

Increase Your Website Traffic

**Attracting People
to Your Website**

To start with...

- Your website needs to be effective
- Your website needs to be attractive
- Your website needs to be easy to use

Having people visit your website does no good if your website doesn't contain accurate information about your church, if it's overwhelming or unattractive, or if people can't navigate to the information they want quickly and easily. If you have any hope of keeping people once they find your website, it must have substance and simplicity.

That's all I want to say about that in this workshop—we have once called "Building an Effective Website" that covers this in depth. The notes are available as these will be later today on both our technology blog (<http://churchtech.gci.org>) and conference website (<http://2013.gci.org>).

How do people find it?

- Personal reference
- Search
- Social networks
- Links from other websites
- Promotional materials

There are few ways a person will come in contact with your website. Probably the top two are because someone told them about it and because they were searching for it or a church in the local area.

Personal Reference

- So how do I capitalize on personal reference?
- How do I make it easier for someone to find my website after I tell them about it?

You know about your website. So do your church members—or at least they should. Tell people about it. Put it on your business cards, work it into your conversation, encourage members to share it with their friends, family and contacts. It's always better to work it into a conversation rather than just sending it to people.

Effective personal reference

- Make the URL easy
- Make the church name prominent

When you refer someone to your website, they'll either be using the URL you give them or the church name to find the website. Chances are that if you can't remember the URL, neither will anyone else. So if you haven't picked an easy URL yet, maybe now is the time to do it. With my first local church website, it took a few tries before we got one the pastor could remember. What did we settle on? GlendoraChurch.com.

The next most common way to find your church website when someone has been referred is by typing the name in a search box. But you'd probably be surprised how many variations of it will be used. For example, "NewLife Christian Fellowship" will probably become "new life church" in a search. Variations of your church name is something you'll need to take into account when you're writing the text for your website.

Search

- How do people search for a church?

Ideas? “diverse congregation”? “Christian fellowship”? “Trinitarian theology”? Not likely.

When people search for a church, they’re looking for a “church”, not some other clever word that has a similar or deeper meaning. Chances are, people aren’t looking for a “congregation” or a “fellowship”.

This isn’t an exact science. Different people search for different things. It doesn’t hurt to informally ask people what they’d search for if they were looking for a church. But chances are, you’ll find most people looking for just a few common phrases...

Key phrases for a church

- Church
- Christian church
- Community church
- Bible-based church
- Maybe, GCI church

Make the content count

- Use key phrases in your content
- Use your location in your content
- The order of words matters

Knowing how you expect people to search for your website allows you to integrate those phrases into your content. Since most search engines ignore the meta keywords now, there are only a few places where you can place phrases to have enough impact to get your site listed. Page content is one very important place.

Current SEO guidelines advise targeting only one key phrase per page. That becomes harder when you need to promote one product (that is, your church) with multiple phrases. You can't repeat significant content on multiple pages without search engines penalizing you for it. So unless you have enough content to warrant splitting the key phrases onto pages of their own, it might be worth working them into the home page even if they'll have less impact than if they were separate. It's a balancing game between writing meaningful content for people while using proven techniques to gain higher standing for certain phrases in search engines.

Emphasizing the key phrases

- Title
- URL
- H1 and other headings
- Text
- Image alt text

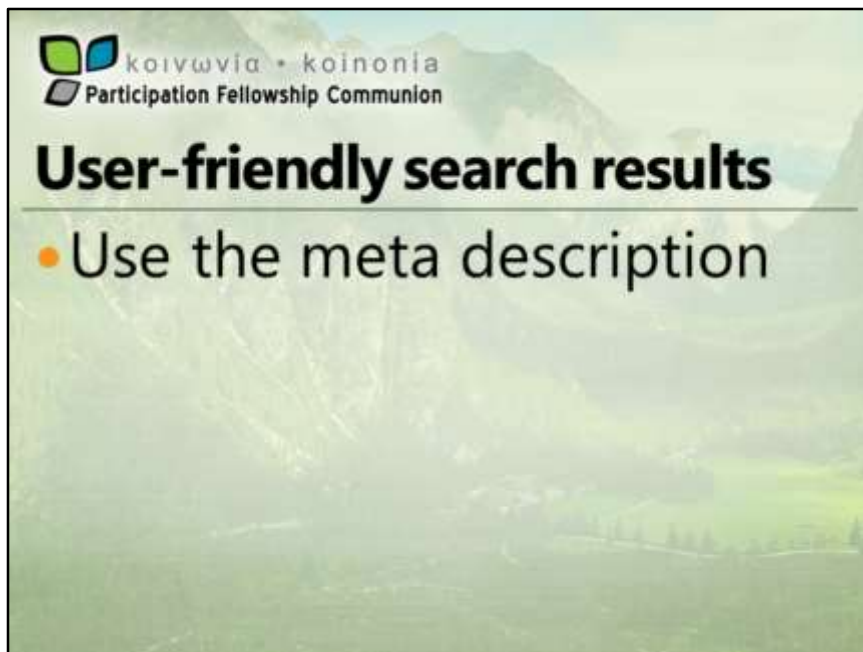
The most important element on the page is the title. Most website I visit use the church name and the word “Home” or just “Home” for the title. This doesn’t help search engines prioritize your page. Using your location and key phrase in the title pushes your page up in the ranking. A good title is less than 65 characters. If you use longer than that, place less important words at the end because your visitors will not see them in the search results.

The URL itself is a great place to insert key phrases. How? For example, you might put your sermons page at www.example.com/bible-based-teaching.htm because that will give you a better ranking for people searching for Bible-based teaching. Note that hyphens work better as word separators because search engines break the words apart. Underscores do not work as well because search engines treat the whole string including the underscores as one single long word.

Another place search engines look is heading tags like H1, H2, etc. Heading tags generally indicate the phrase is more important than the text around it so search engines will give your sites points for your key phrases found there. Since generally headings are short phrases, keep this to a maximum 65 characters to keep it from being ignored. It’s also better if your key phrase is early in the heading.

While we keep searching in mind while we're writing the text on the page, remember the audience is people, website visitors, potential church visitors. The text should be clear and descriptive so people get a good feel for who you are as a church. If they do end up visiting, you can bet they'll assess how genuine you are based on what they learned from the website vs what they find at church.

Remember that search engines still rely on the ALT text of images to know what's in them. If you use an image for your church logo that contains your church name and/or other information, make sure you specify the ALT text and that it accurately reflects what's in the image.



Most of the meta tags are ignored by search engines now, but one notable exception is the meta description. This provides a short, to the point description of the page in search results. Current recommendations are to keep this to 150 characters because longer than that will be truncated, and may be ignored. The meta description also factors into your search engine ranking so keep those key phrases in the mix if you can.

A good one might be something like “Altadena California Christian church helping people discover and live the new life they have in Jesus Christ”.

Counting Characters

- "javascript kit character count"

Some of the items I've discussed have character limits. Avoid special characters like the ampersand because those get ignored and sometimes interfere with the search engine's ability to process the item. Use automated counters like the Javascript Kit's Character Count to count the characters for you as you write and adjust your text.



If you're writing your own HTML, you have easy access to add titles and meta tags, but in content managers like WordPress these items are hidden from you. But there are plugins for every major content manager that can help you add the items you need. For WordPress, SEO Ultimate is the plugin I use and recommend.



Once you have taken the time to develop quality content with the right key phrases, the next step is to get Google and other search engines to index your website. There are generally two ways to do that—submit the home page URL to Google and let it discover what’s there. This method takes more time and is generally less effective and successful than using a sitemap.

Sitemaps are no walk in the park if you code your own html for your website. Your sitemap should list every page, along with the last modification time, priority and how often to check for updates. Your home page should always have the highest priority and be the first page in the list.

Plugins exist for every major content management system to generate the sitemap for you. A number of WordPress plugins will do this. I use and recommend Google XML Sitemaps. Generally speaking if your WordPress website is set up correctly, and uses a cron scheduler, this plugin should automatically generate and update your sitemap.xml. I would recommend that you check regularly to make sure it’s up-to-date. You can always go to the plugin settings and manually generate it if you need to.

Once the sitemap.xml exists, you’ll want to tell Google and Bing about it. The plugin

technically does that for you, but doing it yourself gives you the ability to see how many pages are being indexed, and whether there are errors in it preventing some pages from being seen.

Monitoring Your Success

- Google Webmaster Tools
- Bing Webmaster Tools

Both Google and Bing offer webmaster tools that allow you to see how your sitemap is processed, how many pages are indexed, the key search phrases your website gets listed for and how many people click through to your site from them. Just search for Google webmaster tools or Bing webmaster tools to find them. You will need to sign up by creating a Google or Microsoft account to manage the website.

You should take the time to sign up and review the information provided there. It can be insightful and may help you discover additional key phrases and tune your content to be more effective.

Other ways to increase traffic

- External links

One way to boost your reputation and ranking in search is for other websites to link to you. Now these other website need to be real and reputable—not places you can buy your way onto. Some ways you can do this is by getting listed in church indexes, listing events on various local event websites, getting “press” for some outreach activity.

Other ways to increase traffic

- Social networks:
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Pinterest
 - Instagram
 - Google +

Like other external links, active social networking can both generate ranking and drive traffic to your website. Using Facebook to regularly promote coming topics, praise excellent worship services, make people aware of new website content, or event information all helps to grow the awareness of your church and your website.

For example, for an event like Christmas or Easter, if you create an event under your church's Facebook page, you can invite all the local people you know and ask your local members to do the same. The more people invited, the more that become aware of your church, the event, and potentially your website since people who don't know your church will want more information about it before attending a special service.

But for any social network to work, you have to build a following. Church members need to like the Facebook page, follow you on Twitter, Pinterest or Instagram, and add you to their circles on Google +. Social networking is only as successful as your followers are active on the social network. It makes no sense, for example, to spend time developing a Twitter presence if no one in your church uses Twitter. Your tweets will just go into the nothingness of the internet.

Review...

- Effective content
- Easy URL
- Key search phrases
- External links
- Social networks

SEO Elements

- Title
- Headings
- ALT text on images
- Meta description
- XML sitemap

Monitoring

- Google and Bing webmaster tools



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