

# Promoting your church in a digital world

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# THE BIG PICTURE

In an online world, our digital presence helps us to share our faith and activities with people who might not otherwise connect with the Christian message. It enables us to meet people where they are, rather than expecting them to come to us.

This means that social media and websites are not just virtual noticeboards, they are places which can help people grow in faith, places where we can reach the curious and places where we can share opportunities.

On average, new visitors to a church will have visited the website six or seven times first and will usually have also looked at social media presence.





# SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

Who would you like to reach and why? Where do they spend time online? What do you want people to do after seeing a post or reading a webpage? Examples:

- Maybe you want more people to visit your website – you could include a web link in each Facebook post.
- If you want to get people signed up for your email newsletter – give them some idea of the content, how often will they receive emails etc.
- Invite people to services and events – use welcoming language, avoid church jargon, answer any questions you think they may have.
- Promote a new children's group – use local community Facebook groups to reach families.

**What can we manage to run effectively?**

- Think about time and capacity – only set up as many digital channels as you can manage. You can always add more channels later.
- Ideally you want at least two admins with access to all your digital accounts – this means that you can share the work and aids recovery if one of you loses access for whatever reason.

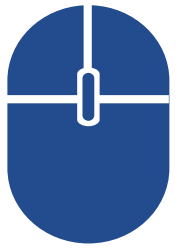
**What are the priorities of your church?**

- If you have a mission plan in place then think about how you can use your website and social media to reflect your church's priorities.
- Is your church working towards an Eco Church Award? Perhaps you have a strong calling to social action or youth work?

**What is your church like?**

- Reflect your church and what it does. Be real - don't present a vision of your church that visitors won't recognise when they step through the door.

# WEBSITES



## Who is the content for on a church website?

As a rough guide around 80% of content is for people thinking of visiting for the first time and those curious about church and faith; and 20% for existing congregation (who are at church, picking up newsletters, magazines, hearing sermons etc)

## User experience

- You have seconds from visitors clicking the link on Google and landing on your home page to make an impression. Around 70% of visitors will never get past the homepage and will bounce straight back to their Google search so think carefully about what you put on it.
- Limit the top menu to 5/6 key choices which should fit on one line. Each top menu can have 3/4 subsections as drop downs.

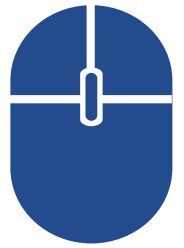
## New to church

Visiting a church for the first time can be a scary step, church websites can help to calm fears by providing practical information to break down barriers. You might want to include:

- directions (postcode facility, Google Maps plug in)
- information about parking, cycle racks and public transport links
- what to expect on arrival
- duration of service
- service style
- dress code
- A who's who page with photos so that people can put a face to a name and recognise people when they walk in the door

Ask “what might confuse new visitors to our church and how can we help with that upfront?”

# WEBSITES (CONT.)



## Top tips

- Be mobile friendly - in the church and charity sector around 60% of visitors will be using mobile devices to view the website, so design it with them in mind and make sure it displays well.
- Think about the key sections of the website for your church - for example if most enquiries about baptisms, marriages and funerals come via the website it might be important to have 'Life Events' as a top menu choice.
- Keep your website up to date. Review content every six months, decide who is the most appropriate person to review each section (e.g. Youth Worker reviews children and youth)

## Website builders

There are a wide range of website builders available depending on budget and experience. WordPress is a popular easy to use option.

<https://wordpress.com/>

It is recommended that churches use paid plans as these remove all adverts and therefore the risk of promoting items and services not in line with Methodist church values (for example online gambling)

## Go further

Many website builders come with analytics which allow you to see which pages are most popular and how people are using your website. You can also add Google Analytics which will give you lots more detail.

## How we see the website at Putnoe Heights

Our website is home to information for church members but its primary purpose is to introduce people to our church.



# FACEBOOK - GETTING STARTED

## Pages or groups?

Facebook can be complicated to get to grips with. You have three options:

- Facebook page – only admins can post, a page is the best place to post updates and news to your followers.
- Public group – only members can post but anyone on or off Facebook can see who's in the group and what they post.
- Private group - only members can post and see who's in the group and what they post.

It might be helpful to think of a Facebook page as a place to engage with the public and groups as a place for discussion. Groups can be linked to pages and some churches find the combination of a page and a private group helpful. Examples include prayer requests or groups for people involved in specific ministry areas such as youth work.

## Top tips

- Share content from other local churches, charities and organisations that you work with or that hire your rooms.
- Ask your church members like, share and comment on posts. At Putnoe Heights we found that on average just 20 people saw each post on our Facebook page but when posts are shared and liked the reach jumps to 200-300.

## Go further

Facebook Insights will help you see which posts are resonating with your audience.

## How we use Facebook at Putnoe Heights

Facebook is where we share posts that reflect all aspects of our church life and mission. It is for church members, the local community, hirers and anyone interested in finding out more about our church or the Christian faith.



# FACEBOOK - STOP THE SCROLL

Top tips to get people to engage with your content

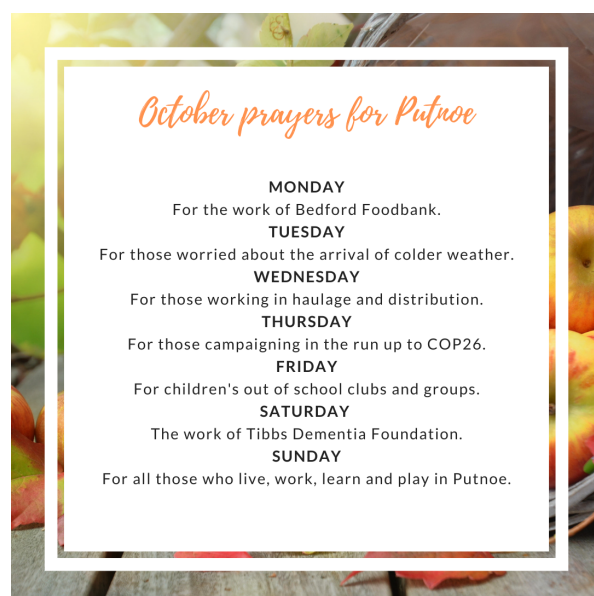
## Media rich

Use videos, photographs and graphics. Avoid using screenshots from PDFs and Word documents if at all possible. If you need to use a screenshot from Word, make sure you take it in print preview mode to avoid reproducing any formatting, spelling or grammar marks.



## Design

Canva is an excellent free design tool – it comes with lots of templates, graphics and images. You can also upload your own photos. Canva allows you to create graphics that look professional and, most importantly of all, display at the right size for social media posts – this is important as it means visitors to your Facebook page will see the whole image at once and not lose any details. Canva can also help make sure that all your publicity has a consistent look (e.g. A4 posters for printing) so people can tell at a glance when content comes from you.  
([canva.com](https://www.canva.com))



Two examples of designs created in Canva for use on the Putnoe Heights Church Facebook page.

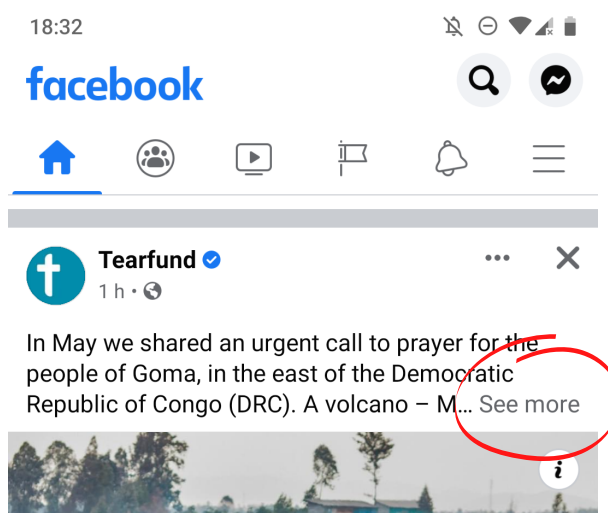




# FACEBOOK - STOP THE SCROLL (CONT.)

## Keep it snappy

Keep accompanying text short – you want to lose as little as possible after the 'see more' line as most people won't click through.



If you need more text than this, you can think about doing three things:

- use your first sentence as a summary so that your readers get the most important point - in the example above it's made clear what this post is about and what action Tearfund would like us to take.
- use your first sentence as a headline or teaser to encourage readers to click through.
- use an image which includes some of the hidden information - this might be particularly useful when advertising events.

## Emojis

Use sparingly – a maximum of one or two at the end of your text. This follows guidance from the RNIB and keeps your content accessible for people using screen readers.

## Social media is social!

Ask questions in your posts, respond to comments and messages, get to know your audience.

# OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA

INSTAGRAM



## Visual

Instagram is a great place to engage with people but you need to be sure that you have a supply of photos and graphics to keep it up to date.

## Themed

Churches might find it most effective to focus on a particular area of their work or ministry.

## Hashtags

Think of these as a virtual filing system, users search for tags that they are interested in – examples might include #prayer #bible #trychurch or your location.

## How we use Instagram at Putnoe Heights

Instagram is where we focus on Eco Church. We are aiming to talk to people who are interested in environmental issues but may have little or no experience of church.

TWITTER



Twitter can be a difficult environment in which to make your voice heard and its value for local churches in terms of promoting events and groups may not be great enough to justify the time commitment. It can however be a useful tool for both networking and evangelism.

## How we use Twitter at Putnoe Heights

Twitter is where we engage with other community groups, churches & charities. It is about building stronger links and highlighting the work of organisations we support.

WHATSAPP



Church uses of WhatsApp might include prayer requests, small groups for prayer and support, and allowing specific groups to stay in touch with each other.

# E-NEWSLETTERS



MailChimp is a popular way of managing e-newsletters and other emails. It's free (although you can pay for additional features and larger sized contact lists)

[mailchimp.com](https://mailchimp.com)

## MailChimp features that churches might find helpful

**GDPR compliant** – takes the worry out of making sure you've bcc'd!

**Tagging** – create different lists – e.g. church members, people who want to receive your weekly newsletter, people who just want to hear about Messy Church and so on. All your mailings can then be managed in one place. Email addresses can be linked to multiple lists.

**Design** – straightforward design features and templates to make mailings look attractive and content easy to find

**Uploads** – you can upload photos, graphics, PDFs for distribution etc

## Top tips

- Put the most important item at the top.
- If your newsletter has lots of items then provide a one or two sentence summary of what readers will find in the email first.
- Break up the text with images. You can also use section dividers to do this.
- Use 'click here' and 'read more' buttons to send people to relevant webpages or downloads.

## Go further

MailChimp's reporting allows you to see how many people are opening your emails and which links in them are most popular.



**mailchimp**



# FURTHER RESOURCES

[www.yorkshirenemethodist.org/digital-resources/](http://www.yorkshirenemethodist.org/digital-resources/) - lots of brilliant how to guides, information and resource packs

**Facebook Groups** - @NetworkofMethodistCommunicators and @churchcommscollectiveuk are good groups to join, you can ask questions, get a second opinion on your designs or wording and learn about new digital developments.

**So Everyone Can Hear: Communicating Church In A Digital Culture** - book by Mark Crosby (published by SPCK) that often feels aimed at larger sized churches but there are some useful insights into why churches need to communicate well. Particularly recommended for anyone interested in strategy and how digital communications might fit into the big picture for their church.

**Sharing Faith Using Social Media** - really useful pamphlet length book by Bryony Taylor (published by Grove Books) for anyone interested in exploring evangelism and social media.

**Christian Publishing and Outreach (CPO)** - find CPO's free digital advice toolkit at [www.cpodigital.org/toolkit](http://www.cpodigital.org/toolkit) and their digital resource shop at [www.cpo.org.uk/Digital](http://www.cpo.org.uk/Digital)