

Churches Adapting to the Digital Age



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We are in an era of fast-paced technological advancements, the Internet, and a prolonged pandemic spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID19). We are no longer able to carry out regular ministries which in turn has expedited our church to adapt to comply with the new regulations.

have accepted the need to change. This is a great opportunity for the church to explore new ideas for the times ahead. I have heard some church leaders asking, "When will the pandemic situation be resolved? So, we can resume our regular congregations." As much as I would like to resume the regular congregations; but this question may fail us from learning and adapting to this crisis for future ministries in the post-pandemic world.

***Caroline Schoeder once said,
"Some people change
when they see the light...
others change when
they feel the heat."***

Change happens either when one "has an open-mindedness to change" or "is obligated to change". Given the current situation, many churches have made new adjustments and members of the church



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Many People Seek God on the Internet

In Thailand where I live, despite being a developing country; 52 out of 67 million Thais have access to the Internet with an average internet usage of 9 hours per day. This makes the Internet a very interesting area for the ministries. If Apostle Paul and Peter were to be alive in this day, they must have been keen on spreading their teachings and encouragements to believers in a much faster and wider manner than the only invention back in their days where only letter writing existed.

Three of the most prominent online evangelical organizations: GMO, BGEA, and Cru pointed out in the same direction that ever since the spread of the COVID19 pandemic, more people are searching online about getting to know God. GMO stated, "since the mid to late March 2020, more people have clicked on advertisements related to:



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During the pandemic, there was a 16% surge in the number of people hearing the Gospel than on an average month; therefore, this is an indicator that people are more open-minded in seeking answers to their questions.

Churches Adaptive Trends in the Digital Age

Jesus uses an analogy of new wine that it should never be put in an old wineskin as the old wineskins will be torn. This implies that if the environment and society have changed but the church does not change the way we serve; we may struggle. For this reason, I would like to introduce some adaptive approaches to the current happenings.

1. The online channel has become many people's "first gateway" to church

In this day, people would read other consumers' reviews or research before deciding to purchase. Online content, product reviews, and online services have become the first gateway and a journey to many people's decision-making. People will also behave in the same manner before deciding to accept Jesus or

join a church community. The church's website, online congregations, and church's social media have become the first gateway to those interested in joining the church, so it is critical for the church to have an online identity.

People will first determine the church based on their online hosting arrangements. A lack of online presence, poor management of online space, or not updating the social media will have a negative impression of the church. Other than keeping good maintenance of the church's building; the church should also invest in developing and allocating people to manage their online presence.

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2. The online channel has become an important **“space for ministries”**

Although COVID19 has led many churches to stream their weekly worship services online, some have adopted the online change even more extensively, for instance:

- **Portraying the church’s good image to non-Christians**
- **Evangelization**
- **Discipleship**
- **Building strong relationships within the Christian community**

Many people want to study the Bible but adding an extra day in their already busy schedule to commute to church would have restricted many from studying. As a result, **Bible study groups can be converted to an online platform and church members can choose to study at their own pace and availability.** Eventually, the church will adjust its measuring metrics from physical attendance per program to the number of reaches in a wider variety of channels. Some programs may be terminated, and some new ones may arise; thus, the programs will be a hybrid of on-site and online gatherings.



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3. The language and church's operations will be adjusted for **ease of access**

While many church leaders may have some concerns regarding the understanding of new technology and online platforms; the truth is new technology is not difficult to navigate, platforms are developed to be more user-friendly, and tools like video cameras are of higher quality at a more affordable price. On the other hand, **another important challenge for the church is to create contents that are understandable and relevant to the audience.** The church's online presence enables Biblical content to effortlessly be shared

to other platforms, which makes it easier for non-Christians to come across what is being practiced taught at church. For this reason, the church has to adjust its activities and teachings for ease of access to non-Christians. We should examine the “map of the heart” to understand the hearts and interests of people in today's society, along with creating teaching content that would come to fruition in their hearts.

GOOD CONTENTS

for people today are as follows:

- Ease of understanding
- Precisely targeted
- Relatability
- Compelling, evolving, and engaging
- Making an impact on the audience

4. On-site gatherings emphasize **building relationships and community**

In the necessity of social distancing, we have discovered that online meetings are incapable of completely replacing face-to-face meetings. Fellowship is essential for spiritual growth and the online ministries help to strengthen rather than undermine other offline ministries, so the church simply has to figure out a way to create more meaningful fellowships. Everyone can watch worship services from any church or listen to renowned pastors delivering sermons online, but people will still be attached to a church that they can call "family". The church, therefore, should focus on being a family rather than a classroom; building strong relationships rather than gatherings. People need meaningful relationships and connections; technological advancements and the online world served as a signboard directing the church to go back to the core foundation of being a community. This is an exciting time for us to

together write the next page of the church history. I truly believe that powerful content is the love of God and the word of truth, which will be the answer for all seekers. Adapting to the digital age is a crucial springboard that jumpstarts the expansion of God's Kingdom. I would like to end this article with Socrates, an ancient Greek philosopher who quoted,

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"the secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."
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