

# Saint John the Evangelist Parish

## Digital Communications Case Study

April 2016

**SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST**

HOME PARISH LITURGICAL SERVICES SACRAMENTS DIOCESE EDUCATION NEWS & EVENTS MULTIMEDIA CONTACT

Thursday, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2016  
Octave of Easter

**WELCOME TO ST JOHN'S**

The Catholic Parish of Saint John the Evangelist, Barrhead, is part of the **Diocese of Paisley** and is situated approximately 10 miles south-west of Glasgow City Centre.

Here you can find information on all our **Liturgical Services** and the other activities going on in our Parish. For all the latest news from our Parish join us on **social media**, click the button at the top of the page for the latest bulletin, or go to our **News & Events** page for more.

Our Parish Hall is available for hire by downloading and submitting an **Application Form**.

If you or someone you know is thinking of becoming Catholic, **click here** to find out more about the process of RCIA.

**TIMES OF HOLY MASS**

Weekdays 9:30am  
Saturday 10am, Vigil for Sunday 4:30pm  
Sunday 10am, 12 noon & 6:30pm

Holy Days of Obligation  
Vigil 7pm, 8am & 10am

Sign up to our **Parish Newsletter** for updates on news and events, reminders about holy days of obligation, and to be informed as soon as the bulletin is available.

**Our Parish** **Liturgical Services** **Sacraments** **Donations**

amazon.co.uk **Subscribe & Save** on Everyday Essentials [Learn more](#)

Whenever you are buying from Amazon, go through the links on this site and you'll be helping out your Parish at no extra cost!

A case study of the Saint John the Evangelist Parish website and digital communications strategy. The study details the pre-existing website and social media presence of the Parish in 2012/13, before going on to present the solutions implemented by RedPillar in 2013/14 and the results of the new strategy in terms of engagement.



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# Background

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## Customer Profile

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<b>Customer Name</b>	Saint John the Evangelist Parish
<b>Organisation</b>	Catholic Church of the Diocese of Paisley
<b>Contact Name</b>	Rev Paul Brady
<b>Title</b>	Parish Priest
<b>Address</b>	Aurs Road, Barrhead, East Renfrewshire, G78 2RW
<b>Telephone</b>	0141 876 1553
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:stjohnsbarrhead@gmail.com">stjohnsbarrhead@gmail.com</a>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stjohns-barrhead.org">www.stjohns-barrhead.org</a>

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Saint John the Evangelist Parish (locally known as St John's) has served the Catholic community of Barrhead, East Renfrewshire, for almost 175 years, being established in 1841. The original building burned down as the result of an electrical fire shortly before its own centenary leaving the congregation to worship at a makeshift altar in the Parish Hall for two decades before the present building was opened in 1961. The recent Golden Jubilee celebrations for the present building provided the impetus for a new Digital Communications strategy.

The Church has strong ties with local youth, with two primary schools and a secondary school forming the "St John's Cluster Group." The Parish youth have been most active in participation through engagement in schools, including the annual Diocese of Paisley Youth to Lourdes pilgrimage.

A large congregation is spread across four weekend celebrations of Mass. The Church is by no means a struggling Parish, forming one of the largest in East Renfrewshire, and indeed in the Diocese of Paisley.

RedPillar took over the Digital Communications strategy for St John's in 2013, with completion achieved in 2014. This case study looks at the period before RedPillar's involvement and compares with the period immediately following completion.

# Technical Situation

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At the outset of the project, St John's had a pre-existing website that ran on the Weebly platform with the domain name "stjohns-barrhead.org". The website was listed in the header of the weekly Parish Bulletin. The Church also had a facebook page which was promoted at various places on the website by hyperlinked images. St John's had also enrolled in the Amazon Associates program.

## The Domain

The domain [www.stjohns-barrhead.org](http://www.stjohns-barrhead.org) reflected the way the Parishioners and other locals referred to the Church. Despite the length and the presence of the much hated hyphen, the domain served as a useful identifier for a church with a common name.

## The Website

The existing website was of a good standard. It provided key information such as contact details and service times on the home page, with more detailed information on the sacraments and Parish groups found in other sections that were accessed through a well positioned menu. Over all the website was good, if a bit bland.

## Social Media Presence

The facebook page was named Saint John the Evangelist Parish, Barrhead, presumably to distinguish it from the millions of other St John's pages that existed. However, this created a disconnect with how Parishioners identified with their church. The page header changed depending on the season or with other special events. The feel of the page was that of a secondary vehicle, something a die-hard could like for extras.

## Advertising Schemes

The Church was already enrolled in Amazon Associates and had been earning well through the use of the scheme, however ads were mostly based on the content of the page in which they appeared, meaning most visitors to the website would be offered deals on religious books.

# Solutions

## The Domain

Since the existing domain was well publicised and reflected the local identifier of the Church it was retained. In addition, a short domain ([sjte.uk](http://sjte.uk)) was registered for the purpose of social media. This domain would automatically redirect to the Parish website (at [www.stjohns-barrhead.org](http://www.stjohns-barrhead.org)) but could also be used to redirect to any website or webpage using [bit.ly](http://bit.ly) integration. This meant that St John's could easily send people to a rather complicated address such as

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B017YF58C8/ref=as\\_li\\_ss\\_tl?keywords=magnificat%20lenten%20companion%202016&qid=1454933188&ref=sr\\_1\\_1&sr=8-1&linkCode=sl1&tag=sainjohntheev-21&linkId=849d6751126add224795da242524fa23](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B017YF58C8/ref=as_li_ss_tl?keywords=magnificat%20lenten%20companion%202016&qid=1454933188&ref=sr_1_1&sr=8-1&linkCode=sl1&tag=sainjohntheev-21&linkId=849d6751126add224795da242524fa23)

using the infinitely simpler link [sjte.uk/23SzpWz](http://sjte.uk/23SzpWz) thereby reassuring users that the link was safe and originated with St John's.

## The Website

The website received a complete redesign in line with current trends, all the while reflecting the dignity of the subject at hand.

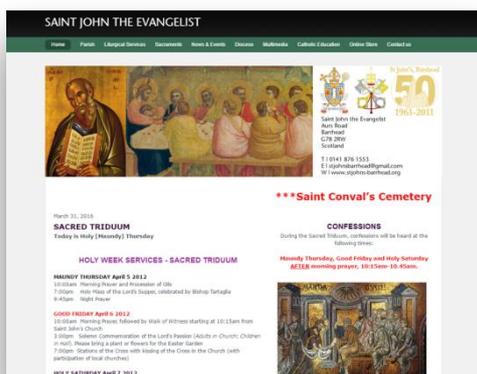


Figure 1: The Saint John the Evangelist Parish website before the RedPillar redesign



Figure 2: The redesign maintained many existing aspects will giving the website a completely new look.

The once dark background gave way to a lively image of the Church itself, brimming with Parishioners. This reflected the lively, welcoming nature of the Parish and relayed the message to visitors. See Figure 1 & Figure 2 for a comparison.

A new footer was added containing the key contact details, social media icon links, and links to the legal pages, so that this important information was always close to hand. In addition, to comply with

European regulations on the use of cookies, a small banner was added to the bottom of the screen upon loading of the homepage that could be closed to indicate agreement with the website's policy.

An attractive button was added to the top of the homepage linking to the latest Parish Bulletin which was uploaded on a weekly basis. Previously, certain items were selected and highlighted in a "News" page. This was replaced with a "News Archive" where previous issues of the Parish Bulletin could be downloaded in full. This freed up some time for the Website Administrator and provided a more comprehensive library for the visitor.

A menu of images was added to the homepage with links to certain key pages. This allowed the Website Administrator to highlight important pages that once were lost within the drop-down navigation menu. It also provided more imagery to the homepage, adding to the overall aesthetic.

The header of the homepage listed the current date as well as the particular part of the liturgical season, e.g.

*Thursday, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2016*  
*Octave of Easter*

however this had to be updated each week by hand, meaning that incorrect information was displayed depending on whether the Administrator was able to update it. This was replaced by a script that would automatically list not only the period, but individual feast days as well. This script need only be updated once annually.

The photo gallery page was updated to allow visitor submissions and a comments plug-in was added to allow visitors to leave messages about the photos using their preferred social media or email account.

Various other improvements were made to individual pages in order to give the site more visual appeal.

## **Social Media Presence**

There existed a disconnect between the facebook identity and that in the mind of the Parishioners due to the rather long name of Saint John the Evangelist Parish, Barrhead. To compensate for this, and to avoid abandoning the 70-odd fans the page had gained since its inception, the decision was made to strengthen the link between the website and the facebook page, both in visual style and in terms of hyperlinks. Therefore, the header image from the website was used to provide both the header image and profile image of the facebook page and social media icon links were added to the homepage of the website as well as the footer.

To widen St John's reach, other social media accounts were established including twitter, Google+, Pinterest, and instagram. These accounts were furnished with the same visual identity as the Parish website and facebook page as much as possible, and where possible similar or identical usernames were obtained.

The online application **Hootsuite** was employed as a simple method of managing multiple social media accounts, with the free version allowing up to 3 accounts. This was used for the facebook, twitter and Google+ accounts, while Pinterest and Instagram have very different purposes that allowed them to be managed individually on an as required basis.

The hallmark of the social media presence has been the use of branded images relating special events or feast days. These typically take one of the following forms (though other variations exist):

- use of a classical piece of art, overlaid by a strong modernist font relaying the key message, with additional details in a softer font (sometimes modernist, sometimes classical), all in a simple frame carrying the short domain name – see Figure 3;
- use of a photograph, overlaid by a strong modernist font relaying the key message, with additional details in a softer font (sometimes modernist, sometimes classical), set off by the facebook, twitter and website links at the foot of the image – see Figure 4.



**Figure 3: Typical example of an image shared on social media using the short domain frame**



**Figure 4: Typical example of an image shared on social media using the social media links footer**

This method of visual communication has proven to be particularly effective. While the use of social media by churches in the past has been simply to relay snippets of information (often directly from the bulletin), it must be borne in mind that the casual user will scroll through scores of posts every minute, limiting possible exposure. Using striking images grabs the user's attention and indeed can add some drama to what may be an otherwise boring announcement. The use of branding is vital in driving traffic as users will rarely leave their own newsfeed to find a link.

## Advertising Schemes

The Amazon Associates program is a particularly good affiliate program as it pays a commission on sales rather than a pay per click revenue structure. Since Amazon deal in products from paperclips to plasma TVs, commission can come from large one-off purchases or smaller but more regular buys.

While St John's was achieving a steady flow of income from the advertisements on its website, the special interest nature of the adverts were hampering conversion rates. Hand-picked "carousel widgets" and "favourites" lists were replaced with automatically rotating banner ads that would highlight the latest holiday on Amazon, or where there was none, a generic banner promoting fast delivery, instant video, and the like. This widened the demographic of the website's users from just those looking to learn about the faith, to everyone who visited the site.

On certain pages where the audience was likely to be more specific, for example on the "Matrimony" page under "Sacraments", where couples were advised on how to book their wedding in St John's, the "carousel widget" style was retained although instead of having hand-picked items, the widget was configured to self-populate using a string of search terms, e.g. "catholic", "wedding", "marriage", etc. This maintained the specific nature of the advertisement, while ensuring it would not become stagnant.

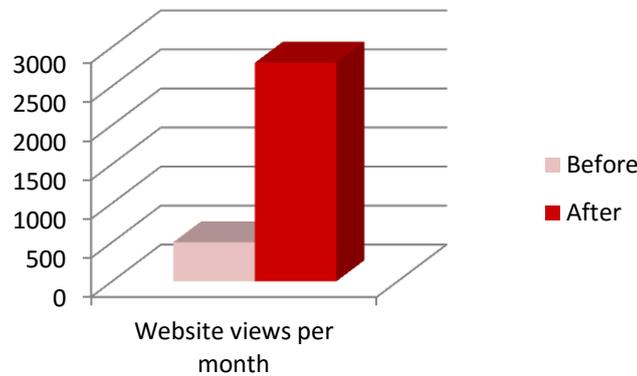
## Additional Aspects

In addition to the improvements detailed above, a number of other features were implemented including:

- an email newsletter with a sign up form on the Parish website allowing Parishioners to receive an email with announcements such as when the weekly bulletin is available to download, when holy days of obligation are taking place, when special collections will be taken up at Masses, and other special events;
- a search facility on the Parish website, placed on each top-level page, which is particularly helpful in searching through past bulletins even though they are in PDF format;
- an interactive Rosary taking users through each of the decades (linked to the appropriate mysteries depending on the day of the week) with the full list of prayers, an image for reflection and the fruit of the mystery listed;
- a suggested apps page with links to a selection of freely available Android and iOS apps that encourage users' deeper interaction with their faith;
- an eBible with a number of translations and a search facility, easily accessible without leaving the Parish website;
- a dedicated Parish Youth page with the ability to add an editor from the Parish Youth team so that the page can act as a stand alone hub for youth activity;
- a website password to make sure pages are hidden until deemed ready to be disseminated.

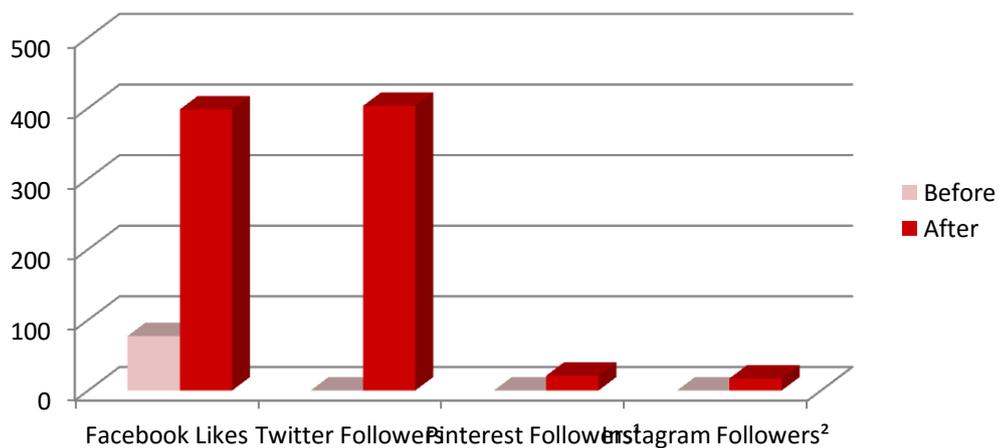
# Results

The evidence that the revised Digital Communications strategy implemented by RedPillar has been effective is overwhelming. The average number of website views per month has increased sevenfold as shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5: Comparison of the number of website views per month before and after the implementation of RedPillar's Digital Communications strategy**

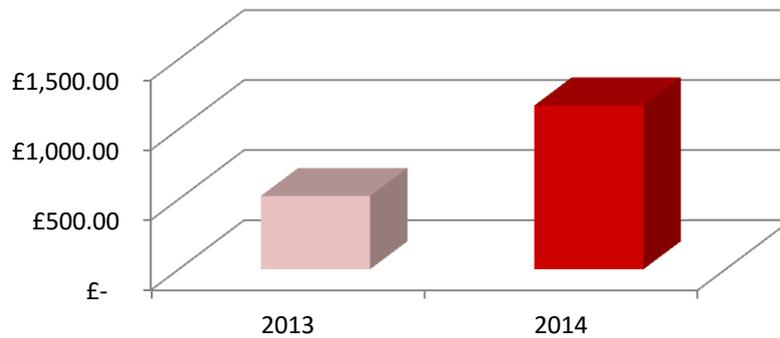
Similarly, Figure 6 shows that engagement through social media has skyrocketed. The number of facebook likes has increased from around 70 to almost 400, an increase of over 450%, while St John's did not even have a presence on three of the four social media channels before the implementation of the new strategy, potentially doubling social media reach through twitter alone.



- 1: Pinterest is a particularly niche platform, which, although mainstream in terms of public opinion, lacks the volume of users that others (such as facebook and twitter) attract.
- 2: The Instagram account was launched only very recently and has a significantly younger audience demographic than the rest.

**Figure 6: Comparison of the number of social media followers before and after the implementation of RedPillar's Digital Communications strategy**

In monetary terms, Figure 7 illustrates a boom in revenue from the Amazon Associates scheme immediately following the implementation of the new Digital Communications strategy, however, this is shown for purely illustrative purposes as there are various other financial factors that have not been taken into consideration for this analysis. It should suffice to say that the improved targeting of key demographics accompanied by the broadening of the overall advertising focus seems to have resulted in increased revenue.



**Figure 7: Comparison of Amazon Associates referral fees across the implementation period**

## Implications

By increasing the Parishioners' awareness of events in the church, they are more likely to participate both online by liking, sharing, retweeting, etc. and in person by attending the events. This in turn will lead to increased revenue from offertory collections simply because of the larger number of participants.



Another aspect, not to be taken lightly in this particular case, is the increased engagement of users with their own faith. Each post, photo, video, that is shared will help someone learn more about their faith and foster growth within them. As a by product, every post that is liked/retweeted by a Parishioner is also shown to their friends, thus helping them evangelise without consciously thinking about it. This could potentially lead to exponential growth in the church, not just this particular church, but throughout the world.



**Website Design & Content Management**

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