

Communications FastTrack NACBA

Don't just have a blog, have a good blog.

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“Everybody has a blog.” How many times have we heard this? Every person, business and church has a blog, and after hearing that enough times, you set up your church blog. After all, they're free and easy to set up, right? Now you have a blog. What should you do with it?

This session goes beyond the basics and focuses on content, conversation and comments. Here's what you'll learn:

- Church blogs versus non-church blogs
- Content is king (and identifying the queen)
- Starting a conversation
- Comments: the good, the bad and the ugly
- 10 simple things you can do to make your blog better

Intro:

Everybody has a blog, right? People, businesses, groups, so that means all churches should have a blog too, right? I think the answer is yes, but only if you're able to do it well.

I'm not going to talk about how to make a blog or any of the basics, as there are plenty of resources out there to do that. I'm going to focus on blog purpose, content, conversations and easy tips for making your blog better.

A blog is like a puppy. It requires care and attention. Why do it?

Purpose of a blog.

There are probably hundreds of answers to this question, and they're all right. **It's not one size fits all.** So knowing that, what is the purpose of your church blog?

Bottom line: **It should support the mission of your church.**

Should church blogs be different than secular blogs? – No. Your church blog has a target audience just like any other blog. The success of your church blog is just like the success of any other blog. Are you reaching the people you're trying to reach?

Let's get to the why question. **Why have a blog?**

- **Reaching people:** Traffic, not numbers, but interaction. Reaching your target audience, existing church congregation and attracting new people.
- **Marketing & communications:** It helps with ranking your church website on search engines. Your blog should be incorporated somewhere within your church website. We live in a digital world. The phone book days are over. A blog supports your online marketing & communications with casual conversation.
- **Conversation:** This is casual, two-way communication with people in your church. Social media is not a fad. Not everyone will read your blog, but it's a good community builder for those who like to participate.

Should you have multiple blogs? You can, but limit them. People prefer to have one place to go. An example of a good use of an additional blog, besides your main one, would be a student blog. Students have their own style, culture and language.

Categorize well and people will be able to find what they're looking for.

A ministry in your church wants their own blog? Tell them to provide you with 5 good posts and a plan to regularly update it. You're not going to see them again unless they're serious about it.

Content.

You are what you blog. If someone reads a blog post and they're not familiar with your church, does it reflect who you are and what you believe? Any of your blog posts could potentially be an entry point to your church.

Target audience. You should be writing for your target audience. Is your content reaching your target audience? Statistics are your friend. How many visitors? Where are they coming from?

Culturally relevant. This is sometimes the simplest thing to do, yet isn't forefront in many churches. In desperation to meet a publishing deadline or just get something out there, we forget or ignore this piece. People need to be able to relate to what you write or they won't read it. Using cultural mainstream references and debates work well.

On my personal blog, I wrote a post about Toms vs. Bob's shoes. At the time, there was a huge controversy about Bob's copying Tom's. This was, and still is, one of my most visited posts. I could have written only about copycats, and not used the cultural reference, but I probably wouldn't have had that many readers.

Don't do free blogs. No ads, and don't use free blogs. My church did that for a while. One week, my pastor wrote a blog post regarding his weekend message. Shortly after posting it, I got a flood of emails about a Victoria's Secret ad being at the bottom of it.

Content they can't get anywhere else. We spent a lot of time regurgitating announcements and events on our blog. People can get those details elsewhere. Give them the behind the scenes stuff, the stories that are derived from past events, a book recommendation, a response to a cultural topic. These are all things that don't fit into your church website. It's unique content and they're only going to get it here, on your blog.

You won't please everyone, so don't try to. Stick with your strategy. We'll be talking about this a littler later. You'll have the people that want more stories, more event info, more scripture, less scripture, different images, video clips, they don't like the comments... You get the picture.

Rabbit trail: Don't delete the opinions or negative feedback. Respond with respect. If it's been posted, chances are someone has seen it already. If you must approve all comments (and you should), remember the writer has seen it. Deleting it says we're guilty or we just want happy comments. On the news, when you hear about how they tried to reach someone for comments and they couldn't get anyone to respond to them, what does that make you think?

Keep your day job. There's probably nobody in here that has blogging as their full time job. Utilize guest writers. No ghost writing, blogs should be authentic. Use author photos and bios. Utilize peoples' passions and gifts. You have to be inspired to write blog posts. Stick to topics you know and love, get someone else to write the other stuff. You'll be amazed at how many people will come out of the woodwork once you start searching for bloggers.

10 simple tips to make your blog better right now.

If you do these things going forward, they *will* improve your blog.

1. **Use an image:** If a picture is worth 1,000 words, and a good word count for a blog is 500, adding a picture is a no-brainer. If written content is king, then images are the queen. 90% of people process visually.
2. **Organize:** If they can't find it, they can't read it. Utilize categories, keywords and always have a search option available.
3. **Make it scannable:** Paragraphs, bullet points, lists, quotes, bolded text... People like to choose what they want to read and go in-depth on topics, stories or pieces that interest them.
4. **Create compelling titles:** Create intrigue, stating what it is. I was a guest writer for a single's Christian blog and my post was titled "Friends... with Benefits?" My post was in the top 5 in traffic and number one in reader interaction.
5. **Add a question:** This starts the conversation and encourages people to comment.

6. **Add subscriptions:** Make sure people can easily subscribe to your blog via email and RSS feeds. This is an immediate action item. If they're surfing, chances are they won't remember to go back to your blog.
7. **Frequency:** There are many theories on how often you should post. Too much can be as bad as not enough. Consistency is the key. Once or twice a week is a good place to start. People will get used to your blogging routine.
8. **Interact:** Reply to comments. If you do a poll or ask people for info, make sure you give the results of it. People love to be part of the story, so let them. Make comment approvals necessary. Moderating comments allows you to read before approval, which is also a good time to respond.
9. **Create an idea list:** Create a list of blog topics or post ideas. This not only makes maintaining it easier, but you can have posts pre-written and scheduled.
10. **Create a plan.** Have a plan for your blog. What is it? What it's not? Everyone in our church had a different view on what our blog content should be. The content should be original, conversational and support the strategy for your blog.

Change?

My blog needs help! How do I get others on board with this?!

My church is in that process right now.

Create a plan. Have a strategy. Who will write? How often? Training? Ideas? Does this support your church's mission?

Present your plan. I had stats about some of our blog posts. They got more visits than our web pages. When I went to present the changes I wanted to make to our blog, it was helpful to have a written plan, along with the statistics.

Implement your plan. Just do it. :)

Wrap up.

Don't have a blog because everyone else does, have a blog because it...

- Supports your mission
- Encourages conversation
- Reaches people

“As I have repeatedly written in one form or other, blogging is not about writing posts. Heck, that’s the least of your challenges. No, blogging is about cultivating a mutually beneficial relationship with an ever-growing online readership, and that’s hard work.” – Alister Cameron

What should you do now? Train the puppy and teach old dogs new tricks.

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