

# Planning Your Website: What's Next?

## 1. The first stage: thinking

This stage is very important, and investing in doing thorough planning in the early stages can save a lot of extra workload – and heartache – later on! There are several things to think about before you begin setting up your site. Depending on how your church operates, you might find it helpful to work through these kinds of questions on your own, as a small group, or as a congregation. Our advice is to make notes of your discussions too – it can be very helpful to have these to refer back to. Here are some questions to get you started:

Thinking about...	Questions to ask:
<b>The purpose of the website</b>	Why do we want a site? Who would we like to be looking at it? What kind of site would they be most attracted to? What do we want to achieve by having the site? What is our single most important desired outcome?
<b>The management of the website</b>	Who is going to manage the site? Do we want to run it ourselves or to have someone else do it for us? Do we have a resident expert – or someone who's willing to learn to become one? If so, is there training available? What level of professional support will we need? Can we share out some of the workload amongst several people?
<b>The drive of the website</b>	How actively do we want to grow an online presence for our church? How much time and money do we want to invest in it? A busy site is a more visible presence, but it requires commitment to do it well – do we want to make that commitment, or are we looking for something else, a quieter site? Who can write content for the site?
<b>The look of the website</b>	Do we want the site to look contemporary or traditional? Do we have a preferred colour, or palette of colours? Would we like the site to be full of images, or mostly text-based? Will we be able to get lots of good quality photographs for the site? How much white space do we want there to be?
<b>The name of the website</b>	Do we want a .org.uk address – or a .com one – or something else? Is there a standard format within our denomination(s)? What domain names are other churches in our area using? What are people likely to be typing into search engines when they're looking for your site? All the short domain names are taken now, so the next best thing is to have a URL that is meaningful – and therefore memorable. You could consider an acronym but be careful – these are not always search-friendly.
<b>The content of the website</b>	What pages do we need/want? How will we arrange them in relation to each other? What should each page contain? (You can use the "Planning your Website: Pages" sheet to help you plan)

## 2. The second stage: researching

Once you've thought in detail about what your site might be like, you might find it useful to spend some time looking at what other sites have done, in order to get some inspiration as to what might work for your site – or what you want to do better! Viewing a lot of church websites will also help you get an idea of what is possible. The next thing to do, then, is to begin your research: you could check out what other churches in your area are doing online; you could try an internet search for 'good church websites' or something similar; you can visit <http://forum.interactivechurch.org.uk/inspiration/> to discover what our webmasters have been doing.

This is also the time to begin researching possible packages for your site. Here are some things to bear in mind when you're searching:

- a) Shop around. There are lots of options, and it's easy to research them online: try searching for different combinations of keywords (eg "church website package"; "buy good church website"; "free website"; "how to set up a church website uk").
- b) When looking into a particular provider, it's wise to make sure that you see examples of their work rather than just descriptions, so you can check that theirs is a style you like.
- c) If you're looking into free options, it's a good idea to work out what restrictions are in place: for instance, how much choice do you have over the domain name? Is there any support available? How customisable will the site be?
- d) When looking at pay options, take care to read the small print: make sure that you know exactly what you'll be buying, that it will meet your church's needs, and that there are not going to be any hidden charges later on. Don't forget to make sure that the site will be mobile-friendly and optimised for search, too.
- e) If possible, check out online reviews of the company you're thinking of using: the opinions of other users can be very revealing. It can also be helpful if you're able to spot other users trying to do something similar to what you're hoping to achieve – this can give you a strong indication as to likely outcomes for your site.

## 3. The third stage: deciding

You've done all your preparation, you have a good idea of what kind of website you're aiming for, and you're aware of several packages that are available: this is the time to start pinning things down. At this stage, you might find it helpful to create a visual map of your site: write onto sticky notes all the elements that you'd like to see in your site, then arrange them on a table until you're happy with the layout. Alternatively, you can simply draw out a rough sketch of what you have in mind. Armed with this concrete understanding of what you want, start approaching the providers you're interested in (if you're looking for a pay option) to find out exactly what they'd charge you to create the site you're looking for. Don't forget to check the likely timescale too. Once you're happy with your choice, you can make your purchase with confidence. If you've decided to go with a free option, now's the time to get started! See our Helpsheet 3 for a step-by-step guide to getting started on WordPress.com.

If you'd like to keep in touch with us, you can email Rebecca at [rebecca.wincen@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.wincen@gmail.com). We'd love to see what you're creating, and will try to help you if we can.