

technology outreach **tools**



Online donations one of the most effective ways to reach out

by Lauren Hunter

In today's technology-laden environment, churches have to think of innovative ways to reach people with the Gospel message. Considering that more than 80 percent of people in the world are online (Harris Interactive), the Internet is one of the most effective outreach tools. Churches should view the Internet as a resource, even a tool to use for various aspects of ministry.

Reaching Out Through Giving

In February 2008, Central Church of the Nazarene (www.centralchurch.tv) decided to accept online donations. The church wanted to meet people where they were at, with the tools they were accustomed to. Since people are doing more and more of their banking and business transactions online, the church hoped it would encourage people to become more consistent in their giving.

"These days, people are accustomed to being able to take care of financial business online. Many pay all their bills online. Some no longer carry a checkbook. We needed to make it easy for those people to give to the church," says Christina Knight, treasurer for Central Church. It was an easy decision to begin accepting donations online."

Often churches are hesitant to start accepting online donations for a number of reasons. Because there are some fees involved, church don't receive the full amount given. Typical fees run between one to three percent per transaction, depending on what payment processor and giving engine provider is used. However, many churches feel the transaction fees are well worth it because of the increase in giving that occurs when online donations are made available. In most cases, giving increases because it is easier and always available, 24/7.

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"In the past year since implementing online giving, we have received 15 percent of our total donations online. And that is a percentage I expect to continue to grow," says Knight. Some churches are scared away from online giving because they incorrectly think that getting it set up will be difficult and complicated. However, companies like ServiceU help churches through the process.

For Central Church, "Setting up the online giving forms and getting it started was simple. Between online tutorials and customer support, ServiceU made the whole process very streamlined," comments Knight.



Central Church of The Nazarene accepts online donations.

Often, even when churches offer online donations from the Web site, church attendees might still not know about it. Like anything, the way in which an organization communicates about a new offering is very important to its overall success.

“We have promoted online giving on our Web site, in e-newsletters, and in our Sunday morning bulletins. Response was a little slow at first and has gradually gathered momentum. I think once people try it they find out how easy it is. They like that they can set up recurring contributions every week or month rather than having to enter them each time. It was particularly nice for people trying to make last minute contributions for tax purposes at the end of the calendar year. They could make their donation regardless of what time the office closed on December 31st.”

Knicht also feels that providing online donations has helped some people get involved in giving that were not giving previously.

Reaching Out Through Events

Often churches can leverage their ministry event offerings by using technology to reach people beyond just their church congregation. Depending on the size of the church, there could be a few events per month or a few hundred events per month.

EventU is an online calendaring application by ServiceU that allows churches to organize their calendars and make them public, or private or both so that people can go online and search via a traditional calendar layout, list view or drop down menu. Churches can set up multiple calendars and have a view for “all church events” and also offer ministry-specific calendars for women’s ministries, men’s ministries, children’s ministries, etc. EventU can be integrated into a church’s Web site and provide great ways to offer events, activities, and services for people beyond just your own church.

To take it a step further, EventU and TransactU can be linked together for the online calendar, registrations and payments. For example, when someone views a calendar listing for Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), they can fill out an online registra-

An advertisement for PowerChurch Plus software. It features a laptop with the software interface on the screen. The text on the laptop screen reads "POWERCHURCH PLUS". Below the laptop, the text reads "Church Management Made Easy". Further down, it says "For over 20 years, PowerChurch Software has been making powerful, affordable, and user friendly church management software." Below that, it lists "Membership • Contributions • Accounting" and "Event Scheduling • And more in one complete package!". At the bottom, the logo "POWERCHURCH PLUS" is displayed, along with the phone number "800-486-1800" and the website "www.powerchurch.com".

Reader Service No. 33

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tion form and even pay online using a credit or debit card on the spot.

“Ministry-driven churches offer numerous events to reach people. Having an online tool to manage these events and to accept online registrations and payments makes it incredibly easy for church members and the general public to get involved,” says Brian Robison, customer support manager for ServiceU. “These tools are crucial to the success of their overall ministry outreach because they help the church reach people and keep their data organized. By reducing the manpower hours involved in managing events, the church staff and volunteers can focus more of their attention on their outreach programs and developing relationships.”

Reaching Out to the Public

For Friends Church (www.ylfc.org) in Yorba Linda, Calif., Information Manager Christy Moore needed a streamlined way to register people for events online. Each year, the church hosts a publically promoted 5K/10K run to raise funds for their Global Freedom Movement. In addition, they offer Pilates classes, Mother of Preschoolers Program and a summer children’s program. All these events and programs draw large numbers of people from the community who don’t attend the church.

“Using EventU for our outreach events ensures that we get complete and accurate information on those that we hope to enfold into the church. Once we have that information, we can use it for follow-up after the event as well as to promote future events that might be relevant to them,” Moore states.

“One of the key things we do on all of our forms is to add a required field entitled ‘Church You Attend.’ This allows us to track who is a part of our church, who is participating in an event that attends another church and who does



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walk with Christ. By keeping track of who is registered for events, the church is able to achieve their goals.

Adds Moore, “The big win for us is when we see someone who has come in through something like Pilates with no church affiliation, then signed up to run in the 5K, and finally sign up for a study where they note Friends Church as their home church. You hope it’s just one more family that will become authentic Christ followers.”❖

Lauren Hunter is a freelance writer and owner of Lauren Hunter Public Relations, a communications firm dedicated to the faith-based technology market. For more information on how internet technology can improve your organization, contact Lauren at lauren@laurenhunter.net or visit www.laurenhunter.net. For ongoing discussions regarding church technology, visit her blog at www.ChurchTechToday.com.

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