

CHURCH ONLINE STRATEGY

Choosing Your Church's Path Moving Forward



2020 HAS BEEN A GAME-CHANGER FOR THE CHURCH



We Never Thought This Would Happen.

No one would have imagined that a global pandemic would shutter virtually every church building in America for at least three full months.

But it did.

Nearly 300,000 churches needed to pivot from in-person services to online gatherings practically overnight.

We've learned a lot.

One thing we've figured out is that while connecting online is different from meeting in person, meaningful ministry can and does take place virtually.

And as our churches slowly return to on-site, in-person gatherings, most churches now realize the importance of continuing their online presence in some way, shape, or form.

What will your church's online/virtual offerings look like post-COVID?

Every church will need to choose a model or strategy moving forward. While no model is distinctively better or worse than the other, each church that is serious about their online strategy moving forward will need to choose one of five virtual ministry models.

Churches that don't make a decision soon will find themselves wandering in the digital desert, possibly for years to come.

We'll help you understand the different online strategy options and choose the one that's the best fit for your church moving forward.

“Churches that don't make a decision soon will find themselves wandering in the digital desert, possibly for years to come.”

The background of the slide is a dark blue gradient. On the left side, there is a vertical strip of lighter blue containing several large, semi-transparent question marks. The rest of the background is filled with a pattern of smaller, faint question marks.

Top questions everyone is asking...

If people only meet online, are they violating scripture?

Do we feel pressure to maintain or increase big-room attendance so that our current model of ministry (including facilities and staffing) can continue?

Is there anything we can learn from churches that are not allowed to meet physically due to religious persecution or other conditions?

Is it possible for a person to grow and mature in their relationship with Christ without stepping into our physical building?

Is it possible to create a 'fully-devoted disciple' that lives 500 miles away from our church building?

What decisions do we need to make now to prepare for my church's future in online ministry?

We think this crisis is temporary. Don't you think everything will get 'back to normal' soon?

CHURCH ONLINE STRATEGY OPTIONS

Every church will need to choose from one of five digital strategy options moving forward. We'll explain each strategy and help you choose the one that best fits your church's future.

1 The **OldNormal** Church

2 The **SimulService** Church

3 The **BuildingFeeder** Church

4 The **CampusLauncher** Church

5 The **DigitalDisciple** Church



The **OldNormal** Church

Some churches are quite comfortable going back to their pre-COVID model. For them, this means going back to their 'old normal' of how they did ministry just months ago.

For many of these churches, this means that they will stop their online service offering as soon as they can meet back in person. The OldNormal Church will go back to pre-pandemic strategy, including audio or video messages made available online for those that couldn't attend on any particular Sunday.

Honestly, no one knows the future. For some churches, the future may look very much like what they experienced pre-COVID.

Many churches will choose to be an OldNormal church. That is a completely viable strategy option for some churches that wish to keep their focus solely on in-person local gatherings well into the future.

OVERVIEW

FORMAT

No online streaming of services. Recorded sermons on-demand.

AUDIENCE

Regular Attenders

MOTTO

"Let's return to church as we knew it"

GOAL

Butt in Seat in Big Room Every Sunday

MINDSET

Add nothing / Status Quo

OVERVIEW

FORMAT

Sunday morning
worship service
streamed live

AUDIENCE

Regular Attenders /
Insiders

MOTTO

"If you can't be here, be
there"

GOAL

Butt in Seat in
Big Room
Next Sunday

MINDSET

Add Another
'Service Option'



The SimuService Church

The **SimuService** is for the church that feels they should probably continue to have an online service but believes that real worship, connection, and discipleship can only happen when gathered together in one place simultaneously.

A **SimuService** is essentially a live-feed of the Sunday morning worship service from start to end. It is provided, as a courtesy, to those that can't physically make it to the church on Sunday.

SimuServices are great for shut-ins, church members on vacation, or those regular attenders that are stuck at home sick.

With churches that choose the **SimuService** model, the goal is almost always in-person attendance in the future. The online service is there only for those who can't make it on Sunday for one reason or another.

The **SimuService** church expects to return to the Pre-COVID standard model of meeting in-person, aside from keeping the online service as an additional option for those that may temporarily need it.



The **BuildingFeeder** Church

The **BuildingFeeder** model gives slightly more importance to your church's online strategy. Rather than just being a fallback for those who cannot attend on a Sunday, this strategy also tries to position your online service as a 'front door' for new people that may be checking your church out.

BuildingFeeder churches feel strongly that prospective attenders will most likely investigate and 'kick the tires' online before they ever enter their building. Online services should then be welcoming and inviting to the person who may ultimately decide to attend your church in-person next Sunday or sometime soon.

The ultimate goal of the **BuildingFeeder** model is still in-person attendance at your Sunday service. **BuildingFeeder** churches, like **SimulService** churches, still hold that authentic worship, connection, and discipleship will most likely happen in-person or as people gather together in one designated physical location.

Most **BuildingFeeder** services will look much like the pre-COVID 'online campus' model some churches employed. Online services are somewhat modified for the outsider. There will be a designated online host on video that will provide a specific welcome to the online attenders. Volunteers will most likely monitor the live chat area of the live stream to welcome people as they enter or answer questions they may have.

The **BuildingFeeder** online service feels like a peek into your church's live service. That is what it is: an opportunity to show new people what it's like to attend a physical in-person service at your church in the hope that they'll someday drive to your building and walk through your doors.

This model still views the physical gathering as primary. The ultimate goal of the **BuildingFeeder** model is to convert online viewers into in-person attenders at an existing physical building.

OVERVIEW

FORMAT

Modified online service to serve as church's front door

AUDIENCE

Potential Attenders / Outsiders

MOTTO

"Check us out online, then come visit us"

GOAL

Butt in Seat in Big Room Sometime Soon

MINDSET

"Add Another Campus" (online campus)

OVERVIEW

FORMAT

Customized service for anyone in our geographical region

AUDIENCE

Insiders AND Outsiders

MOTTO

“Where two or three are gathered”

GOAL

Eventual in-person gathering, but probably NOT in our Big Room

MINDSET

“Add Another Church” (micro-sites, eventual new larger campuses)

4

The **CampusLauncher** Church

The **CampusLauncher** model takes a slightly little different approach. Like the **SimulService** and **BuildingFeeder** models, the **CampusLauncher** church still is convinced that people best grow and are disciplined when they are engaged in live, in-person community. However, according to the **CampusLauncher** model, that in-person community and face-to-face contact may never happen inside the four walls of your current church building.

It may happen in a home. Or an office. Or a prison. Or a nursing home or homeless shelter. This face-to-face gathering may never grow larger than a few people, but will still, under this strategy, be considered a manifestation and legitimate expression of your local church.

Some churches are calling these gatherings ‘micro-sites.’ In this approach, “where two or three are gathered” constitutes a church. And they’re fine if that micro-site never joins the large gathering at the main building.

CampusLaunchers have switched their metric from counting large-room gatherings to reaching people wherever they are. They’re still counting. And they are still gathering people in groups. But they’re doing so differently. Their underlying conviction is that growth and discipleship CAN happen online, but that there still needs, at some point, to be some physical connection for maximum benefit and spiritual growth.

Because of this, the **CampusLauncher** church views their online experience, not exclusively as a front door for potential new attenders as the **BuildingFeeder** church does. **CampusLaunchers** see the weekly online church gathering as a possible replacement for the pre-COVID big-room experience. They expect that dedicated Christ-followers may want to be a part of a ‘corporate’ online worship service but only meet face-to-face with their small group for connection, growth, and a sense of community.

The thought is that some people will enjoy the virtual service enough to choose it over the big-room in-person experience. But those same people will still want and need the community of a small group in some type of physical gathering.

CampusLauncher churches realize that this model is a significant change in approach and strategy. They recognize that they will need to dramatically increase their online engagement strategy to resource and help facilitate these new ‘off-campus’ physical groups. Part of this approach will most likely include a dedicated (or at least part-time) digital engagement director that will provide structure and opportunities for these new smaller in-person gatherings. This will be a new role for most churches.

CampusLauncher churches may also continue to provide increased opportunities for children, students, and small groups online, encouraging smaller regular in-person gatherings to feed community and spiritual growth.



The **DigitalDisciple** Church

The **DigitalDisciple** church feels that the church can function, totally and completely, in a virtual setting. According to this model, no physical building or in-person interaction is necessary for discipleship and meaningful connections to take place.

The way to understand the **DigitalDisciple** church is that, while they will continue to build buildings and hold in-person, large gatherings, they do not believe that those tools are necessary to ultimately reach and disciple people.

DigitalDisciple churches will continue to do church in much the same way that they did pre-COVID. Still, they will also acknowledge that some people may never attend their church or any in-person gathering, even a micro-site or physical small group.

For **DigitalDisciple** churches, they are not saying that this is a superior way of doing church. They are saying that for some people, the approach to spiritual growth and maturity may not always include any physical component at all.

They will take a lesson from different areas of virtual collaboration that already exist that have NO physical connection. For example, some virtual employees create meaningful relationships totally online. They are able to accomplish great work online without ever meeting physically. And those involved in online gaming have been creating bonds, relationships, and friendships online for years. They learn, grow, and mature as gamers in a totally virtual setting.

The **DigitalDisciple** church understands that genuine spiritual growth and discipleship can happen absent physical proximity. As a result, they have decided to embrace this reality with an 'all in' approach to their digital presence and strategy.

For the **DigitalDisciple** church, they strive to do everything online that they do in their physical location. This includes children's ministry, student ministry, and small groups. They also find ways to engage individuals to serve, either through online service opportunities through the church or another virtual organization. There is no expectation or push to have each individual attend any kind of physical gathering. Some will, but it is not the ultimate outcome for a **DigitalDisciple** church. The ultimate outcome is the maturing of a person in Christ through online engagement. This strategy just believes that this process can happen entirely online for some people.

DigitalDisciple churches will shift a substantial amount of their time and effort into figuring how this model might work. This means a significant increase in resources (both financial and personnel) since you are building a totally self-sufficient ministry model outside of your current paradigm.

Not every church will see the **DigitalDisciple** model as a viable option either financially or philosophically. Those that do will have the possibility of seeing growth not just locally but worldwide (as your location and physical proximity is no longer a determining factor). They will see the potential of reaching different types of people than they would ever attract using the traditional physical gathering approach.

OVERVIEW

FORMAT

Exclusive online service w/ in-person ministries deployed entirely online

AUDIENCE

Everyone & Everywhere

MOTTO

"Disciples can be made anywhere and in any way"

GOAL

Everything we do in-person can be translated to an online format

MINDSET

Add "Another Disciple"

CHURCH ONLINE STRATEGY OPTIONS

The OldNormal Church	The SimulService Church	The BuildingFeeder Church	The CampusLauncher Church	The DigitalDisciple Church
FORMAT				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + No online streaming of services. Recorded sermons on-demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Current Sunday morning service streamed live 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Modified online service to serve as church's 'front door' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Customized service for anyone in our geographical region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Exclusive online service w/ in-person ministries deployed entirely online
AUDIENCE				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Audience = Regular attenders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Audience = Regular attenders / Insiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Audience = Potential Attenders / outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Audience = outsiders and insiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Audience = everyone, everywhere
MOTTO				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + "Let's return to church as we knew it" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + "If you can't be here, be there" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + "Check us out online, then come visit us" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + "Where two or three are gathered" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + "Disciples can be made anywhere, wany way"
GOAL				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Ultimate goal = Return to 'normal' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Ultimate goal = 'butt in seat in big room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Ultimate goal = 'butt in seat' in big room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Ultimate goal = Eventual in-person gathering, but probably not in our big room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Ultimate goal = everything we do now modified to online only audience
MINDSET				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Add nothing / Status Quo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Another service time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Another campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Another church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Another disciple

CHOOSING YOUR STRATEGY MODEL

Every church must choose one of these five models. Which church are you? Which online strategy best fits your church?

Here are some quick questions to help you decide.



If people only meet online, are they violating scripture?

If you believe people must meet physically (face-to-face) collectively as the local church, you're most likely a **SimulService** or **BuildingFeeder** church.



Is it possible for a person to grow and mature in their relationship with Christ without stepping into our physical building?

If so, you're most likely a **CampusLauncher** or **DigitalDisciple** church.



Do we feel pressure to maintain or increase big-room attendance so that our current model of ministry (including facilities and staffing) can continue?

If your immediate answer is 'yes,' then the **SimulService** or **BuildingFeeder** model is the one with which you will feel the most comfortable. That doesn't mean that the **CampusLauncher** or **DigitalDisciple** models are not a potential option for you, but it does mean that until you can agree on metrics different than in-person attendance, it will be hard to fully engage these more non-traditional approaches to online ministry



Is it possible to create a 'fully-devoted disciple' that lives 500 miles away from our church building?

If your answer is yes, a **DigitalDisciple** model may be an exciting option for your church.



We think this crisis is temporary. Don't you think everything will get 'back to normal' soon?

Honestly, no one knows the future. For some churches, the future may look very much like what they experienced pre-COVID. Many churches will choose to be an OldNormal church. That is a completely viable strategy option for some churches that wish to keep their focus on in-person local gatherings.



Is there anything we can learn from churches that are not allowed to meet physically due to religious persecution or other conditions?

If you're actively wondering how the underground church is thriving in China and other nations, you may be open to a **CampusLauncher** or **DigitalDisciple** approach to online ministry.



ACTION STEPS TO TAKE NOW:

ACTION STEP #1: Choose Your Model

Every church needs to choose an online model quickly to avoid being left behind.

ACTION STEP #2: Secure Buy-In From Your Governing Board, Staff, and Key Volunteers

Your model will never get off the ground without the support of key leadership, staff, and volunteers.

ACTION STEP #3: Allocate Budget Priority for Online Ministry

Your online ministry will never be a priority until you significantly prioritize it in your budget.

ACTION STEP #4: Determine Staffing Needs for Online Ministry

Each model/strategy requires the deployment of key lay volunteers or part-time or full-time staff.

ACTION STEP #5: Dedicate Yourself to Constant Innovation and Iteration

What works for others may not work for you. Constant testing and improvement will provide increased results.

We're here to help with your online strategy. Let's talk.

We'd love to have a conversation with you about your church's future online strategy. We can help you through all five actions steps. [CLICK HERE to schedule a 30-minute strategy session now.](#)

