

Your School Website – Asset or Liability?

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The Internet is often criticized for being a source of information that ranges from the ridiculous to the downright dangerous. Some call for the dismantling of the WorldWide Web because of the questionable information that has infiltrated the Internet. Throughout history, books have been banned and burned for the same reasons. But cutting off the vehicle for information is not the answer. It is incumbent upon the individual to carefully consider the value of any information regardless of its source. When used properly, the Internet can be used as a quick and easy source of valuable information.

For example, businesses use the Internet to promote themselves and provide essential information to potential customers. If the website is out of date, most Internet users will pass it by in their search for a product or service. Incorrect information, poor layout, spelling errors and broken links will turn potential customers away. Companies with the best websites employ teams of people to ensure that their websites are attractive, current, easy to navigate, and meaningful to their current and future customers. Vast amounts of money are spent on company websites to secure the company's reputation, build its customer base, provide current information, and offer continuing support for its products.

Like business, Seventh-day Adventist Education provides a valuable service, one that is even more important to the temporal and eternal future of children everywhere. Some Christian parents have called Adventist Education one of the Church's best kept secrets. And we cannot assume that even the church members who know will automatically send their children to their local church school. As enrollments decline and costs increase, marketing our schools is a vital and often expensive necessity.

Many parents who are seeking a Christian education for their children will do their research on the Internet. In the past, Adventist colleges and universities were generally expected to go to the expense of maintaining good websites but few elementary and high schools were able to afford them. Some had established sites administered by volunteers, but many of these websites were poorly maintained and often full of outdated information because volunteers lost interest or relocated. In some cases it would have been better if the website did not exist at all because of the negative impact of a poorly managed site. Most of the smaller schools did not have the resources to manage a website or resorted to free sites that were filled with annoying banners and advertisements.

There is good news! The North American Division Office of Education has opened the door to the Internet for **all** Seventh-day Adventist schools in North America. Every school can go to www.adventistschoolconnect.com and start taking advantage of this free service offered by the NADOE. Schools do not need to hire skilled website developers to have professional looking websites. If you can access the Internet, do some word processing and some image and file management, you are already well equipped to create and maintain a meaningful, attractive, and up-to-date website for your school. Instead of waiting several weeks for a website to update site information, editing can be done in real time. Information you add to your site appears instantly. The smallest school in the

North American Division can now be on an equal footing with corporations spending millions on website maintenance and design.

A website that contains outdated information is a liability. When I surf the Internet looking for products and services, I want current information on the websites I view. If the site contains information that is out of date or no longer relevant, I assume that the company is either no longer doing business or doesn't care to attract me as a customer. When viewing a school website I don't want to see year-old newsletters, invitations to events that have already passed, or names of staff who have retired or moved. Even as a person working within the system and knowing a particular school is still in operation, I question its structure and function if it has a poorly maintained website. Imagine how a potential customer views that same school, particularly when this may be that person's first exposure to the school or the system in general.

A poorly maintained website is a liability to a school and reflects badly on the Seventh-day Adventist school system as a whole. We can no longer offer excuses such as lack of funds, little or no expertise, or being held hostage to a website company that may be too busy to take care of our little account. The NADOE deserves a huge THANK-YOU for providing a service that enables all of our schools, no matter how small, to maintain a website that can be a great asset. Your website can witness to the world, provide up-to-the-minute information for patrons, and attract new families to your school. You can insert links that will take users on a meaningful journey as they explore Seventh-day Adventist Education throughout the world, beginning with your small school. The possibilities are endless.

We have been using Adventist School Connect for about a year and a half at College Park Elementary School and every week we are still finding new ways to use our website. Check us out at www.cpes.ca and see what can be done with this service by investing nothing more than very basic computer skills and often less than 30 minutes a week.