

# Evangelism on the Internet

## Growth of the Internet and World Wide Web Use

### Internet Facts

Precursor to the Internet was the ARPANET (Advance Research Projects Agency Network) which was begun in 1969 by the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA). Four research facilities were linked: University of California at Los Angeles, Stanford Research Institute, University of California at Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah. The primary purpose of the ARPANET was to support military research and to provide reliable channels of communication in the event of a natural disaster or nuclear attack. The ARPANET was based on a suite of protocols, new at the time, called TCP/IP.

By 1990 the European High-Energy Particle Physics Lab (CERN) had become the largest Internet site in Europe. Tim Berners-Lee created the **World Wide Web** in 1992. At the beginning of

1996, it was estimated that there were over 100,000 Web sites in existence. In an April 1999 survey conducted by CommerceNet and Nielsen Media Research, it was estimated that the number of Internet users in North America has now reached **92 million**.

#### ◆ Gender composition

Female	46%
Male	54%

#### ◆ Use Location

At home	72 million
Work	46 million
School	28 million
Alternate	32 million

The gender gap has been closing on the Internet. Before 1995 it was estimated that females accounted for 20% and males accounted for 80% of Internet users. **Top online purchasing categories for both males and females in the first quarter of 1999 was books followed by CD s and videos.**

Advances in technology can have a positive impact on the advance of the Gospel. The Roman roads enabled the Apostle Paul and other early Christian missionaries to reach many points around the Mediterranean with the Good News. The invention of the printing press and moveable type put affordable Scriptures into the hands of the people. The advent of radio and

television made it possible to reach millions with a message. In the recent past we have witnessed the explosive growth of the Internet and the use of the World Wide Web for e-commerce.

### **Popular Internet Services**

**E-mail:** Electronic mail, uses simple mail transfer protocol (smtp), and post office protocol (pop).

**Ftp:** File transfer protocol, used for uploading and downloading of files from one machine to another over the Internet. FTP is used to upload Web pages to the host machine.

**Gopher:** A client/server application for indexing and retrieving information on the Internet. Gopher uses a menu-driven approach to finding information. With the growth of the Web, Gopher is falling into disuse.

**Telnet:** An application which allows remote logon to another network.

**Usenet:** A worldwide system of discussion groups.

**Web:** World Wide Web. This is the portion of the Internet which consists of networks whose web servers are linked and which serve up HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) pages. Typically the output from a web server is displayed in a browser such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator.

For the technically oriented, the Internet services are documented in Request for Comment (RFC) documents, which are indexed for you at the following site: <http://www.faqs.org/rfcs>. SMTP, for example, is documented in RFC 821.

### **Theme Scriptures**

- ◆ **Genesis 11:1-9**
- ◆ **Acts 2:1-13**

### **Questions to Discuss**

- ◆ **What was the motivation in Genesis for the tower builders? What were the results of their use of technology?**
- ◆ **In what sense does the coming of the Holy Spirit, recorded in Acts 2, begin to reverse the effects of the Tower of Babel?**
- ◆ **How do these two passages speak to the Church's use of technology to advance the cause of Christ in the world?**
- ◆ **How does your church use technological advances to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ now: use of amplifier in worship, electronic keyboard, video and/or audio tapes of worship, Web site, telephone ministry, other?**

## **Your Church on the Web**

Christian efforts on the Web can be divided into **three broad categories:**

### **1) Parachurch efforts (including publishers and educational institutions)**

American Bible Society	<a href="http://www.americanbible.org">www.americanbible.org</a>
International Bible Society	<a href="http://www.gospelcom.net/ibs">www.gospelcom.net/ibs</a>
The Navigators	<a href="http://www.gospelcom.net/navs">www.gospelcom.net/navs</a>
InterVarsity	<a href="http://www.gospelcom.net/iv">www.gospelcom.net/iv</a>
Campus Crusade for Christ	<a href="http://www.ccci.org">www.ccci.org</a>
Billy Graham	<a href="http://www.billygraham.org">www.billygraham.org</a>

### **2) Individual efforts**

ChristChat Network	<a href="http://www.serve.com/larryi/christchat.html">www.serve.com/larryi/christchat.html</a>
The Text This Week	<a href="http://www.textweek.com">www.textweek.com</a>

### **3) Church efforts (including denominational sites)**

Seaview Baptist Church Linwood, NJ	<a href="http://www.seaviewbaptist.com">www.seaviewbaptist.com</a>
Metropolitan Baptist Church Washington, D.C.	<a href="http://www.metropolitanbaptist.org">www.metropolitanbaptist.org</a>
ABC of Michigan	<a href="http://www.abc-mi.org">www.abc-mi.org</a>
National Ministries	<a href="http://www.nationalministries.org">www.nationalministries.org</a>

**In order to have an effective Web site for your church, you should be able to answer the following 7 questions:**

- ◆ Whom are we trying to reach? Who is the target audience?
- ◆ What will be the source of the content for our church's site?
- ◆ Who will maintain the site, and how often will the material be refreshed?
- ◆ How might we measure the impact of our site? By e-mail responses, requests for more information, increased attendance, decisions for Christ?
- ◆ How will we promote the site after it is developed?
- ◆ How will we follow up on contacts from our Web site? Who in the church will be responsible for responding to e-mail, form queries, or telephone inquiries?
- ◆ What time and money resources are available for the church's Web efforts?

### **Theme Scriptures**

- ◆ **Mark 10:35-45**
- ◆ **I Corinthians 1:17 2:16**
- ◆ **Acts 17:16-34**

### **Questions to Discuss**

- ◆ **If in our evangelism efforts we are determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Corinthians 2:2), how may we use technology to communicate the message of the Cross?**
- ◆ **If God overturns all human evaluations about what is true, important, or successful, how should this guide *our* use of technology to proclaim the Gospel?**
- ◆ **How would you and your church answer the seven questions on Web planning listed above?**

## **How Can We Get Started?**

First, be sure that you can answer some, if not all, of the **seven questions** listed in the previous section! If you have done that, then you know what kind of budget you have to work with, who your target audience will be, and who is going to maintain and develop your site.

There are several options for developing a Web site for your church. They can be divided into **low (or no) cost** and **expensive** options.

### **Low cost options**

**ForMinistry.com (formerly Houses of Worship )** [www.forministry.com](http://www.forministry.com)  
Equipping the Church Online for Ministry  
American Bible Society  
1865 Broadway  
New York, NY 10023-7505  
Toll-Free Phone: 1-800-439-0492  
Email: [PartnerServices@forMinistry.com](mailto:PartnerServices@forMinistry.com)

**American Baptist Churches, USA** [www.abc-usa.org](http://www.abc-usa.org)  
David Chandler, Communications  
PO Box 851  
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851  
Toll-Free Phone: 1-800-222-3872 ext. 2216  
[david.chandler@abc-usa.org](mailto:david.chandler@abc-usa.org) -or- [webmaster@abc-usa.org](mailto:webmaster@abc-usa.org)

**Comment:** American Baptist churches may obtain a free, small Web site (size no more than 25K bytes) hosted as a branch of the American Baptist site. If you already have a site, you are urged to provide its URL (Uniform Resource Locator) to the Communications office so that a link can be created to your site.

### **Online Services and Internet Service Providers**

With subscriptions to online services such as America Online, Prodigy Internet, and Erols, for example, comes the right to develop free, small Web sites (usually between 1 and 2 MB in size). In most churches at least one member, or the church office, has such a subscription, and many are not using this feature of their membership. These free Web sites, although limited, can provide a low-cost start for a church.

## **Costlier options**

### **Web Provider**

To get a site which can run Common Gateway Interface (CGI) scripts that respond to custom forms filled out by your visitors, for example, or to engage in e-commerce over the Internet, you need to pay a Web provider to host your site. Magazines devoted to Web topics, such as *WEBTechniques*, contain numerous advertisements for Web hosting services in each issue.

### **Some examples include:**

Interland Web Hosting	www.interland.net	from \$19.95/month
IMC Online	www.imconline.net	from \$24.95/month
Erols	www.erols.com	from \$30.00/month

### **Registering a domain name**

If you use a free service, the URL of your church will be something like:

**www.myhost.net/~mychurch/**

If you wish to have a name which advertises your church name, instead of the Web host's name, (**for example: www.mychurch.org**), you need to register a domain name. In recent years INTERNIC has been responsible for registering domain names (although this responsibility is soon to be distributed).

**Your first choice for a domain name may not be available.** A quick check indicates that the following names are already registered:

- www.firstbaptistchurch.org (.com or .net)
- www.churchofthevalley.org (.com or .net)
- www.bethanybaptist.org (.com or .net)
- www.jesuslovesme.org (.com or .net)

Just as an example, however, the following were still available (as of 2/8/2000):

- www.primeraiglesiabautista.com (.net but not .org)
- www.myministry.org (.com or .net)
- www.oldruggedcross.net (but not .com or .org)

**There is a charge of \$35 per year to register your domain name**, and you may register for a period of one to ten years.

To check on the availability of a name and to register, go to the following site: **www.networksolutions.com**. Your Web provider may charge an additional fee to enable you to use your domain name (virtual hosting).

If you are going to develop and maintain your site yourself, you will need access to **hardware** and **software** for building your site:

**To browse the Web** you need a computer with a connection to the Internet and a browser like Microsoft's Internet Explorer or Netscape's Navigator.

**To hear sound files** from the Web you need a sound card in your computer and speakers.

**To produce Web pages** you can use a product like Netscape's Composer, Microsoft's FrontPage, or Allaire's Homesite, to name a few. If you learn HTML, you can also hand code your Web pages in a text editor like Notepad.

**To produce your own graphics**, you need a graphics manipulation program like Adobe PhotoShop or Serif DrawPlus.

**To upload your files to the server**, you will most likely use an ftp client. Some Web page editors allow you to store the location on the server, your user id, and password for easy publishing. There are some ftp client applications with a graphical user interface (e.g., WS\_FTP), or you can work from the command line.

### Theme Scriptures

- ◆ **I Corinthians 9:15-23**
- ◆ **I Corinthians 15:50-58**
- ◆ **John 1:1-18**

### Questions to Discuss

- ◆ **If you have Internet access, take a tour of some of the sites referenced earlier in this document. How is the message and meaning of the Cross evident in each site?**
- ◆ **Electronic evangelism does not involve a face-to-face encounter with a flesh-and-blood human being. The Bible talks about the Word become Flesh in Jesus Christ. Not only did the Word become flesh in Christ, but His Word is to become embodied in our lives through our actions. Given the tendency to faceless anonymity on the Internet, how can we carry out evangelism through that medium which is faithful to the Word become flesh? How can we embody Christian truth using electronic media?**

## **Using the Web for Evangelism**

Often when a church develops a Web site, they use their site as a kind of electronic Yellow Pages advertisement, providing contact information with a list of programs and times and some pictures of people or buildings. Even those sites which contain a Guest Book to track visitors, may not provide any help for the visitor who wonders how to become a Christian.

### ***Cyberfaith: Gimme that online religion***

Abraham McLaughlin, Staff writer of *The Christian Science Monitor* (April 22, 1999)

( CHICAGO) The nation's church pews may be emptying, but the Internet is bursting with believers. Legions of cyber-congregants are changing the very nature of worship in America. Take the many thousands of people who gather daily in online forums like Microsoft Network's religion site. They tackle topics like "Can God Heal?" or human sexuality or praying about Kosovo.

It's a disparate, often cacophonous jumble. And there's the occasional mean-spirited attack. But more often what emerges are civilized, substantial discussions within faiths and between them - without priests, ministers, rites, or rituals.

Some observers say the arrival of online religion is as dramatic as when printing presses brought the written word to medieval Europe, elbowing aside stained-glass windows and other images as the primary focus of worship.

We can use our Web sites to invite people to faith in Jesus Christ. Each church will no doubt present the Good News with a different look and feel, but a church Web site which doesn't issue an invitation to draw closer to Christ is losing a wonderful evangelistic opportunity!

Some ways in which the Web is used for evangelistic purposes are listed here:

### ◆ **Engage seekers in extended e-mail correspondence about faith issues**

Sometimes it is a pastor who does this, but it could be any mature member of your congregation who is willing to be an Internet pen pal with a seeker who asks questions after visiting your site.

A recent article in the [Christian Science Monitor](#) ( *Cyberfaith: Gimme that online religion: 4/22/1999*) on religious use of the Internet noted that the Baltimore-based Project Genesis offers e-mail classes on everything from weekly Torah readings to Jewish ethics.

### ◆ **Post a plan of salvation and invite decisions for Christ**

This can be something as simple as posting the Four Spiritual Laws or Steps to Peace With God

(see: [www.theway.billygraham.org/steps1.asp](http://www.theway.billygraham.org/steps1.asp)) to something custom-written to express the faith and style of your congregation.

◆ **Hold online Bible studies**

Content and quizzes or discussion questions for Bible studies can be made available from your Web site. If you use material prepared by someone else, be sure you get written permission to use it! *If you use a Bulletin Board approach for discussion of a Bible passage, be sure that someone is designated to check it regularly for appropriateness of content.*

◆ **Offer sermons, Bible studies, or videos from the Web through the use of streaming media**

In order to do this, your Web provider must offer the software which serves up the media files. If you choose RealMedia, for example, the RealMedia server must be running on a host machine. Also, your visitors will need the hardware and software to be able to enjoy your audio or video clips. The RealPlayer software is available free of charge. Since these media files can become quite large, there is sometimes an extra charge for this service.

In order to turn sound clips from a tape recorder into RealAudio files, you need the encoding software (RealProducerG2) **available free of charge:**

[www.real.com/products/tools/authkit/ndex.html?src=toolsmain,tools\\_modules](http://www.real.com/products/tools/authkit/ndex.html?src=toolsmain,tools_modules)

InterVarsity makes use of streaming media. You can find a sample at:  
[www.gospelcom.net/iv/grad/fcsow/realaudio/ntwright3.html](http://www.gospelcom.net/iv/grad/fcsow/realaudio/ntwright3.html)

The Jesus Movie , the life of Jesus based on the Gospel of Luke, has been translated into many languages, and is available on the Web in streaming video: [www.harvestcfchurch.com](http://www.harvestcfchurch.com)

For information on this project go to:  
[www.jesusfilm.org/aboutus/faqs.html](http://www.jesusfilm.org/aboutus/faqs.html)

Some churches are serving up video of their worship service using Web cams and streaming video. Peachtree Presbyterian of Atlanta, Georgia is one church doing this: [www.peachtreepres.org](http://www.peachtreepres.org)

◆ **Develop a chat room aimed at reaching those who have not yet committed to Christ**

Some chat uses Internet Relay Chat (IRC) for chat in real time. Other chat rooms use a CGI routine which appends the comments to a file. To see the latest comments, visitors to the chat room must click a refresh

button periodically. In either case, if you want to be able to offer this from your church's Web site, your Web provider must offer the necessary software, and **you must have people to staff the room** during the hours you have posted its availability. Those staffing a religious chat room should be good listeners. The following site has links to many different chat rooms: [www.serve.com/larryi/christchat.html](http://www.serve.com/larryi/christchat.html)

You can register with the Global Christian Network site to obtain the right to set up chat on your church's Web site using their chat server. Go to: [www.gcnhome.com](http://www.gcnhome.com).

### **Theme Scriptures**

- ◆ **I Corinthians 15**
- ◆ **Mark 10:17-22**
- ◆ **John 3:1-21**

### **Questions to Discuss**

**Imagine a visitor to your Web site asking: How do I become a Christian? How would you answer that question using the Web?**

## **Helpful Links**

### **Bible Gateway**

You can create your own links to the Bible Gateway, which has Scriptures online in German, Swedish, Latin, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Tagalog, Norwegian, and English. In English they have made available the following translations:

- ◆ **New International Version**
- ◆ **Revised Standard Version**

- ◆ **New American Standard Version**
- ◆ **King James Version**
- ◆ **Darby**
- ◆ **Young's Literal Translation**
- ◆ **World English**

Consider the following HTML code on a Web page from your church:

```
<a href= http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?John+3:16 >John 3:16</a> says that  
God  
loved the world so much that He gave His only Son...
```

The following line would be produced in a browser:

**John 3:16** says that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son...

where clicking on the underlined John 3:16 would take the visitor to that passage at the Bible Gateway.

To get a similar result in Spanish, you would put the following code in your page:

```
<a  
href= http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?language=Español&passage=Juan+3:16 >J  
uan 3:16</a> dice ...
```

With the proper coding in your pages, your visitors could even search by key word for Bible texts. For more details on how to link to the Scriptures in this way, point your browser to: [bible.gospelcom.net/bg/howto.html](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bg/howto.html)

## Maps

You can also provide maps on your church's Web site. You can link to the **Tiger Map Server** run by the Census Bureau and produce maps of different scale, which could be used to give visitors to your site an idea of where your church is located. To find out more about this, point your browser to: [tiger.census.gov/faq.html](http://tiger.census.gov/faq.html)

Many different controls are possible with the maps from Tiger, however the site is sometimes very busy, and results can be slow. See: [tiger.census.gov/instruct.html](http://tiger.census.gov/instruct.html)

**MapQuest** also offers some free mapping. Visit their site at [www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com). Maps to your church location from different directions can be quite helpful to visitors who are considering worshipping with you. You can register to use either MapFree or LinkFree, depending upon whether you want to display static maps or produce maps dynamically.

### **Brigada**

Brigada offers a guide for doing Web evangelism. You can download it by going to the following location: [www.brigada.org/today/articles/web-evangelism.html](http://www.brigada.org/today/articles/web-evangelism.html)

### **e-vangelism.com**

[www.e-vangelism.com](http://www.e-vangelism.com) is a site devoted to promoting the use of the Internet as a tool for evangelism. It is maintained by Andrew Careaga, author of [E-vangelism: Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace](#).

At this site Careaga says:

**As the first medium that is both mass and personal, the Internet promises to revolutionize Christian outreach. With e-vangelism.com, we hope to help raise the church's awareness of this powerful new evangelistic tool and to bring together existing Internet resources to equip the online saints for the global harvest.**

Point your browser to: [www.e-vangelism.com](http://www.e-vangelism.com)

While there, be sure to visit their helpful Links page: [www.e-vangelism.com/links](http://www.e-vangelism.com/links)

### **AmazingGrace.com**

AmazingGrace.com is another site with many resources for online evangelism.  
Communicating the Gospel of Christ Via the Internet

They say:

**This site is dedicated to helping believers and churches take an active role in fulfilling the Great Commission by providing training and resource materials that will equip them to use the interactive tools of the Internet to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.**

Point your browser to: [www.amazinggrace.com/](http://www.amazinggrace.com/)

### **National Ministries**

Thomas Johnson, Associate Director of New Church Planting, posts helpful resources for church planters, many of which would be of help to any church.

Point your browser to:

[www.nationalministries.org/mission/partners\\_programs.cfm](http://www.nationalministries.org/mission/partners_programs.cfm) and click the New Church Planting link.

You may also call National Ministries office of Information Services for suggestions:

1-800-222-3872 ext. 2494

Prepared by National Ministries' Office of Information Services  
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or send e-mail to: [david.cushman@abc-usa.org](mailto:david.cushman@abc-usa.org)