Lynne M. Baab. *Reaching Out in a Networked World: Expressing Your Congregation's Heart and Soul*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008. 190 pages. $18.

Our church realised the importance of a website as our church's new front door when a visitor said, "We looked for your website and couldn't find it." Another guest said, "I thought your service started at 10 a.m. from your website, not 10:30." "That's the other Auburn Baptist Church in another state," we had to say.

We also want to help church members stay connected. As people travel from near and far, and engage with church with different regularity, we are eager to communicate well and help people feel connected. We realise a website can help us, but have been wondering how best to proceed. Our denominational tribe, the Baptist Union of Victoria, is also asking questions about how best to present itself and resource churches online.

Lynne Baab offers excellent practical advice on how churches use (or misuse or don't use) websites and digital communication. A Presbyterian minister teaching pastoral theology at the University of Otago in New Zealand, Baab has worked as a writer and desktop publisher and undertook her doctoral research in communication studies and specifically congregational websites. She models asking curious questions and listening closely to different generations about how they find community. Her work includes advising churches on how they communicate and how they foster community and spiritual practices, including online resources (see http://www.lynnebaab.com/).

Baab's basic argument is that churches need to pay attention to their communication and be coherent and up to date in communicating who they are and what they value. It is not about communicating a glossy marketing image, but conveying a church's heart and soul to accurately describe who they are and what they want to become.

The book is worthwhile just for its advice on website design, focused on churches but relevant for others, especially other not-for-profit groups. Baab stresses the importance of using inviting photos and graphics and selecting appropriate fonts (it's a myth that words alone convey all we need to say). She prompted me to consider using authentic testimonies and narratives of how people experience church life and welcome questions and interaction (perhaps in words and video files). She left me wondering how to make the website colourful to reflect our multiculturalism and have lots of links to local community services to reflect our value of community engagement. And she gave me useful guidelines about how to start blogging to foster community and online trust. The Church has a heritage of pioneering new forms of communication, and it is critical for churches to thoughtfully engage with our increasingly digital world with an online presence and witness.

There is a wealth of advice also on how to encourage non-obsessive email usage and appropriate texting manners, wisdom and pitfalls of desktop publishing and printed communications, suggestions for using Yahoo groups and list serves, and advice on preparing for the next frontier of wikis. Baab does not advise uncritical adoption of all new technology and business principles. She urges particular discernment with the use of mission statements and projection screens, which like most other communication media are not always used helpfully. The book offers a framework for a communication audit (including building, signs and answering machines) and examples of churches that have overhauled their website and communications. Baab's most important advice is to evaluate all communication forms with the eyes of a newcomer and their information needs.

Whether readers are uneasy with digital communication, or fearless but not thoughtful in their approach, *Reaching Out in a Networked World* is a useful checklist for all forms of digital communication and helpful theological reflection on the importance of engaging an image-driven culture. It is a useful resource manual for church leaders, web designers and anyone interested with how churches and other faith and not-for-profit groups authentically engage with a digital world.

Darren Cronshaw, Baptist Union of Victoria, Australia