

# Something to Talk About – A conversation guide for church leaders

By Bob Osborne, EFCA West  
Director of Church Leadership and Organizational Development  
([bob.osborne@efca.org](mailto:bob.osborne@efca.org))

December 1, 2015

## What's On Our Website?

*Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.*

*Prior articles can be found at [www.efcawest.org](http://www.efcawest.org). Click on the Church Leadership tab to get to the archive.*

For at least a decade, I paid virtually no attention to my home church's Website. I would access it from time to time to get some informational tidbit or to listen to a sermon I missed, but I paid no real attention to it. Another way to say this is that while I looked at our Website, I didn't actually notice anything about it. I was looking, but not seeing. The reason is simple – it's because I am an insider, and I know what I am looking for.

In my work with EFCA West, I find myself looking at some church's Website most every day. While I pay scant attention to my church's site, you can bet that I notice all kinds of details about your site. And, far more often than not, the truth is that I usually don't like your Website very much. I'm not always happy with my own, either.

If I don't like your Website much, it's likely that others don't like it, too. And, in this highly digitized age in which we live and minister, what people think and feel about our Website is something to talk about.

One of the fundamental issues to consider regarding a church Website is who the intended viewers are. Most church leaders I know indicate that their Website is targeted to insiders (members and regular attenders looking for something specific) as well as potential guests (those unfamiliar with the church or trying to figure out what you are all about). When I look at your church's Webpage, it's more often than not through the eyes of a potential guest.

Here are some of the things that frustrate me as an outsider taking a first look at a church through their Webpage.

- I can't easily find your location or service times.
- Photos that are obviously "off the shelf" and don't illustrate anything about the actual church.

- The pastor is the “star” of the show, usually indicated by his prominent photo and glowing bio on the opening page. I know I’m “churched,” but I still like the pastor/staff information at least one click away.
- Scrolling photos that don’t allow me to pause them or go backwards to stay on the one I want to look at.
- Prominent and lengthy doctrinal statements and treatises. While I love that we are committed to proper doctrine, nothing communicates to me that “we are trying to keep outsiders out” any more than lots of doctrine or rules prominently displayed on the Website. I won’t want to come if I don’t think that I’ll be accepted.
- In contrast to the above, it’s also frustrating to have nothing on the Website that indicates that what the church is about – it’s values and mission. These need to be communicated in a winsome way.
- A link to the “most recent” sermon that takes me to a sermon three or four weeks ago (sometimes more!). There hasn’t been a sermon for the past month?
- Other stale information listed on the calendar or as coming events.

Leaders, let’s take a moment to look, to actually see, the details of your church’s Website. Don’t do this by yourself – do it as a group. Talk about it together. Here are some questions that you might use stimulate the conversation.

- Who is the primary target audience(s) for our Website?
- Does the information that first appears on the Webpage reach out to the target audience?
- Have an unchurched friend or acquaintance look at your Webpage. Ask them what they see, how they feel about it, and whether they can navigate to get information they might want should they decide to attend services there at some time.
- Ask church members of various levels of computing skills for their thoughts about the Website. How often is it used? Do they find it useful? Is it easy to navigate? Can they find what they are looking for?
- Does our Website attract viewers by drawing them in or does it repel them by putting up barriers (whether by content or by navigation)?
- What are the core essentials we believe our Website should contain?
- Might we have funds somewhere (in the budget? Special gift?) for hiring a trained consultant to assess our Website and make recommendations (or implement) useful updates?

It’s virtually impossible to design a Website that everyone, whether a guest or long-tenured member, will love. Nonetheless, if we are going to put our Website out there, we may as well do as good a job of representing our Savior and church as we can. What’s on your Website?

That’s something to talk about.

*Let us know how your conversation goes. Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at [bob.osborne@efca.org](mailto:bob.osborne@efca.org).*