

THE SMALL CHURCH GUIDE TO
**CREATING
A DIGITAL MINISTRY
STRATEGY**

**RAISE
YOUR
HAND IF
YOU
THOUGHT
THINGS
WOULD BE
DIFFERENT
BY NOW.**



Raise your hand if you thought things would be different by now. After all, it's nearly 2023. The pandemic is (sort of) over. Life is back to (kind of) normal. Shouldn't we be back to levels of engagement in our churches too?

If you are like most churches that we serve, you know the frustrating truth because you see it each week—attendance is down. Some people left and didn't come back. Some people found a new church. Some people decided to simply stay home and watch church online.

**WHATEVER THE CASE MAY BE,
THE NUMBERS DON'T LIE.**

According to an article in Christianity Today: "While people steadily returned to church services in the first half of 2021, the trend hit a plateau. Going into the third year since COVID-19, congregations and their leaders are left with the reality that the people who worshiped alongside them before may not be coming back."

Or this quote by ATS, "According to the "Twenty Years of Congregational Change" report by Faith Communities Today, 70% of churches now have 100 or fewer weekly attendees, with half in the country having 65 people or fewer in weekly attendance. It is predicted that this trend will accelerate during the next ten years in the post-pandemic world."

But the most conclusive proof is probably what you see week in and week out at your church.

**THERE ARE TWO WAYS
TO LOOK AT DATA LIKE THIS.**

The first way is to lament the old days and wish things would go back to normal. The truth is the old normal is gone. Modern churches have to learn to operate in today's environment to the best of their ability. And that brings up the second way we can view the data above—as an unprecedented and unique opportunity to reach more people.

Because of the pandemic, inflation, racial and political tensions, global uncertainty—people are hurting more than ever and searching for solutions. The good news is that the Gospel message still moves people and there is a greater opportunity than ever before to reach people and strengthen your church.

CHECK OUT THIS QUOTE BY CAREY NIEUWHOF (IRONICALLY, FROM AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN 2018, PRE-PANDEMIC):

“ *In the future, the church will meet anywhere, any time, sometimes. You'll have set gatherings and people will gather together in person, but the digital will supplement, enhance, expand and sometimes replace your local gatherings.*

For example, when people are out of town, they'll join you online. But through email (yes despised email... people read them every day), online church, social and more things we'll invent, we can engage people daily in the mission. And we can reach people who haven't been reached every single day, not just Sunday. **”**

Did you catch that phrase—more things we'll invent?

It's past time for churches to be innovative in our thinking and willing to expand our idea of what your church could look like. We have the greatest message in the world—a world that is desperate, by the way, to find hope.

IT'S TIME TO EXPAND OUR THINKING ABOUT CHURCH BEYOND THE BUILDING.

**IT'S TIME TO
IMPLEMENT A
DIGITAL MINISTRY
STRATEGY.**

THE CHALLENGE

Let's go ahead and address the elephant in the room. Most churches intuitively know they need to do something to enhance their online presence, but deep down, they really don't want to. In a way, it's understandable. It's much more rewarding to deliver a message to a room full of people than speaking to a camera lens. As a communicator you can read the room, feel the energy, and interact during and after the message. It's one of the reasons you go into ministry in the first place. It's much more enjoyable to have a conversation or prayer in the hallway of your building than to type a sentence on social media and hit send.

No wonder most pastors and churches think of digital ministry as—best case, a necessary evil and worst case, something that actually keeps people from going to church. [Call out] The problem isn't that digital ministry is bad; it's that most churches don't know how to do it well.

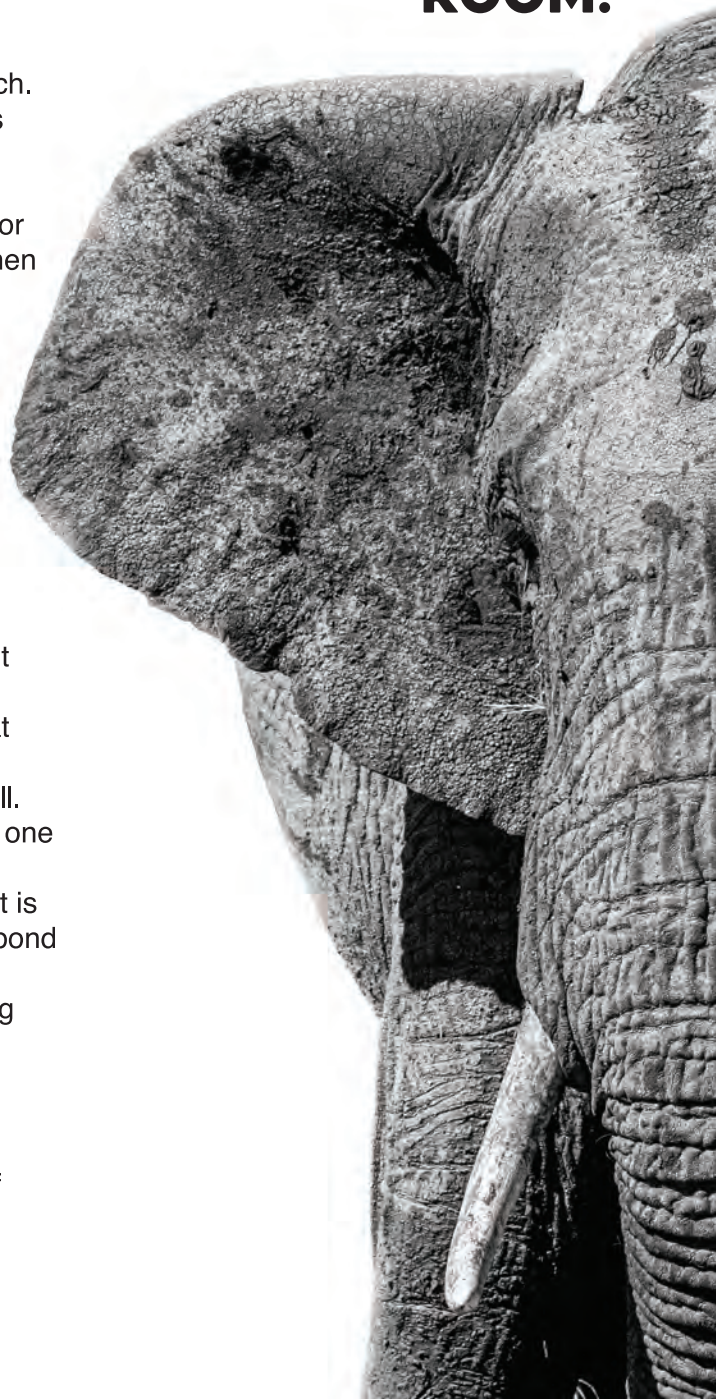
This is especially true if you are a small church with one or two, possibly bi-vocational staff members. If this is you then you are probably doing everything from preaching, kids ministry, visitation, changing the sign, cleaning the bathrooms, and a host of other responsibilities. Who has time to worry about a digital ministry strategy?

SO, FOR MOST SMALLER CHURCHES, THEIR DIGITAL MINISTRY STRATEGY LOOKS SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

A website that is either incomplete, hasn't been updated since Christmas, or looks like a glorified church bulletin; it actually repels people from considering your church. Messaging that is all insider focused, using language that church people understand, but the people outside the building, those you hope to reach aren't familiar with at all. A social media plan (usually a Facebook page) that is all one way information. It may share a Bible verse once a week with some bad clip art graphics and point to an event that is happening on campus, but it doesn't invite people to respond or engage or get to know you as people. A live stream of their entire service (music included) using one camera, way back in the back of the room, with inadequate sound, and poor lighting.

If any of this describes you, keep reading, because this guide is going to help you begin to work through some of those problems and find ways to make things better.

**LET'S GO
AHEAD
AND
ADDRESS
THE
ELEPHANT
IN THE
ROOM.**



WHAT IS DIGITAL MINISTRY ANYWAY?

So what is digital ministry and why is it important for your church? What's the difference between digital ministry and live streaming? What about forsaking the fellowship of the body? Why do I need more than a FB page? And most importantly... Will I have to TikTok?

ALL GOOD QUESTIONS, BUT LET'S START WITH THE FIRST ONE AND CREATE A WORKING DEFINITION OF DIGITAL MINISTRY.

Digital Ministry: An intentional ministry strategy that leverages digital (online) tools to expand your platform, the right messaging to create buy-in, and the right communication strategy to drive engagement with a goal of reaching more people and inviting them to become a part of your community.

SO WHAT IS DIGITAL MINISTRY?

The truth is it depends—on you, your church, and what you hope to accomplish. This strategy may or may not include live streaming your service. (For smaller churches without the right technology, live streaming is probably hurting you.) It definitely means making sure your website is top-notch. It will mean learning to create teaching videos that are “evergreen” and still impact after you finish your message. It may mean adding another social media platform or enhancing one you currently use.

Most of all, it means learning to be innovative while taking advantage of the tools that are now available. Learn to do this well and you will have a powerful digital ministry presence that reaches and teaches people, ultimately drawing them into your sphere of influence.

WHERE TO START

So where to begin? There are several steps you can take to help you evaluate your online presence and enhance your digital ministry strategy. Let's walk through them one by one.

STEP #1: EXAMINE YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

First you have to examine your digital footprint. We all exist in some form or fashion online. This includes your church. So begin by gathering all this information so you can see what's out there and what's missing. Don't worry if you can't fill all this in. The idea is just to gather info for later.

List your website address: _____

List the names and add links to your social media accounts:

Do you have a podcast? Y/N

Have you appeared as a podcast guest?

List the links here:

Have you written any articles either on your site or as a guest of another?

Have you created any books, guides, or other resources?

Write any additional observations here:



STEP #2: TAKE A WALK THROUGH YOUR WEBSITE

Websites have been around for over 30 years and have come a long way since then. Your website doesn't have to be super fancy, but it does need to be super friendly. It needs to be easy to follow and understand, clear and compelling.

TO CREATE AN INTENTIONAL DIGITAL MINISTRY STRATEGY, YOU MUST START BY LOOKING AT YOUR WEBSITE THROUGH A FRESH SET OF EYES.

Use the prompts below to grade your website on five key metrics. Better yet, ask someone you trust who is not part of your church to give you their feedback.

GRADE THE OVERALL APPEARANCE.

Are the fonts uniform and pleasing to look at?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Are they the right size and easy to read?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Is your website mobile friendly?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Do the colors & logos match your church's style and brand?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

GRADE THE OVERALL USEABILITY.

Is it easy to navigate from top to bottom, page to page?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Is there a well-designed flow?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Is there a clear call to action?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Does a visitor know what you want them to do next?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

GRADE THE OVERALL SIMPLICITY.

Is it easy to find who you are? (Leadership and staff)

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Is it easy to find out what you believe?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Can the user see how you benefit them?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Can the user find your online resources, teaching/messages, links to social media, and how to visit in person?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

GRADE THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE.

Does it feel you are approachable as a church?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Are you welcoming to new people?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Is it helpful for the person you hope to reach?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Does it match your tone/vibe/style?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Do you make it easy to engage/take the next step?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Is the wording clear and concise?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Is it focused on "them" or on you?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

GRADE THE POTENTIAL OF THE AVATAR'S EXPERIENCE.

Is your website created/designed for the type of people you want to serve?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Is it "them" focused?

• Their needs/wants/hurts

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

• The benefit you provide to them.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

• How do you make them feel?

• What emotions do you tap into?

Does it have "insider" language that's confusing?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

How will they experience you?

WHAT SHOULD I ADD, SUBTRACT, OR ENHANCE?

What do you love?

What do you hate?

What is missing?

STEP #3: TAKE A JOURNEY THROUGH YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA

Love it or hate it, social media must be a part of your digital ministry strategy. Why? Because that's where the people are. According to most recent data, people are on social media for an average of 2 hours and 27 minutes per day.

They go there for community, for answers to questions, and for information. That means you can tap into that connection and need to communicate and, most importantly, engage with the people you hope to reach.

Start by walking through the prompts below to evaluate your social media strategy. Or, enlist the help of a trusted friend to give you their feedback.

CONSIDER WHERE YOU CURRENTLY COMMUNICATE.

What social media channels do you currently use?

Which one is most effective/has the most engagement?

Have you set up a church Facebook page?

Is this where your people live online?

SEE IF YOUR POSTS ARE INVITING AND ENGAGING.

Are your posts more informational (one-way) or engaging?

Do you have a mix of text, video, and images?

Do you regularly ask people to like, share, and comment?

Do you have clear calls to action for people to follow?

How often does your church engage with comments or questions?

EVALUATE THE TOOLS YOU USE TO MAKE IT SIMPLE.

Do you use a tool to schedule posts in advance?

How many posts per week do you try to reach?

What's your mix of text, video, and images?

Do you have a "digital day" mapped out to focus on this aspect of ministry?

WHAT SHOULD I ADD, SUBTRACT, OR ENHANCE?

What do you love about your social media strategy?

What do you hate about your social media strategy?

What is missing about your social media strategy?

**LOVE IT OR
HATE IT,
SOCIAL
MEDIA MUST
BE A PART OF
YOUR DIGITAL
MINISTRY
STRATEGY.**

CORE COMPONENTS OF A DIGITAL MINISTRY STRATEGY

How are you feeling? Are you tracking with us so far? If you walked through the three steps above, you probably discovered some areas that were good, some that weren't, and some that didn't exist at all. That's a good thing and gives you something to build upon.

Anything in the digital space is continually growing and changing. New technology comes out that disrupts the status quo and creates more opportunity. You don't have to be a tech genius or even on the cutting edge to tap into this space. Too many churches get intimidated by concepts like Facebook and the metaverse, or dancing on Tik Tok, or Reels on Instagram and then stay paralyzed.

**A DIGITAL MINISTRY STRATEGY DOESN'T
HAVE TO BE COMPLICATED OR
COMPREHENSIVE, BUT IT DOES NEED
THESE THREE COMPONENTS
TO BE SUCCESSFUL.**



**YOUR
MESSAGE**



**YOUR
PLATFORM**



**YOUR
ENGAGEMENT**

YOUR MESSAGE

In the digital space, the message doesn't refer to your sermon or teaching. Rather it's the overall messaging or communication strategy that you are using in person, on your website, and on your social media.

This can include the words you use, the tone you adopt, and the images you share.

There's a secret to good communication and that secret is using the "customer's" language in all of your communication. Most churches miss this. They use insider language—words like saved, believer, fellowship, small group, sermon, message, worship, etc. To those already inside your church, these words are easily understood and make sense.

But to those outside the church, they may either be confusing, or, in some cases may actually turn people off.

A better way is to use the words they would use to describe their pain points. For example, loneliness, hopelessness, loneliness, community, sadness, fear, guilt, fear, worry, anxiety, etc.

Obviously, you don't want those words all over your website, but you do want to make sure you position your church and the Gospel as the antidote to those felt needs.

For example:

We share a weekly teaching message (something you are already doing) that meets you where you are and helps you find hope (benefit) in the midst of helplessness {felt need}, peace (benefit) that combats worry {felt need}, and community (benefit) to fight off loneliness {felt need}.

Your weekly teaching message is something you are doing anyway. But positioning it as something that will help them with their felt needs—feelings of helplessness, worry, and loneliness draws them in makes them want to learn more. Then you deliver the benefits—hope, peace, and community.

See the difference the right messaging can make?

You should apply this process to everything you write and share online and on social media.



**THIS CAN
INCLUDE THE
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YOU SHARE.**

YOUR PLATFORM

That brings up the next component of your digital ministry strategy—your platform.

If you preach or teach in person, you likely do so from an elevated position—the stage is your platform. You need to use the same principle in your digital ministry strategy. In this case, your platform is your website first, followed by your social media presence (we'll talk about that more in the third point—engagement).

Your website is your home base. It's where you point people when you talk about your church in the community, on a podcast, in an article or book, at a conference, within your denomination, etc.

Most importantly, your website is where people go to learn more about you. And, most churches do this backwards. They mistakenly think that their website is for those already in their church, when actually, your website should be designed for those outside your church.

It should have a message that makes the outsider feel welcome and want to learn more. That's why it's critical to get the messaging right.



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**THERE ARE TWO AREAS OF FOCUS
ON YOUR WEBSITE STRATEGY.
BOTH ARE IMPORTANT.**

APPEARANCE.

This is the “eye test” that is all about how good it looks.

A GOOD CHURCH WEBSITE:

- Matches the branding of your church including logo, fonts, colors, and taglines.
- Has plenty of open space, in other words, it's not too text heavy.
 - It's optimized for mobile devices—it looks good on phones and tablets.
- Is updated frequently with pertinent information and new opportunities.
- Positions your church or ministry organization as the solution to their pain point, felt need, or problem.
- Shares the heart behind what you do and the people who help make it happen.
- Is easy to follow—menus make sense, there's a logical flow, it drives people to a call to action and makes it easy for them to do so.

CONTENT.

This is the “messaging test” that is all about how well it communicates.

A GOOD CHURCH WEBSITE:

- Has a clear understanding of the “win;” everything points to the one thing you are trying to accomplish.
- Uses a mix of bold headings to catch the eye, images that capture a feeling, and videos to make big ideas easy to understand.
- Uses language that makes the visitor feel welcome and understood.
 - Talks about Jesus!
- Teaches the basics of faith and how to begin your faith journey.
 - Onboards visitors and new members about what to expect when they visit and get connected.
- Is non-judgmental—makes people feel welcome to walk in the door.

Of course there are many other things that we could add to this list, but when you get these things right it positions you well to begin engaging with people and inviting them into your community.

YOUR ENGAGEMENT

The third, and perhaps most important part of your digital ministry strategy is engagement. Engagement is simply the way you interact online with the people who find your platform and hear your message.

This will most likely be seen in your social media strategy.

A couple of quick notes about social media. First, you don't have to be everywhere. It's much more effective to start with one platform and engage consistently than trying to tackle everything all at once. Second, you don't have to have it all figured out. You can start small, see what works, and adapt. Launch, then improve.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU GET STARTED:

- Create a Canva template for your graphics that matches your branding and use it each time you post.
- Schedule in advance using Facebook's Meta Business Suite, Later.com, or some other content scheduling platform to keep track of what, when, and where you post.
- Respond to every comment; let people know you see them and hear them.
- Ask for a response—a like, a comment, or a share—with every post.
- Use video frequently—but make it short (2-3 minutes maximum) and impactful.
- Give people something to do—make your posts actionable.
- Share good resources frequently—books, podcasts, messages, songs—be a source of learning and hope for people in need.
- Let your personality show—be exactly who you are, but don't be afraid to be real.

WHY IS ENGAGEMENT SO IMPORTANT?

Here's how Carey Nieuwhof puts it, "Over the long-term in a church, you can accomplish more with 300 engaged Christians than with 3000 disengaged attendees."

**IT'S PARAMOUNT THAT YOU MAKE
ENGAGEMENT A KEY PART OF YOUR
DIGITAL MINISTRY STRATEGY.**



**...SIMPLY THE
WAY YOU
INTERACT
ONLINE WITH
THE PEOPLE
WHO FIND
YOUR PLATFORM
AND HEAR
YOUR
MESSAGE.**

SO WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOUR CHURCH?

DIGITAL MINISTRY IS HERE TO STAY.

That may seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. In fact, it can and should be a sense of encouragement. With the right strategy in place you can actually multiply the reach and impact of your message and reach an entirely new group of people.

The pandemic brought certain things to light that have caused us all to adapt. We want to encourage and equip you to make the small changes to your ministry strategy that yield big results.

The things we cover in this guide are not an exhaustive list, but they should give you a quick idea of where your digital ministry shines and where it can use some intentionality and improvement. A compelling digital ministry strategy is critical if you want to expand and grow your church, reach the next generation, and stay relevant in your community.

ARE YOU INTERESTED TO LEARN MORE?

We've partnered with Jesse Barnett of Message Accelerator to help you bring your church into the digital age and create a digital ministry strategy for your church.

Jesse Barnett is a writer, coach, and the creator of Message Accelerator, a creative agency that helps ministry leaders and churches expand their influence and multiply the impact and reach of their message. To connect with Jesse or learn more about how he can help you, visit MessageAccelerator.com.



**DIGITAL MINISTRY
IS HERE TO STAY.**

Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

Tools and support to strengthen churches.

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

We believe in YOU!

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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