

TOPTIPS

PUTTING SERMONS ONLINE

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Have you ever thought about putting audio recordings of your church's sermons on the internet? Not sure how to do it? Here is a very basic guide of how to do it.

RECORD THE SERMONS

Recorded sermons can be made available online or set up as podcasts. There are ways to convert a sermon recording to the appropriate format whether you have used CD, digital recorder, computer, or a cassette player to make your recording.

GET THE SERMON ONTO YOUR COMPUTER

If you've used a digital recorder to record the sermon, just plug it into the computer to access and download the sermon file. If the sermon is on a CD, 'rip' the CD onto the computer using a program like Windows Media Player or iTunes. If you've got the sermon on a cassette, plug a tape player into the computer using a microphone socket or a 'line in'. To 'capture' the sermon from the tape you'll need specific recording software (see below).

FORMAT THE SERMON INTO AN MP3 FILE

When downloading the sermon onto your computer, it is possible in programs like iTunes to automatically convert it to an MP3 file (in iTunes for instance you would go to 'Edit', 'Preferences', 'Import Settings' in 'General' and make sure it is set to 'Import using MP3 as Encoder'). Or you can record directly onto a computer using a program such as Audacity <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> (a free program which gives you all the functionality you're likely to need). If you have a Mac you can use Garageband <http://www.apple.com/ilife/garageband/>. These software programs will allow you edit the sermons and remove dead air, fade in and out, add intros and outros, and change the volume levels.

PUT THE SERMON ONLINE

There are a number of ways you can put your sermon online: you can post it on your website (this requires a bit of technical know-how), use a special online service that will do the hosting for you, or podcast them using iTunes or another podcasting service.

Sermon.net

Slough Baptist Church uses an online service called sermon.net. Alan Rolfe explains how to use it:

"Go to <http://sermon.net> and hit the 'Sign Up' link. You can add the details of your church, including a suitable photo, address, email contact details and so on. They will send you a URL which is your church's home page on the sermon.net site. This page contains all the details you provided, plus the 'sermon player', ready to play back or download your sermons once you've uploaded them. A simple 'login' link gives you access to the 'back-end', where you can easily upload the MP3 files you made earlier. These can be tagged with date, speaker, subject, Bible passage, keywords and any other parameters you care to invent, to make archival and retrieval easier.

Now you have a choice. You can either put a link to your sermon.net home page on your church's website, or you can embed the player into one of your own pages – they give you the code to do this."

Continued overleaf...

Using a Content Management System (CMS) / Doing it yourself

Minehead Baptist Church uses a Content Management System, called Wordpress, to podcast their sermons. James Cooper explains more:

“If you want to ‘podcast’ the sermons (rather than just having them on the website) you need a ‘feed’. The feed allows people to subscribe to the sermons (so new sermons come to them, rather than them having to visit the site every week). A podcast is a feed with audio and/or video ‘enclosures’ put into the feed. They’re a bit like attachments on an email.

You’ll need something to make your feed! Services like sermon.net (mentioned above) or sermondrop.com can do this for you as part of their package, or you can use a CMS to run your podcast.

We use a popular CMS called Wordpress (www.wordpress.org) to run the whole church site as well as the podcast. Wordpress automatically makes the podcast feed for us.

To subscribe to podcasts you need a feedreader/podcatcher that can use podcasts. Two popular ‘podcatchers’ are iTunes (made by Apple and used with the iPod <http://www.apple.com/itunes>) and Juice (<http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net>). You don’t need an iPod to listen to podcasts!

For more information on feeds go to <http://www.churchcommunicationspro.com/2006/11/10/eatthis-blog/>

To make sure that your feed is compatible with services like iTunes, it is recommended that you use a service like FeedBurner <http://www.feedburner.com>.”

PROMOTE YOUR PODCAST FEED

If you use iTunes or another podcasting service you can promote your podcast in two main ways:

On your church website - Add a link to the feed address on your Church website so people know that can subscribe to your podcast! This might mean editing your sidebar or adding a widget. Also add the feed to the ‘head’ section of your church website (the ‘head’ section is not visible to those using your site but is part of the structure of your website). Doing this allows the browser (Internet Explorer/Firefox etc) to detect there is a podcast feed available.

On podcast directories - Add the podcast to iTunes and other podcast directories. This is relatively simple but you do need iTunes installed on your computer to add it to the iTunes directory. <http://www.apple.com/itunes/whatson/podcasts/specs.html>

BE AWARE OF COPYRIGHT

The pastor’s sermons are the property of your pastor and/or the church, so this should not be a problem. However, if you also wanted to include music, this will be subject to copyright. Check the licenses that your church holds to see whether they cover this – they probably don’t. The only exceptions to this would be songs that someone in your church has written themselves, or hymns which are in the public domain.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This article has been compiled thanks to the input of Alan Rolfe at Slough Baptist Church and James Cooper at Minehead Baptist Church. If you wish to know more about sermon.net you can contact Alan Rolfe at rolfes@tesco.net James Cooper has produced a very informative article called How to Podcast Sermons, with lots of technical details and useful weblinks. To download the document, go to <http://www.minehead-baptist.com/how-to-podcast-sermons.pdf>