appreciated as a golfer), but nothing about this weekend's service. Why would I come if I don't know what I'm going to experience?
2. **Put a picture of your building on the main page.** After all, ministry is all about the buildings.
3. **Use lots of purple and pink and add pictures of flowers.** Really. Are you expecting *any* men to show up? And, for my benefit, please don't put any doves on your website. Doves scare me.
4. **Make me click a "skip intro" or "enter site" link.** I don't have time for that and it's very annoying. If I have to wait for something to load or have to click around intro pages to get to the real information, I'm probably going to skip your church service.
5. **Add as many pictures and graphics as you can to the main page.** My life is already complicated. I don't have time to figure out what's important at your church. If you dump everything on the main page, I'm assuming you don't know what's important either.
6. **Use amateur photography.** And, for the record, it would be helpful to have at least one normal looking person on your site. Do us all a favor and hire a graphic designer, a professional photographer or purchase some stock photography.
7. **List every single ministry you have at your church.** Frankly, I don't care what ministries you have. I just want to know whether or not I should visit your church this weekend. My first step isn't the men's Bible study or joining your church's prayer partners ministry.
8. **Make it as difficult as possible for me to get directions, services times, or find information about what will happen with my kids.** It's important that my kids have a great experience. If you can't convince me that that will happen, I'm probably not going to risk visiting your service.
9. **Put a picture of your pastor with his wife on the main page.** That tells me it's all about a personality, and I see enough of those people on television. I actually found one church that had not one but two pictures of the senior pastor on the main page. He was looking mighty dapper, though, in his fancy suit.
10. **Try to sell your church rather than telling me how I will benefit from the experience.** I don't care how great your church is. I just want to know if visiting your church will help me and my unchurched friends take our next steps toward Christ.

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Guidelines for online presence of church entities

Web sites established by the Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout its structure, organizations and entities, represent our faith community to the Internet world. The following are recommended guidelines for Web sites operated by the church.

1. Seventh-day Adventist Church teachings and beliefs are to be upheld in content published on all denominational Web sites.
2. Adventist internal language, jargon, acronyms and abbreviations are to be avoided on denominational Web sites as they are available to all Internet users, many of whom are not Seventh-day Adventist; content is to be checked for spelling and grammar.
3. All Web sites are to display professional appearance, including design, choice of colors, graphics and layout. It is recommended that Web sites be tested for usability before being made public;
4. Only official churches, organizations and entities administered by organizations listed in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook are entitled to use the Seventh-day Adventist Church's corporate identity symbols (logo graphic and text) as described in the church's corporate identity standards manual;
5. A feedback option for visitors to leave inquiries and comments is recommended;
6. Every denominational Web site is to display appropriate trademark and copyright notices and symbols;
7. In the context of the Internet culture, web pages which include timely information are to be updated on a regular basis. All web sites are to receive regular maintenance and content supervision; reports to measure unique visitors or page views only;
8. Care should be exercised when selecting links to other web sites;
9. Seventh-day Adventist web sites must respect intellectual property rights when posting audio, video, pictures, text and all other content;
10. Domain names used by church entities should be registered in the entity's name, and a business model established to preserve the domain name for future use by the entity.

Online Committee General Conference Communication Department
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