From My Desk to Your Inbox

The Digital Lane: Using Today's Technology to Shape Eternity
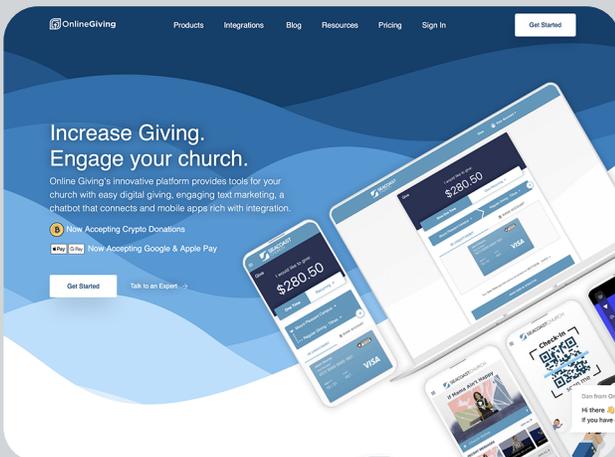
Is Your Church Website Giver-Friendly?

The Story of a Great Landing Page

From My Desk to Your Inbox

Did you know you have less than 10 seconds before someone leaves your website if you don't capture their attention? If this is the case, what can you do to communicate information and build a culture of generosity?

In this issue of the Stewardship Journal:

- **Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, asks the question, "Where are people today?"** and encourages us to be where the people are – online.

- If you only have 10 seconds to make an impression on those visiting your website, it must be set up correctly. **The Bonus Section, "Is Your Church Website Giver-Friendly?** will provide some much-needed direction.

- **The Story of a Great Landing Page** is the final post of this issue and will show examples of how you can design a site that improves your ability to effectively communicate the story you want members/ potential members to hear – and support.

Idea ... consider sharing some of the above information with your leadership - including your Finance Committee.

Did you miss a week? Find all the posts at: **https://stewardshipjournal.com/**.

For additional resources, visit: **LouisianaBaptists.org/Stewardship**.

I'm praying God will make us all better stewards of all that He's provided.
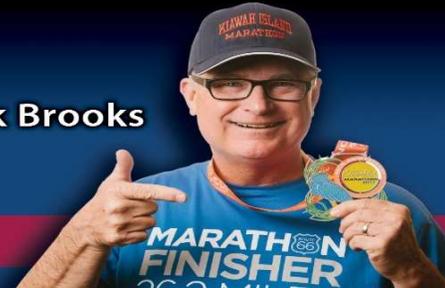
Keep Looking Up,

Dr. Steve Horn

The Digital Lane: Using Today's Technology to Shape Eternity

"And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." Luke 14:23

The above verse is from Jesus's teachings in The Parable of the Great Banquet. The master invited many guests, but few came. So, his servants went where the people were. Where are people today? Look around you the next time you are at Starbucks. Count how many people's heads are down looking at a screen. That's your answer. Technology is the modern-day highway and hedges where people are. This is why this post of the Coach is entitled *The Digital Lane: Using Today's Technology to Shape Eternity*.

Let me go back to my question: where are people today? Consider these findings from statista.com:

- As of January 2024, there were approximately 331 million internet users in the U.S.

- 239 million were social media users.

- As of the third quarter of 2022, over 90% of U.S. internet users accessed the net by mobile phone.[1.]

I could give you more data, but you get the point. So, as I continue this series on the lanes of focus to build and sustain a culture of generosity for your church, I will share about the Digital Lane. The Digital Lane is now more complex, so I will break this lane down into two Coaches. First, in this issue, I will deal with the basics of websites with an eye on online giving because, after all, I am The Stewardship Coach, and someone needs to think about the offering! Next week I'll deal with social media, a key part of your Digital Lane. The following is my textbook of church website basics. But first, you need to know that you have,

10 seconds or less to engage people who land on your church web page before they exit. If you want to communicate in this day and age, you need an online presence, and that starts with a great website. So, you have one chance to make an impression. What impression do your sites make? Let's dive into what I call …

Church Website Basics – Here are some basics you need to think about for your website.

It's home base. That is how you need to think of your website. It is not the only source of information, but it should be the key source of information. A website is a guest's first impression of your church. So, make it a good one. Your website is also your base for collecting digital offerings. **Websites and social media are today's Yellow Pages!** Before people ever enter your parking lot or watch your live stream, they first visit your website.

Think of your church website as two tracks. Your website must be designed for two target audiences: searchers and members. Most church websites are designed with members in mind rather than searchers. As such, they fail to connect with those who are looking for a church.

Tell your story! The Church has an amazing story that we too infrequently focus upon. Young donors want to know that their gift matters, so talk about what giving to your church accomplishes. Don't talk about what a great church you have. Talk about the great things your church does in Jesus' name.

Make sure your website is mobile-friendly. 90% of Americans have a smartphone! If your website is not accessible by smartphones or tablets, you are missing out on connecting with potential attendees and donors. If you don't know if your website is mobile-friendly, try accessing your church site on your smartphone and tablet.

Less is more. One final point is that with people giving you ten seconds or less of viewing before they leave your page, you had better clean up the mess. One of the church website's biggest mistakes is putting too much information on the page.

The importance of curb appeal - As a pastor, I once had an architect come inspect our buildings and give us his recommendation. He stated that our dated buildings did not communicate how up to date we were in our programming and interior facilities. In short, he recommended we update our curb appeal. Curb appeal is what gets people in the door. After that, it is up to you. Your website should have curb appeal. One way to ensure your site has good curb appeal is to keep it up to date. Out-dated information is one of the biggest mistakes I find on church websites.

Make the landing page of your online giving easy to use and impactful. COVID-19 taught us the importance of digital giving. I stress the importance of making giving quick and easy. The easier you make it for people to give, the more apt they are to give.

As I sat down to write this post, another passage came to mind. **"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" Romans 10:14**

So, pay attention to the crowd around you and see how many have their heads in their smart device. If we are to bring them into his "house," we first need them to hear our message. Like it or not, the Internet is the most traveled highway in our world. It's where the people are. So, today's "pulpit" is both physical and digital, which is why you must have a Digital Lane of strategy for telling your story *and* for giving to help support that story. That's one way to shape eternity!

Mark Brooks – The Stewardship Coach
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1. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1044012/us-digital-audience/#:~:text=United%20States%3A%20digital%20population%20January%202024&text=As%20of%20January%2020 24%2C%20there,million%20were%20social%20media%20users

Bonus Section

Is Your Church Website Giver-Friendly?

Here are some recommendations that can and will improve the success of your website. These recommendations can be implemented in your church whether you run 100 on a Sunday or 10,000.

First, let's learn from **Top Mistakes of Websites –** You want to do the opposite of what I list here.

- ✓ **Too much clutter.** This is the number one mistake I find on church sites. Less is better. Think Google!

- ✓ **Not mobile-friendly.** How does your site look on a cell phone? How easy is it to read and navigate?

- ✓ **It's all about the church, with little said to the person visiting the site.** Design your landing page for guests, not members.

- ✓ **It looks like a Sunday bulletin.** That might be great for your members, but it will not gain you visitors.

- ✓ **Saying too much.** This adds to the clutter. Think of brief, short statements and paragraphs.

- ✓ **Outdated stuff.** Your website needs to be a work in continual progress.

- ✓ **Failing to optimize pages for search engines.** If you are not on the first page of a search engine, it is doubtful that anyone will find your site to click on it. Pay attention to what is called Search Engine Optimization, or SEO for short.

- ✓ **Hiding the giving button.** If people must hunt and look for your giving page, it's unlikely that they will give.

When it comes to your giving page, here are some of my basic recommendations…

- ✓ Put your most important information at the top of the page.

- ✓ The page must be easy to understand and use.

- ✓ Show what you are doing to reinforce how important giving is.

- ✓ Think mobile. Take your smartphone and check out your site now to see how it looks.

- ✓ Change the format regularly.

- ✓ Provide multiple digital options for how people can give!

Work to drive people to the site!

And, if you want the best platform and systems, check us out at https://www.onlinegiving.org/.

The Story of a Great Landing Page

By Mark Brooks

Your church website is one of the key tools for your Digital Lane for building and sustaining a culture of generosity. The following post gives great examples and ideas of how to tell your story. It was reposted from https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/the-story-of-a-great-landing-page.

If you have ever visited the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals website, you know immediately what they are about: taking care of animals. Right on their home page, they show you pictures of sad-looking cats and dogs and then ask you to donate money to help these unfortunate animals. You'll find a similar use of pictures at nearly every non-profit site you visit. For instance, the non-profit Charity: Water shows a picture of a woman with a glass of clean water. The ASPCA and Charity: Water boldly ask you to contribute financially to support their work. They make it easy to figure out what they do and make it easy to give in support of what they do. Their landing pages tell their story and make their appeal.

What story does your landing page tell? Non-profit organizations know the value of a picture to tell their story. They know the power of a picture and use it to tell their story to gain gifts. I have found that a well-designed giving landing page can be the gateway to beginning a journey of generosity.

Sadly, most churches never give any thought to their landing pages. I believe there are two major reasons why. First, few have ever considered using their giving landing page to tell a story. That shouldn't be a surprise, as few churches understand the importance of connecting giving to the vision of their church. Here is a great post about how vision can increase generosity: https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/using-the-power-of-vision

I think the major reason churches don't personalize giving pages is that most don't feel they can build their own landing page story. For OnlineGiving.org church partners, our Custom Giving Pages make customizing your Giving Pages for special giving initiatives quick and easy. Our admin control panel allows our church partners to create and manage Custom Giving Pages for every giving season in a church's life.

Our Custom Giving Pages are designed to allow churches to create supplemental giving pages with designated funds and sub-funds. An example of a popular custom-giving page would be "Mission Trip Giving." Giving pages can have the same layout as the primary donation form. However, custom-giving pages allow church administrators full control over the page title, page labels, header text, payment types, and other features. Custom giving pages are designed to be used in addition to the primary donation form. Custom giving pages can be public (visible in the giving website navigation) or hidden (accessed via direct link only).

For years, I have advised church leaders to utilize special landing pages for particular types of offerings. I like to set up special landing pages for seasonal events like end-of-year appeals, Easter offerings, mission trip appeals, and other special offerings. A brief story with pictures can help potential donors see the value of their gift in making a difference for the Kingdom. One of my primary goals with any offering is to see new people begin their generosity journey at your church. While your regular donors are interested in a quick process, new donors need more information before they give. This is where the story behind your appeal can be a powerful tool to motivate people to give. You must get the first gift before moving donors to a lifetime of support. Your story can be the trigger that starts that lifetime of generosity.

THE STEWARDSHIP JOURNAL

Custom Giving Pages vs Custom Form:

A popular question we are often asked is the difference between a Custom Giving Page and a Custom Form. Custom Giving Pages are useful for scenarios where the church wants select funds to be displayed on a secondary donation form. Custom Forms are useful for collecting additional information, allowing the church administrator to organize sections for additional questions and input. While Custom Giving Pages and Custom Forms allow the church to accept payments/donations, we strongly advise always using a Custom Giving Page over a Custom Form for anything related to giving. Custom Giving Pages have the advantage of using the same layout as the primary donation form, which has been tailored (designed specifically) for streamlined giving.

If you want to see great giving landing pages, look at one of our client churches' sites, Northridge Church in upper New York State: https://www.northridgerochester.com/give.

To read more about the importance of your landing page, read this post: https://www.onlinegiving.org/support/design-your-giving-page-for-growth.

One last reason why I think most churches ignore this kind of advice is they think it will take massive amounts of time. However, you will find that we do most of the work for you. We have guides, videos, and other coaching to help personalize your landing pages quickly and easily. If you run into trouble, call us, and we will spring into action to help answer your questions and solve your problems. We lead the industry in customer service and support, which is one reason our turnover rate is so low. With the platform, tools, and help we give you, your story can and will motivate the financial support needed to carry out your mission.

Contact us today at (615) 206-4000 or at support@onlinegiving.org for a free demonstration of our customizable landing pages.