

Church spire against blue sky  
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We've been keeping an eye on some of the trends impacted by the pandemic - one of which is the move towards hyper-local communities. The Global Web Index (GWI) reported this at the beginning of 2021, saying now more than ever, people want to walk to work, meet local friends and feel connected to their neighbourhood.

Where do people go when they want to find something locally? Most likely straight to a search engine or social media. So, how easy is it for local people to discover your church community?

Before we address this, let's consider what they might be searching for. As much as we might hope, not everyone will search for a local church – some will – but others might be looking for something more specific. This could be a toddler group, friendship café, wedding venue or free debt advice, all of which may be operating within the church building or run by its community. How can you make sure your church is easily found for these things, as well as church services?

## **1. Update your A Church Near You (ACNY) page**

Did you know that A Church Near You received 77 Million page views in 2020 and 80% of viewers were there for the first time?

ACNY is the Church of England's church finding website, connecting people with their local worshipping community. Every church within the CofE has a page on the site that can be customised for its community, giving every church a free and secure website. Oftentimes, a church's ACNY page will come up on the first page of a google search, so, is your page up to date?

Adding events, contact details, pictures and a warm welcome message will create a friendly impression to new visitors. Learn how to become an editor of your church's page in our simple guide.

## **2. Create or update your Google My Business listing**

One of the easiest ways to be found on the search is to put yourself on the map – literally. Google My Business is a free tool that lists your church on Google maps along with web addresses, images, descriptions and contact information. Adding this information will make it easier for anyone to find you, and an up-to-date profile may encourage someone to click on your website to find out more. Include details of your service times, activities, projects and groups to help your church show up in relevant searches in your area.

Google My Business is easy to set up, and you only need to update it a few times a year, if that. Also, it's free!

[Find out how to set up Google My Business here.](#)

### 3. Update your website homepage and content pages

Next up, your website – take a look at your homepage, do you mention your village, town, borough or city? Is the name of your area in the web address? Adding local details onto your homepage and in the website address will help it appear in relevant searches in your area.

A good example of this in practice is [St Peter's Church Brockley](#). The web address uses the location – <https://www.stpetersbrockley.org.uk/> and the homepage of the website has a picture from the local area too, making it feel part of the community.

St Peters Brockley homepage

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Many of you may be using A Church Near You as your main church website. Did you know you can create your own unique website address (URL) and redirect it to your ACNY page? Learn more about how to do it here.

Next, take a look at your website content. Earlier, we spoke about the importance of considering what people might be searching for in your area. If they are searching for a parent and toddler group, they may search for 'parent and toddler groups near me'. If your church runs a group, make sure the details are on your website, alongside any projects, activities and groups your church runs.

St Peter's have created web pages for the key projects run by the church such as the food bank, dance classes, and weekly services. So, when searching for dance classes in Brockley, the church appears on the first page of the search, and the same when searching for Foodbank in Brockley. These small additions have made the church visible online to the local community.

Food bank in Brockley map

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## 4. Create a Facebook event

Alongside your website, your presence on social media will go a long way to reaching your local community. You can read more about creating social media profiles for your church here, but we are going to focus on Facebook events here.

Facebook events are a way for your to list your events on Facebook's events calendar for anyone to see – think of it as a billboard on your local high-street - online.

To find events on Facebook, go to your **Facebook app**, click on the **menu**, and then **events**. You'll see that Facebook groups events that are local to you as **This week, Online** and those that your **friends** are interested in.

If your church has a Facebook page, you can create an event linked to the page - learn how to in this blog. Fill in as much detail as you can, remembering that people who have never been along to your church will see it, so avoid words that may not make sense to those outside your community - or include a short explanation.

Once your event has been created, share the link with your friends, click the button that says you are attending, and invite your church community to do the same. This will help the event reach further online.

If you are part of local Facebook groups, share the event there too! For example, local families may be looking for a toddler group, so let them know yours is on by sharing the event listing with the group.

## 5. Add a location tag to social media posts

Social media posts can be searched by topic but also by location. Adding a location to any post on social media will let everyone know where the post is taken from, but also users will be able to see it amongst all the posts shared from that location.

For example, adding your village or town as the location for a post on Instagram will mean your post will show up for anyone who searched for that location = free advertising! What's more, according to Sprout Social, posts using location tags get 75% more engagement which simply means more people will see the post on social media.

After you've got location tags sorted on your social media, why not explore who is posting in your local area? Find local people, businesses and charities, follow their profile and like or comment on their posts. Build your church profile as a local friendly, sociable community by being more interactive online.

## 6. Use local hashtags

Hashtags are used on social media to group topics and conversations and are searchable, enabling users to find a post that has used the hashtag without following the account. Typically, posts on social media that use hashtags receive 70% more likes and 392% more engagements (Agorapulse).

Hashtags should be included in the **caption of a post** by using the **#** symbol followed by a **word or short phrase**. Learn more about using hashtags in our recent blog [A guide to hashtags for churches in 2021](#).

Any word can be a hashtag, but location-based hashtags are useful for churches raising awareness in their local community.

Use the name of your town, village, borough, county and neighbouring areas as a hashtag by writing the # symbol followed by the word.

For example, #Norwich, #Norfolk, #NorfolkBroads and #NorfolkUK.

Alongside these, use local hashtags commonly used in the area.

By searching #Norfolk on Instagram, we discovered: #NorfolkLife, #NorfolkLiving and #NorwichUniversity, which may help the post be seen by Norfolk residents and University students.

## 7. Join local Facebook groups, and be sociable

Facebook groups are a place people can gather and share interests, experiences and build community online. Making it a great place to get to know others in your local community.

To find local groups:

1. Log in to **Facebook**
2. click **Groups** found in the menu
3. use the search bar to type in keywords such as your village, town, city, or borough
4. Browse the suggestions and join any that are relevant.

Once you are in, be sociable. It's an opportunity to meet more people in your community but the group is not a place to advertise every single event or service run by the church. Instead, answer questions, start helpful conversations, join in the fun, and, when relevant, share an invite to an online or onsite event. In doing so, you'll become a trusted and valued member of the group, and in turn, you'll build the reputation of your church community too.

With so many opportunities to use free advertising and simple tactics, every church can establish an online presence which is visible to the local community.

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**Church Digital Champion**

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