



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

Communications Survey 2016

How can we improve our communications?

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About respondents

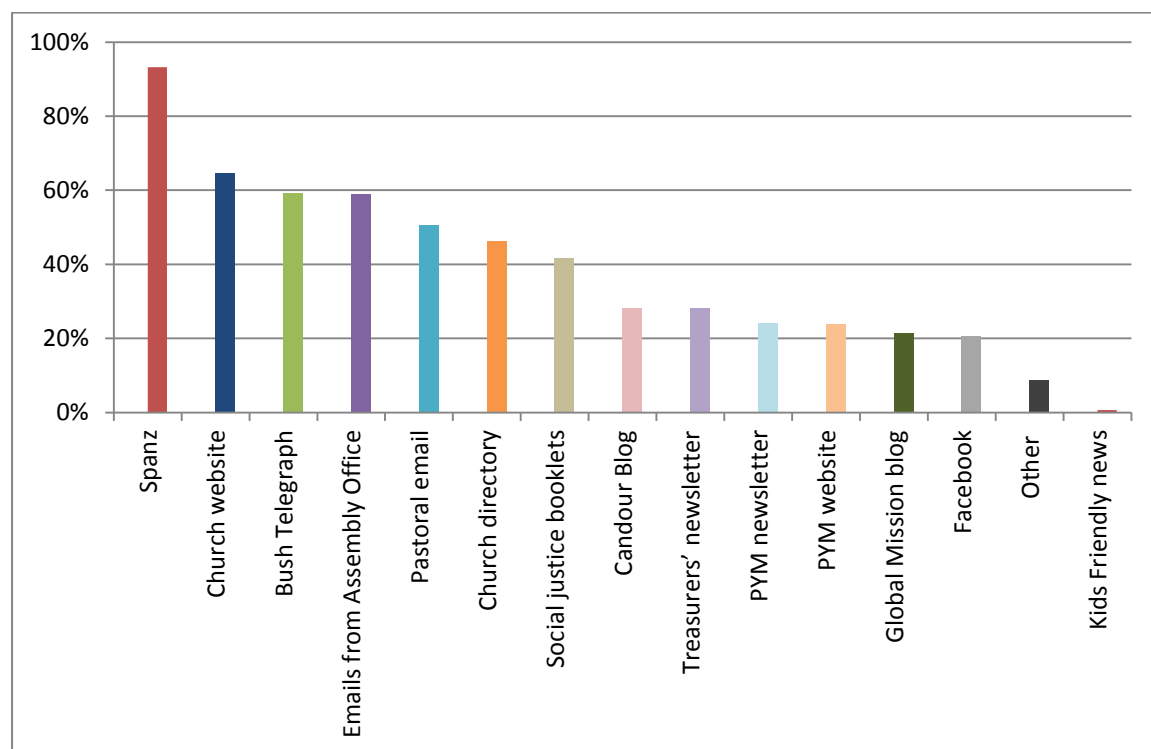
The last communications survey was undertaken in 2009, and was completed by 151 people. In 2016, 304 people responded to the survey.

Ninety-three people returned a hard copy survey; the remainder completed the survey electronically either via the Church's Facebook page (50 people), Church website or a link from the hard copy letter.

A little over half (54 percent) of the respondents were female, and 86 percent were aged 45 or over. People from a variety of church roles responded: ministers (26 percent), elders (21 percent); session clerks (13 percent); smaller numbers of those involved with youth and families and church administrators also offered feedback via the survey. There was limited cultural diversity among respondents, with 87 percent identifying themselves as European.

Popularity of publications

Survey respondents were more likely to have read *Spanz* than any of the Church's other publications, which is consistent with the 2009 survey results, where *Spanz* was also the most commonly read.



A note about Kids Friendly and PYM newsletter: It should be noted that the small number of children and families workers and youth responding to the survey has contributed to Kids Friendly and PYM publications not featuring heavily in respondents' answers. The size of the Kids Friendly and PYM mailing lists, and Facebook community and resource downloads from their websites, indicate that Kids Friendly and PYM communications are much more widely read than the results of the survey indicate.

Publication usefulness

Overall, the publications that people identified as most useful were *Spanz* (53 percent), the Church website (46 percent), *Bush Telegraph* (35 percent) and emails from Assembly Office (31 percent).

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who found identified publications useful

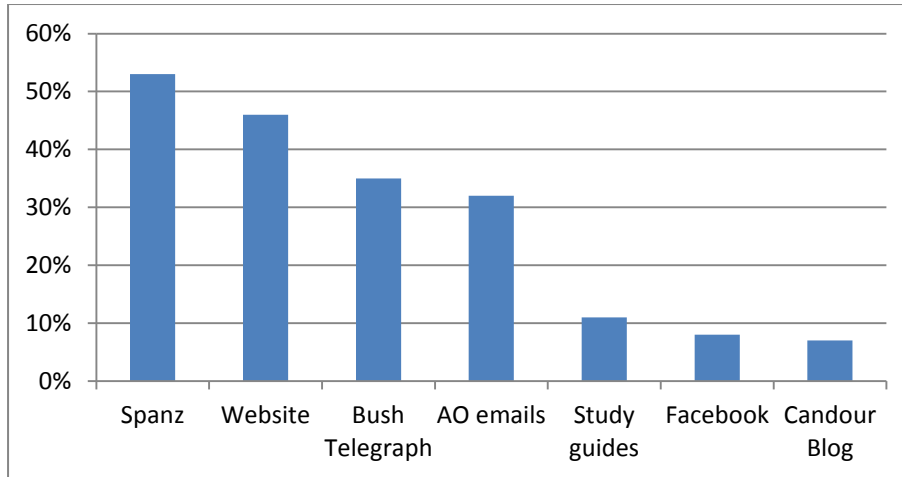
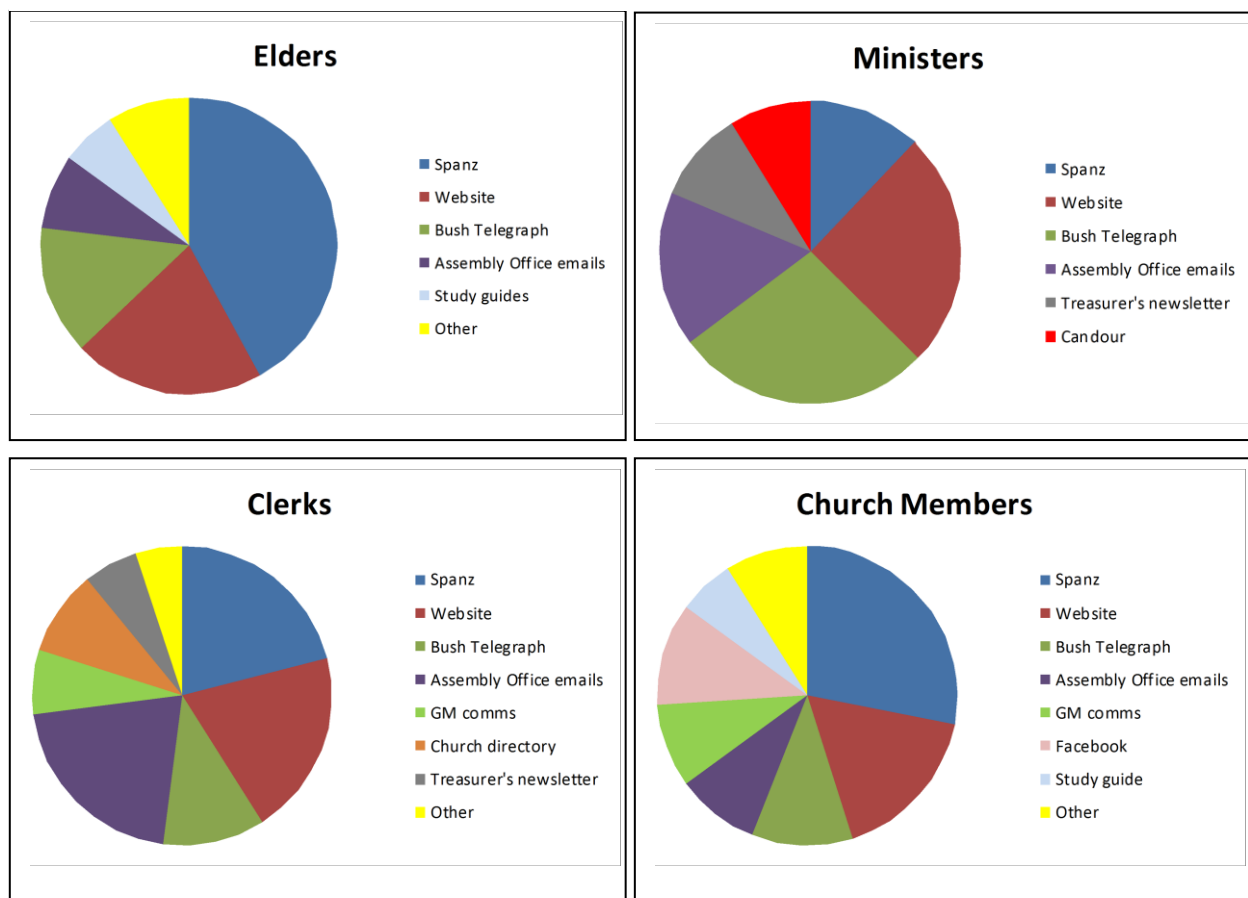


Figure 2 shows the perceived usefulness of key publications by main role at church, which provides some insights into the readership for publications.

Figure 2: Publication usefulness by role at church



What do people want to know about?

Those who responded to the survey considered it “very important” that they receive information about the following topics:

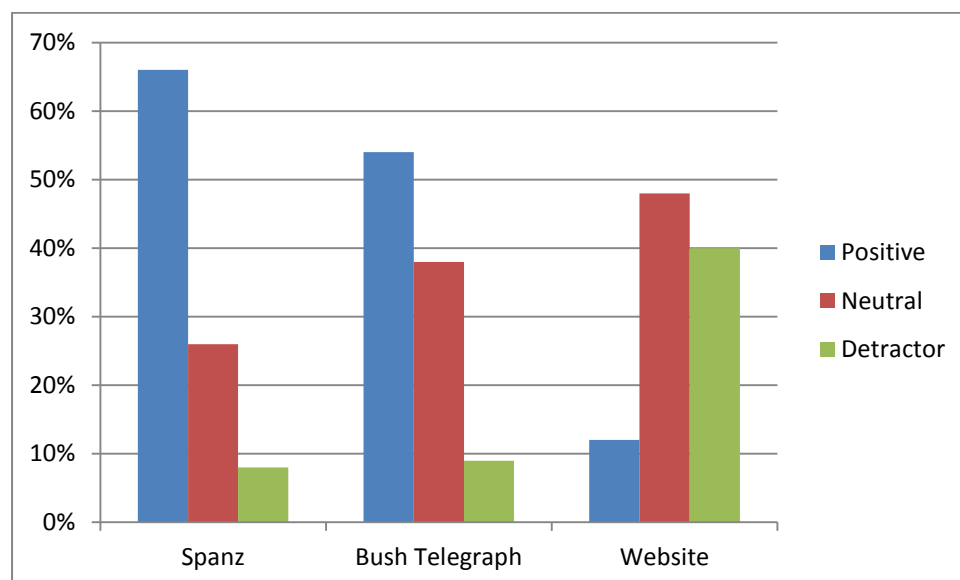
- Information about strategic direction of the church (59 percent)
- legislative issues and matters that affect administration of their church (54 percent)
- Third equal with around 45 percent support were: (a) stories about mission, (b) pastoral notices and (c) worship resources.

Readership habits

The survey asked respondents for detailed information about three of the key communication vehicles managed by the Church’s communications team: *Spanz*, *Bush Telegraph* and the Church website.

Overall, respondents responded positively to the Church’s communications, although the website fared worst in respondents’ feedback about specific publications (see Figure 2 below). *Spanz* and *Bush Telegraph* were rated positively with 67 percent of respondents describing the magazine as either “excellent” or “very good” and 54 percent of readers saying the same about *Bush Telegraph*. In contrast, detractors of the website (40 percent) were far more common than those who rated it positively (12 percent).

Figure 3: Net promoter status for key publications

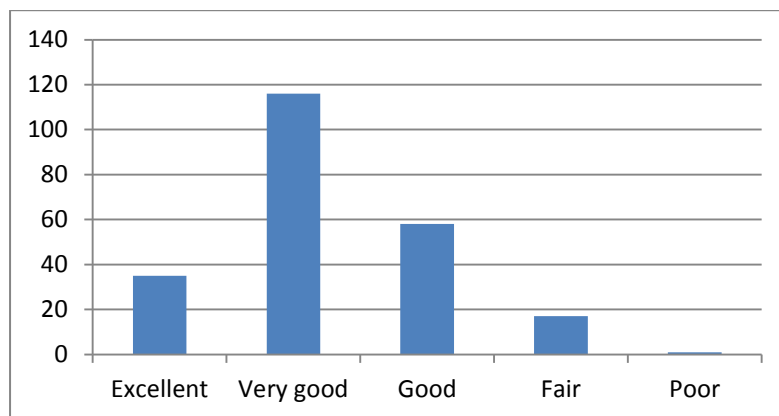


Spanz readership

A significant 81 percent of respondents had read *Spanz* in the last three months with around two-thirds of respondents indicating that they read “all” or “most” of the magazine.

Overall, *Spanz* is rated favourably by respondents, the significant majority (92 percent) evaluating the magazine as “good”, “very good” or “excellent”. See Figure 3.

Figure 4: Overall evaluation of Spanz



Comments reflected the fact that respondents found the magazine informative, and good for keeping people up to date with what is happening in the wider church community.

Ten of the 304 respondents commented, regarding the question about improvements that could be made to the magazine, that there could be less focus on “feel good” stories and more in-depth coverage of contemporary.

Bush Telegraph readership

Almost half of those who took the survey (48 percent) had read Bush Telegraph in the last three months, with 67 percent of respondents indicating that they read “all” or “most” of the magazine.

Only a small number of respondents made suggestions for improvements, with the most common feedback asking for a more concise magazine.

It is worth noting that information from Bush Telegraph is often shared in parish bulletins.

Website usage

The website received feedback indicating that a little over half (52 percent) of respondents had never used the site or used it less than once per month. Reasons for not using website were varied: a concerning 15 percent don’t know the site exists; others get info they need from other sources (33 percent); and 17 percent of respondents said it was hard to find the info they were looking for.

This last comment is further reflected in the section where respondents were asked to offer feedback on the worst thing about Church communications where 18 percent of comments said that the website was the worst thing. Respondents cited that it wasn’t easy to use or find information with many commenting that the search engine was substandard.

The website is the core platform for the Church’s digital communications, so poor website responsiveness and visibility are barriers to building better engagement among our target audience.

Best and worst aspects about our communication with parishes

Figure 5 depicts key themes from comments about the best things about Assembly Office communication with parishes.

Figure 5: Summary of what respondents consider is best about our communications with parishes

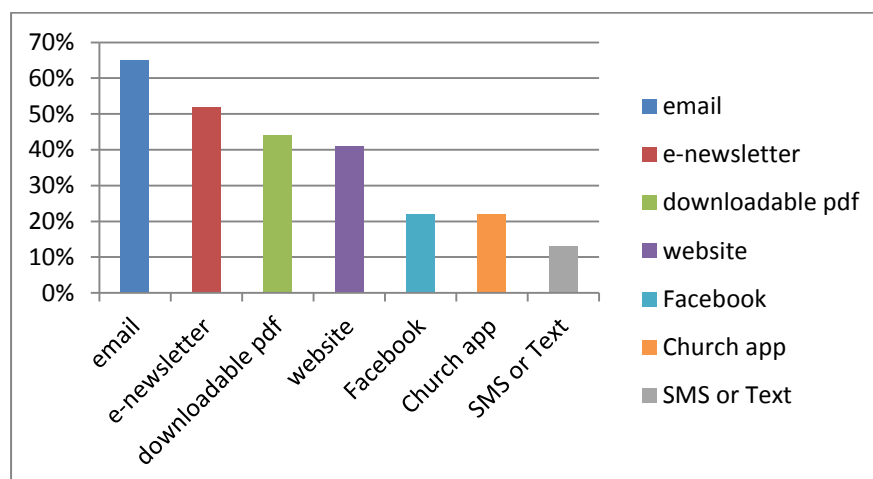
competence of the individual. I am somewhat limited.” Use of the Church website as a tool and resource is difficult for those who do not know how to use website functions.

Survey results show that while respondents access the internet in their personal lives, they lack the time to do so for church purposes. The fact that internet access is available at only 73 percent of parishes is a further barrier to engagement with digital communications.

Seventy-eight percent of respondents said that they most frequently accessed the internet via desktop computer (or laptop). Despite increasing use of tablets and smartphones in the wider community (reports suggest that around 25 percent of New Zealand’s national web traffic is via a tablet or smartphone¹), results from our survey show that tablets or smartphones were the most frequent means of accessing the internet for just 16 percent of all respondents.

When asked about the current level of digital communications, 32 percent of respondents said they would like to see more, 6 percent said less, and 45 percent of people thought that the current level was about right. Figure 6 shows the relative popularity of various forms of digital communication.

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents “very happy” to receive communication in these formats



A common theme was that union churches, in particular, largely see denominational communications as not relevant to them and do not access the Church website or other communications.

Communication within parishes

The most common means of communicating within congregations are printed bulletins (88 percent) and verbal or PowerPoint notices during services (89 percent). Comments indicate that the traditional printed bulletin is increasingly available in both printed and digital format. Just over a third of parishes are using digital communications: 35 percent of respondent parishes have a regular email bulletin, 45 percent have a website, and 30 percent have a social media presence such as Facebook.

A small number of people indicated filtering at the parish office means that they sometimes miss out on receiving information that they would like to see.

¹ March 2014 web traffic statistics *Frost & Sullivan New Zealand Mobile Device Usage Report 2013*

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, feedback indicates that the Church's communications are reaching their audience, which is pleasing. Some areas of enhancement have been identified but it must be noted that these were not noted by a majority. Changes that could be made in response to this feedback are noted below in recommendations.

The biggest opportunity for improvement lies with our website, which is built on what is now dated technology. To make the website more user-friendly a major upgrade is required, and the points highlighted in the survey are consistent with the Communications team's assessment of the website. Proposed changes to the website will be costed and presented to Council for its consideration.

Recommendations

- More widely publicising our range of publications and how to sign up to them
- Investigate ways to improve representativeness and usability of our communications for the wide range of cultures that make up the Church today
- Provide opportunities for increased meaningful theological and biblical discussion on important matters

Spanz

- Consider changing design for better legibility and readability for older eyes and to refresh the look of the magazine.
- Consider covering tough and sometimes controversial issues facing the Church as well as news about national Church, mission and parishes.

Bush Telegraph

- Move publication to third week of the month (rather than last) so that info can be used in monthly parish or presbytery bulletins
- Change the format of the covering Bush Telegraph email so that it has highlights and links from each section so that readers can see at a glance what content is available.

Website

- Update the website to make it easier to find information, including improvements to the search function and information hierarchy
- Better presentation of commonly used information to make it easier to find, use and share

Survey limitations

Personal communications – Evaluating the effectiveness of personal or face-to-face communications was outside the scope of this survey. However, a common theme expressed in the survey is that communications from Assembly Office are providing a point of connection with what is happening in the wider Church, and some respondents value the “feeling of being part of something larger than ourselves in our own parish sphere”.

People expressing a sense of disconnection between the national Church body and local churches has been far more common in recent times, and the fact that communication from Assembly Office is going somewhat toward building a sense of community and collegiality is an excellent outcome.

Personal communication is typically a more effective mechanism for building community and collegiality, so personal communications are an area that warrants further investigation. How could the Church's communications (overall) programme better support outcomes in this area?

Multicultural and multi-generational engagement – a limitation of the survey is that it was not meaningfully engaged with by people from non-European backgrounds, nor those who are younger than 45. Survey conclusions should be read with this in mind. Alternative means of engaging with these important church communities need to be considered so that the voices of younger Presbyterians and those from a variety of cultural backgrounds can be heard. Feedback from these groups will help shape communications that will more effectively engage with them.