



# THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

## BUILDING A DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR YOUR CHURCH

Caroline Bletso, Press and Communications Officer, 22 April 2021

### Some notes:

- In 2019, before Covid 19 was on our radar, approximately 400 people attended the Good Friday Mass at St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham.
- Just one year later, 1,582 people attended virtually- an increase of nearly 400%
- Now, more people are slowly returning to church, and the numbers attending the St Chads' Good Friday Mass online this year were down to 245 and numbers returned to the pews. The demand for streaming is still there, but diminished as the door reopened.

Having our live streams on the website served a specific purpose- they made Mass accessible to parishioners who were unable to get to church.

The livestreams and the online communities still have that purpose of course, but we must remember that they are often simply replicating the services and groups in your parish, in most cases without any element of interactivity.

Just having a livestream on your website it is not a digital strategy.

### ***In March 2020, the share of Google searches for prayer surged to the highest level ever recorded***

One impact of the pandemic has been the increase in searches for prayer.

Your parishioners and your new prospects are still online- it is where many people live their daily lives. We can access people every day of the week, not just on Sundays.

Your digital strategy will help to ensure that you are out there, in the digital landscape, ready to help them.

Some simple steps to get a strategy underway:

#### **#1 Start with a team.**

Don't do this on your own! Recruit people with the skills to run a website, or the social media channels that you may be less familiar with?

If you don't have the right skillsets in your church teams, find some digital natives in your congregation, or even in your own family who can help.

Not having a digital presence is not an option.

#### **#2 Take stock**

What do you have now, and how good is it?



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Do you have a website? How good is it?

- What content do you have on there?
- Is it up to date?
- Does it work on a mobile phone?
- Does it load quickly?
- Can you read it?
- Does it LOOK like your church?
- Does your website have analytics linked to it? (If not, do it now! It's free!)

Just over half of website visitors are using their mobile phone or tablet.

Look at your social media profiles:

- What platforms are you on?
- Are they up to date?
- Are they regularly updated?
- Do you get lots of responses to your posts?
- What kind of posts are the most popular?
- Are they set to private? Open them up

### **#3 Know where you want to go**

Why are you here? What are your priorities as a church or group? Who do you most want to engage with your message?

This is the basis for your strategy. You cannot have a digital strategy in isolation.

If you don't have a church plan, this is key work for your group, before you do anything else.

### **#4 Understand your existing audience**

You need to think like the people you are trying to reach, anticipate their needs to help you to write your online content and point visitors to the information they really want.

Audience: people on the pews and/or visiting your website and social media pages.

Speak to your parishioners and all groups associated with your church. Create a focus group that represents a cross section of your congregation. Ask:

- Where they come from
- How did they hear about you
- Why they come to you
- What groups and activities do they like best
- What questions do they feel are still unanswered
- If they were going to invite someone to come to the church, what would they say
- How do they think that others perceive your community
- Can they find answers to the questions they have on your website
- Does it look like your church to them



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- Do they use your social media channels? Why? Why not?

Analytics

Can show you:

- Where visitors come from geographically as well as the referral sources
- What devices they use
- On which pages they spend the most time
- What their other interests are
- Demographic data, age and gender.

Does your online community reflect the physical community you see in church?

## #5 Personas

A way of planning your content for different key groups of people.

E.g. You are actively looking at an evangelisation strategy. You want to grow your congregation and help people take a step closer to God. Focus on the spiritually curious – they have an interest but would be out of their depth in a service. So your goal is for them to become known to you, to receive information from you. Think about the questions they might be asking, think about the barriers they face and look at your website from their perspective.

Can they easily find what they need?

Is your language clear to someone who is unfamiliar with church terminology?

Think about where they are most likely to be- Facebook, Insta, TikTok, Pinterest, Twitter all have different demographic profiles. Your messages need to be different on each platform.

As a group: consider who that person is. Their interests and motivations. Put together a persona to represent that person or group of people. Consider what their journey looks like.

Think about the short and long term goals for this persona- once they have read a blog, or watched a testimony, what can they do next? It may be that at the end of a testimony video, there is some information about an upcoming event, or an invitation to join a mailing list specifically for people in that place, so you can send them more relevant content until they are ready to come and meet you in person.

How does the journey continue from online to offline-. It's important that your website and your content creates realistic expectations of what happens next.

Pick out your top priorities for the kind of people you want to speak to: make persona profiles based on these and use them whenever you plan any content. Always consider who they are for, what goal you want to achieve, and what will happen next for the people who read/watch/attend.

So to help build your persona profiles, think about your key audiences – the ones you already have and the ones you want to increase.



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- Think about where they come from
- Think about their age, their personal situation
- Think about the demands on their lives and the questions that they may have
- Think about where they are on their spiritual journey. Are they:

- Non believers
- The spiritually curious
- People who have drifted away but want to return
- Believers
- Evangelisers

## **#6 Analysis**

Analyse at LEAST twice a year. Check your analytics, see what has changed. Was it what you expected? Are you hitting your goals? Use this information to improve what you do.