

Live Streaming Frustrating You? Get Better Results Today



Are you frustrated by live streaming?

Small church pastors already carry a load of significant priorities and now they are wrestling with the extra demands of online services and caring for their flocks that are now seen in Zoom rooms rather than lounge rooms.

My good friend Derek Gerrard is a church planter and entrepreneur. He pastors Local Community Church in Perth Australia and has written an extensive guide to live streaming for small churches.

This guide will lower your frustration and give you simple, inexpensive and clear next steps.

This material was originally published on his website, Derek Gerrard, and is reproduced here with his permission.

With social distancing, churches are needing to rapidly get online for live streaming services and other content to connect regularly with their members.

Over the last 10 years our church has been producing short 5 minute videos that we use in our small groups .

We have learnt some lessons about producing video content mainly through lots of mistakes and getting feedback.

Today we are doing an ok job of it these days.

Live Streaming Tech Options For Small Churches

In this section we will focus on tech options.

While the other posts are relevant for any size church, this section will focus on helping smaller churches.

There's obviously a lot of content around on this right now, but in many cases if you don't have a technical team or high budget it doesn't translate to a small church.

I'm going to assume that you have a phone, a laptop and an internet connection.

The most basic option is to download the Facebook app, point the camera at yourself and turn on Facebook live.

Of course, this will get you online, give you some content and is great for quick snaps.

However, in a world that is highly competitive for online engagement and where we will need to hold people's attention for more than a few weeks, we need to go further.

I'm assuming you are reading this because you want a step up from that.

I also want to make sure it is clear. There are no affiliate links in these recommendations and I'm not getting paid in any way. These are just the best of what we found works.

I. Our Setup

Before we get started – here’s a pic of our set up. Its affordable, everything is wireless making it portable, and it will give you a step up in the quality of your content.



1. Get Our Audience Online

Before you even think about producing video content you need to make sure that your congregation is connected with you online.

I won't jump into details here as it's not the point of the post, but if you've been lagging a bit in this area then maybe social isolation is enough to get you moving.

If you're still not convinced [here's some good stats to help](#).

At a minimum you need to have this happening:

Collect email addresses

For the cheapest option, store the email addresses of your church members in an Excel spreadsheet. However, to get other functionality, including automatic integration with Mailchimp, get a Church specific database.

We use the [Breeze Church Software](#).

Use An Email Marketing Tool

This helps give your emails a nicer design but has other features like allowing you to schedule emails, also track some metrics etc. We use [Mailchimp](#).

Pick a social channel

Facebook is the most widely used and it's simple to set up a page for your church.

Then email everyone and ask them to follow your page. You can [check out our church's Facebook page here](#).

Pick A Video Channel To Store Your Videos

There are options like Vimeo but YouTube is the second largest search engine after Google and is owned by Google so that is what we use.

You can also directly load your video content from your phone to your YouTube account.

THE HUB Free for 31 days

Click here to check it out today 

2. The Camera



If you have a phone that is less than 5 years old that is all you need.

You can point and shoot but for a small budget you can add a tripod, lighting and audio that will 10x the quality of what you produce.

3. Tripod



This obviously keeps the camera steady and allows you to hang the light and microphone off it.

You want to make sure your camera is pointing straight at your eye line level and not tilted so the tripod helps set this.

We use the Joby Gorilla Mobile Rig for Vlogging.

Very sturdy and portable but also connectors for your lights and mic.

4. Microphone

You can use the inbuilt microphone of the phone and its ok if you are close but over time the quality of the audio will reduce engagement.

Rode make great audio gear and have developed microphones specifically for phones.

For the most flexibility we use the Rode Video Micro.



This doesn't need batteries, plugs straight into the phone and comes with a clip to attach directly to your tripod.

Just keep in mind if you have a new phone that doesn't have a 3.5mm jack input you'll need an extra adapter cable here.

To level up your microphone kit you can go to a wireless lapel system. We use a combo of each depending on requirement.

Our wireless lapel kit is the Rodelink Wireless but suggest you go for the Rode Go.

5. Lighting

You can go without lighting but if you do make sure there is more light behind you than there is in front of you.

You can achieve this if you record during daylight hours and use a window. This is a good video to help with that.

Otherwise you can get a wireless LED rechargeable battery to connect to your tripod.

We use the LituFoto F18.



6. Publishing

Before you start recording make sure you look at our post on tips for presenting well in a video to get the shot set up in the best way.

Once you have that, it is then a choice of whether you are live streaming or pre-recording or we have an option for a hybrid.

a. Publishing: Pre-Recorded

If you are pre-recording content, then the next step is to do a small amount of editing.

We won't go into this in detail here but to add just a slightly more professional look you want to do things like:

- Trim the beginning and add a fade in from black effect and trim the end and add a fade out to black effect.
- If the software allows for it auto balance your colours and audio.
- Depending on the vibe of the video you may also want to some quiet background music.

Many cameras come with an app for you to do this as do laptops.

If we are editing on the phone we use iMovie and if we go to the laptop we use Final Cut Pro.

b. Publishing: Live Streaming

We would not recommend this option over the hybrid option below, but if you do have a requirement here's the simplest low-cost option without needing to buy encoder hardware and more.

You can stream direct from YouTube but to use the mobile app you need to have over 1000 Subscribers on the channel which is unlikely for many small churches.

I won't explain the technical details here but here is an alternative option where you need a few additions:

- On the phone you need an app that can record live and send data to a RTMP server. We use [Wirecast Go](#). In that app you will need to enter the RTMP details from your live video streaming host.
- You will then need a live streaming service. We found the most affordable and reliable to be [Dacast](#).
- Once you have those connected you will need to choose where to stream to. Dacast provides the code to embed into the web location you are live streaming to.

c. Publishing: The Hybrid Cast

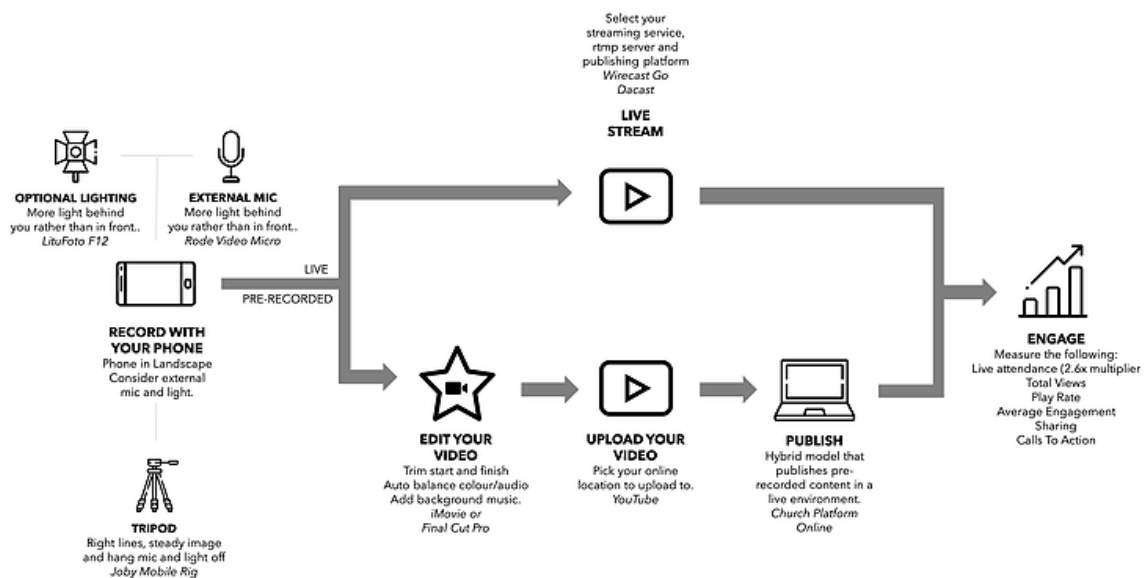
If you want to give the experience of streaming you can do this by pre-recording your video and then playing at a pre-scheduled time, using a platform that allows for real time engagement like online chats.

This takes away the pressure of the live stream and getting the technical aspects right.

We've only just started doing this and used the [Church Online Platform](#) for this which amazingly is free.

It also comes with some cool extras like private chat rooms for prayer and access to the Bible online.

In case you prefer a visual representation that all the words this diagram gives a summary of how we set up:



Now that you've got your video set up with camera, lighting, audio and publishing platforms let's discover how to present well in a video.

II. Tips to Boost Your Live Streaming Presentation

When your church is first jumping online, you may get some good engagement as they are curious to see what is happening.

However stats show that consumers have a low tolerance for poor quality streaming, meaning they may only last 90 seconds before switching off.

This post then is about helping you keep your congregation stay engaged online for longer especially if self-isolation goes on for many months.

1. Stay Looking At The Camera

If you ever watch a TV journalist, they are taught to look straight at the camera all of the time.

For the viewer this gives a sense you are keeping eye contact and is easier to engage with.

It's easier said than done, particularly given some phones and video conferencing software put up an image of you talking.

If you are looking at this rather than the camera, the viewer will feel like you are looking past them so keep looking at the camera lens.

Don't forget to blink.

2. Be Your Natural Self

When we are talking on video, it's easy to speak differently and concentrate so much that you lose your usual facial expressions.

Take a few deep breaths, smile and be yourself.

If you can pretend you are in a conversation with your best friend, that will come out more naturally.

Try to avoid getting monotone, take pauses and remember to smile

3. Get Ready For No Audience Interaction

If you've not done a lot of video or radio work, this can take a while to get used to.

We are relational beings, so a lot of our response comes from the energy and interaction with an audience.

If you make a joke, no one is laughing. If you make a great point, no one is agreeing. Therefore, consider how you are going to keep your energy up and thus keep people engaged.

4. Watch The Replay

When I first started public speaking, I used to use the word "OK" a lot.

It wasn't until someone was brave enough to point that out and I listened back to a message that I noticed. It was so distracting.

Don't be afraid to ask for feedback for the sake of improvement, take a slice of humble pie and watch back some of what you create to see it for yourself.

5. Create The Atmosphere Of Your Set

In church over the years there has been a lot of effort go into creating the right atmosphere of worship.

Whether that is from previous generations of stained-glass windows or more recently our stage setting, room temperature, seating layout and more.

I think we can take this level of excellence into thinking about the environment around us when we record and be intentional about your set composition.

This can be simple but just needs to be thought about.

There are few things to consider here.

The first is where are you positioned in the set as the speaker.

Check out the rule of thirds, the simplest rule in composing a set. You need to line your eyeline up to the one of the top two third intersections.



Trust me, it will just look better.

Think about what you want in the photo.

If you are in your home what furniture, plants, books etc will work for you and your audience. If you are outside consider the placement of grass, trees, water and so on.

Next think about the leading lines that are created in your set.

Whether we like it or not lines that are created by a table or a horizon in our set either attract or detract the viewers experience.

A horizon line, or window frame that cuts through the head of the presenter is very distracting.

Alternatively, you can use intentional lines to point them towards something. Read here to understand this in more detail.

Finally make some small improvements in your lighting and audio set up.

6. Improve Your Lighting and Audio

To get the lighting right quickly just make sure there is more light behind you than there is in front of you.

You can achieve this if you record during daylight hours and use a window. [This is a good video to help with that.](#)

You want to make sure your audience can see your face clearly, engage with your emotions and not be distracted with shadows.

Audio is ok direct from your phone but a small improvement here goes a long way to improve the quality of the video.

[You can read about the affordable mic options we use to help with that here.](#)

7. Record in Landscape

If you are going to record on your phone turn it on its side to the landscape angle.

People are used to watching movies, tv and other online content in a wide format. If you record in landscape if someone watches on their phone either way round it will look fine.

However, if you record in portrait and someone watches it on a laptop, TV or Facebook channel they will get the blurred lines at the side to fill in the space.

8. Get the Video Length Right

The [average video length on YouTube](#) is 11.7 minutes.

While a church service may go for 60 – 90 minutes you need to think about the right amount of time your online versions will go.

it's harder to engage for long periods of time in this medium so reconsider what the run sheet of your livestream is going to look like.

9. Create Calls to Action

In our physical services we would often create space for people to respond to what the message has been about.

For your online services we need to think about the same thing, just in a different way.

If people were going to do one thing as a response to your video content, what would you like it to be?

This could be jumping in an online prayer room, filling in a form, or registering for another online event.

What we've done that won't be perfect but we try to take into account these elements when we do our live streaming.

THE HUB Free for 31 days

[Click here to check it out today](#) 

III. How to Measure Live Streaming Engagement

Answering the question, how do you measure the health of a church was simpler and easier than it is in this pandemic.

Let's look at how we measure engagement of our services, as we move into a more permanent online world for the time being.

When you first kick off, the number of viewers may seem high but what do the metrics really mean?

If they start dropping off, how do we focus on what really matters. Here's some ideas to track with, as you have more and more online services.

We've written why you want to track the metric and what your action could be depending on what the trends are telling you.

1. Live Attendance

So that's easy enough in a physical sense but hard to know in an online sense.

Hopefully, you are using a platform that gives you a live streaming viewing count like YouTube or Church Online Platform.

In many cases a whole family will be watching on one computer so one viewer stat may represent 4 or 5 people.

We've decided to use a multiplier on viewers, of the average household size in Australia, to get an estimate of what it might be.

In Australia (and similar for the OECD countries) this is 2.6.

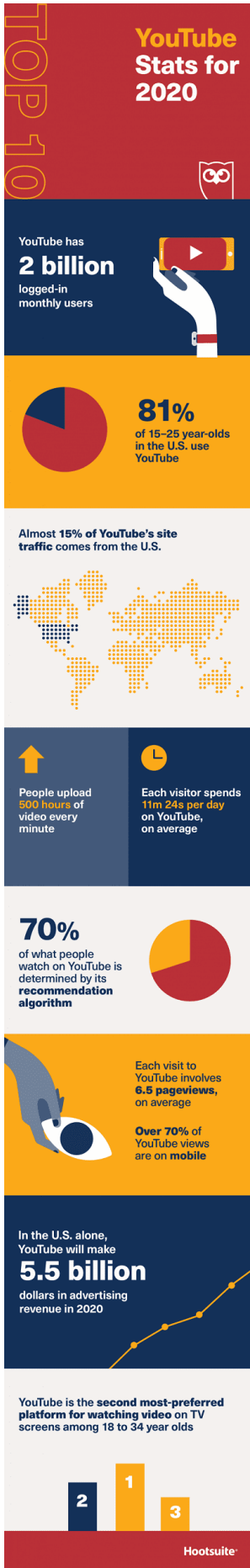
Our first live service had 70 viewers so we've estimated we have about 180 attendees on our live stream.

This number is worth tracking to see whether your live engagement is increasing or decreasing.

You won't know the trend over a few weeks, but over a few months you'll want to respond in the same way you do with your physical attendance.

If its working let's keep going, if its declining let's try something different.

2. Total Views



23 YouTube Statistics that Matter to Marketers in 2020

Once the live content has played you may put that up for further viewing, so you can compare live attendance to total views.

This gives some interesting intel like:

- How many people in your congregation are happy to just watch later and not engage in the live content? In this case you may need to consider either improving the quality of your live stream or add elements that are only available during the live stream. As an example, we've found the live chat really helps with this.
- It may be that the difference relates to people engaging with your content that wouldn't otherwise normally do that. In this case the question is how can you create a call to action to connect them with the church?

3. Play Rate

This stat relates to how many people came to your webpage to look at the video content, versus how many of those played the video.

If this ratio is low your conversion from site landing to video watching needs to be considered.

You can look to improve the thumbnails you are using and maybe the set design or you may need to make the video more prominent on the page.

4. Average Engagement

This is the most relevant metric you want to track, even more than those above.

This is calculating what the average viewing time was of all viewers on your video.

If your video went for 10mins and the average watch time was 5 minutes, then you have a 50% metric.

YouTube Analytics has an Engagement tab that lets you see this as well some other cool stats.

Warning: these numbers are probably going to be lower than you're expecting and if you look at the stat to see how many people make it to the end it may not be great.

I'm saying this because it is sobering and it's why we've written these posts to try and help and because it is common so don't lose heart.

By measuring we can improve.

This is the ultimate view on whether people are engaging well with your online content.

They may come and take a look out of curiosity, but if they don't stay we've missed the opportunity.

YouTube stats show us how popular video is in today's world.

5. Sharing

How many times has your video been shared?

If it is low this may be an opportunity to start asking your viewers to share it.

We ask people to invite others to church, why not ask them to share your church content?

6. Call to Action

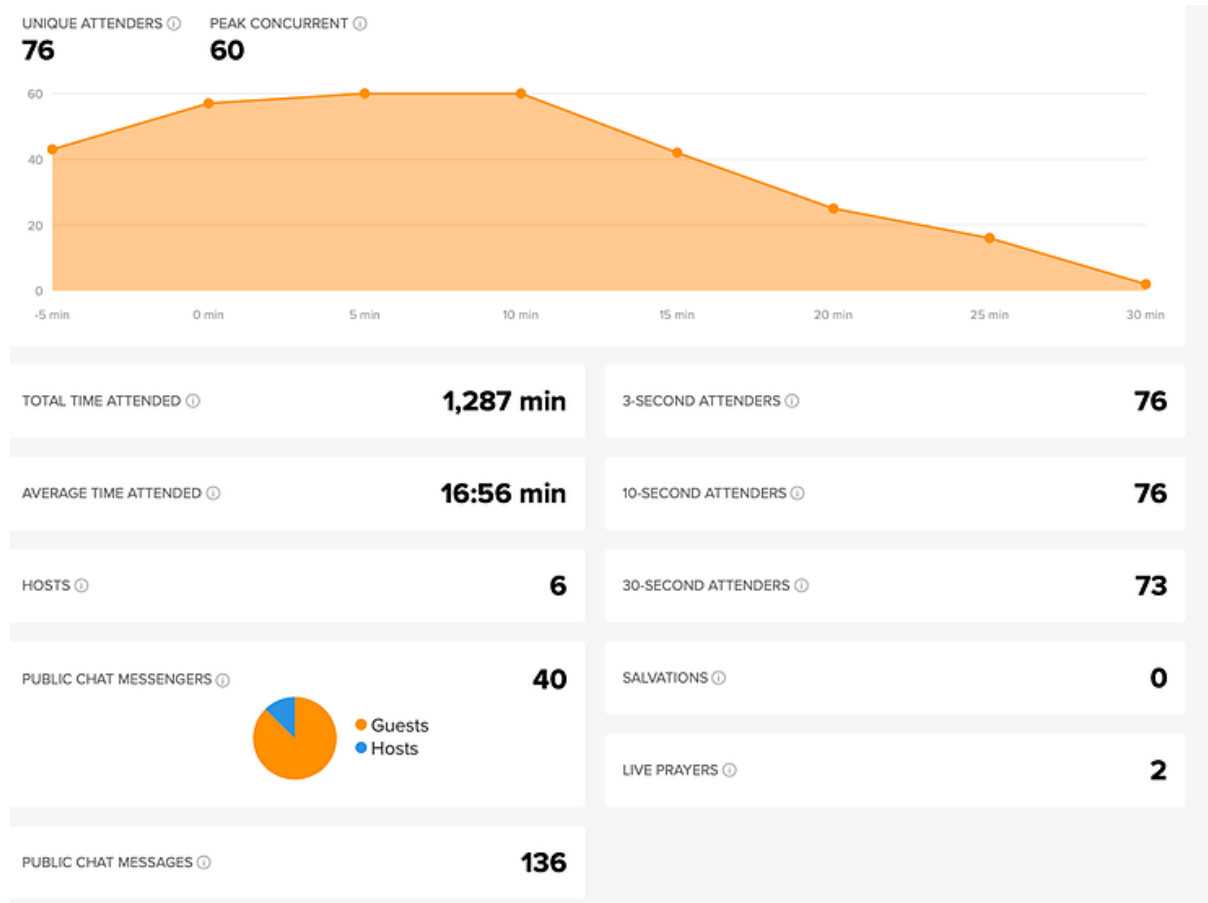
How do we know if our service has had the impact we were hoping for?

One way is to create a call to action and review how many people have responded.

I think this is important to create social connection at a time of physical isolation.

If people can still participate in something together there is a great sense of belonging.

I've put some calls to action in our final post in this series on creative content to add to your live streaming service. Here's a snapshot of some of the metrics that are tracked with the Church Online Platform:



IV. Creative Content to Add to Your Live Streaming

Let's consider some ways you can get creative with your online services.

We are on this journey as well of trying to create engaging online experiences. If you have any other ideas, we'd love to hear about them.

1. Worship with All The Senses

In our churches, we are used to our worship experiences revolving around music. With social distancing that is almost impossible but it's a great chance to get creative with our worship experience.

One way to consider this is through the idea of Howard Gardners theory of Multiple Intelligences.

Our school systems tend to focus on being word-smart and number-smart but Gardners theory gives a broader variety to that.

We can worship through nature, through movement, spatially and relationally.

So many of these ideas are about exploring worship with all the senses.

2. Pre-recorded Testimonies

Testimonies are always great to hear at church.

At this time people are getting opportunities to practically love people or they have been the recipient of that practical help and sharing these stories can be an ongoing encouragement.

You can get someone to pre-record their testimony (maybe send them the tips on presenting well on video) and then you can add that to your live service.

3. Take Communion Online

If you give people notice they can prepare their own communion elements and have them ready to have together during the live stream.

It connects the online experience to the physical experience.

4. Engagement in Live Streaming

Use a platform for your live streaming that lets people engage in real time.

Facebook live is easy as you can see who is watching and interact with them.

We are using the Church Online Platform which has some other cool features like live chat, and the ability for people to request prayer live which our online hosts can respond to.



5. Different Content for Adults, Youth and Kids

During our live service we are sending pre-recorded content for the kids and teenagers which they can watch at the same time or after the service.

We don't have the ability to create content each week but what we can do is use some of the great resources online.

Our Kids Pastors are top and tailing that with a short video so our kids get contact with them each week.

Think Orange is a good example where all ages content is made and available to download.

6. Worship with Word or Picture

Rather than using music to create space for people to connect with God, try using the spoken word or a set of pictures that represent creation.

Your worship could be reading a set of favourite Psalms or you could experiment with the tradition of liturgical reading.

It's not something we do a lot of in our Charismatic and Pentecostal churches but could work in this environment.

The idea is a communal response to the spoken word of either praise, thanksgiving or even repentance.

7. Create A Call to Action

Connecting with new people has become more difficult. We can no longer give out physical connect cards to visitors.

This is the area we are looking forward to exploring the most as social distancing goes on for longer.

What better way to create and improve engagement than a response to the message we are giving.

Some ideas here include:

- Dropping off food and toiletries to those in need
- Getting a sign up to a follow up event (e.g. a weekly Google Hangouts prayer meeting)
- Sign up to another church social media channel
- Download a follow up document like an eBook, Infographic, Devotion
- Get people to send photos of them watching the live feed
- If someone has a birthday or special event arrange a co-ordinate drive by

We are all in this together and our hope of sharing these posts is that you can continue building the church during this challenging time.

If you have any ideas that are working, we'd love to hear from you as well.