

Churches have an incredible opportunity to grow their reach through church online. This model of ministry allows you to reach a wider audience, become a welcome mat for people far from God, be financially effective as possible and position yourself for the future. I was the Church Online Pastor at [Liquid Church](#) for three years.

I've learned a lot from incredible leaders in this area, and I've learned a lot through trial and error. In this resource, I'll:

- Explain the difference between church online and streamed services
- Map out the pros and cons of church online
- Give best practices for on camera talent
- Help you engage your audience through chat hosts
- Look towards future developments

Streamed Services Compared To Church Online

Let me first state that neither model of ministry is inherently better. Both work well in different contexts. So your church needs to identify which model will work in your setting.

Also, these are broad brush strokes. There is a lot of nuance between these two general models. For example, [church online](#) at Liquid Church is "simulated live" every Sunday morning on [Facebook](#) and our [website](#). We use [Open Broadcast Software](#) to host on Facebook and [CoHP](#) to host on our website. Church online is then available as on-demand playback on both of these platforms throughout the week.

Streamed Services

- Entire service (worship, hosting, and message) is available live on Facebook on Sunday mornings and/or posted a er-the-fact on your website.
- Closed system or experience. Streamed services don't have any of the features or aspects of an open system like a church community.

Church Online

- Replicates a physical church experience online, thus creating a spiritual community in a digital environment. Some of those replicated elements include:
 - Discussion through chat windows.
 - Prayer through email correspondence.
 - Life groups through video conference services like [Zoom](#).
 - Serving in the online community by becoming a chat host, prayer warrior, group leader or social media promoter.
 - Communion participation. Every time we have communion in the service, I encourage our online community to raid their pantry for bread and grape juice

before the message so they can participate at home in this sacrament after the message.

- One of the few things an online church can't do is weddings and funerals. So if you want to get married or buried, then you still need to go to a physical church :)

If you're wrestling through which model is best for you then ask this question, "do you believe discipleship can happen online?" If you answer yes then church online is for you. If you answer no then stick with simply posting your message or streaming your service.

Church Online Pros And Cons

Pros

- High Reach - You're now on the world wide web baby. You can reach a lot more people digitally than you can physically. Nough said.
- Welcome Mat - Church online allows people to try before they buy. People can check out a service before coming to a service. At Liquid Church 5% of our guests a physical campus first started attending church online. That is huge!
- Campus Alternative - Church online provides a service alternative for those who normally attend a physical campus but cannot on a particular Sunday because of sickness, volunteering, work or vacation.
- Increased Vulnerability - A couple of guys each year will approach me as a pastor to talk about their struggle with porn at our physical campuses. But a couple of guys will approach me about the same subject each month online because the platform lends itself to increased openness. When we connect with people in person we spend the majority of our time with small talk. When we connect online we bypass these obligatory social norms and go directly to heart issues.
- Financial Solvency - Because church online requires such little overhead and generates a high degree of revenue it will always be in the black. Now, I put this pro last because monetary benefits should be a by product of a flourishing spiritual community. It should never be the motivating factor to do church online.

Cons

- Lack Of Social Decorum - Because there is an increased degree of autonomy online there can be a lack of basic social graces. If you have ever read the comments section of a website, you know what I mean. This confrontational and even hostile approach to interaction can manifest itself in church online. So anticipate it and be prepared to handle any destructive personalities quickly or your community will become toxic.
- Tech required. is is a technology-heavy approach. If your church doesn't have the equipment or the know-how, it's going to be an uphill climb. at doesn't mean it's impossible—you can do a lot with an iPhone and the free Church Online platform—but it's going to be new territory for you, and that can be an obstacle.

On Camera Best Practices

Overall the goal for on camera hosts is to make the guests feel welcomed, lead them through a service experience and direct them to action steps at the end.

- Be the most charismatic version of yourself. I say *charismatic* because we need to draw people into the experience. And I say *version of yourself* because you don't want to be insincere by trying to be someone else. People easily sniff out insincerity and will be turned off right away.
- Encourage as much engagement as possible. Any question the hosts ask each other they should ask the audience. Another way to encourage engagement is ask the guests to post photos of themselves watching church online and to hashtag it with the church name.
- The more comfortable and engaged hosts are with each other, the more comfortable and engaged the audience will be with them. In other words, if you are boring each other, you will be boring the audience. Not a good thing.
- Hosts need to be visually dynamic because people look before they listen. People scrolling through their social feed will only stop and listen if it looks like you are interesting. So your face and body need to be animated to visually pull in your online audience.
- Ideally hosts are going to connect with the crowd and convey the content. But if they end up being weaker in one area, it should be content. I would rather have a relatable host who flubbed a date than one that nailed the details while coming off as distant.
- Don't use sacred language if you can use secular language. So avoid churchy or religious terms if possible. When you need to use spiritual terms like gospel or salvation then explain them in understandable terms.
 - Example - God calls all of us to repentance. Repentance is a spiritual 180. It means to stop walking towards sin, and to start walking in the opposite direction towards holiness.
- Make more eye contact with the camera than the other host. This will create a three way conversation between the hosts and the audience. It will make the audience feel more connected to the content.

Engagement Through Chat Hosts

Chat hosts need to draw in the guests as much as possible. Below are some basic ways to do that.

- Picture the guests as your unsaved friend or family member. The people you have been praying over for years. When you picture your target audience this way you will naturally communicate in a loving and respectful way which will draw them in.
- Give away free stuff. If your campus gives away free new here t-shirts, then do that online. At Liquid Church Online we encourage everyone to fill out this [connection card](#) and we will mail them a t-shirt. Go ahead and try it out!

- Keep them in the loop. Inform your community with email updates, video [announcements](#) and PDF [versions](#) of printed materials
- Gently encourage guests to join the chat. Once they join the chat greet them by name. If you know them, personalize your greeting. If you don't know them then introduce yourself and ask how long they've attended church online. Never ask if it's their first time.
- If you can't answer a question, let the guest know you'll forward it to the church online pastor and they'll get back to them. Never say I don't know.
- Steer the conversation away from contentious topics like politics. This is especially helpful every four years in November.
- At the end of the service, cut and paste the chat and email it to the church online pastor. This helps them know how the experience went for our guests and how best to continue serving and pastoring the guests. It also allows the pastor to do some quality control and any necessary coaching with the chat hosts.
- Watch your spelling, grammar, capitalization and punctuation as you host. Watching for this will help avoid any unnecessary distractions. This will in turn make the experience as engaging as possible.

Future Developments

- It will become the norm. Just as multisites were the anomaly a decade ago, but have quickly become normative for churches, church online will also become the norm over the next decade.
- It will grow. We used to have physical churches that might have an online representation of themselves. That will reverse. The day is coming when we have online churches that might have a physical representation of themselves - think Amazon. In fact, the future is now. When Perry Noble and Mark Driscoll rebirthed their ministries and launched [Second Chance Church](#) and [The Trinity Church](#), they both opened online for a number of months before opening any physical doors.
- Right now, the majority of Christian colleges, universities and seminaries do not incorporate this model of ministry into their programs or course loads. This will change. Schools that are equipping future ministers will eventually get behind this new reality and properly prepare their students by adapting their ecclesiology and incorporating this model of ministry.

Hopefully this explanation of church online helps you consider adopting this ministry model. If you've already adopted this model, then hopefully the above best practices help you continue utilizing church online to grow your reach. Send an email to benstapley@gmail.com and let me know what best practices I missed. I would love to hear from you and learn from you. I would also love to connect on social media so look me up. Have an awesome day.