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Online News Website Review: christiantoday.com

Perspectives on the news vary greatly, with many well-know news organizations having earned a reputation for a liberal bias effecting even the way their questions are asked (mediaresearch.org). For this reason, I chose to review a Christian news resource, which attempts to maintain a biblical truth perspective in their reporting. The website is <http://www.christiantoday.com>, and is operated as an independent, inter-denominational, Christian media company, serving to present current news to Christians. Based in the United Kingdom, their content includes world news, as well as regional



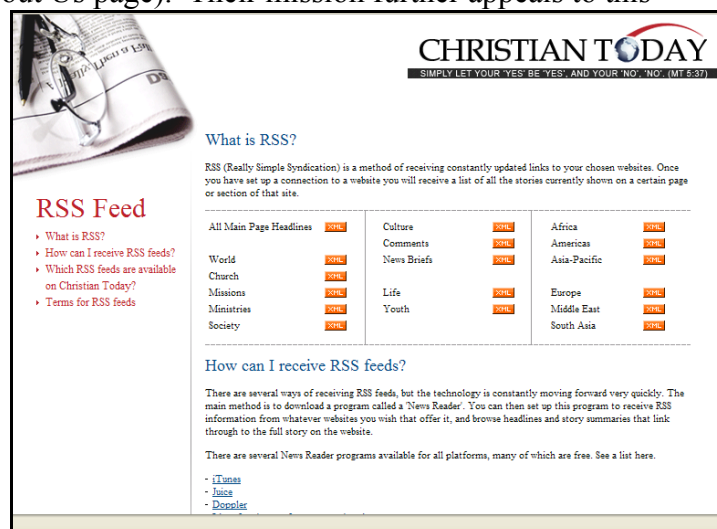
coverage with reporters in 17 countries. Their statement of faith is consistent with an evangelical perspective, also evidenced in their participation in the Evangelical Alliance (Christian Today “about us” page).

I find the Christian Today website to be well-designed and effective, with a wide variety of current news from around the world. Their coverage includes general world news, as well as topics that are ignored by the secular media because of their faith-related content. News content is updated hourly, with the specific update time stated on the top right corner of the home page. I

find this appealing, to know that the page is current. Headline news is provided in concise ways, with logical sections in columnar structure, including “Top Stories,” “Culture and Youth,” “World News,” “Life and Health,” “Comments” (editorials), “Special Features,” “Week in Pictures,” and others.

The site design uses a hierarchical navigational model, bringing the user from the home page to main sections (News, Church, Missions, Ministries, Society, Culture, Comments, Archives), which lead to further listings and individual story content within these respective sections. Navigation is intuitive, with consistent flush-left section links, and general site links on the bottom of each page.

Page layout is logical, with pleasing color use and appropriate use of fonts. Dynamic font sizes are supported, allowing the user to adjust text size for body text headings according to their personal need or preference. “Top Stories” are placed in an eye-catching location at the top of the page center, with a news ticker presenting the latest headlines on the top of the page just below the banner header. The design appeals appropriately to their stated audience of “all denominations as equal constituents of the body of Christ and in preserving its identity as an ecumenical Christian media source” (About Us page). Their mission further appeals to this demographic and I feel is being met through their site, seeking to “simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No” (Matthew 5:37, quoted on About Us page, no version listed).The Christian Today website does support a



number of Web 2.0 features, including RSS, reader comments, and a limited number of media offerings. The RSS feeds are well-implemented, with sixteen different options plus “All” feeds available. The RSS page provides a useful orientation to RSS, with instructions for the user in setting up the desired feeds in their news reader. The website allows users to integrate their content on non-commercial websites with proper formatting and attribution.

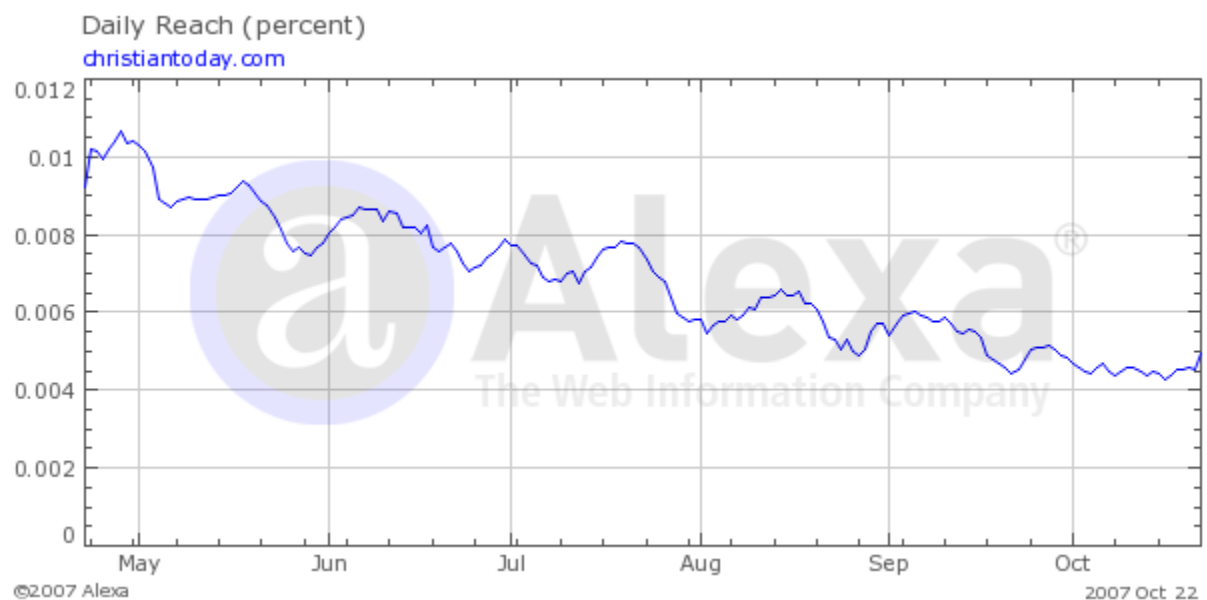
Because the website does not operate as a broadcasting organization, their media content is limited. Readers can submit comments to news stories without membership, though the host organization retains the right to edit comments. Readers may also submit photographs for use in new stories, with a call for qualified correspondence reporters to broaden their coverage. Users can follow a media link to Premier Christian Radio, which provides Christian radio programming to the UK. This radio broadcast content is not directly linked to news stories, though, making its usefulness limited.

News stories can be emailed to others, or saved for later viewing. Besides online comments posted following news stories, feedback can be provided to the editors through a “review” email link. The site does load quickly, including the media content (though it is limited) utilizing javascript and a pop-up video player that does not require a special media plug-in.

Christian Today presents a professional-looking website, with a Christian worldview perspective on news that is absent from most other news providers. Their advanced features do not compare to the mainstream of the BBC, Fox, CNN, and others, but they do present a perspective that deserves consideration from the evangelical Christian community. The inclusion of the 17 different RSS feed options is a valuable feature, as well as the home page option to choose either a UK-specific or International version. Having researched a number of other

Christian News sites, I find their coverage appealing in its approach to cover general news content, and adding important information for their unapologetically-Christian audience. While some other Christian organizations (such as CBN, TBN, Mission Network News) provide more interactivity and Web 2.0 features, I find this website to have appealing content that is absent from these other, which are either more specialized or feature-focused.

Targeting a narrow demographic compared to the mainstream secular society, christiantoday.com has a respectable usage rate. According to www.alexa.com, the website has a traffic rank of 13,183. A secular news website with a conservative reputation,



www.foxnews.com, maintains a much higher access rate of 690 according to the same source, but I consider this ranking quite strong. According to their own Media Pack, Christian Today is the highest ranking Christian website in the UK.

The website does not have a direct opportunity for citizen journalism in an easy-to-setup way. There is an invitation for international correspondents, but this is via a formalized process of application and processing. But the fore mentioned options for both comments and editorial

submissions support this to a limited extent.

Improvements to the site could come, in my opinion, through enhanced media offerings, as well as additional opportunities for this type of citizen journalism. The danger of this is the possible abuse by opponents to the evangelical content of the site. I have observed this problem in some Christian forums, where heretics come to disrupt the otherwise friendly community of those seeking answers, or wishing to discuss issues and perspectives.

Overall, I find this website worthy for consideration as a news source for world-minded Christians.

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