



UNseminary



**6 ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL LESSONS
PELTON CAN TEACH YOUR CHURCH**

BY RICH BIRCH



As the country pivots out of COVID-19, it would be wise for us to look around and notice some organizations that are thriving in this season. While some have struggled, others have thrown off the shackles of COVID-19 and the financial calamities that accompanied it.

Several organizations are accelerating their growth and impact in this season. There are several lessons we can draw from Peloton as we look to lead our churches in this season.

Your church and mine can apply lessons from other organizations as we reposition our ministries for the future. **The internet-connected at-home exercise equipment company, Peloton, is no doubt one of the darlings of the COVID-19 era.** They are emerging from the pandemic in a much stronger position partly because of early lockdowns across the country and shifts in consumer behavior. Most people have drawn away from their local gyms to enjoy more robust at-home experiences.

Peloton has three broadcast studios and is about to launch a fourth. Their global expansion continues as they imminently launch into the Australian market with not only new stores but studio instructors and a full complement, as they have done in other countries around the world.

Peloton is a fascinating example because although they are primarily an online experience, they also offer in-person locations. They currently have 37 retail locations across the country. In the very depths of the pandemic, I came across this fascinating quote from John Foley, the founder, and CEO of Peloton. The excerpt is taken from an investor's call, where he was being asked how Peloton continues to keep its retail locations open.

“We are committed to retail, we love retail. In this environment, you could actually see with some retail struggling 12 months from now but then having even better leases, better locations. And so, retail **has been and will continue to be an important part of our strategy and our multi-channel marketing** and the efficiency of how we go to market and we engage with our consumers.”

John Foley – Peloton, Co-founder & Chief Executive Officer

This post is not completely unbiased. Earlier this year, I picked up a Peloton and I've got to say that I love it. In fact, in my first 148 days of having a Peloton, I've done 179 rides. I'm currently chasing my "double century badge" on the platform (that's 200 rides for those uninitiated.) I am hooked. I used to be a *go-to the gym around the corner from my house four or five times a week* kind of guy. As you can see by the numbers above, I've consistently done more than one ride a day throughout my Peloton experience. **They've made cardio workouts fun whereas before, I used to dread that part of my workout regime.** My wife is happy with the results too :) It fits my personality and lifestyle. I am so thankful for this tool. But let's dive in and pull some lessons from Peloton's business model and apply these to our churches as we plan.

3 ORGANIZATIONAL LESSONS FROM PELOTON AS OUR CHURCHES PIVOT BEYOND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

There are several things about how the Peloton organization is structured and functions that could be instructive as we think about how we're going to restructure and reposition our organizations in the future. Here are three things that stand out to me:

- **BOTH/AND IS THE PATH FORWARD.**

As the quote above discusses, Peloton is firmly committed to both a robust online experience and continues to look at how to offer in-person experiences through their retail locations and studios. This is an important lesson for us if you think about the fact that most of our pre-pandemic ministries would have primarily indicated that we were an in-person organization—even if we were doing church online. **As we look to the post-pandemic world, it would be a mistake for us to shed our online experience and shift back to a fully in-person experience.** Take a lesson from Peloton and look for a way to use the best of one to drive the other. How can we take the lessons that we've been learning from the church online experience over the last year and a half and apply them to our in-person experience? (And vice versa.)

- **REAL-WORLD ENGAGEMENT WITH ONLINE AUDIENCES.**

There's so much that we could discuss regarding how Peloton instructors engage with their fans and community. Whether it's through social media or other ventures, the instructors engage with users. But one of the things that I'm most fascinated about is how, as a Peloton member (pre-pandemic), you can attend live classes as a part of your membership. Before COVID-19, these classes were far more than just an opportunity to sweat with other people in the room rather than do it at home in your basement. Some members planned their vacations (pilgrimages) to New York City around dropping in on the latest [Emma Lovewell](#) workout. These events included chances to connect with the instructor for the requisite selfie and to exchange high fives in real life with other members.

Should our churches be looking at developing real-world experiences that are designed specifically to target our online viewers? We know that we have increased audience shares and people who track us. Rather than just driving our normal weekend services, maybe we should be structuring weekend conferences that are explicitly designed to call our online communities together. These short and special experiences could add increased value to our communities and help us deepen our relationships with the people who are connecting with us online. Maybe it's an opportunity for us to invent some new middle ground where we develop our real-world engagement opportunities for our online communities rather than just doing business as usual.

■ **SOME PEOPLE AREN'T COMING BACK. NOW WHAT?**

This fall, there's going to come a point when we will be sure of who will not be coming back to our church communities. Across the country, churches are seeing a reduced attendance from their pre-pandemic levels. Please don't panic. This is going to be an impact of the pandemic. The question is, what are we going to do about it? In the same way that gyms across the country are going to need to pivot and try something new when people don't sign up at the same rate as before, we need to have new strategies for our churches. I love what our friends at [OrangeTheory](#) have been doing. (Maybe we'll do a post on them at some point, to discuss some of the community and metric features that are built into a Peloton.)

I anticipate us seeing a shake-up in gym environments in the coming weeks and months as they resize their locations. They'll be looking for ways to add more community and develop their post-pandemic business models. [We've talked about CrossFit before, and there's no doubt that the community-driven aspect of CrossFit will only further drive that movement's growth in these relationally starved times that many people find themselves in.](#)

3 OPERATIONAL LESSONS YOUR CHURCH CAN APPLY IN THIS POST PANDEMIC WORLD

On top of how the Peloton organization is structured, there are some interesting things to discuss when it comes to how they deliver their experience to their members. Here are three things that come to mind.

■ **SHOULD WE GAMIFY DISCIPLESHIP?**

I might be a little bit ashamed to admit this, but a part of the reason I'm such an avid user of Peloton is they're consistently rewarding me with badges and milestones. These are just small graphics that show up on my screen. Every time I cross a certain number of rides, achieve my personal best, or even just participate in a certain kind of ride I receive a badge. This positive reinforcement is at the core of the user experience of Peloton and consistently drives members to engage at a deeper level. Any conversations around Peloton always refer to these badges and milestones as a critical part of the puzzle for encouraging people to be a part of the community.

Perhaps there is something we can learn from this idea. **When was the last time we reached out to a family and thanked them for attending 8 of the last 10 weeks at our church?** As our churches begin to gather again, maybe we should celebrate those who have attended their small groups for a certain number of weeks throughout the fall. Acknowledging growth is an important part of motivating people to move forward. How could we learn from this gamification and apply it to what we're doing?

■ HOW DOES THE CHURCH REENGAGE WITH THE NON-TRADITIONS FOR NON-TRADITIONAL SPIRITUALITY?

A lot has been written about Ally Love's "Sundays with Love" series. It's a fantastic ride, but at its core, it also has an interwoven spiritual message. Here are some articles written in various papers about Ally Love and her [Sundays With Love](#) series:

- ▶ [Peloton makes toning your glutes feel spiritual. But should Jesus be part of the experience?](#) The Washington Post
- ▶ [Not My Job: We Quiz Peloton Instructor Ally Love on Skeletons](#) NPR
- ▶ [Go ahead, call it a cult: I'm grateful for my Peloton](#) The Forward

This is an interesting trend for us to think about and represents the broader spiritual (but not religious) movement. Ally is a Christian but attempts to leverage her platform to help people, regardless of their faith, connect not only with the platform but also to spirituality. The question is, how is your church engaging with this community?

When I first started in ministry, there was so much fear about the new age movement and so much fearmongering about the impact of that movement in our culture. However, it's clear that the "spiritual but not religious" community is here to stay and rather than hiding from it, we need to find ways to engage with this group. Recently, [Holly Furtick from Elevation Church had Ally Love on her Lunchtime Live podcast](#). It was encouraging to see Holly take a risk and engage an audience that could be interested in the message of Jesus. We'll most likely only find these kinds of examples in non-traditional spaces. The reality is that people are receiving spiritual teaching on podcasts, YouTube, books, movies, and other avenues! Your church and mine need to think carefully about how we engage with those people and attract them to the message that they're ultimately seeking.

■ WHAT CAN WE DO TO LEVERAGE PAST CONTENT?

Your church is a content production machine. It really is amazing that every week churches across the country are producing somewhere between 30 and 60-minute pieces of digital content that are high-quality and rivals many content production organizations around the world. However, because of the nature of what we do, we produce that content and then move on quickly to what's coming next. **Very, very few churches attempt to curate and catalogue their past content in a way that makes it open and easy for people to connect with.** Peloton has done a stellar job in encouraging people to go back and take past rides and connect with past

content. This is a lesson that you and I can apply to our churches. I love what our friends at Sandals Church have done to repackage their past content into a Netflix-like experience that encourages people to binge past content and connect with the messages that the church has already produced. How can you leverage your past content in a way that helps the future of your church?

THIS FALL IS A HUGE GROWTH OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR CHURCH.

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