

Case Study: Beechfield United Methodist Church Website
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Beechfield United Methodist Church

Overview

Platform: Weebly Pro

Skills: project planning, wireframing, web design, CSS, basic photograph editing, web content design and management

Design Methodology: Waterfall

Introduction

This website is the result of a student project for a web design course. I was enrolled in an online course through Towson University's Center for Professional Development. As an end project the students had to develop a live web site. The instructors recommended that we build a site on a subject that we knew a lot about. Since I was a former United Methodist Church (UMC) pastor I decided to do a site for a church.

How I chose Beechfield UMC

The pastor of the church is a friend of mine. We communicate regularly. During the course of our conversations she shared that the church was struggling. She and the congregation wanted the church to grow and to raise the visibility of the church. The church was financially strapped so my willingness to build the site pro bono made the offer that much more attractive.

The Church

Beechfield UMC is a small membership church located in the Beechfield neighborhood of Baltimore, MD. The congregation is an aging one. The church has experienced an extended period of transition. The church has transitioned racially. Beechfield UMC was once predominately white. The church is now predominately black. There has been a transition in pastoral leadership. The current pastor has been there for about three years. The previous pastor served there for 15 years. There has been a change in lay leadership. The church council, which is the governing body of the local church is composed of all new members. New practices and procedures for the operation of the church have been implemented.

Because there have been such major changes the pastor believes that Beechfield UMC is in some ways a new church start

The church operates a preschool and a cemetery. The church would like to see the school expanded.

The Project

Initiating Phase

I began the project by writing a letter to the church council introducing myself. I stated the purpose of the project and allayed any fears about technical knowledge or lack thereof. This was necessary because most of the members of the church council had a low level of computer literacy and technical knowledge. During this phase I identified the stakeholders as the pastor and the church council.

Design Phase



Figure 1 Lo Fi Mockups

Once the pastor and church council agreed to the project we began the design phase. I had a session where I created a mind map. In this session I found out the goals of the church and the goals for the website. From this information I developed the content specifications, the web site wireframe, web page wireframes and web page mock-ups.



Figure 2 Hi Fi Mockups - color choices

I thought the way the site colors were chosen was interesting. Other than the cross and flame logo of the UMC Beechfield had no other branding elements. When I asked about colors the pastor suggested I come up with four or five palettes and present them to the church council. I did so but the church council was unable to decide. So what they did was post the mock-ups in the social hall and let the congregation choose one. The congregation chose the gray and maroon palette.

After completing the design I created a design document which included a Statement of Work. In addition to the website specifications I also made recommendations for developing the site. In making my recommendations I considered ease of use, ease of maintenance, access to hosting and technical support and finances.

I recommended that the church use a site builder to develop the site. We decided to use the Weebly site builder. Of the site builders I researched I found Weebly to be the best one for this church. Weebly provided hosting and technical support. It was the most cost effective of the site builders. The plan chosen by the church allowed them to have unique domain name, security on individual web pages and online payments. Weebly is relatively easy to use so it will be easy to teach someone to be the website manager.

Testing Phase



Figure 3 Testing Plan

I did some research and found a simple, one page test plan. I felt this was needed because most of the plans I found were complicated and involved equipment that neither I nor the church had. Also, I didn't think the church members would participate in a complicated test plan

I had difficulty scheduling members of the congregation to test the site so I got members of my Front-end Lab Meetup group for some testing. There were no major problems but they made suggestions which I thought improved the site. For example, on the "Leadership" page there were short blurbs about each of the leaders. One suggestion was to make the blurbs a series of bullet points. I took the suggestion and the blurbs were easier to read and looked better.

Launch and Post Launch Phases

The website was launched Easter Sunday (March 27, 2016) . For Christians, Easter is about the Resurrection of Christ, new beginnings and new possibilities. The pastor wanted to tie in the launch of the site with those themes. Now that the site is up I'm creating a style guide and maintenance manual. I will be training someone to take over as web manager.

What I Learned

HTML/CSS

I discovered I needed more practice with HTML/CSS. Some of the design elements I couldn't implement because Weebly didn't support them and I was unsure how to code them. For example, on one of the paragraphs in the Preschool page I wanted to make the background color pink. I wasn't able to figure out the code to make that work with Weebly's code. I will build the next site by hand-coded HTML/CSS.

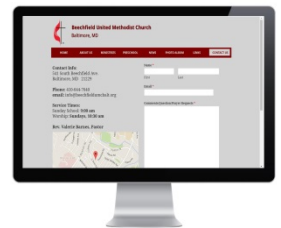
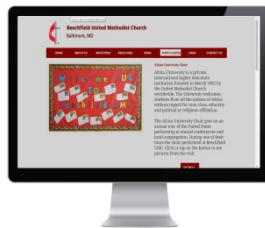
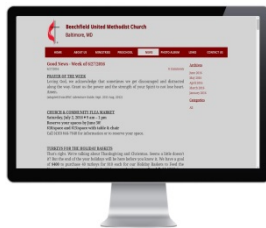
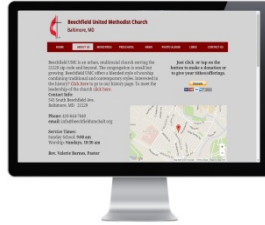
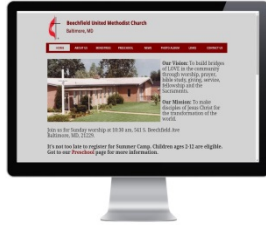
Using Site Builders

Be sure to research everything a site builder can do. In addition to the issue I had with paragraph background color I also had an issue making the site responsive. I made the mistake of choosing a template that was not mobile friendly. I had to choose a separate template for the mobile version.

Customer Relations

Patience is a very good quality to have, especially when working with customers with a low level of technical knowledge. Adaptability is also a good quality. Things don't always go according to plan.

Desk Top Screen Shots



Mobile Screen Shots

