

'LDS WEB GUY' MAKES HIS PRESENCE KNOWN

By [Steve Fidel](#), Deseret News

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Summary

The director of Internet and project coordination for the LDS church's Curriculum Department started blogging two years ago about online projects the church was working on. His site attracts 5,000 regular visitors from 60 countries.

The renaming of a Web site hosted by the LDS Church's director of online projects coincides with the cover story of the July Ensign that encourages church members to use the Internet to share the gospel.

Larry Richman, director of Internet and project coordination for the church's Curriculum Department, started blogging two years ago about online projects the church was working on at a site he named [ldsWebguy.com](#). Richman said the site has since grown to have 5,000 regular visitors in 60 countries.

A church official blogging unofficially about development projects attracted a helpful and friendly audience as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints expands its presence online. "I was explaining to the public what we were doing on church Web sites," he said. "It was a good way to capture anecdotal information and a good way to get feedback."

But there was more to say than one voice could address, and Richman's online project attracted the attention of his peers in the Church Office Building in Salt Lake City. Discussions about other information that would be valuable to an online audience developed with Joel Dehlin, the church's chief information officer; David Nielson, managing director of the Audiovisual Department; and David Frischknecht, managing director of the Curriculum Department.

"It came to a point where all of us said 'We have a lot to say about this, to families,'" and on June 10, the site was rebranded as [LDSMediaTalk.com](#).

"We kept all the same content, but we announced three new authors," Richman said. Though informal and unofficial, "Obviously our file leaders know what we're doing," he added.

The primary mission of the site is to help Mormon families find positive ways to use new technologies. That objective mirrors the topic of the "Sharing the Gospel Using the Internet" cover story of the July Ensign, which is just off the press and on its way to mail subscribers.

In the church-magazine spread, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve addresses positive ways to use new technologies in a changing world.

"Ours is the world of cyberspace, cell phones that capture video, video and music downloads, social networks, text messaging and blogs, handhelds and podcasts," Elder Ballard says, adding a question for church members: "How will you use these marvelous inventions? More to the point, how will you use them to further the work of the Lord?"

Elder Ballard then issues a request that church members "join the conversation by participating on the Internet to share the gospel and to explain in simple and clear terms the message of the Restoration." His observations about the world of the Internet includes cautions about avoiding

online "predators trying to trap the unwary" followed by counsel to avoid discussions "focused on questioning, debating and doubting gospel principles."

Richman said the principal writers for LDSMediaTalk.com will glean technology information useful to families based on each author's area of expertise. The curriculum director will focus on teaching the gospel. The audiovisual director will focus on Hollywood, movie-watching and music. The CIO will dig into technology issues. "I'm somewhere in the middle of all of those," Richman said.

The site currently has posts about the beta release of the new meetinghouse locator on LDS.org, a summary of research about popular conceptions of the LDS Church, information about Web 2.0 and a discussion about monitoring what kids do online.

Richman said he expects to see use of the rebranded Web site grow four- to five-fold in the next few months, adding the site will not be the place where major church projects are announced but will continue to be the place he and the other writers can quickly post "the little day-to-day stuff."

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