

## Adding the Bible with Web Services

*We're continuing the series on "Launching Online" – capturing the decisions faced and lessons learned in launching a new online ministry/business.*



By Russ McGuire - [russ.mcguire@gmail.com](mailto:russ.mcguire@gmail.com)

**A**s we continue to build our online social network ministry for Christian families, it's time to add functionality that is distinctly Christian. How can we have a service that is distinctive from secular sites without including the Word of God?

### Version Control

The first challenge in integrating the Bible into any online site is dealing with the different versions of the Bible that are available. There are so many, and each translation takes several MB of disk space on a hosting platform. Making each one readable, browsable, and searchable is no simple task. [The Bible Gateway](#) provides 23 different English versions alone, plus versions in 52 other languages. We aren't so ambitious as to want to include all of those versions. But, since folks have different preferences, we probably need to include a few.

The second challenge is almost insurmountable. Most of the versions that we use every day are under copyright control.

When you check into using these versions for any purposes, you'll encounter restrictions like these:

- The text of the New American Standard Bible® may be quoted and/or reprinted up to and inclusive of five hundred (500) verses without express written permission of The Lockman Foundation, providing the verses do not

amount to a complete book of the Bible nor do the verses quoted account for more than 25% of the total work in which they are quoted.

- The NIV text may be quoted in any form (written, visual, electronic or audio), up to and inclusive of five hundred (500) verses without express written permission of the publisher [Zondervan in the U.S.], providing the verses do not amount to a complete book of the Bible nor do the verses quoted account for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the total text of the work in which they are quoted.
- Publication of any commentary or other Bible reference work produced for commercial sale that uses the English Standard Version must include written permission for use of the ESV text. [Good News Publishers /Crossway Bibles holds the copyright for the ESV.]

Of these, my experience indicates that Crossway is the easiest to work with for electronic publishing, but even so, licensing for a use similar to what we needed would cost several hundred dollars per year.

The good news is that there are many good translations in the public domain. A few worthy of note are:

- [The King James Version](#)
- [The American King James Version](#)
- [The World English Bible](#)
- [The Hebrew Names Version](#)
- [Young's Literal Translation](#)
- [Duoay-Rheims Version](#) (Catholic)
- [La Biblia Reina Valera](#) (Spanish)

Most notable among these is the WEB – a modern translation that has specifically been created to be in the public domain and friendly for electronic publishing.

### Serving the Bible to the Web

But figuring out that there are public domain translations that can work for us isn't enough. We

still need to find a way to make the Bible usable to our visitors – where they can easily read from chapter to chapter, can jump around from passage to passage, and can search for words in the text.

A few years ago, as I was working on a couple of different projects, including a church web site and a site for another ministry, I came to realize how big of a challenge this was. I decided, instead of solving it once for each site, I'd solve it once for all and make it freely available for other ministry sites to use. As part of Living Stones Ministry (<http://lstones.com>), I have been providing a Web Services interface (and sample software for accessing it) for the above translations and more.

Time out. What is “web services” and why did I go that route?

According to Wikipedia “**Web services** are typically [application programming interfaces](#) (API) or [web APIs](#) that are accessed via [Hypertext Transfer Protocol](#) and executed on a remote system hosting the requested services.”

In other words, a program running on one computer sends an HTML request to another server to get some information and that server returns the

## Just how fresh is the info in your directory?

If your directory is printed (even hot off the press), the answer is, “not at all.” Families in your congregation are constantly changing—changing neighborhoods, contact numbers, Internet service providers—even changing household members (as children move out, and sometimes back in).

The result? **Any printed information is out-of-date before the ink dries.** That's not to say church members don't still enjoy flipping through a printed directory, but for serious information lookup, they're used to the Internet. With the **Directory Tool**, one of the basic tools in our **Web Ministry Toolkit**, you can give members protected access to a searchable directory of names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses—live information from CDM+ Membership—right on your website.

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information in a way that the program can interpret and use the data. As an end user, you benefit from web services all the time, whether you realize it or not. For example, anytime you see a website with a Google map on it, or displaying Google ads, you are seeing the result of a web services call using Google's web services APIs.

The benefit of a web services approach is that the web site that folks are visiting doesn't need to do much work – the originating program can be really simple – and yet the results can be very impressive.

In my case, I wanted many web sites to be able to include full Bible capability without having to implement sophisticated software or host large Bible text databases. The Living Stones web service currently supports nine different public domain Bible versions and is used by ministry web sites around the world.

But, it's not the only Bible web service that's out there, and it's not even the best. Crossway Bibles provides a very sophisticated web service for non-profit ministries to include the ESV translation of the Bible in their web sites (see [http://](http://www.esvapi.org/)

[www.esvapi.org/](http://www.esvapi.org/) ). There are limitations on its use that make it not appropriate for my ministry site, but it may be the perfect solution, especially for a church website.

To give you a better sense of how web services actually work, I've put together a live demo that takes you step by step through the messaging back and forth between a ministry web site and the Living Stones web service. I recommend you check it out here: <http://www.lstones.com/webservices.php>.

### Putting it all together

For the Hschooler.net online social network, I was able to use the Living Stones web service to add four types of capabilities:

1. A basic interface for reading and searching the Bible.
2. A "favorite passage" tool so that users can share with their friends their most impactful verses and friends can comment back and forth on those passages.



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3. A "From God's Word" widget that randomly selects from a list of identified short passages and presents it on the user's homepage each time they log in (in their preferred translation).
4. A "Read through the Bible in a Year" widget that makes it easy for Hschooler.net members to develop the discipline of spending time in the Word each day.

The writer of Hebrews said (4:12, ESV) "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

That sounds like the kind of power that is essential for any ministry website. Hopefully I've given you some ideas on how to add the Word to your site.

*Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial*

*venture is Hschooler.net (<http://hschooler.net>), a social network for Christian families (especially homeschoolers) which is being built and run by three homeschooled students under Russ' direction.*

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First Baptist Church	Atlanta, GA	11-15	\$15,000 - \$18,000	\$16,500	Health, Dental, Life
Grace Community Church	Atlanta, GA	16-20	\$18,000 - \$22,000	\$20,000	Health, Dental, Life

**Report Summary:**

Job Title	Min	Q1	Median	Q3	Max
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