

**CHURCH 2.0: A STUDY OF CHURCH WEB DEVELOPMENT
IN LIGHT OF WEB 2.0**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts, Writing

By

Sarah J. Austin

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ABSTRACT

Religion is ever present in American culture and on the Internet, and as the Internet shifts from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, churches must reexamine how their web sites address the needs and desires of their audiences. In this project, the researcher studies members of LifePoint Church and their use of the church's web site, church web developers' methods and attitudes toward church web development, and the web sites of LifePoint's competitors for the purpose of deciding whether LifePoint should embrace Web 2.0. The researcher applies the results of the three mini-studies to the seven characteristics of Web 2.0: Web as platform, collective intelligence, perpetual beta, specialized databases, lightweight services, device outgrowth, and rich user experiences and concludes that Web 2.0 is indeed worth embracing on LifePoint Online.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, Church 2.0, Internet, religion, technology, Web 2.0

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As the principal web developer at LifePoint Church (LPC), in Ozark, Missouri, I am responsible for taking the vision cast by LPC's pastors and director of creative communications and molding it into a web site for both LPC members and visitors. My responsibilities include making weekly updates, maintaining site design, tracking traffic statistics, identifying site users, analyzing LifePoint's competitors, and staying ahead of Web trends. Because my work at LifePoint has been mostly voluntary, some of these responsibilities have been shoved to the back burner, but the studies conducted as part of this research project allow me to bring these tasks forward. As I study LPC's site users, other church web developers, and LPC's competitors' web sites, I will ask one question: Should LifePoint Online embrace Web 2.0?

While I will further define Web 2.0 in the following chapter, for now understand that it is the next phase or chapter of the Internet. Right now, the most profitable sites—Google, Amazon, eBay, and Facebook—are deep into Web 2.0, and companies who are slow to embrace Web 2.0 will be left in the proverbial Internet dust if they do not start implementing it soon.

With Web 2.0 and the question of whether LPC should implement it in mind, I conducted three mini-studies:

1. LifePoint Online User Survey, which sought to establish the demographics and webographics of LifePoint Online's users. I also asked how they selected LPC as a church home, their use of LifePoint Online, and their attitudes toward church web sites.
2. Church Web Developer Survey, which sought to establish the demographics and webographics of the developers' churches and the purpose/target of the church

sites. I also asked the web developers to measure their sites' success and questioned their methods of and attitudes toward church web development.

3. Competitors' Web Site Analysis, which sought to establish what "essential content" is present on these sites, what design technologies and navigation systems are in place, and how the sites perform against existing Web standards. I also counted the number of links to these sites and inventoried the features on these sites' home pages.

Though these are separate studies, they interrelate in their purposes. Because I ultimately wanted to figure out whether LifePoint should move toward Web 2.0, I could use these studies

- To identify what LPC users want in a web site.
- To examine how LPC users are using the Web and LifePoint Online.
- To compare the attitudes of LPC site users with attitudes of church web developers.
- To dissect competitors' web sites.
- To compare competitors' web sites with how web developers say the sites are actually being developed.

From these collective studies and their expected outcomes, I could hypothesize that yes, LPC should embrace Web 2.0. The second chapter of this project will establish a background of the Internet as part of the American culture, review why religion works so well in an online environment, and discuss the similarities and differences among the terms "Web 1.0," "Web 2.0," and "Church 2.0." The third chapter will discuss what is happening academically and professionally in the fields of Internet studies, religion, and web design. Specifi-

cally, it will discuss what is being said about online communities versus real-world communities; technology, spirituality, and the church; the gospel, evangelism, and media; church web development; and current Web trends. The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters will each review the methods and results of the three studies—LifePoint Online User Survey, Church Web Developer Survey, and Competitors' Web Site Analysis—respectively. The seventh chapter will discuss the results of these studies, both individually and collectively, and the eighth chapter will formulate conclusions based upon that discussion and the background and literature-review chapters.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Before I can begin to discuss what is happening academically and professionally in the fields of Internet studies, religion, and web design, I must first define them and explain their importance. In this chapter, I will explain how the Internet is part of American culture, review why religion works so well in an online environment, and discuss the similarities and differences among the terms “Web 1.0,” “Web 2.0,” and “Church 2.0.”

Culture & the Internet

In America, the Internet is a part of everyday life, and as our behavior patterns have become increasingly driven by Internet technologies, we have embedded it in our culture. If we have a question, we go to Wikipedia for an answer. If we need to communicate, we send an e-mail. If we need to shop, we go to Amazon.com. Twenty years ago, people could easily answer questions, communicate, and shop without the Internet, but now it is hard to imagine accomplishing these tasks—for some, even surviving—without it.

Beyond our personal Internet needs, most media use the Web to supplement their pre-Internet forms: magazines want readers to receive e-mail newsletters, which contain links driving readers to their web sites; newspapers provide readers with online interactive maps that cannot be published in print; television shows encourage viewers to download missed episodes; and advertisers no longer promote only their products but also their products’ corresponding web sites, which may have games, recipes, or other interactive features. Before the Internet’s rise in popularity, the business sector got by quite well without web sites, but today, they can hardly stay in business without them.

It seems that the Internet can be found in every corner of our culture, and likewise, it seems that our culture can be found all over the Internet, but which—Internet or culture—is

shaping the other? In the article “Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies,” Heidi Campbell writes, “As a cultured technology, the Internet shapes and is shaped by the culture in which it is utilized. This notion recognizes that the Internet is a technology that frames these cultural spaces through complex social and value-construction processes” (313). In other words, it is often hard to determine where technology stops and culture begins because technology has an impact on whatever culture it is developed from.

The Internet is not the first technology to do this; the printing press, radio, and television all helped shape the culture of their times. The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century helped spark the Protestant Reformation with the printing of German Bibles and Luther’s 95 Theses. Centuries later, politicians such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill used the radio to address their constituents regarding the economic, political, and moral issues of the era, and Rev. Charles Coughlin used the radio to evangelize to millions across America. Likewise, in the 1950s and ’60s, evangelists such as Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, and Fulton Sheen used television to spread the gospel, and even President John Kennedy is said to have won his presidential election because of his good looks and composure during the first televised presidential debates. These political and religious leaders embraced technology and used it to advance their subcultures, and both groups continue to do so with the Internet today. But while online politics is still largely restrained by existing political lines, online religion is not and flourishes in the Internet environment.

Religion & the Internet

For millennia, religion—just like technology—has shaped culture. In today’s culture of information, where the amount of existing information doubles every 18 months, religion is influencing and being shaped by the Internet and the infinite amount of information it of-

fers. But *why* does religion flourish on the Internet? Three reasons: Both the Internet and religion have an infinite number of forms, the Internet makes the world smaller to the religious, and the Internet makes the world larger to religions.

Let me look first at the Internet and religion's infinite number of forms. Outside of cyberspace—in what I will call the real world—the varieties of religion are endless. In one metropolitan area alone, one is likely to find Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu places of worship; organizations affiliated with a particular religion; and religious schools. Multiply that number across a country and then around the world and the number is exponential. Likewise, the Internet is inexhaustible, with its number of web sites and amounts of information, from news sites to personal web pages. Because both the Internet and religion are seemingly infinite, religion naturally uses the Internet to pursue its boundless forms.

As religion uses the Internet to expand, the Internet makes the world smaller to the religious. Imagine living far from any other person with whom you can openly share religious beliefs—perhaps as a missionary in China or as an immigrant into a new culture. Before the Internet, contacts—phone calls or letters—with another adherent of your religion might be unreliable and few and far between, but in the age of the Internet other like-minded people are a few keystrokes away. Your world has become smaller because you can connect with people from around the globe.

Even more, information about other religions is closer, and that makes the world smaller, too. Before the Internet, finding the basics about a religion just out of curiosity was tough, unless you had a set of Encyclopedia Britannicas at home; otherwise, you had to march to the library to look up the information you sought, and chances were the source was

outdated. With today's Internet, the answers you seek can be found online. Just a few Google searches of religious keywords conducted on 5 March 2007, displayed in Table 2.1. Results for Google Search of Religious Keywords, yielded enormous results. Though there are so many results—so many that even viewing all the results for one search would be foolish, if not impossible—the information available still makes the world smaller to the seeker as it comes from around the world to the seeker's computer.

Table 2.1. Results for Google Search of Religious Keywords

Search term	Number of Google hits
Christian ^{*1}	427,000,000
Religion	242,000,000
Islam*	235,000,000
Tao*	61,300,000
Spirituality	56,900,000
Hindu*	27,900,000
Buddhism	17,400,000
Judaism	14,200,000
Satan*	3,570,000
Wiccan	2,760,000
Shinto*	1,480,000

¹ The asterisk is a wild card search character and allows the searcher to include additional suffixes of the search term.

And while the Internet makes the world smaller to the religious, it makes the world larger to religions—it allows religion to spread out. Whereas religion was once limited by geographical location, it is no longer restricted in that way. The spread of culture and religion has always stemmed from international travel—from the time Abram set off from Ur to Canaan to the British empire and its worldwide colonies and from the Roman domination of

Europe and the Middle East to the European immigration to the United States. Even though adherents were present in the U.S., religions in Asia and Africa were largely foreign to Americans until the Internet proliferated in American lives in the 1990s; now hardly a day goes by without news from a world religion.

Even locally, the Internet allows religious organizations to spread out. Twenty years ago, to search for a place of worship in a geographical area, you would go to the phone book, call up potential organizations, and ask them about their beliefs and service times. If they were appealing over the phone, you might visit the organization the next time it met. That complicated process is made simpler with the Internet because most religious organizations now have web sites, and a search for keywords relating to the type of organization you sought, such as “springfield mo lutheran churches” can provide a head start to the search process. Instead of calling for service times, beliefs, and ministry details, you can visit their web sites from your office chair and decide whether to visit the church in person. Aware that this is how people are now searching, religious organizations aim their sites toward the seeking non-member.

Web 1.0, Web 2.0, & Church 2.0

While religious organizations create websites that are friendly to non-members, the Internet is changing, too. The Web was once text-based and linearly-designed—a phase referred to as Web 1.0. It was about personal home pages, domain-name speculation, publishing, content-management systems, directories, and page views (O’Reilly 5). Now the Web is moving to a media-heavy, interactive networking phase, known as Web 2.0.

In 2001, Tim O’Reilly and MediaLive International coined the term “Web 2.0” as they sought to identify what the surviving companies of the dot-com crash had in common.

In the article “What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software,” O’Reilly explains how the Internet has shifted from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and defines the characteristics of Web 2.0.

1. **Web as Platform.** Web 2.0 companies are Web-based and facilitate their services in an online environment instead of basing services on a computer desktop as Netscape, DoubleClick, and Akamai did. These online services improve the more they are used because they use the collective power of small sites and hefty database management (O’Reilly 9).
2. **Collective Intelligence.** Web 2.0 companies improve their online applications by inviting users to contribute content and to develop the application. Yahoo!, Google, eBay, Amazon, Wikipedia, and del.icio.us have all used this primary principle to create a unique experience for their users. For example, Amazon took the existing ISBN database and enhanced the data with publisher-supplied data to create a database of bibliographic information that is now considered the primary source of such information (O’Reilly 27–28).
3. **Specialized Databases.** Web 2.0 companies collect exorbitant amounts of information when users contribute to their applications, so companies must create specialized databases to store all their information. Even though the companies own their proprietary databases, ownership of the data is blurry. Today’s mapping market, for example, was once monopolized by MapQuest, but NavTeq and Tele Atlas now dominate the market after investing millions of dollars in their databases of street addresses and satellite images. They now lease their databases to Yahoo! and Google, who have also entered the mapping market. Had MapQuest

extended its data with user contribution rather than just use its data, MapQuest might still have a monopoly on the mapping market today. O'Reilly says there is a race "to own certain classes of core data"—maps, for example—and whoever manages to reach the masses, collect the data, and develop it into a service will eventually be the winner of this race (O'Reilly 51).

4. **Perpetual Beta.** Web 2.0 companies keep their services in beta for years, adding features as they are developed and allowing users to test those features. Because no project has a final end date, Web 2.0 companies keep their services running by paying careful attention to their daily operations and to the maintenance of their databases. Users are co-developers, and their use of service features is monitored in real time (O'Reilly 57). One particular web site that is in perpetual beta is LogYourRun.com, a one stop shop where runners can record their runs, map their routes, blog, and meet other runners. Since the site began in 2006, its developers have added new functions and features, often at the request of users who make suggestions on the site's discussion board.
5. **Lightweight services.** For users to co-develop these platforms, Web 2.0 companies must keep their services lightweight, so developers can loosely couple them with other services to create new and interesting applications (e.g., my favorite applications integrate Google Maps and running-route trackers). These lightweight services syndicate data outwards without concern for what the data will look like or how it will function once it is in use elsewhere. The data's simplicity makes it easier to work with, and this ease of use has allowed many services to grow out of this open-source intellectual property (O'Reilly 62).

6. **Device Outgrowth.** As Web 2.0 companies use the Web as platform, they are able to move beyond the Internet browser. O'Reilly cites iTunes and the iPod as “the best exemplar of this principle,” where the two utilize the PC as a local cache and control station but extend beyond the local machine to a portable device (O'Reilly 70). Apple's iTunes is not, in the truest sense, a web application but seamlessly adds “the power of a web platform” to its database management infrastructure. In recent years, Apple and Nike have joined forces to create Nike + iPod—runners insert the iPod chip into special Nike shoes and the chip wirelessly communicates with the runner's iPod nano the runner's pace information. When the runner connects the nano to a PC, the nano automatically downloads information from the last run to the runner's Nike.com account. In other words, these services have outgrown the Internet browser—on whatever device and for whatever application. The applications connect to the Web without the user having to think about it (O'Reilly 67).
7. **Rich User Experiences.** Server-side applets started this movement, and JavaScript and DHTML's client-side scripts propelled it forward. Then Macromedia jumped on board and developed Flash, a multimedia user experience. Once Google's Gmail and Maps were launched (and since then, Docs, Calendar, and Reader), the popularity of other web-based applications with PC-equivalent interactivity and rich user experiences exploded online. Web 2.0 applications often use Ajax, an amalgam of technologies working together in new ways that allow users to interact with online applications as never before (O'Reilly 73–75).

These seven characteristics of Web 2.0—Web as platform, collective intelligence, specialized databases, perpetual beta, lightweight services, device outgrowth, and rich user experiences—in one way or another define the successful Internet giants of today but present a problem for religious organizations, who devoted their time to creating text-based, Web 1.0 sites in the 1990s, and now face a changing Internet and a changing Internet audience. The result of this challenge is Church 2.0, a combination of Web 2.0 and its application to the church.

Church 2.0 is a new term; in fact, a Google search of the term yields only a handful of results, none of which indicate the term's origin or originator. The term suggests that 1) Web 2.0 principles are applied to church web sites, 2) that Christians are embedding themselves into Web 2.0 culture, and/or 3) churches are shifting from traditional church to using Web 2.0 to “do” church. One halfway quasi-useful site—Church20.blogspot.com—uses its blog to educate tech-savvy pastors (and other church-goers) about new Web 2.0 tools. Though not exactly a holistic approach to church and Web 2.0, it is a useful source for leaders looking to implement Web 2.0 into their ministries.

Just as Web 2.0 is beginning to impact the church, this chapter has also examined how other technologies—print, radio, and television—have impacted the cultures from which they stemmed and has established how culture and the Internet interact with one another. Religion has impacted culture over the millennia, and it is using the Internet to affect today's culture. Web 2.0 is dominating the Internet culture today and has the most definitive characteristics of Web 1.0, Web 2.0, and Church 2.0. With these discussions, I am better ready to examine what is happening academically and professionally in the areas of Internet studies, religion, and web design.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Now that I have established some background on culture, religion, and the Internet and Web 1.0, Web 2.0, and Church 2.0, I am better ready to examine the academic and professional writing literature about Internet studies, religion, and web design. Specifically, I want to discuss what is being said about online communities versus real world communities; technology, spirituality, and the church; the gospel, evangelism, and media; church web development; and current Web trends.

Community Online vs. The Real World

In the previous chapter, I briefly touched on the problems churches must address when faced with Web 2.0, and one such problem is community, for when a community exists in the real world, can the same community exist successfully in the digital world? Jenson, in the 1987 essay “The Church and Mass Electronic Media: The Hermeneutic Problem,” identifies the characteristics of modern electronic media of which the church should be made most aware. He first discusses electronic media as social institution, suggesting that because mass media is mass consumed, it creates an institutionalized gospel that contradicts the church’s message. The church’s response should thus be “to combat the media’s disintegrative effects upon [the gospel], and with other forces in the community to seek and create communal institutionalization of electronic communication” (159). Jenson next discusses the technological structure of electronic media, wondering “is there more to communication than information, so that something must be lost in the current means of translation?” (159). He answers his questions by suggesting that what is lost in translation is touch:

Full human communication, ... in or out of church, requires touch; or at least it requires that the embodiment of those who address each other be verifiable by touch. ... For it is as bodies that we are available to one another, and when that availability fails on either side or even becomes doubtful, how is the partner to remain free in the discourse? But when we speak the

“gospel” to one another, when we claim to speak *God’s* word, embodiment and so touch becomes a matter of life and death (160).

While he recognizes that touch is essential in sharing the gospel and in being vulnerable to one another (essential to authentic Christianity), Jenson says there is no reason why an “electronic democratic network” (known these days as the Internet) should not be a part of a congregation as long as touch is provided for (161).

Ten years after Jenson—unaware that the advent of the Internet was right around the corner—wrote about mass media and the church, Zaleski also wrote about religion and community, though this time within the context of the Internet. In cyberspace, he says, people do connect to one another, though this connection does not necessarily ensure community. Cyberspace is often “a one-way, broadcast flow of information,” but if there is interactivity and a mutual exchange, community will exist (244). In an interview with Bob Y, who hosts the “Recovery is Good for You” web site, which provides online Internet sponsorship for recovering addicts, Zaleski asks, “Why isn’t online sponsorship enough? Why do people need a ‘live’ sponsor?” Bob Y replies, “I don’t think you can replace the sense of intimacy that is possible in a live situation. And I believe that a sense of intimacy and complete trust are required for successful sponsorship” (Zaleski 245–246). Bob Y’s observation is synonymous with Jenson’s: electronic mass media lack the intimacy—and the touch—that is required to really connect with another person, and Zaleski agrees, observing that out of human nature and our curiosity about the body, people who meet in cyberspace eventually want to meet in real life (e.g., match-making web sites such as Match.com, eHarmony.com, and Chemistry.com). From all this, Zaleski says the “subtle key” to a virtual community’s success “may be that it exists in the real world with nearly as much vigor as it does in the digital realm” (251).

This real-world-versus-digital-world dichotomy is further addressed by Foltz and Foltz in their article “Religion on the Internet: Community and Virtual Existence.” In their comparison of the online church and the traditional church, they “explore the concept of computer-based religious ‘cybercommunities’ and see how they compare traditional ideas concerning church and community” (322). During their exploration, Foltz and Foltz come to define community as “the way people interrelate to each other” (322), for “community demands at least two people: one to speak the word and one to hear, one to confess and one to forgive, one to pour the water and one to receive the water, and two to share a meal” (Foltz 324).

Citing standard sociological literature, the authors identify two forms of community: *local*, which defines community as a physical place where specific groups of people may interact, and *associative*, which defines community as an abstract place where specific groups of people may interact because of similar experiences, not merely similar locations (322–323). The church, Foltz and Foltz say, is most often identified as local community; its inclusive nature and bodily presence of people in the local community are two important characteristics of the Christian community (324). But however it is identified as local community, the church can be equally identified as associative community. “The associative community of the early church,” Foltz and Foltz say, “interrelated through letters, some of which are retained in the official canon” (324).

After their discussion of the church as both local and associative community, Foltz and Foltz go on to list five types of community found on web sites: research sites that offer “resources pastors and laypeople can use in their personal or church lives” (326); extensions of local communities that offer “information, official statements, help for congregational life,

and aids in finding a local congregation” (326); independent sites that offer associative community and allow users to participate in a group without being associated with a local group; sites that serve as spiritual retreats and provide online devotional services; and sites that offer online worship and provide “worship opportunities that would normally be considered a function of the local congregation” (328).

Whereas Jenson and Zaleski postulate that online interaction is not enough to sustain community, Foltz and Foltz conclude that the global community will inevitably feature “electronic neighborhoods bound together by shared interests not geography” (323) and that rather than being only a place where people form associative community, the Internet has become a place for new communities that assume the roles formerly played by local communities.

Technology, Spirituality, & the Church

As the Internet becomes the new place for communities to form, the traditionally local church must stretch beyond its usual community-building methods and embrace technology as another possibility for people to connect to one another spiritually. Christianity, it seems, is already ahead of the world-religion pack.

Zaleski, in his book *The Soul of Cyberspace*, devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of Christianity in the context of the Internet and other world religions. Christianity has long been the leader in the grand total of religion-related web sites, even surpassing other major world religions—Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Zaleski attributes this online domination to the United States and Western Europe, who are led by a Christian majority; likewise, the U.S. and Western Europe’s total Internet hosts outnumbered the sum of Internet hosts from the rest of the world (at the time of Zaleski’s publication). This combination

of Christian majority and Internet hosting made Christianity an easy frontrunner among other religions as the Internet began to boom; even more, Zaleski speculates that Christianity, especially Protestantism, will continue to lead other religions though the Internet is expanding in parts of the world where Christianity is not as popular:

If information is power, then during the next century Christianity, of all the major world religions, will benefit most from Internet growth. ... The Holy Roman Catholic Church dominates Christianity in the real world, but not in the virtual one. This is so partly for the same reason that Christianity as a whole dominates cyberspace: the majority of Internet users live in the United States, and the United States is predominantly Protestant (Zaleski 99–100).

As the Christian church leads online, Zaleski says it must carefully address how spirituality and technology are bound together, for their “marriage” is ancient, spanning from before cave paintings to the inventions of the book, radio, and television to spread the message of Christianity (103); thus, today’s Internet technology is bound to today’s spirituality.

Where Zaleski identifies the carefully balanced relationship between spirituality and technology, Jenson addresses what will happen if the relationship is thrown off balance. Technology, he says, is “the creator of a mass audience” and uses its “institutionalized character” to distract the church, becoming the church’s enemy (159). “By [electronic media’s] need and power to replace human communities by a human mass, these media contradict the church’s message” (Jenson 159). The church’s message has essentially remained unchanged for millennia, but considering the age of the church, electronic media is new and a bit of a novelty. Electronic media, especially the Internet, Zaleski says, have a certain degree of entertainment value, but there is a danger of subverting the church’s message and it “increases in lockstep with technology’s power to dazzle” (Zaleski 106).

The Gospel, Evangelism, & Media

Though there is a danger of technology subverting the church's message, electronic media may, in fact, prove useful in evangelizing the gospel around the world. Jenson, writing from a pre-Internet culture, disagrees, arguing that the gospel cannot be spoken through electronic media, that it can only communicate theology. This "second-order activity" is inferior to the task of evangelizing the gospel (161).

Jenson continues to argue that humans do a much better job than mass media at evangelizing the gospel but suggests that Christians should use mass media to present themselves as "the people of the gospel," giving the media—and thereby the world—permission to spy on them, "for better or for worse" (162). Jenson aptly notes that Christians are not perfect: on one hand, the scrutiny of mass media may shed positive light on the church; but on the other hand, when a church member commits a private sin that becomes public, the world-wide church is negatively affected rather than just merely the local church community.

Encouraging Christians to present themselves as people of the gospel is risky, as it can—and will—mar the gospel, but Jenson suggests that this will educate others about faith; "we can, perhaps, without too much distinction, use [media's internal and external functions] to educate both our own scattered flock and the world out there, insofar as the world has any curiosity about the phenomenon called Christianity" (Jenson 162).

Some Christians today are addressing curiosity about Christianity and presenting themselves as people of the gospel in their blogs. These "God bloggers" work online to spread the gospel, reform the modern church, and infuse politics with religion as they write about their relationships with their churches, mainstream politics, poverty and world hunger, and religious oppression (Associated Press). These blogs allow the world to see Christians as they

really are, but “God blogging has the potential to be a ‘train wreck’ because it can reinforce stereotypes of evangelical Christians as angry and close-minded ‘pit bulls of culture wars’”— exactly what Jenson warns of (Associated Press 10).

Church Web Development

Blogging is a means for individual Christians to present the gospel online, but what about corporate churches? What are they doing to present the gospel—and themselves—online? In the 2000 study “Wired Churches, Wired Temples: Taking Congregations & Missions Into Cyberspace,” Elena Larsen and the Pew Internet & American Life Project surveyed over 1,300 Christian, Jewish, and Unitarian Universalist congregations about how they build and use their web sites, how their congregations and leaders use e-mail, and whether their use of the Internet has helped the spiritual life of their members (Larsen 2). Their study found these trends:

- Most congregations (37%) own their web sites and domain names. Other congregations’ web sites and domain names are owned by their denomination (20%), donated by a congregation member (15%), hosted in exchange for advertising (8%), or hosted with a faith-related group other than their denomination (7%) (Larsen 8).
- The most popular features that are currently offered on congregation web sites are encouraging visitors to attend the church (83%); posting mission statements, sermons, or other texts concerning faith (77%); linking to denomination and faith-related sites (76%); linking to scripture studies or devotional material (60%); and posting schedules, meeting minutes, internal communications for the church, etc. (56%) (Larsen 11).

- The most popular features that may be offered on congregation web sites in the future are posts of congregational events (29%); posts of youth group material (27%); space for prayer requests (22%); sign-up pages for classes/programs (21%); and links to scripture studies or devotional material (18%) (Larsen 11).

This study allows me to see the congregational web trends in 2000 and establishes a point of reference for future studies on congregational web trends.

I can further track other congregational web trends from a 2002 Massachusetts Institute of Technology Communications Forum. In his presentation “Religion and the Internet,” Dr. Scott Thumma presents his findings from his meta analysis of three studies: the National Congregations Study, the Presbyterian Church USA 2001 survey, and the U.S. Congregations Project. He found that when a church is affluent, middle class, and educated, they already have e-mail communication in place and that churches commonly have weekly e-mail announcements from clergy or other church leadership (22). He also found that laypeople often develop and maintain their church web sites. Beyond these generalizations, Thumma identifies problems liable to surface when a church is online, including an excessive amount of e-mail directed to church leadership, potentially distracting them from their duties; the blurring of membership boundaries when online visitors can participate online without attending Sunday mornings; connections to former pastors or leaders via e-mail or sermons as a new leader tries to establish ties with the congregation; and questions raised from Internet-savvy members by their surfing of other religious web sites from around the world (30).

In another study conducted with the Hartford Institute for Religion Research in 2000, Dr. Thumma surveyed 125 webmasters from Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant congregations to learn how congregational webmasters manage their web sites. He found that

the idea for most of these web sites came from a layperson within the congregation rather than the leadership (4) and that the development of these sites came from skilled members within the congregations (7)—none of the congregations hired an outside web design firm to create their sites (5). The webmasters said that it was pretty easy to obtain original material for their sites, but it was difficult to get new material or updated material for their sites (8). Thumma also asked the webmasters about their site traffic and found that a quarter of the webmasters thought that nonmember visitors made up most of the traffic to their sites. For those who tracked their site traffic, sermons, newsletters, calendars, lists of links, and event pictures drew the most traffic (12).

From these studies conducted earlier this decade, I can already see trends coming forth and shaping the future of church web development. I know that certain types of content—church calendars, event photography, mission statements, and sermons—tend to be most popular and most useful to congregations. I also see that web development in congregations often comes from laypeople and not necessarily professional web development firms or congregation leadership.

Current Web Trends

Besides looking at church web development trends, which apply to a specific online niche, looking at other studies about religion, cyberspace, and how people are using the Internet can also be helpful in tracking trends. The Pew Internet & American Life Project has five studies of note: “Faith Online,” “Cyberfaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online,” “Home Broadband Adoption 2006,” “How Women and Men Use the Internet,” and “Social Networking Websites and Teens.”

Pew's 2001 "CyberFaith" study by Elena Larsen examined how Americans are seeking online religion. She found that over 3 million people seek religious material online on any given day and that about 28 million Americans have visited religious cyberspace (6). Larsen's study also yielded these results:

- The top activities that are of importance to "religious surfers" are solitary meditation or prayer (85%), volunteering to help others (71%), regular worship or prayer (70%), conversation with fellow worshippers (69%), and group celebration of holidays (55%) (Larsen 7).
- Getting religious or spiritual information online is not strongly related to an Internet user's level of Internet experience (Larsen 8).
- At least once a week, 74% of religious surfers attend a religious service (Larsen 9).
- When online, religious surfers most look for information about their own faith (67%), look for information about another faith (50%), e-mail a prayer request (38%), download religious music (38%), and give spiritual guidance via e-mail (37%) (Larsen 13).
- In their most recent online session, religious surfers found educational or devotional materials (40%), found general information about a religious faith or tradition (29%), communicated with people in their church (11%), gave or received faith-oriented support (8%), and/or did another online activity for some other reason related to their faith (7%) (Larsen 16).

This CyberFaith study shows me how the religious were generally using the Web before the onset of Web 2.0; this establishes a foundation for our study of how the church may benefit from Web 2.0.

In the 2004, “Faith Online” study, Hoover and Clark focused on what religious and spiritual activities Americans are performing online and on how these online activities may be replacing more traditional religious activities. Of the 128 million adults who use the Internet, the authors found that 82 million (64%) have used the Internet for faith-related purposes at least once (Hoover 1). The authors also found these trends from their Faith Online study:

- The five most significant online activities were sending, receiving, or forwarding e-mail with spiritual content (38%); sending an online greeting card for a religious holiday (35%); reading online news accounts about religious events/affairs (32%); seeking information about celebrating holidays or other religious events (21%); and searching for places in their communities where they could attend religious services (17%) (Hoover 4).
- Of the 82 million “online devout,” half attend a religious service at least once a week (5), and the online devout are more active online than the average Internet user (Hoover 5).
- Those most interested in religion news are also the most frequent church attenders (Hoover 12).
- Those who use the Internet for both personal religion and spiritual purposes consider themselves spiritual and religious (Hoover 14).
- Those who most frequently attend religious services are more likely to seek information about religion online (Hoover 15).

From these results, I begin to see how the online devout are pursuing their religions online, and from here I can start to understand what they might be looking for on a church web site.

While examining how Americans are pursuing their religious activities online is beneficial for this study, so is looking at how men and women use the Internet. In 2005, Pew released its “How Women and Men Use the Internet” report by Deborah Fallows. From this study, Fallows concluded that the online population has balanced itself, as the number of men and women online are about equal, though young women outnumber young men and black women outnumber black men online (i). Fallows also reported these results:

- Men more intensely use the Internet than women: they are more likely to go online, get online more frequently, and have faster Internet connections at home than women (Fallows ii).
- Women are more likely to seek religious information, find support for health or personal problems, find maps and directions, and send/receive e-mail than men; on the other hand, men are more likely to take classes, use web cams, download music files, rate products/people/services, listen to music, download software, conduct job-related research, find financial and political information, get sports updates and news, and check the weather than women (Fallows ii).
- Men interact more with online special interests groups than women, but women do more with their e-mail communication with men (Fallows iii).
- Men conduct more online transactions than women (Fallows iii).
- Men and women use search engines about equally (Fallows iv).
- Men use the Internet more for entertainment than women (Fallows iv).
- Men are more interested in technology (knowing the latest terms, fixing/maintaining their computers, trying new gadgets and applications) than women (Fallows v).

These study results are useful because, dependent upon the gender demographics of a church web site, a church web site can be tweaked to address how its users will use the site.

The “Home Broadband Adoption 2006” study by John Horrigan found that 84 million Americans have broadband at home in 2006 rather than only 60 million in 2005, an increase of 40% (Horrigan i). Horrigan also reports that of the 48 million who post content to the Internet, most of them have broadband at home (ii). These results are also of interest:

- Of the Americans who have broadband at home, 32% have shared something online that they have created, 17% have created or worked on their own web pages, 16% have created or worked on web pages or blogs for others, 11% have created or worked on their own online journal or blog, and 42% have done at least one of the preceding content activities (Horrigan 11).
- In their respective groups, these people have created online content: 43% of 18–29 year olds, 36% of 30–49 year olds, 29% of 50–64 year olds, and 18% of 65 year olds or older (Horrigan 13).
- In their respective groups, these people have created online content: 38% have more than a college education, 37% have only some college education, 28% are high school graduates, and 32% have less than a high school education (Horrigan 11).

From these statistics, I can even further surmise how users of a church web site may behave or contribute based on their home Internet connection speeds.

The last Pew study up for examination is the “Social Networking Websites and Teens” study conducted by Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden. The researchers found that 55% of

online teens use social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook (2). These results are also of interest:

- Of the teens who have a social networking site profile, 85% most use MySpace and only 7% most use Facebook (Lenhart and Madden 4).
- Social networking teens use social networking sites to keep in touch with friends they see frequently (91%) and friends they see less often (82%) (Lenhart and Madden 5).
- Online teens who go online most from home (58%) use social networking sites more than teens who access the Internet most from school (42%) (Lenhart and Madden 4–5).
- Online teens said social network profiles are most interesting if they are frequently updated (Lenhart and Madden 4).

From this study, I can better work with LifePoint's youth leaders to create a space online for LifePoint teens.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the academic and professional dialogues about Internet studies, religion, and web design. With regard to online communities versus real world communities, online communities must address the breakdown of communication and lack of touch when taking the place of real world communication. As technology, spirituality, and the church bond, they must balance the message with the mass media's mass audience; furthermore, the gospel, evangelism, and media must come together without subverting the gospel's message. More practically, church web development has evolved with the Internet, and so have Americans and their quest for online religion. After this review of existing literature, I am ready to look at my three original mini-studies of church web development.

CHAPTER 4: LIFEPOINT ONLINE USER SURVEY METHODS & RESULTS

The first of the three mini-studies surveyed the recipients of LifePoint Church's (LPC) E.notes, its weekly e-newsletter, for the purpose of identifying the recipients' demographics, webographics, and use of the LPC web site.

Methods

In this section, I detail the methods used to conduct this study, including sampling and data gathering procedures, study benefits and risks, analysis of risk:benefit ratio, minimizing risk procedures, and informed consent procedures. The Missouri State University Institutional Review Board approved this study before the survey commenced.

Sample. Because of the study's nature, I used purposeful sampling to select study participants, as most recipients of E.notes have the characteristics necessary to answer questions about the LPC site. The sample size—or the number of E.notes subscribers—at the time the initial invitation e-mail was sent was 197.

Data Gathering. I used the LifePoint Web User Survey (Appendix A) in conjunction with SurveyMonkey.com to gather data.

Benefits. By participating in this study, participants contributed to a better LPC web site, which benefits both visitors to and members of LPC and/or the LPC web site. Additional benefits included creating a more usable, content-oriented Internet

Risks. If participants were susceptible to computer ergonomical-related medical conditions, participation in this study may have aggravated symptoms. There were no other apparent risks—physical, psychological, and/or sociological—from participation in this study.

Analysis of Risk:Benefit Ratio. The ratio between this study's risks and benefits was nominal.

Procedures for Minimizing Risk. All survey questions were optional, so if a participant felt uncomfortable about a specific question, the participant was free to skip the question. I minimized risk to the participants by having no contact with participants beyond the initial invitation and follow-up e-mails. The surveys were anonymous; therefore, the data is anonymous. The data may be used again for future reference and will not be disposed of when the study is complete.

Procedures for Obtaining Informed Consent. The initial invitation e-mail to potential participants explained the research purpose and procedures, the benefits and risks to the participants, that participation was voluntary, who participants may contact with pertinent questions, the amount of time required of the participants, and confidentiality of the data obtained. If participants read this e-mail and participated, I could reasonably assume they consented to the study.

Results

I sent a survey-participation e-mail to all the subscribers of E.notes—at the time 197 e-mail addresses. Of that number, 64 people (32.5%) began the survey. Of those who began the survey, 53 (82.8%) completed it. The survey addressed five areas: LifePoint demographics, general demographics, webographics, church selection, and LifePoint Online.

LifePoint Demographics. I used the LifePoint demographics section to identify where the participants currently fit in at LPC. The section yielded these results:

- Participants originally heard about LPC from friends/family (51.6%), other—primarily Second Baptist Church from where LPC began (29.0%), the LPC billboard (12.9%), an Internet search (8.1%), the LPC launch card (4.8%), an Internet link (1.6%), or an advertisement (1.6%).

- Most participants have attended LPC over one year (66.1%); 19.4% have attended 6–12 months, 11.3% have attended less than three months, and 3.2% have attended 3–6 months.
- Most participants are LPC members (66.1%), but 17.7% are regular attenders, 11.3% are members in application, and 4.8% are visitors.

Demographics. I used the demographics section to identify the basic demographics of the survey participants. The section yielded these results:

- The age of most participants was 25–34 years old (50%); 38.3% were 35–49 years old, 8.3% were 18–24 years old, and 6.7% were 50–64 years old.
- Participants' highest level of education was college (55%), some college (26.7%), post-graduate work (13.3%), high school (5.0%), or some post-graduate work (3.3%).
- The annual household income for participants was \$20–49,000 (33.3%), \$50–74,000 (28.1%), \$75–99,000 (19.3%), \$100–150,000 (14.0%), less than \$20,000 (7.0%), and over \$150,000 (1.8%).
- Most participants were female (66%); 34% were male.

Webographics. I used the webographics section to identify how the survey participants use the Internet. The section yielded these results:

- Participants most access the Internet from home (64.4%) and work (32.2%); 1.7% access the Internet from school.
- Participants most frequently use the Internet 1–3 hours/week (40.7%), 10+ hours/week (30.5%), 4–10 hours/week (23.7%), or less than 1 hour/week (5.1%).

- Most participants most access the Internet in the morning (38.3%); 26.7% most access the Internet in the afternoon, 23.3% most access the Internet in the evening, and 11.7% most access the Internet in the late night.
- Nearly all of the survey's participants have been online over 5 years (93.3%); the other 6.7% have been online for only 3–4 years.
- The most popular online tool of survey participants is iGoogle (51.1%). Facebook and MySpace are next popular at 31.9% each. Other popular tools included Yahoo! (27.7%), Blogger or other blog (10.6%), Picasa or other photo exchange service (8.5%), del.icio.us or other book marking tools (6.4%), and WetPaint or other wiki (6.4%).

Church Selection. I used the church selection section to identify what people generally look for on a church web site when in the process of choosing a church home. The section yielded these results:

- The top five most important features/content items on a church web site when choosing a church are belief statements (86%), schedule (82.5%), Bible study/small group information (75.4%), contact information (64.9%), and directions/map (63.2%).
- Most participants rated the content for a church web site as very important (61.4%), the credibility of a church web site as very important (57.9%), the usefulness of a church web site as important (41.4%), and the professionalism of a church web site as important (41.4%). Most participants also rated the navigation systems of a church web site as important (40.4%) and rated the design for a church web site as important (39.7%). This breakdown in participant opinions is

shown in Table 4.1. E.notes Recipients' Opinions of Church Web Site Characteristics.

Table 4.1. E.notes Recipients' Opinions of Church Web Site Characteristics

	Very Un- import- ant	Unim- portant	Some- what Unim- portant	Neither Impor- tant nor Unim- portant	Some- what Impor- tant	Impor- tant	Very Impor- tant
Usefulness	3.4%	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	24.1%	41.4%	25.9%
Credibility	3.5	0.0	1.8	3.5	8.8	24.6	57.9
Professionalism	3.4	0.0	1.7	1.7	17.2	41.4	34.5
Design	3.4	0.0	5.2	0.0	31.0	39.7	20.7
Content	3.5	1.8	0.0	7.0	15.8	40.4	31.6
Navigation Systems	3.5	1.8	0.0	7.0	15.8	40.4	31.6

- In choosing a church, most participants said a church's web site is somewhat important (37.9%).

LifePoint Online. I used the LifePoint Online section to learn how survey participants are using LifePoint Online. The section yielded these results:

- Most participants heard about LifePoint Online from friends/family (30.9%). Others heard from the bulletin (23.6%), the Internet (12.7%), or the billboard (9.1%).
- Before coming to an LPC worship experience or event, 60.4% of participants did not visit LifePoint Online; 39.6% did visit LifePoint Online before attending an LPC event.

- While visiting LifePoint, the E.notes feature (67.4%) and About LifePoint section (59.6%) on LPC Online were most helpful to participants.
- Currently, participants most use the E.notes feature (77.1%) and E.notes section (63.8%) on LifePoint Online.
- The top five features participants would like to see on LifePoint Online are a calendar (78.4%), photo galleries (62.8%), a servant positions newsletter (47.1%), blogs from pastors/elders/leadership (37.3%), and online tithing (23.5%).
- Participants agreed that LifePoint Online is useful (54.7%), credible (52.8%), and professional (49.1%). Participants rated LifePoint Online's design as very satisfactory (49.1%), content as satisfactory (43.4%), and navigation systems as very satisfactory (46.2%). Participants' opinions are also shown in Table 4.2. E.notes Recipients' Opinions of LifePoint Online (see page 33).
- In their decisions to attend LPC, 41.5% of participants said LifePoint Online was neither important nor unimportant in their decision.

Men vs. Women. I split the cumulative survey results across genders. By cutting the results in two, the survey yielded these results:

- Women most access the Web from home (74.4%), while men access the Web about equally between work (50%) and home (45%).
- Most men use the Internet 10+ hours/week (50%) or 4–10 hours/week (25%); most women use the Internet 1–3 hours/week (51.3%) or 4–10 hours/week (23.1%).

Table 4.3. Differences in How Often LifePoint Men and Women Use the Internet breaks down how often men and women use the Internet (see page 33).

Table 4.2. E.notes Recipients' Opinions of LifePoint Online

	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
LifePoint Online is useful.	1.9%	0.0%	3.8%	20.8%	54.7%	18.9%
LifePoint Online is credible.	0.0	0.0	3.8	3.8	52.8	39.6
LifePoint Online is professional.	0.0	0.0	3.8	7.5	49.1	39.6
	Very Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Neither Satisfactory nor Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Superior
Design	0.0	1.9	3.8	22.6	49.1	22.6
Content	0.0	1.9	3.8	43.4	37.7	13.2
Navigation Systems	0.0	1.9	11.5	28.8	46.2	11.5

Table 4.3. Differences in How Often LifePoint Men and Women Use the Internet

	Men	Women
<1 hour/week	5.0%	5.1%
1-3 hours/week	20.0	51.3
4-10 hours/week	25.0	23.1
10+ hours/week	50.0	20.5

- Women use the Internet pretty evenly throughout the day; men most use the Internet in the morning (50%).
- When choosing a church, men find belief statements (94.7%), Bible study/ small group information (79.0%), contact information and schedule (72.7%),

directions/map (68.4%), and sermon samples (57.9%) most important. When choosing a church, women find schedule (86.8%), belief statements (81.6%), Bible study/small group information (73.7%), contact information and directions/map (60.5%), and leadership information (57.9%) most important. Men and women equally found children’s ministry information important (47.4%). The differences in what men and women find important on a church web site is shown in Table 4.4. Differences in What Men and Women Find Important on a Church Web Site.

Table 4.4. Differences in What Men and Women Find Important on a Church Web Site

	Men	Women
Contact Information	73.7%	60.5
Directions / Map	68.4	60.5
Schedule	73.7	86.8
Belief Statements	94.7	81.6
Leadership Information	47.4	57.9
Worship Music Samples	36.8	34.2
Sermon Samples	57.9	34.2
Bible Study / Small Group Information	79.0	73.7
Family Ministry Information	31.6	55.3
Men’s Ministry Information	31.6	21.1
Women’s Ministry Information	15.8	47.4
College / Young Adult Ministry Information	26.3	21.1
Youth / Student Ministry Information	21.1	31.6
Children’s Ministry Information	47.4	47.4
Missions Information	31.6	36.8

- Before coming to a LifePoint worship experience or event, 50% of men and 34.3%

of women came to LifePoint Online first.

“Before” vs. “After” Visitors. I also split the cumulative survey results between those who visited LifePoint Online before coming to an LPC event and those who visited after. This dichotomy yielded these results:

- Of the “before” visitors, 21.1% heard about LPC in an Internet search; none of the “after” visitors found out about LPC in an Internet search.
- Of the “after” visitors, 46.9% are between the ages of 35 and 49 and 37.5% are between the ages of 25 and 34. Of the “before” visitors, 81.0% are between the ages of 25 and 34 and 19.1% are between the ages of 35 and 49. The differences in age between “before” and “after” visitors are shown in Table 4.5. Differences in Age Between “Before” and “After” Visitors.

Table 4.5. Differences in Age Between “Before” and “After” Visitors

Age	Before	After
18–24	4.8%	9.4%
25–34	81.0	37.5
35–49	19.1	46.9
50–64	4.8	6.3

- The “before” visitors have either a college education (71.4%) or some college education (19.1%). The “after” visitors also have either a college education (43.8%) or some college education (34.4%).
- In choosing a church, the “before” visitors said belief statements (95.2%); directions/map, schedule, and Bible study/small group information (81.0%);

contact information (71.4%); children’s ministry information (47.6%), and leadership information (42.9%) were most important. The “after” visitors said schedule (80.7%), belief statements (77.4%), Bible study/small group information (74.2%), contact information and leadership information (58.1%), and directions/map (48.4%) were most important. These differences are shown in Table 4.6. Differences Between “Before” and “After” Visitors Regarding What Features are Most Important on a Church Web Site.

Table 4.6. Differences Between “Before” and “After” Visitors Regarding What Features are Most Important on a Church Web Site

	Before	After
Contact Information	71.4%	58.1%
Directions / Map	81.0	48.4
Schedule	81.0	80.7
Belief Statements	95.2	77.4
Leadership Information	42.9	58.1
Worship Music Samples	38.1	25.8
Sermon Samples	33.3	41.9
Bible Study / Small Group Information	81.0	74.2
Family Ministry Information	38.1	54.8
Men’s Ministry Information	14.3	35.5
Women’s Ministry Information	23.8	45.2
College / Young Adult Ministry Information	14.3	29.0
Youth / Student Ministry Information	19.1	35.5
Children’s Ministry Information	47.6	48.4
Missions Information	38.1	32.3

- The “before” visitors most said that LifePoint Online was somewhat important (33.3%) when making the decision to attend LPC, but most “after” visitors said

LifePoint Online was neither important nor unimportant (56.7%) when making the same decision.

I will discuss the results of this mini-study in Chapter 7: Discussion of Results.

CHAPTER 5: WEB DEVELOPER SURVEY METHODS & RESULTS

The second of the three mini-studies surveys the web developers of LPC's competitors' and/or other like-minded churches for the purpose of identifying how they develop their web sites, their priorities in web development, and their resource disbursement in their web development.

Methods

In this section, I detail the methods used to conduct this study, including sampling and data gathering procedures, study benefits and risks, analysis of risk:benefit ratio, minimizing risk procedures, and informed consent procedures. The Missouri State University Institutional Review Board approved this study before the survey commenced.

Sample. Because of the study's nature, I used purposeful sampling to select study participants. Participants were identified as competitors of LPC or as having similar church-wide goals as LifePoint. The sample size at the time of the initial invitation e-mail was 90.

Data Gathering. I used the Web Developer Survey (Appendix B) in conjunction with SurveyMonkey.com to gather data.

Benefits. By participating in this study, participants contributed to a better LPC web site, which benefits both visitors to and members of LPC and/or the LPC web site. Additional benefits included creating a more usable, content-oriented Internet

Risks. If participants were susceptible to computer ergonomical-related medical conditions, participation in this study may have aggravated symptoms. There were no other apparent risks—physical, psychological, and/or sociological—from participation in this study.

Analysis of Risk:Benefit Ratio. The ratio between this study's risks and benefits was nominal.

Procedures for Minimizing Risk. All survey questions were optional, so if a participant felt uncomfortable about a specific question, the participant was free to skip the question. I minimized risk to the participants by having no contact with participants beyond the initial invitation and follow-up e-mails. The surveys were anonymous; therefore, the data is anonymous. The data may be used again for future reference and will not be disposed of when the study is complete.

Procedures for Obtaining Informed Consent. The initial invitation e-mail to potential participants explained the research purpose and procedures, the benefits and risks to the participants, that participation was voluntary, who participants may contact with pertinent questions, the amount of time required of the participants, and confidentiality of the data obtained. If participants read this e-mail and participated, I could reasonably assume they consented to the study.

Results

I sent a survey-participation e-mail to the designated web developers—at the time 90 e-mail addresses. Of that number 24 people (26.6%) began the survey. Of those who began the survey, 21 (87.5%) completed it. The survey addressed five areas: church demographics, church webographics, purpose/target, development/maintenance, and success.

Church Demographics. I used the church demographics section to identify the size of the web developers' churches. The section yielded these results:

- Of the web developers' churches, 12 (50%) had a population between 50 and 100, 10 (41.7%) had a population between 101 and 500, 1 (4.2%) had a population of fewer than 50 people, and 1 (4.2%) had a population of more than 1,000.

Church Webographics. I used the church webographics section to establish a basic foundation in how the churches are using their web sites. The section yielded these results:

- Most web sites averaged between 1,000 and 4,999 hits per month (30.4%). Others averaged between 10,000 and 49,000 hits (21.7%), fewer than 500 hits (13.0%), between 500 and 999 hits (8.7%), or between 5,000 and 9,999 (8.7%). Four churches (17.4%) did not track their site traffic.
 - Web developers overwhelmingly updated their site weekly (91.3%). One church (4.4%) updated its site daily, and another updated its site monthly.
 - The annual web development budget for 7 (33.3%) of the churches was between \$100 and \$499. Five churches (23.8%) spend less than \$100 annually, 4 (19.1%) spend between \$500 and \$999 annually, 4 (19.1%) spend between \$1,000 and \$4,999 annually, and 1 spends over \$10,000 annually on its web development.
- Table 5.1. Annual Web Development Budgets of LPC’s Competitors shows how much competitors have to spend on web development.

Table 5.1. Annual Web Development Budgets of LPC’s Competitors

Budget	Percentage
< \$100	23.8%
\$100–\$499	33.3
\$500–\$999	19.1
\$1,000–4,999	19.1
\$5,000–9,999	0.0
> \$10,000	4.8

Purpose/Target. I used the purpose/target section to identify how the churches are

using their web sites and why they have them. The section yielded these results:

- Most web developers (90.9%) said their churches have web sites to attract local visitors to their churches. They also have web sites to extend their local church community (77.3%), to facilitate an online community (27.3%), and because every other church has one (9.1%).
- All the web developers (100%) said their web sites were targeted to local visitors, 17 (77.7%) were targeted to local members, 16 (72.7%) were targeted to online visitors, and 3 (13.6%) were targeted to online members.
- All the churches (100%) use identity pieces (letterhead, envelopes, business cards, etc.) to publicize their web sites. Other methods of publicizing included putting the web address on real-world takeaways (86.4%); in electronic newsletters/e-mails (81.8%); on fliers/postcards (54.6%); on other web sites through linking partnerships (27.3%); in TV, radio, and/or print ads (18.2%); through online advertising (13.6%); through Google AdWords advertising (9.1%); on billboards, outdoor, and/or transit ads (9.1%); and with press coverage (4.6%). These promotion methods are also shown in Table 5.2. Web Site Promotion Methods Used by Competing Web Sites (see page 42).
- Most competitors (38.1%) used professional firms to initially design the sites and construct the navigation systems and used others—pastors, namely—to write the content. Most competitors use volunteers without formal training to maintain site design (38.1%), content (47.6%), and navigation systems (38.1%). Table 5.3. Who Initially Develops and Maintains Church Web Sites? details who is developing and maintaining church web sites (see page 42).

Table 5.2. Web Site Promotion Methods Used by Competing Web Sites

Identity Pieces	100%
Web Address Written on Real-World Takeaways	86.4
Electronic Newsletters / E-mails	81.8
Fliers / Postcards	54.6
Linking Partnerships	27.3
TV, Radio, and/or Print Ads	18.2
Online Advertising—Other	13.6
Online Advertising—Google AdWords	9.1
Billboards, Outdoor, and/or Transit Ads	9.1
Press Coverage	4.6

Table 5.3. Who Initially Develops and Maintains Church Web Sites?

	Volunteer (without formal training)	Volunteer (with formal training)	Freelancer	Professional firm	Other
Initial Design	23.8%	28.6%	9.5%	38.1%	0.0%
Initial Content	28.6	28.6	4.8	4.8	33.3
Initial Navigation Systems	28.6	19.1	9.5	38.1	4.8
Design Maintenance	38.1	28.6	4.8	19.1	9.5
Content Maintenance	47.6	14.3	4.8	4.8	28.6
Navigation Systems Main- tenance	38.1	19.1	4.8	19.1	19.1

- Most web developers completely overhaul their sites' design (52.4%) and navigation systems (38.1%) every two years. Web developers equally (23.8% each) overhauled their sites' content every two years, once a year, or more than once a year.
- Most web developers said that design was very important (47.6%), content was very important (47.6%), and navigation systems were important (42.9%) in their

web sites' initial development. Most web developers said that design is important (42.9%), content is important (61.9%), and navigation systems are important (57.1%) in the sites' maintenance. The opinions of the web developers regarding development and maintenance is further broken down in Table 5.4 Web Developers Opinions Regarding Site Development and Maintenance.

Table 5.4. Web Developers' Opinions Regarding Site Development and Maintenance

	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Some-what Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Some-what Important	Important	Very Important
Initial Design	9.5%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	9.5%	28.6%	47.6%
Initial Content	9.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.8	38.1	47.6
Initial Navigation Systems	9.5	4.8	0.0	9.5	4.8	42.9	28.6
Design Maintenance	0.0	0.0	14.3	0.0	9.5	42.9	33.3
Content Maintenance	0.0	4.8	4.8	0.0	0.0	61.9	28.6
Navigation Systems Maintenance	0.0	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8	57.1	23.8

- For the initial development of the web sites, 9 churches spent less than \$100 (42.9%), 9 churches spent between \$1,000 and \$4,999 (42.9%), 1 church spent between \$100 and \$499 (4.8%), 1 church spent between \$5,000 and \$9,999 (4.8%), and 1 church spent more than \$10,000 (4.8%).
- For the monthly maintenance of their sites, 17 churches spend less than \$100 (81.0%) and 4 churches spend between \$100 and \$499 (19.1%).

Success. I used the success section to establish how web developers measure general web site success and the success of their own sites. The section yielded these results:

- Most web developers strongly agree that the usefulness (71.4%), credibility (61.9%), and professionalism (52.4%) are important to a church web site; likewise, 71.4% strongly agree that design is important, 76.2% strongly agree that content is important, and 47.6% agree that navigation systems are important to a church web site.
- When they rated their own web sites, web developers strongly agreed that their sites are useful (42.9%). They also agreed that their sites are credible (52.4%) and professional (57.1%); likewise, most web developers said their design (47.6%), content (71.4%), and navigation systems (42.9%) were satisfactory.

Population. I split the cumulative survey results according to church population. There were 12 churches with populations between 50 and 100 people and 10 churches with populations between 101 and 500 people. This split yielded these results:

- The annual web budget for most churches with between 101 and 500 people is between \$1,000 and \$4,999 (44.4%); the annual web budget for most churches between 50 and 100 people is between \$100 and \$499 (50%).
- All of the 50–100 people churches want to attract local visitors to their local churches, and 70% want to extend their local church communities. Just 80% of the 101–500 people churches wanted to both attract visitors to their local churches and extend their local church communities.
- Most of the 101–500 people churches spent between \$1,000 and \$4,999 (44.4%) or spent less than \$100 on their sites' initial development (33.3%); likewise, the

50–100 people churches equally spent either less than \$100 (50%) or between \$1,000 and \$4,999 (50%) on their sites’ initial development.

Annual Web Budgets. I also split the cumulative survey results according to annual web budgets. Five churches had web development budgets less than \$100, 7 with budgets between \$101 and \$499, 4 with budgets between \$500 and \$999, and 4 with budgets between \$1,000 and \$4,999. This split yielded these results:

- Of the churches with budgets of less than \$100, 3 (60%) had populations between 50 and 100 people. Of those with budgets between \$100 and \$499, 5 (71.4%) had populations between 50 and 100 people. Of those with budgets between \$500 and \$999, the populations were equally split 50/50 between 50–100 people and 101–500 people (2 each). All the churches with web budgets between \$1,000 and \$4,999 had between 101 and 500 people. Table 5.5. Web Budgets and Church Population further details how the annual web budgets relate to church population.

Table 5.5. Web Budgets and Church Population

	< \$100 Budget	\$100–499 Budget	\$500–999 Budget	\$1,000–4,999 Budget
< 50 People	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
50–100 People	60.0	71.4	50.0	0.0
101–500 People	20.0	28.6	50.0	100.0
501–1,000 People	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
> 1,000 People	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

- The average number of hits per month for competitors were spread over five

ranges. These results are detailed in Table 5.6. Web Budgets and Average Number of Hits Per Month.

Table 5.6. Web Budgets and Average Number of Hits Per Month

	Less than 500	500-999	1,000-4,999	5,000-9,999	10,000-49,000
Less than \$100	0%	20%	20%	20%	40%
\$100-\$499	0.0	0.0	57.1	0.0	0.0
\$500-\$999	25.0	25.0	25.0	0.0	25.0
\$1,000-\$4,999	50.0	0.0	25.0	25.0	0.0

- The initial web development for churches with web budgets less than \$100 cost either less than \$100 (60%) or \$1,000–\$4,999 (40%). Most churches with \$100–\$499 budgets spent less than \$100 on their sites’ initial development (71.4%). All the churches with \$500–\$999 budgets spent \$1,000–\$4,999. Half the churches with \$1,000–\$4,999 budgets spent \$1,000–\$4,999; 25% spent less than \$100, and 25% spent \$5,000–\$9,999. These results are further detailed in Table 5.7. Web Budgets and Cost of Initial Site Development.

Table 5.7. Web Budgets and Cost of Initial Site Development

	< \$100 Budget	\$100-499 Budget	\$500-999 Budget	\$1,000-4,999 Budget
< \$100	60%	71.4%	0.0%	25.0%
\$100-499	0.0	14.3	0.0	0.0
\$500-999	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
\$1,000-4,999	40.0	14.3	100.0	50.0
\$5,000-9,999	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0
> \$10,000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

I will discuss the results of this mini-study in Chapter 7: Discussion of Results.

CHAPTER 6: COMPETITORS' WEB SITE ANALYSIS METHODS & RESULTS

The third of the three mini-studies analyzes the web sites of LPC's competitors for the purpose of understanding their content, design, navigation systems, and performance.

Methods

In this section, I detail the methods used to conduct this study, including sampling and data gathering procedures.

Sampling. Because of the study's nature, I used purposeful sampling to select competitors' web sites. Once competitors were identified, I assigned them to one of four categories:

URL Competition. (Web sites that share the words "life point" in their URLs) I searched with Google for "lifepoint church" and "life point church," which provided these five web sites:

- LifePoint Church, Reisterstown, MD (www.lifepointchurch.us)
- LifePoint Church, Wilmington, NC (www.lifepointnow.com)
- LifePoint Church, Columbus, OH (www.lifepointcolumbus.com)
- LifePoint Christian Community Church, San Diego, CA
(www.lifepointcommunity.com)
- LifePoint Christian Church, Lake Mary, FL (www.lifepointchurch.com)

Ozark Web Competition. (Web sites of Ozark churches that are major competition either physically or on the Web) I searched with Google for "Ozark Missouri church," "Ozark Missouri churches," "Ozark MO church," and "Ozark MO churches," which provided these seven web sites:

- First Baptist Church of Ozark (www.fbcozark.com)

- Victory Baptist Church (www.victoryozark.com)
- Ozark United Methodist Church (www.ozarkumc.org)
- Ozark Freewill Baptist Church (www.ozarkfreewillbaptist.com)
- Ozark Highlands Church (www.ohconline.com)
- Hopedale Baptist Church (www.hopedale.org)
- St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church (www.saintjosephozark.com)

Springfield Church Planting Competition. (Web sites of other Springfield area church plants) I referenced SpringfieldChurchPlanting.com, searched for each web site's URL with Google, and used web sites with the most URLs found with Google, which resulted in these web sites:

- Nu Brew Church (www.nubrew.com)
- North Point Church (www.northpointnow.org)
- Living Waters Church (www.livingwatersnixa.com)
- The Church at Finley Crossings (www.finleycrossings.com)
- The Bridge Church (www.thebridgenixa.org)

Springfield Geographical Competition. (Web sites of other churches in the Springfield area that pose significant geographical competition) I identified these churches based on their size and based upon the number of visitors to LifePoint that have come from these churches:

- James River Assembly of God (www.jamesriver.org)
- Second Baptist Church of Springfield (www.secondbaptist.org)
- Ridgecrest Baptist Church (www.ridgecrestbaptist.org)
- Nixa First Assembly of God (www.nixafirst.org)

- First Evangelical Free Church (www.firstefc.com)

Data Gathering. I manually gathered data using Mozilla Firefox's Web Developer toolbar and went through the analysis checklist (see Appendix C). I also recorded, if provided, the names of companies used for the sites' design and made a list of any interesting or outstanding features found on these sites.

Results

I analyzed 22 competitors' web sites, measuring them in five areas: essential content, design technologies, navigation systems, links, and performance.

Essential content. I used the essential content section to check for the presence of content items determined as "essential" by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. The section yielded these results:

- Mailing addresses; physical addresses, directions, and/or maps; and phone numbers were present on 100% of the web sites.
- Schedule and/or service times were present on 95.5% of the web sites.
- Leadership profiles, contact information, and belief, mission, and/or vision statement(s) were present on 81.8% of the web sites.
- Only nine (40.9%) web sites had general e-mail addresses.
- Only two (9.1%) sites had last updated dates.

Design technologies. I used the design technologies section to identify what design and programming frameworks are in use among LPC's competitors. The section yielded these results:

- Of the competitors, 77.3% used design tables and 9.1% used design frames. At the same time, 81.8% of the competitors used CSS in conjunction with their design tables and frames.
- JavaScript and PHP are also frequently used in web design, and 72.7% of competitors used JavaScript, and 50% of the competitors used PHP (or other server-side script).
- Just one site (4.5%) used media plug-ins, and six sites (27.3%) used Flash.

Navigation systems. I used the navigation systems section to identify how competitors move their users through their sites. The section yielded these results:

- Left-hand panel and page-top navigation bars were most popular among competitors, with 72.7% and 50% of using these systems, respectively.
- Other popular navigation systems were search boxes (31.8%), breadcrumbs (13.6%), and site maps (13.6%).

Performance. I used the performance section to measure how the sites validate against World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standards. The section yielded these results:

- Of the 20 sites whose HTML could be validated by the W3C validator, none was completely compliant. On average, these sites had 61.3 errors each.
- Of the 17 sites that had style sheets, 9 (40.9%) passed validation, and on average, these sites had 2.2 style sheet errors.
- The links on our competitors' web sites generated ten kinds of errors as they were being validated. Of the 22 sites checked, eight (36.3%) had zero link errors. The other 14 (63.7%) sites had between 1 and 21 link errors.

- The average home page size for LPC's competitors was 229 KBs, with a maximum of 993 KBs (nixafirst.org) and a minimum of .32 KBs (lifepointchurch.us). These home page sizes translate to an average download time (across a 56K connection) of 49.7 seconds, with a maximum of 204 seconds and a minimum of .26 seconds.
- None of the web sites checked was compliant with Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) specifications, and only three (13.6%) of the sites were compliant with Section 508 specifications.

Links. I used the links section to understand how the sites are publicized on the rest of the Internet. The section yielded these results:

- In a Google search of their URL listings, competitors' web sites had an average of 106 URL search listings on Google each, with a maximum of 737 (lifepointcommunity.com) and a minimum of 2 (saintjosephozark.org).
- In the same search using Yahoo!, the sites had an average 51.8 URL search listings, while on Ask.com, the sites had an average of 38.4 listings.
- Only three (13.6%) of our competitors' sites had a listing on DMOZ.
- Zero sites had directory listings on Yahoo!'s directory.

Site features. I identified and recorded features on competitors' web sites that are not available on LifePoint Online:

- Request newcomer CD/information
- Staff/leadership blogs
- Facility layout map
- "What can I expect?" page
- eVites

- “Contact Us” link on every page
- “Join our mailing list” link
- External links (weather.com; espn.com; etc.)
- “Make us your home page” link
- CafePress store (clothing, promo items, etc.)
- Online giving
- Amazon bookstore
- MySpace pages

I will discuss these results of this mini-study in Chapter 7: Discussion of Results.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Now that I have presented the methods and results of my three mini-studies, I can bring them all together and synthesize a discussion. This chapter will discuss the results of the three studies individually and then discuss them collectively.

LifePoint User Survey

Subscribers to E.notes, LPC's weekly e-newsletter, were e-mailed the LifePoint User Survey. Subscribers' e-mail addresses are generally obtained from "Connect Cards" on Sunday mornings. Most survey participants (75.5%) have been at LifePoint six months or longer; likewise, most participants (77.4%) are LPC members or have applied for LPC membership. Because the survey results are primarily from those familiar with LifePoint and its web site, I must be aware that the conclusions I draw will largely apply to that group.

Just as survey participants are mostly LifePoint veterans, participants are also Internet veterans. All of the participants have been online longer than three years, and many are using online tools like iGoogle, Yahoo!, Facebook, and MySpace. These online tools incorporate the Web 2.0 characteristics of Web as platform and rich user experiences, and because participants seem to already be comfortable with these technologies, I might assume they would be comfortable using the same type of technologies on LifePoint Online.

Collectively, participants access the Web twice as much from home as they access it from work, yet men are accessing the Internet about equally between work (50.0%) and home (45.0%), and women are most accessing the Web from home (74.4%). Men indicated they are online most in the mornings, and women seem to most access the Internet throughout the day from home. As much of LPC's population is comprised of young families, I might

surmise that many of the women participants are homemakers and/or stay-at-home moms, an assumption that also reflects the general membership demographics of the church.

LifePoint's Analytics numbers agree with these survey results. Site traffic is heaviest between 8 AM and 4 PM, with a dip at noon for lunch. Traffic increases again around 9 and 10 PM after kids are put to bed but before parents retire for the night. While traffic is heavy throughout the day and reflects how women may be using the site, average time on the site is greatest at the 8 AM hour, when men said they were online. This validates the Pew Internet study, which said men are online more frequently and are more likely to be online.

Though site traffic numbers are not directly related to Web 2.0, they show me when the site is in use, which is important to general LifePoint Online development—making content updates, sending important e-mails, etc. The more efficiently LifePoint Online is maintained and the better the church communicates with LifePointers, the richer their LPC Online experience—and *that is* a Web 2.0 characteristic.

Most survey participants are online more than one hour a week (94.9%), and most of those are online 1–3 hours throughout the week. More than 30% access the Internet more than 10 hours a week. When people are accessing the Internet from home and are spending extended periods of time online, I should question their connection speeds. Our Analytics numbers indicate that, of our known connection speeds, 48% of traffic comes from cable, 40% comes from DSL, 10% comes from T1, and 2% comes from dialup. I might eliminate T1 connections because those are most likely coming from places of business, so after eliminating that 10%, about 53% of traffic comes from cable, 44% comes from DSL, and 2% comes from dialup. These numbers do not align with Pew Internet's study of home broadband adoption; in that study 50% of connections were DSL and 41% were cable—opposite of Life-

Point's Analytics numbers. Though these numbers are flipped, 98% of LifePoint's traffic still comes from high-speed connections, and the Pew study found that 42% of home broadband users have posted content to the Internet. That said, I might assume that LifePoint Online users may be likely to contribute to the site's collective intelligence with writing, photography, videos, etc.

Belief statements on a church web site were most important to LifePointers, especially men and "before" visitors. Men chose belief statements (94.7%) over Bible study/small group information (79.0%), contact information (73.7%), and schedules (73.7%); men are supposed to be the spiritual leaders of their families, so it is logical that choosing a church that aligns with their belief systems would be most important. Likewise, "before" visitors are most likely searching for churches online before visiting them in person. They find beliefs most important because they do not want to bother visiting churches whose beliefs do not align with their own. LifePoint Online already has LPC's belief statements available, and though there is not much interactivity on these pages, they still contribute to a rich user experience because they provide the information people are looking for.

Church Web Developer Survey

The Church Web Developer Survey was sent to web developers of LifePoint's competitors and of Acts 29 churches (Acts 29 is a church-planting network) from across the country.

Of the church web developers who participated in the study, 90.9% indicated that their churches have web sites to attract visitors to their local churches and 77.3% have web sites to extend their local church communities. The web developers all target their sites to local visitors, but only 77.3% target their sites to local members. Because churches are largely

targeting church visitors, they must have content that visitors are looking for and they must optimize their sites for search engines or pay for online advertising. The churches that are targeting both visitors and members have a double challenge—providing static content for visitors and adding fresh content to keep members coming back. LifePoint faces this same challenge; the content on the site is mostly static and aimed at visitors, so members have no reason to visit the site regularly because they already know everything that is on the site. LPC could implement Web 2.0 features such as lightweight services and collective intelligence and create a space where members can contribute writing, photography, videos, etc. If church members are contributing content, people have a reason to come to the site, and LPC's traffic will increase.

To attract visitors to their sites, church web developers all publicize their sites in some way. The most popular publicity methods—identity pieces, 100%; real-world takeaways, 86.4%; electronic newsletters, 81.8%; and fliers/postcards, 54.6%—are targeted to members only or both members and visitors. Table 7.1 Target & Popularity of Church Publicity Methods shows the popularity of these methods and who they target (see page 58). The cost of publicity might be one reason for the disparity between target and popularity. Identity pieces, real-world takeaways, and fliers/postcards are expensive to produce, but most churches used such publicity methods before the Internet, and the cost of adding a web address to these items is nominal. Linking partnerships are usually free, but they involve a substantial time investment. Advertising, in any form, is directed to visitors but is expensive. Press coverage is typically free, but the church must release its news to the public *and* the press must choose to use the release. Attracting people to LPC and LifePoint Online is crucial if the church is to continue its growth. Currently LPC publicizes LifePoint Online and the church itself with

Table 7.1. Target & Popularity of Church Publicity Methods

	Target	Popularity
Identity pieces	Both	100%
Real-world takeaways	Both	86.4
Electronic newsletters	Members	81.8
Fliers/postcards	Both	54.6
Linking partnerships	Visitors	27.3
TV/radio/print ads	Visitors	18.2
Online advertising	Visitors	13.6
Google AdWords	Visitors	9.1
Billboards, outdoor, transit ads	Visitors	9.1
Press coverage	Visitors	4.6

identity pieces, real-world takeaways, electronic newsletters, fliers/postcards, linking partnerships, print ads, and a billboard. Most of the LifePoint Online User Survey heard about LPC and LifePoint Online from friends and family; our next highest publicity strategy for the church has been the billboard, and our next highest publicity strategy for the web site has been the bulletin.

Competitors' Web Site Analysis

The Competitors' Web Site Analysis examined the web sites of LifePoint's competitors from four categories: URL, Ozark web, Springfield church planting, and Springfield geographical.

Essential Content. Nine of the competing web sites had generic e-mail addresses for contacting the church; most of the sites without these addresses provided contact forms through which a visitor could request information. Using an e-mail address on a web site increases the amount of spam the address receives (unless it is protected by a piece of script),

so there is a certain advantage to using a contact form over an e-mail address. It would be interesting to know how well contact forms work because as a web user, I rather hate filling them in and usually decide the information I desire is not worth giving the church or company my personal information—I would much rather send a real e-mail. After all, in the age of Google, where small organizations can use e-mail, calendar, and word processing applications for free, web developers can pass generic e-mail addresses through Gmail's spam filter and eliminate most, if not all, spam.

Directory Listings. Only three sites had listings on DMOZ. At LifePoint, I waited almost two years before our URL was listed on the directory. Though a web developer must be patient with the process of being listed on DMOZ, I actually expected more churches to have listings.

The Yahoo! directory listings are paid listings, so it is no surprise that no sites were listed. Actually any site may be submitted to the directory for free, but developers can expect to wait a long time (like DMOZ) unless they pay to expedite the process. As at LifePoint, competitors probably do not want to spend money on directory listings when they can list their sites on other, more specific directories for free.

Site Features. Though the study unofficially looked at LifePoint's competitors' site features, the ideas this list of features generated was probably the most insightful for what could be done with the LPC web site. The notion of building an online community with blogging, discussion boards, MySpace pages, and Facebook accounts might appeal to LifePointers, for 31.9% each have Facebook and MySpace accounts and 10.6% have used Blogger or another blogging program. Even having online giving, bookstores, and branded material stores might be of interest to LPCers.

Collective Results. As I have discussed the results of the three mini-studies, I have overlapped their discussion a bit. If I pan out and look at these studies globally, I can see where other churches are moving toward Web 2.0—namely through Facebook, MySpace, and blogging—and I can see that a portion of LifePointers are already using those tools. With a bit of encouragement and education, I might be able to get other LifePointers on board.

I can also see that some content items are essential to a church's web site, namely belief statements, schedules, Bible study/small group information, content information, and directions/maps. LifePoint Online users found these items important, and these items were present on most of LPC's competitors' web sites. This information tends to remain static on a church site, and because it does not frequently change, LPC needs to make other more frequently updated content available to users.

Web developers use their sites to attract local visitors and to communicate with local members, but LPCers said that visitor information was most important to a church web site. Perhaps LPCers are perceiving LifePoint Online to be only for visitors and not for members. Incorporating Web 2.0's use of collective intelligence into LifePoint Online might encourage members to think differently about the LPC site.

Now that I have discussed the results of these studies, I will conclude in Chapter Eight: Conclusion by further applying this discussion to Web 2.0.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I have discussed the Internet as part of American culture; religion and the Internet; Web 2.0, Web 1.0, and Church 2.0; online vs. real-world community; technology, spirituality, and the church; church web development; and current web trends. I have also presented the methods and results of my three studies—LifePoint Online User Survey, Church Web Developer Survey, and Competitors' Web Site Analysis—respectively, and I have discussed those results in light of Web 2.0, which brings me to my original question: Should LifePoint Online embrace Web 2.0? As I revisit the seven characteristics of Web 2.0, I will answer this question using my research.

- I. **Web as Platform.** Because a substantial number of LifePoint users are accustomed to using online tools such as iGoogle, Facebook, MySpace, and blogs, LPC can implement these or other online tools on its website with some confidence that they will be used. Based upon Lenhart's online teen study, LifePoint could use MySpace to engage the church's youth online by creating a youth group profile and frequently updating it. LPC could also use Facebook for college students and young adults and blogs for communicating from church leadership to members. As the pastors, elders, and other leadership begin publishing new work to LifePoint's blogs and leadership site, the rest of the community can come together online to respond. Additionally, LifePoint leaders can use online applications for e-mail, document management, and data management to better communicate with one another. Currently, LifePoint has no central office, which makes communication and data sharing difficult, but using Web as platform can help alleviate that problem.

2. **Collective Intelligence.** Because most LifePoint Online users have broadband Internet connections, I can assume they have contributed online content before. If they haven't, I can assume, based on the Pew Internet study, that they might be willing to give it a try. LifePoint can begin to use blogs, wikis, or content management systems to gather contributions of writing, photography, videos, etc. from LifePointers. Even further, I might explore how small groups can create online spaces of their own where entire groups can contribute to the material on their own sites.
3. **Data Management/Owning Data.** Much of my research does not address data management, but looking into the future, if LifePoint continues its growth, that issue will need to be addressed because when web sites increase in size, they become increasingly difficult to manage. More than likely, when it is that time, LPC will need to outsource its web development (or at least the programming and database portions) to an outside firm.
4. **Perpetual Beta.** Regardless of a site's Web 2.0 implementation, perpetual beta is a good web development principle for any site. That said, as LifePoint Church grows LifePoint Online should also grow. And just as LPC is ever evolving to improve how it does church, LifePoint Online should also be ever evolving to improve communication with LPCers and visitors.
5. **Lightweight Services.** LifePoint Online is not in a place to develop its own services, but other companies make their services available to implement on a third-party site. By using such services as Blogger, Google Reader, Google Apps, and Google Maps, LifePoint can seamlessly integrate external code into the LPC site.

This even helps with the contribution of content because these services are easy to use.

6. **Extends Beyond Local Machine.** Though LifePoint probably will not ever develop applications such as iTunes, the LPC site can be designed for the portability of Blackberries and cell phones instead of designed only for the computer screen. Furthermore, LifePoint Online can make use of RSS feeds to extend information on the local site to other sites.
7. **Rich User Experiences.** Using online tools, consistently adding fresh content, and maintaining LifePoint Online will only improve the site. As the site improves, user experiences will become richer and more users will use and contribute to the site.

Each of Web 2.0's seven characteristics can, in some way, whether in the present or the future, apply to LifePoint Online. As I have looked at what academics have to say about online and real-world communities; technology, spirituality, and the church; church web development, and current web trends, and as I have studied how Internet is part of American culture; religion and the Internet; and Web 2.0, Web 1.0, and Church 2.0, I can see how the characteristics of Web 2.0 can be applied to LifePoint Online. But after studying LifePoint Online users, church web developers, and competitors' web sites, I really start to see Web 2.0's application to LifePoint Online. For present and future LifePoint web development, Web 2.0 should indeed be part of the plan.

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APPENDIX A: LIFEPOINT USER SURVEY

LifePoint Demographics

1. **Select all that apply.** How did you originally hear about LifePoint Church?

- Friends / family
- Billboard
- Internet search (Google, Yahoo!, etc.)
- Other Internet (link from another site, etc.)
- New Neighbor packet
- Launch card
- Phone book
- Advertisement
- Other

2. **Select one.** How long have you attended LifePoint?

- Less than 3 months
- 3–6 months
- 6–12 months
- Over 1 year

3. **Select one.** What is your membership status?

- Member (completed the Navigation Series)
- Member in application (applied for membership but have not completed Nav. Series)
- Regular attender (have attended more than three times)
- Visitor (have attended three times or less)

Demographics

4. **Select one.** How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–49
- 50–64
- Over 65

5. **Select one.** What is your highest level of education?

Some high school

High school

Some college

College

Some post-grad

Post-graduate

6. **Select one.** What is your household's annual income?

Under \$20,000

\$20–49,000

\$50–74,000

\$75–99,000

\$100–150,000

Over \$150,000

7. **Select one.** What is your gender?

Male

Female

Webographics

8. **Select one.** From where do you most access the Web?

Home

School

Work

Other

9. **Select one.** How frequently do you use the Internet?

<1 hour/week

1–3 hours/week

4–10 hours/week

10+ hours/week

10. **Select one.** What time of day do you most use the Internet?

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Late night

11. **Select one.** How many years have you been online?

First year online

1–2 years

3–4 years

Over 5 years

12. **Select all that apply.** What online tools do you use?

Facebook

MySpace

del.icio.us or other book marking tools (e.g. BlueDot or Digg)

Xanga

Blogger or other blog

WetPaint or other wiki

Picasa or other photo exchange service

iGoogle

Church Selection

13. **Select all that apply.** In choosing a church, what features on a church web site are most important?

Contact information

Directions / map

Schedule

Belief statements

Leadership information

Worship music samples

Sermon samples

Bible study / small group information

Family ministry information

Men's ministry information

Women's ministry information

College / young adult ministry information

Youth / student ministry information

Children's ministry information

Missions information

For questions 14–20, 1=very unimportant; 2=unimportant; 3=somewhat unimportant; 4=neither important nor unimportant; 5=somewhat important; 6=important; 7=very important.

14. How important is the usefulness of a church web site?

15. How important is the credibility of a church web site?

16. How important is the professionalism of a church web site?
17. How important is design for a church web site?
18. How important is content for a church web site?
19. How important are navigation systems for a church web site?
20. In choosing a church, how important is a church's web site?

LifePoint Online

21. **Select all that apply.** How did you originally hear about LifePoint Online?

- Friends / family
- Billboard
- Internet
- New Neighbor packet
- Launch card
- Phone book
- Advertisement
- Bulletin

22. **Select one.** Did you go to LifePoint Online before coming to a LifePoint worship experience or event?

- Yes
- No

23. **Select one.** How often do you visit LifePoint Online?

- Less than once a month
- About once or twice a week
- About two or three times/week
- About every day
- More than once a day

24. **Select all that apply.** While you were visiting LifePoint, what LifePoint Online features were most helpful to you?

- E.notes
- Prayer Network newsletter
- Sermon podcast
- Worship archives
- Site map
- Search
- Other

25. **Select all that apply.** While you were visiting LifePoint, what LifePoint Online content sections were most helpful to you?

- About LifePoint
- Worship
- Community
- Impacts
- Projects
- E.notes

26. **Select all that apply.** What LifePoint Online features do you use?

- E.notes
- Prayer Network newsletter
- Sermon podcast
- Worship archives
- Site map
- Search
- Other

27. **Select all that apply.** What LifePoint Online content sections do you use?

- About LifePoint
- Worship
- Community
- Impacts
- Projects
- E.notes

28. **Select all that apply.** What features would you like to see on LifePoint Online?

- Forums
- Calendar
- Online tithing
- Servant positions newsletter
- Related links on each page
- Photo galleries
- Blogs from pastors / elders / leadership
- Chat rooms
- Other

For questions 29–31, 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=somewhat disagree; 4=neither agree nor disagree; 5=somewhat agree; 6=agree; 7=strongly agree.

- 29. LifePoint Online is useful.
- 30. LifePoint Online is credible.
- 31. LifePoint Online is professional.

For questions 34–36, 1=inferior; 2=very unsatisfactory; 3=unsatisfactory; 4=neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory; 5=satisfactory; 6=very satisfactory; 7=superior.

- 32. How would you rate LifePoint Online's design?
- 33. How would you rate LifePoint Online's content?
- 34. How would you rate LifePoint Online's navigation systems?

For questions 35, 1=very unimportant; 2=unimportant; 3=somewhat unimportant; 4=neither important nor unimportant; 5=somewhat important; 6=important; 7=very important.

- 35. How important was LifePoint Online in making the decision to attend LifePoint Church?

APPENDIX B: WEB DEVELOPER SURVEY

Church Demographics

1. **Select one.** What is your church size?

- Less than 50 people
- 50–100 people
- 101–500 people
- 501–1,000 people
- More than 1,000 people

Church Webographics

2. **Select one.** If known, what is your average number of hits per month?

- Less than 500
- 500–999
- 1,000–4,999
- 5,000–9,999
- 10,000–49,000
- 50,000–99,000
- 100,000–999,999
- More than 1 million
- Don't know / don't track our traffic

3. **Select one.** How frequently do you update your site?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Yearly
- Never

4. **Select one.** What is your annual web-development budget?

- Less than \$100
- \$100–\$499
- \$500–\$999
- \$1,000–\$4,999
- \$5,000–\$9,999
- More than \$10,000

Purpose / Target

5. **Select all that apply.** Why does your church have a web site?

- To attract visitors to your local church
- To extend your local church community
- To facilitate an online (not local) church community
- Because every other church has one
- Other

6. **Select all that apply.** To who is your web site targeted?

- Local visitors
- Local members
- Online visitors
- Online members

7. **Select all that apply.** How do you publicize your web site?

- Identity pieces (letterhead, envelopes, business cards, etc.)
- Electronic newsletters / e-mails
- Web address written on real-world takeaways (bulletins, guest information, etc.)
- Online advertising—Google AdWords
- Online advertising—other
- Linking partnerships
- Press coverage
- Fliers / postcards
- TV, radio, print ads
- Billboards, outdoor, transit ads

Development / Maintenance

8. **Select one.** Who initially designed your web site?

- Volunteer (without formal design training)
- Volunteer (with formal design training)
- Freelance designer
- Professional design firm

9. **Select one.** Who initially wrote the content?

- Volunteer (without formal writing training)
- Volunteer (with formal writing training)
- Freelance writer
- Professional writing firm

10. **Select one.** Who initially constructed the navigation systems?

Volunteer (without formal web development training)

Volunteer (with formal web development training)

Freelance web developer

Professional web development firm

11. **Select one.** Who maintains your web site's design?

Volunteer (without formal design training)

Volunteer (with formal design training)

Freelance designer

Professional design firm

12. **Select one.** Who maintains your web site's content?

Volunteer (without formal writing training)

Volunteer (with formal writing training)

Freelance writer

Professional writing firm

13. **Select one.** Who maintains your web site's navigation systems?

Volunteer (without formal web development training)

Volunteer (with formal web development training)

Freelance web developer

Professional web development firm

For questions 14–16, 1=never; 2=less than every two years; 3=every two years; 4=once a year; 5=more than once a year.

14. How often do you completely overhaul your web site's design?

15. How often do you completely overhaul your web site's content?

16. How often do you completely overhaul your web site's navigation systems?

For questions 17–22, 1=very unimportant; 2=unimportant; 3=somewhat unimportant; 4=neither important nor unimportant; 5=somewhat important; 6=important; 7=very important.

17. How important was design in your web site's initial development?

18. How important was content in your web site's initial development?

19. How important were navigation systems in your web site's initial development?

20. How important is design maintenance for your web site?

21. How important is content maintenance for your web site?

22. How important is navigations-systems maintenance for your web site?

23. **Select one.** How much did the initial development (design + content + navigation systems) cost?

Less than \$100

\$100–\$499

\$500–\$999

\$1,000–\$4,999

\$5,000–\$9,999

More than \$10,000

24. **Select one.** How much does monthly maintenance cost?

Less than \$100

\$100–\$499

\$500–\$999

\$1,000–\$4,999

\$5,000–\$9,999

More than \$10,000

Success

For questions 25–33, 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=somewhat disagree; 4=neither agree nor disagree; 5=somewhat agree; 6=agree; 7=strongly agree.

25. The usefulness of a church web site is important.

26. The credibility of a church web site is important.

27. The professionalism of a church web site is important.

28. The design of a church web site is important.

29. The content of a church web site is important.

30. The navigation systems of a church web site are important.

31. Our church web site is useful.

32. Our church web site is credible.

33. Our church web site is professional.

For questions 34–36, 1=inferior; 2=very unsatisfactory; 3=unsatisfactory; 4=neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory; 5=satisfactory; 6=very satisfactory; 7=superior.

34. How would you rate your web site's design?

35. How would you rate your web site's content?

36. How would you rate your web site's navigation systems?

APPENDIX C: COMPETITORS' WEB SITE ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

- Checked for essential content items, determined as “essential” by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research
 - Mailing address
 - Physical address, directions, and/or map
 - Phone number(s)
 - General e-mail address
 - Schedule and/or service times
 - Belief, mission, and/or vision statement(s)
 - Leadership profiles and/or leadership contact information
 - Last updated date
- Identified design technologies
 - Media plug-ins, such as Quicktime, Windows Media Player, or RealMedia
 - Frames
 - Design tables
 - Cascading style sheets (css)
 - JavaScript or other client-side scripts
 - PHP or other server-side scripts
 - Flash
- Identified navigation systems
 - Tabs
 - Left-hand panel
 - Page-top navigation bar
 - Breadcrumbs
 - Folders/files
 - Hubs/spokes
 - Linear path
 - Multi-page paths
 - Pull-down menus
 - Search box
 - Image maps
 - Site map
- Measured the use of W3C HTML and CSS standards using W3C's online validity checkers
- Checked the validity of links using the W3C's online link checker
- Recorded homepage size and download time using WebSiteOptimization's speed report tool

- Measured compliance with WAI and Section 508 accessibility standards using CynthiaSays.com's accessibility report tool
- Recorded the number of URL listings found with Google, Yahoo!, and Ask.com search engines
- Checked for listings in DMOZ and Yahoo! web directories