



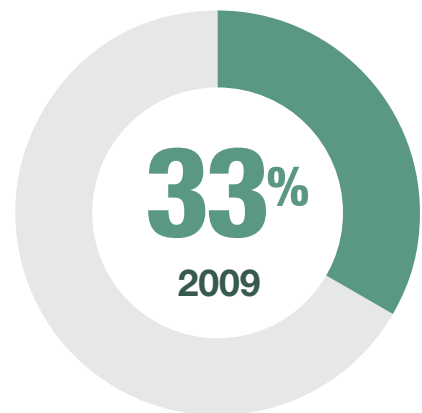
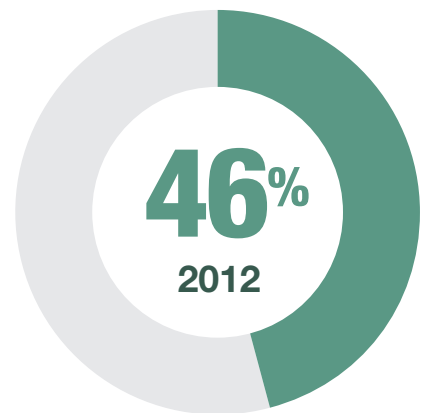
CHURCH CONTENT STRATEGY
WHITE PAPER



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The spectrum of the church landscape in North America is changing. With more churches closing their doors in rural communities, and population centers migrating towards urban environments, churches face new challenges of shrinking brand awareness. Denominations are shrinking, attention spans are limited, and young people, seemingly, are leaving local churches in droves. Put simply, many churches are not as visible as they once were.

Part of this challenge can be addressed by having an intelligent website. A church's online presence should embody who the congregation is, while organizing information for users in a logical, helpful, intuitive way. Studies show that as the internet as a medium takes center stage, more potential church members are making attendance decisions based on a church's web presence. Churches with an effective content strategy in place are more effective at engaging their community members, have increased discipleship rates, report increased staff unity and alignment, and, ultimately, build a more effective web presence. It is a process that can seem overwhelming at first. However, when churches invest in a content strategy, the results are immediate and far-reaching. This report is filled with case studies, examples, and analysis of churches who have invested in a content strategy.



Percentage of church attenders who said the church website was somewhat to very important in their decision to attend the church (Up 39% from 2009-2012).

STUDIES SHOW THAT AS THE INTERNET AS A MEDIUM TAKES

CENTER STAGE, MORE POTENTIAL CHURCH MEMBERS ARE MAKING

ATTENDANCE DECISIONS BASED ON A CHURCH'S WEB PRESENCE.

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A Case Study in
Clarity vs. Complexity:
University Christian
Church



THE CHURCH WEBSITE AS THE NEW FRONT DOOR

Any church with an online presence must answer the question, “How do we keep our website content fresh and relevant?” It vexes more church leaders than one might imagine, but it is a question that must be answered. In the 2012 State of the Online Congregation Survey, 46% of church attenders said the church website was somewhat to very important in their decision to attend their current church. This is up from 33% in 2009. Compounding this problem is the shifting demographics of the local church landscape. More people are moving toward urban centers, thus abandoning rural communities where smaller churches typically thrive. In 2011, the largest 10 percent of American churches accounted for over 50 percent of total church attendees¹. Additionally, 75 of the 100 Largest Churches in America are multisite².

ANY CHURCH WITH AN ONLINE PRESENCE MUST ANSWER THE QUESTION,

“HOW DO WE KEEP OUR WEBSITE CONTENT FRESH AND RELEVANT?”



Anne Rudig,
*Episcopal Church Director
of Communication*

Church leaders are learning the “if you build it, they will come” philosophy to church-planting is ineffective at best, delusional at worst. Denominations used to be able to build a church on the corner in Anytown, USA and watch as the faithful flocked in. Not so in our modern culture. Put plainly, more people in urban centers creates a need for more options.

Increasingly, people are finding their way into the pews and programs of a church community by first “kicking the tires” online. If users are unable to find the information, links, or content

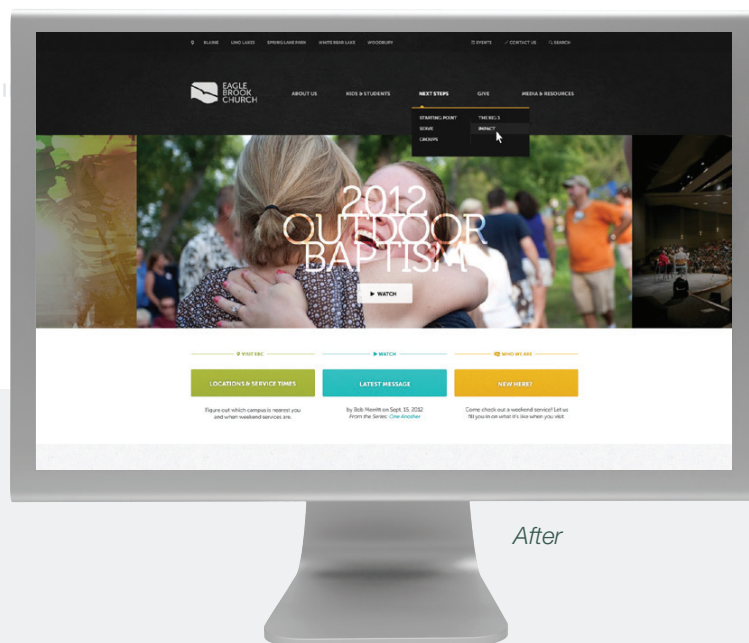
they are searching for, they are less likely to attend in-person. Churches large and small are realizing their website is the new front door to the organization. As Anne Rudig, Episcopal Church Director of Communication, puts it, “If a church cannot be Googled, it does not exist.”

According to Lifeway Research³, 78% of churches have a web site. 42% of these churches update their site once a month or less, while 7% update their site once a year. This lack of updating creates potential problems for users, church ministries, and church staff. For instance, if a current church member is not finding the information he or she needs on the website, they’re most likely calling the church office. This ties up valuable staff resources and time.

¹ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/seven-updated-trends-on-megachurches-in-america-81860/>

² Outreach Magazine, 100 Largest Churches list (2011 edition)

³ <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-Churches-divided-web-use>



After

Eagle Brook's newly redesigned website with Monk Development.



Before

A CASE STUDY IN CONTENT STRATEGY: EAGLE BROOK CHURCH

The content audit surfaced poor ratings for Eagle Brook's site. For instance, many of the navigational items assumed prior knowledge, leaving the user to guess what the item meant and how to best use it. The revised navigational items speak plainly to the users, assuming no prior knowledge of the church.

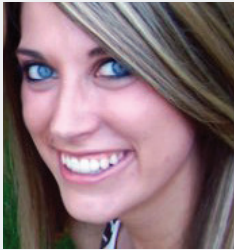
Eagle Brook's content strategy reduced the site from 186 navigational items down to just 54. There was also a 70% reduction in content, improving usability for the user by making content easier to find. There was increased clarity internally, easing the governance burden for the communications team.

A viable content strategy, put in place by church leadership or communications team, can help alleviate a majority of these headaches. Take Eagle Brook Church, for example. This Twin Cities-based church serves over 18,000 people each weekend between its five different locations. The church continues to grow with over 160 people on staff.

Melissa Therrien is the Communications Coordinator at Eagle Brook. Part of her responsibilities include keeping website content current. After joining the staff earlier this year, she described a major problem facing the church. "The website had just gotten to the point where there was so much on the site. So many people had gotten through the cracks and had approval to get [content] on the site. We lost sight of our goals." She continued, "we got off track with approvals and managing what's on the site and what gets on the site, how we're represented online."

Melissa worked with the team at Monk Development to complete a content audit. A content audit evaluates every page on a website based on a certain set of criteria. For instance, every ministry area at Eagle Brook was asked to evaluate each piece of content relating to their area based on the following questions:

- 1 Does this content accomplish our goal to reach people for Christ?
- 2 Does this help people who are wanting to find out about our church find what they need?
- 3 Does it accomplish either of these things?
- 4 Do we know who our audience is for this piece of content?
- 5 Do we know what our call to action is?



Melissa Therrien
Eagle Brook Communications
Coordinator

Thanks to this strategic content auditing process, Melissa and the rest of the staff have gained a missional perspective for their website. They know what they want to accomplish organizationally and have a solid plan to ensure their website contributes to those goals. Melissa shared, “[content auditing] can be overwhelming, but it’s worth it because the website can be a great tool to reach people for Christ. It’s worth putting the time in and not pushing it under the rug.”

**THANKS TO THIS STRATEGIC CONTENT AUDITING PROCESS,
MELISSA AND THE REST OF THE STAFF HAVE GAINED A MISSIONAL
PERSPECTIVE FOR THEIR WEBSITE.**

	A	B	C	D
	Page Title	Page URL	Comments/Notes (From Site Audit)	Comments/Notes (From Department)
1	Care & Life Events --	http://eaglebrookchurch.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=39538	Care Landing; Brief description of all resources and ministries available through Eagle Brook	
2	Prayer Requests	http://eaglebrookchurch.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=225769	Can we consolidate this somewhere else? Not much information here to dedicate an entire page to.	
3	Marriage & Family	http://eaglebrookchurch.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=231179	One sentence for an entire page doesn't seem necessary. If there are additional resources, we should wait to make this page live until we have information to give.	
4	Counseling (three pages)	http://eaglebrookchurch.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=183734	Can we consolidate to one Counseling page? Incorporate referrals and counseling links, clean up text; maybe make "do I need counseling?" and "how do I find a christian counselor?" downloadable PDFs instead of web pages.	
5	Weddings	http://www.eaglebrookchurch.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=39545	Consolidate wedding form into page or hide form from left nav.	
6	Hopelink Ministry	http://www.eaglebrookchurch.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=128443		
7	Immediate Care	http://www.eaglebrookchurch.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=39539		

An example from Eagle Brook Church's content audit, performed by Monk Development.



WHAT IS CONTENT STRATEGY?

Loosely defined as, “the practice of planning the content creation, delivery, and governance,” content strategy helps to create a system for assigning, producing, and maintaining content. This can include print materials such as bulletins, pamphlets, mailers, etc., but for our purposes we will be solely focusing on digital website content. Online content has a very short shelf-life in the church world. Once content (i.e., copy, videos, graphics, event calendars, etc.) has been created, it is often left unchecked for days, weeks, months—even years. The result is a church website that has ceased being useful for community members and staff alike.

None of this is intentional. Church website “ghost towns” emerge because those tasked with content creation and maintenance—typically a church communications director or team member—are simply overwhelmed by the task. Depending on church size, this one person or team can be responsible for up to 350+ pieces of original content. (That is not including social networks, either.)

There are ways to proactively take control of your website, primarily by building a content strategy. When website content is individually addressed on the following set of criteria, clarity emerges and results—real results—follow. Consider the following questions. These are addressed in a quantitative audit:

- 1 **READABLE CONTENT.** Is the content on your website easy-to-read? Is it designed properly for the web, e.g., bullet points, short paragraphs and sentences, appropriate images, etc.
- 2 **UNDERSTANDABLE CONTENT.** Can the majority of people who visit your website for the first time understand the meaning of your content? Do ministry names, different campuses, theological statements, etc. make sense to someone unfamiliar with your church or denomination?
- 3 **FINDABLE CONTENT.** If users cannot find the content they’re looking for, it is not going to be very useful. Content architecture simply means your website navigation is structured in a way that is intuitive, clear, and allows users to quickly find the information they need.
- 4 **ACTIONABLE CONTENT.** Once users find the content they need, do they know what the next step is? Is it clear from the content itself? Whether it’s signing up to volunteer, attend a service or event, or donate online, all content should contain a simple call-to-action.

**CHURCH WEBSITE “GHOST TOWNS” EMERGE BECAUSE THOSE
TASKED WITH CONTENT CREATION AND MAINTENANCE – ARE SIMPLY
OVERWHELMED BY THE TASK.**

The goal of content strategy is to take a look at your website through a fresh set of eyes. Events pass, people transition on and off staff, service times change, and ministries come and go. Stale content can fly below the radar, leading users to information that is no longer relevant or factual. Additionally, one of the biggest content challenges facing churches is including effective calls-to-action. When a user arrives on a webpage, they should easily be able to identify what they are supposed to do with the content. For example, if a church has a page dedicated to a building campaign, there should be a clear way for them to donate online for that campaign. Put simply, users should not be left guessing how to get involved or participate.

GIVE Give Now 90 Day Tithing Challenge Christmas Offering

WHY WE GIVE

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."
—MATTHEW 28:19

Not tithing yet?
TAKE THE 90 DAY CHALLENGE

Give to the
CHRISTMAS OFFERING

SIGN IN TO GIVE NOW **GIVE VIA *PayPal***

[Create a new account](#) or [sign in](#) to your existing account to give now. This User ID/Password will give you access to additional features of the site.

If you need any help with your giving account, please feel free to call our Finance Team at 864-226-6585 or e-mail us at finance@newspring.cc. We'll be happy to assist you!

Note: eCheck transactions cost NewSpring much less in fees compared to credit cards. If you set up an eCheck transaction for online giving, we can put more of each gift towards what it was intended for—making a difference. We appreciate your continual contributions and support of NewSpring Church. Your financial partnership with NewSpring Church is helping to advance the Gospel!

GIVE THROUGH PAY-PAL

NewSpring.cc has an effective, clear, helpful call to action on their “Give” page. A user can choose to sign into the database system for the church or give directly through Pay-Pal. There are also clear instructions on what to do if you have questions, including the theological basis for the church’s tithing policy.

TACKLING THE BEAST OF CONTENT STRATEGY: CLARITY VS. COMPLEXITY

Nestled on the picturesque Texas Christian University (TCU) campus in Ft. Worth, TX, University Christian Church (UCC) draws from a rich heritage and proud tradition. However, the staff at UCC felt like they were missing out on opportunities to serve the student population of TCU. Part of this was due to an ineffective website. With many students seeking information online, the staff felt the UCC site did not truly communicate who they were as a congregation. A portion of UCC's content audit.



Amberley Parker
UCC Communications
Coordinator

Amberley Parker is the Communications Coordinator at UCC. She described the content governance process for the church as, "a mess." Explaining further, "We had a ton of content on the website and a lot of it was out of date." The communications team at UCC was small, so sifting through outdated website content took precious time away from more important work.

The solution? Walking through a content strategy. It helped to unveil problems that many UCC staff leaders were unaware of. "Going through a content strategy has helped show everyone on staff how big of a mess we were in." The scope of problems surrounding the website was underestimated by many.

UCC		Usability	Knowledge	Findability	Actionability	Audience
Page Title	URL					
Visitors	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=103820	Very Poor	Very Poor	Fair	Very Poor	New Visitors
Directions & Parking	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=104261	Very Poor	Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor	New Visitors
Newcomers	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=752812	Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair	New Visitors
Visitor's Card	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/blankwh/details.asp?id=24656&PID=107490	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	New Visitors
About UCC	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=103821	Poor	Fair	Fair	Poor	New Visitors
Business Office	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=195854	Very Poor	Very Poor	Poor	Very Poor	?
2012 Stewardship Commitment	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=196250	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Fair	New Visitors
There Are Many Ways to Give at UCC...	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=104264	Poor	Poor	Very Poor	Poor	New Visitors
Career Opportunities	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=915092	Poor	Poor	Poor	Very Poor	New Visitors
Congregational Leadership	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=186808	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	New Visitors
Transition Team	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=895453	Very Poor	Very Poor	Poor	Very Poor	New Visitors
Disciples of Christ	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=106545	Poor	Poor	Poor	Very Poor	New Visitors
History of UCC	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=104253	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair	New Visitors
Staff Directory	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=705119	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Fair	New Visitors
The Chancel Cross of UCC	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=160046	Poor	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	New Visitors
The Symbolism of the Bell Tower	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=596389	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	New Visitors
Vision Statement	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=104252	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	New Visitors
Events	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=103822	-	-	-	-	Regular Attendees
A Disciples Habitat House in 2012	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=872507	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Very Poor	New Visitors
Labyrinth Workshop	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=930825	Very Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair	New Visitors
Room in the Inn Training	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=929751	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	New Visitors
Trip to Florence	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=928606	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	New Visitors
Walls of Peace	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=929832	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Very Poor	New Visitors
Media Center	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=103823	-	-	-	-	New/Reg
Bible Search	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PID=144545	Very Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor	New/Reg
Search Our Web Site	http://www.universitychristianchurch.org/templates/cusucc/details.asp?id=24656&PG=Search	Very Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor	New/Reg
Home						
SIDE NAVIGATION						

A portion of UCC's content audit, performed by Monk Development.

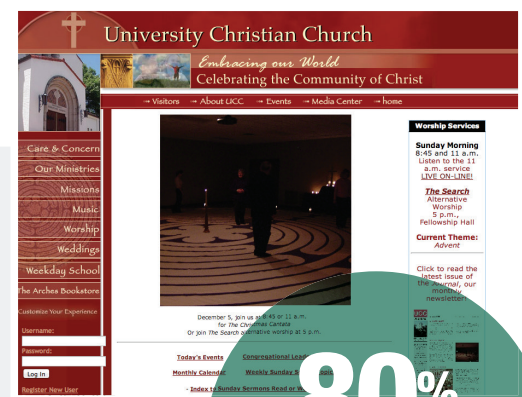
"GOING THROUGH A CONTENT STRATEGY HAS HELPED SHOW EVERYONE ON STAFF HOW BIG OF A MESS WE WERE IN."

“GOING THROUGH THE STRATEGY PROCESS LED TO CLARITY AND MINISTRY FOCUS.”

Thankfully, it wasn't all bad news. “Going through the audits helped get buy-in among our staff. The whole process took a lot of the overwhelm out of redesigning our website. It helped quantify that there was an end and a clear strategy moving forward.” For churches like UCC considering a website redesign, Amberley was clear, “Start with content strategy. A new design and functionality will not help solve content issues.” For instance, UCC started out with 220 navigational items before their content strategy. That number decreased to 40 after completing the audit. There was an 80% reduction in content, demonstrating that not all things have to go on the web. The results for the user are better usability and content is easier to find.



After



Before

80%
REDUCTION IN
CONTENT WITH
REDESIGN

Bryan Newberry, senior pastor of Calvary Church San Diego, stated a common problem for churches considering a content strategy, “We have one of the biggest websites we know of in terms of the amount of content. Our challenge was figuring out how to better get people to the right content.” For Newberry, after evaluating the entire website, the results were easy to see, “Going through the strategy process led to clarity and ministry focus.”

CENTRALIZED COMMUNICATION EFFORTS CREATE UNITY

Gerry True, Communication Arts Minister at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas, knows how to implement a content strategy. The preaching pastors at Oak Hills, Randy Frazee and Max Lucado, have an international following. The church's website welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, with many looking for messages and resources from Frazee and Lucado. Simply put, Oak Hills' website content must be organized to serve their community well.



Gerry True,
Oak Hills Church
Comm. Arts Minister

Implementing a content strategy was not easy. True shared, "It was a very painful process. When we launched our first couple of campuses, there was no clarity about the role of central support and new campuses in terms of branding and communication. The sites more resembled church plants than one church." True described the mood at Oak Hills during this period as "tension-filled," as many of the campuses wanted more control of their branding and communication process. The remedy for Oak Hills came in the form of developing an in-house online system# that staff and ministry leaders use to send work requests. The system also has content guidelines and checklists built into work submissions. Before an Oak Hills team

members submits a communication request, they are required to provide information on how many people will be affected by their event, who the target audience is, and what organizational goal the event aligns with.

This centralized system allowed Gerry and his team to use a standardized process for filtering collateral requests. Additionally, centralizing efforts infused the Oak Hills DNA into everything True and his team produced. Every announcement, bulletin, promotional poster, and website content piece is produced by one centralized team, not individual departments within each campus. With this level of clarity surrounding the church's communication efforts, the content produced by True and his team is laser like in its focus. The hard work of defining audience, purpose, and scope is done beforehand to ensure the maximum amount of impact once the collateral is produced.

**THE HARD WORK OF DEFINING AUDIENCE, PURPOSE, AND SCOPE
IS DONE BEFOREHAND TO ENSURE THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF
IMPACT ONCE THE COLLATERAL IS PRODUCED.**

ACHIEVING RESULTS THROUGH CONTENT STRATEGY

Why does content strategy matter? Because when churches take the time to invest in their content strategy, the results follow. Results like changed lives, deepened relationships, and thriving communities built on discipleship.

A church in Texas saw participation in small groups rise from 40% to 60% after investing in a website content strategy. Another church saw a 20% increase of new people after thoroughly evaluating the navigational options on their homepage. Ministry challenges such as these can be addressed with a cohesive content strategy.

Content strategy also has a positive relational results on church staffs. A centralized strategy formulated by the communications team identifies what other staff members are responsible for—and what they are not. Bryan Newberry said, “Our whole team has adopted a common language and the ability to pursue a unified vision.” Newberry and his entire team took time to evaluate their shared mission in ministry, clearly identifying their values and goals as an organization. These were then connected directly to the content featured on the website, creating online ministry movement.

Eagle Brook’s Melissa Therrien solicits feedback from other ministry areas when content needs to be evaluated. But, in an effort to maintain relational integrity and role responsibility, she states plainly, “The communications team is going to make the final decision.” When working with ministry leaders, she makes it clear that they individually know their area the best. She encourages honest feedback to ensure a better end product. At Eagle Brook, however, it is clear—the communications team has the final say.

MOVING FORWARD WITH CONTENT STRATEGY FOR YOUR CHURCH

A content strategy improves the effectiveness of one of the most important assets for any church: the website. It gives every piece of content a specific purpose that is directly tied to organizational goals. Churches will save resources by reducing the amount of time spent developing content that is not effective. Content strategy helps teams plan better, think about what they want to say as a faith community, and establish processes for future content generation needs. Content creators will know what is expected of them, and web designers will be able to design with content, not for content.

MONKDEV™

DOES YOUR CHURCH NEED A CONTENT STRATEGY?

Let us help take the pain out of the process. To receive a free content strategy consultation, please visit: **<http://monk.so/monkdev-white-paper-01>**

