

Online Worship Engagement – Best Practices

One of the main challenges of online worship is the tendency for it to feel like a secondhand or passive experience. The lack of a physical environment can be a formidable challenge to engagement, but it can be overcome with intentional best practices. Following are suggestions to help you to think through what may be best for your own setting.

Where to start

- Consider every element of engagement you already include in your in-person worship experience. Can these elements be modified to engage people online?
- Gather a group together to brainstorm engagement ideas.
- No need to recreate the wheel. Check out churches like [Saddleback](#) and [Life.Church](#) with your group. Each church has over a decade of experience in engaging people online.
- Make a list of “must implement immediately” and “would be nice to add later” in terms of how you will engage your people online.
- Regularly check your list to add new items and make plans towards implementing items from “would be nice to add later” to your worship experience. Also assess items that are already implemented to discern their impact and if they need to be modified.
- Always keep in mind that engagement isn’t an end to itself. What are you leading the people to do once they are engaged? How will they progress as disciples of Christ?

Common Engagement Strategies

- Utilize a central interactive location like Church Online Platform (see Useful Tools on Church Online Platform below for more details). Like your physical sanctuary, this will be your consistent hub for anything interactive that you will do online.
- Do you use a streaming service with analytics? Call out locations at the most opportune time in your service to celebrate how God is bringing the community together.
- If you are engaged in hybrid worship, consider a special greeting just for your online folks. You can direct them to areas of your online worship hub that you want them to engage, but it is to mostly help them feel valued and seen.
- Make regular eye contact with the camera lens. It’s weird at first, but it gets easier with practice and people online feel like you’re actually talking to them. The camera should be zoomed close to the speaker and not fixed at a wide shot of the worship space.
- Design an online connection form to provide next steps and capture information.
- Ask for feedback. Feedback creates ownership which enhances the experience.

Next Level Engagement Strategies

- Host Zoom or Live Streaming events on Facebook so your people can get to know you personally. This can be a very informal time of fellowship or something more focused.

- Once you know some of your online members, invite them to share their stories. If permission is given, these could be shared with the whole church.
- Hold live polls and ask questions that your in-person and online folks can engage in. For instance: “What was your takeaway from today’s sermon?” Then share the results.
- Consider mirroring your worship space to appear more like the home setting of your online members. This creates a more casual atmosphere that translates well online.
- Recruit and train a team of hosts that can pray for, direct, engage, and follow up with people on your online worship hub.
- Remember that your website is the front door to your online church. Is it up to date and easy to navigate? What quality of life improvements do you need to make?
- Adapt your discipleship pathway and strategies to incorporate your online members. As you are able, get people in Zoom groups, classes, and online connect events.

Useful Tools on Church Online Platform (<https://churchonlineplatform.com>)

- The platform’s chat feature is easily moderated, generates logs of every event, and contains real time emote reactions (like hearts or raised hands) that people can activate during the service. When they do everyone else will see the reaction on their screen.
- Moments is an incredibly useful feature that can be tailored for any purpose. When activated, Moments anchor themselves in the chat and gradually shift up the screen as people continue to interact. Some examples of Moments include:
 - Connect – A way to direct people to something like sermon notes or a bulletin.
 - Give – The equivalent of passing the plate. One click and your members can give.
 - Prayer – This will send notification to a host that someone needs prayer.
 - Salvation – Inviting people to start a relationship with Christ.
 - You can also post images and quotes as moments in the chat.
- You can custom design the look of your platform and have up to five custom links at the top of the page where you can direct your online members to engage further.
- The notes tab under the chat can be utilized for sermon notes or next steps or a general message welcoming your online members, letting them know how they can get the most out of their online experience.
- You can see how many people are active in your service at any given time. These metrics help you to see where people may be checking in and, more importantly, checking out.
- Check out Church Online’s *Level Up Your Online Ministry* guide [here](#) for more ideas.

Always Innovate

The way you do online worship may look different in what will become the increasingly hybrid model of the post-pandemic period than it did during the pandemic. What is most important moving forward is a continued commitment to evaluation, brainstorming, and innovation.