What Shape is Your "Front Porch" In?

If you lived around the turn of the century until the 1950?s, the front porch of the homes, the general store and local business was a vital part of culture.

If you wanted to know what was happening in your community, especially your immediate 5 minute walk, you could sit out on a front porch and see and hear what was going on. My grandparents lived in an old house in Canton, Ohio with a front porch. I can remember as a boy sitting out there and watching the neighbors interact…watching the "social media" of the day in full action. My grandfather used to take me on a 3-4 minute walk up Second Street to the general store that also had a front porch that was occupied by people connecting, sharing life and sharing experiences. I also remember watching the Any Griffith Show and seeing how the gents used to sit out front of Floyd's Barbershop talking to the passerby's and getting caught up on the local news (or gossip). If a new person or business came to town and you wanted to know more about it/them, you could hang out with these boys and get the skinny.

The front porch was a primary means of gathering information. It is also the place that a "first impression" of something or someone might be developed. If the boys in the rockers said that the new hardware store was a great new addition to the community, your first impression would be positive. The converse would also be true. If you wanted to know what was going on at the local church, you could hear the latest by hanging out on the front porch. Or you would ask your neighbor as you swung on your front porch swing and they played catch with their kids in the street or front yard.

So what about in today's culture? I would suggest that in 2013 (as in the previous 5-10 years), **the new front porch is the internet, websites, social media and the like**. While the traditional "front porch" has been decimated by zoning laws, busy-ness and our desire to hibernate/escape society in our suburban settings (which is where I live as well), we have turned to other means and methods to gain the information that we desire.

Like it our not, the new "first impression" of your church may have little or nothing to do with your facility, preaching, music, friendliness, denominational affiliation or any of the other things we think attract guests. In fact, **more times than not, a first time guest (not visitor) is going to check you out on the web before darkening your doors**. They will check out your website. They may Google the church and see if there are any reviews or good/bad press about the church. What if they get to your site and there is a picture of Brittany Spears? If you can capture their attention…which is usually less than 1 minute…they may even check out a sermon or podcast. From that initial experience, they will make a determination if they want to physically come and check you out. If your website and other internet interactions do not **tell a story that impacts their interest**, they will be moving on to the next website. Period.

I know that many of you are thinking, *"How shallow."* **Really?!?!?** You think that? When was the last time you were looking for a good place to have dinner and you searched the internet before leaving your house or office? Did you open a website to be unimpressed by the "presentation" and representation of the establishment, so you moved on to another? I know I

have…and I have missed out on some great dinning experiences because the website turned me off. Whether we like to admit it or not, first time guests…especially a non-believer, is a consumer. **They are "shopping" for an experience and that experience starts on the web**. I know many "churched" people don't like to think in these terms, but thats reality…deal with it (in Jesus name). Just like you "shop" on line for a restaurant that meets YOUR needs and expectations, people are doing the same thing with church.

I was recently talking to Peter McGowan with [PlainJoe Studios](#) about this topic. He said the biggest factor for churches is being intentional about who you're trying to reach. For example, making a church style website with tabs like "ministries," "service times" and "current series" will generally just appeal to your standard church audience. The key is to really think through who you're speaking to and trying to reach. Is the site for your existing attendees? Seekers who have never had a church experience? Seekers who have walked away from church after being raised in a religious household?

Peter mentioned the [Granger Community Church site](#) as a great example of a church that's moved their web site away from the traditional model in order to speak to people that are looking for more than the typical church experience (i.e. their target market).

Over the next several weeks we are going to talk more about the "story" your church facility tells. "Story" is a huge part of our interaction with people and having a congruent story about or churches starts not at the front door, but at your new "Front Porch". **How inviting is your front porch?**

Read more from Tim [here](#).