***How to develop your church website***

Often on the wish-list for churches will be a new (or rebuilt) website. We’ve put together some basic considerations to help get the ball rolling.

**A Church Near You**

First things first: keep your free entry on www.achurchnearyou.com (ACNY) up-to-date, add a decent cover photo (preferably of people not just the building) and think about adding a few pages to highlight particular ministries: additional functionality will appear later in 2018. Thanks to a recent re-launch of ACNY, there can now be up to five editors, default administrator will be the incumbent (ACNY gets this info via Crockfords). To get started: find your church’s page and click ‘Edit this Church’ (bottom left).

**Social Media**

These are free to set up and use. You can add events, photos, stories, groups as well as connecting with the wider community. Users do need to have their own account/ profile and that can put some people off.

**Building/Replacing a website**

Anything more than ACNY will not be free: you will need to pay each year for at least hosting and probably the domain name (e.g. www.exampleparish.org.uk) too.

\* Build-it-yourself website tools (£50-100 annual for no-adverts)

\* WordPress.com

\* Blogger.com (not just for blogs: includes templates which work well for static pages)

\* Pay a website builder (£100-500/annual): lots of web firms available.

**Appearing on web searches**

• SEO: To improve the chances of Google (and other search engines) ranking your pages more highly in their results, the structure and accessibility of your website is vital. For SEO-specific advice, there is good clear guidance at: http://static.googleusercontent.com/media/www.google.com/en//webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf

• Google Cards: This is the box in the right hand corner that appears when someone searches for your church in Google. Churches will need to create a Google My Business listing (or get access to one, if it already exists). Visit the Google support page here for help with how to do this. Not claiming this card also leaves churches vulnerable to someone else doing it and providing incorrect information.

**Review your current site**

• Responsive: Since 2008, all sites should be ‘responsive’, resizing content to work well on smartphones and tablet devices. Sites which aren’t responsive will exclude 30-50% of potential traffic. Website templates which come with content management systems like WordPress or Joomla or Wix will all be responsive out of the box;

• Bottlenecking: Sites which require a single person to make updates via HTML / FTP are prohibitive as methods of communication and can suffer when people move on or aren’t available. A free CMS with multiple maintenance logins (like WordPress or Joomla) would mean many people would be able to update content at any time, reducing workloads and easing communication.

• Accessibility: Sites built with accessibility in mind will not only be better for users but will naturally perform better on search engines. Great free tool to audit your website here: http://wave.webaim.org, which includes advice on how to solve any issues your site may have;

• Ergonomics: Navigation and ‘grid’ (layout) should be consistent between pages. Changes in emphasis, layout, navigation and branding can disorient the user;

• Fonts: A minor point perhaps, but the only real rule we’d highlight is to ban Comic Sans. The issue with Comic Sans as a font >> http://www.comicsanscriminal.com – being unaware of the chequered history of the font can be a problem for credibility. There are great free fonts out there eg. https://fonts.google.com/;

• Images: Ideally use at least one quality image on each page. These include pictures of people, not just buildings or objects, but check you have permission from anyone depicted. There are free image banks if you don’t have pictures of your own yet, including LightStock; and the free diocesan images on our website image library.

• Architecture: A more advanced point perhaps, but websites that allow you to ‘tag’ your article/page content are more connected and future proof. Tagging is a fundamental to data architecture because it removes the hierarchical limitation of information, and enables sites to connect information laterally through topics. Read more about this

Our own diocesan website is built using the free WordPress.org engine, and is very friendly for those users who update the site and add/edit content, for all levels of expertise.