



Google, the company behind arguably the world's most popular search engine, have developed a number of free services that could help you in your church communications. Ian Britton explains more.

Google Mail

Google Mail is a free advertising-supported email service with 146 million users worldwide.

By creating a Google mail address for your church you will be able to access all of their services described below. To do this go to www.google.co.uk/mail and follow the instructions.

Google Calendar

Graham King from York Baptist Church is one of many who use Google calendar in their church. He emailed me to say:

"We actually use Google Calendars and link it to a web page, so that several people can add / edit diary events which we want to publicise. Members of the church running their own Google Calendars can also be set up to read and copy events from the church calendar to their own. We have one for most church events and a separate one for Students / Young Adults. You can see what it looks like embedded in a web page."

<http://www.yorkbaptist.org.uk/events.php>

Google Docs

Google Docs is a free, web-based word processor, spreadsheet, presentation, and form application offered by Google.

It allows users to create and edit documents online while collaborating in real-time with other users.

This article, for instance, has been written and edited using Google Docs.

Google Docs serves as a collaborative tool to allow documents to be shared, opened, and edited by multiple users at the same time.

Google Local

You can add all the details of church and services for free to Google Maps and Google Local. This means that when people search your location using Google or Google Maps information about your church will show up on the map and in the listings. Here is an example from Beacon Lough:

<http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/place?cid=2741665460276106974&q=beacon%2Blough%2Bbaptist%2Bchurch&hl=en&gl=uk>

To create your listing, go to the Google Local Business Centre:

www.google.com/local/add

You will need a church Google email address to create a free listing.

Google Mobile

Many of the tools that Google offers for your computer are also available to use on your phone.

It is possible to read emails, sync your calendar, take quick pictures of church events and edit the church programme all on my phone.

Google Apps

Google Apps offers communication, collaboration and publishing tools, including email accounts on your church's domain (like webmaster@thenba.org.uk).

Google Apps consists of various Google services, including Google Mail, Google Calendar, Google Docs and Website Builder, all managed under a single Web-based control panel.

It's quick and easy to get started even if you don't have an IT expert in your fellowship.

The Standard Edition is free and offers the same amount of storage as a regular Gmail account but is limited to 50 users.

The Northern Baptist Association use Google Apps to manage all their email needs.

A growing number of churches, including Beacon Lough Baptist Church in Gateshead, also use Google Apps to look after all their email needs.

All four million Virgin Media broadband subscribers with a @virginmedia.com address now use Google's mail services.

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