



*DESIGNING YOUR*

# DIGITAL MINISTRY STRATEGY

**THE UNSTUCK GROUP®**  
— WE HELP CHURCHES GET UNSTUCK. —

# WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT



## Our churches are losing the content battle.

We've worked with churches of all shapes and sizes for the past 11 years, and what's one thing we almost never see a church doing well? Even the big ones?

## CONTENT STRATEGY.

Even before the unique events of 2020, we were living through the biggest communication shift in 500 years. Fewer people were attending church and more were utilizing the web for every aspect of their lives.

And now that the trends we were seeing beforehand seem to have accelerated, our churches can't afford to not have a digital content strategy. This isn't something we can just add on the side—it's a full scale shift.

### **People who are searching are finding answers from everyone but the local church.**

We don't doubt that your student ministry or small groups are answering some of life's toughest questions, but do you answer them online in a way that an unchurched person might find them?

What if finding out ways to connect online is now the first step to inviting people into community? How would that change your approach to the content you are planning and producing? How can you equip your current congregation to leverage their social networks and invite people into conversations about God and into community with your church?

If you haven't taken steps in this direction and you're just waiting for normal to return, we hope our most recent data from the Q3 2020 edition of The Unstuck Church Report will encourage you to shift your perspective and start taking those steps.

In late September 2020, we conducted a survey to learn more about how churches are engaging digital ministry strategies. And the results are disheartening, but this one in particular stood out...

Only 21% of those surveyed agreed with this statement: “We have a well-defined digital ministry strategy to engage with people who are outside the church and outside the faith.” In other words, 79% of churches don’t.

It’s time to shift from defining your digital ministry strategies as putting your services online and to think about how to really connect with people outside the church and outside the faith online.

We created this guide to equip you with resources and tools to do just that—to help you get started and ask the right questions.

### **One last note before we continue...**

If you’re the pastor and you’re reading this, let us offer you some encouragement—

#### **Leading the digital ministry strategy isn’t your job.**

It’s crucial that someone owns the alignment of the digital strategy with the ministry strategy, but you need to find the right leader on your team for the job.

We’re excited about your commitment to reaching new people for Jesus.

We’re rooting for you!



# GETTING STARTED



Thousands of churches are getting serious about developing a digital ministry strategy. We know because you're reaching out to us here at The Unstuck Group asking for help.

## “What would you do if you worked at our church?”

But the answer to this question is not that easy.

As we dug into why this feels complicated with each new conversation, we were hit with this reality—

### It's because it *is* complicated.

Ultimately, your digital ministry strategy cannot be an addition to your “real” ministry methods. You have to dig all the way down to the [foundation of your ministry](#) and start answering these key questions:

- **What's your vision for the next 5 years?** (*What do you believe God wants your church to look like?*)
- **Who are you trying to reach?** (*Who has God equipped you to serve really, really well?*)
- **How are you reaching them now?** (*What's already working for you? What's driving growth?*)
- **If you're losing people, why are they leaving?** (*What are they choosing instead?*)
- **Who is your competition?** (*HINT: It's probably not other churches. How is culture attempting to meet the needs only God and the local church can truly meet?*)
- **How are you perceived in your community?** (*Is the perception true? Do you need to change it?*)
- **What are your goals for trying a new strategy?** (*How will you know you're winning?*)
- **Who does what on your team?** (*Who owns and drives each goal?*)

If those sound more big picture than specifically related to communications strategy, it's because they are.

No digital strategy company worth its hefty retainer would tell you they can give you a strategy that will work without diving deep into understanding who you are, where you're going, and how you define success.

## Digital Ministry Strategy = Ministry Strategy

Digital strategies are going to become embedded parts of your ministry strategy. It won't be something separate. They will be elemental, essential, components of how you do what you do to help people far from God meet him and take next steps in their relationship with him.

That new, clear perspective you have on how your church does ministry will include in-person gatherings and environments *and* online gatherings and environments—with both in-person next steps *and* digital ones.

And they'll all be completely woven together, into one comprehensive way you do church. And you'll revisit, and change it, and try new things, and keep iterating with the things you learn—because it won't be your digital ministry strategy. It will just be your ministry strategy.

### NEXT STEPS

Take some time to answer the questions above with your senior leadership team. Many of these questions could already be defined, but write them out again as you're considering it in this new context.

# DEFINING WHO YOU ARE TRYING TO REACH



When we work with churches, **we always start with who.**

This is such a critical conversation. If a church does not define this, the planning process is very difficult because everyone is confused about who they are designing ministry for.

We understand the temptation to have the answer, “Everyone!” Why wouldn’t we want everyone to know about Jesus? That’s ultimately why we got into ministry, right?

**But the problem is, we THINK we’re speaking to everyone, but we’re not.**

We’re usually talking to people just like us in big, vague terms that don’t connect on a personal level.

As we’ve worked with hundreds of churches over the past 11 years, we’ve learned something highly valuable that sounds a bit counterintuitive when it comes to how we do church:

**It’s crucial to have a defined mission field to lead a growing church.** You can’t have an effective ministry strategy without knowing who you are trying to reach. And you certainly can’t expand your church’s digital front door if you don’t know who you are trying to reach.

With that said, there are a few key identifiers that we like to encourage churches to dig into.

## AGE RANGE

Ideally this is a 10-year range but no more than 15 years.

*define age range.*

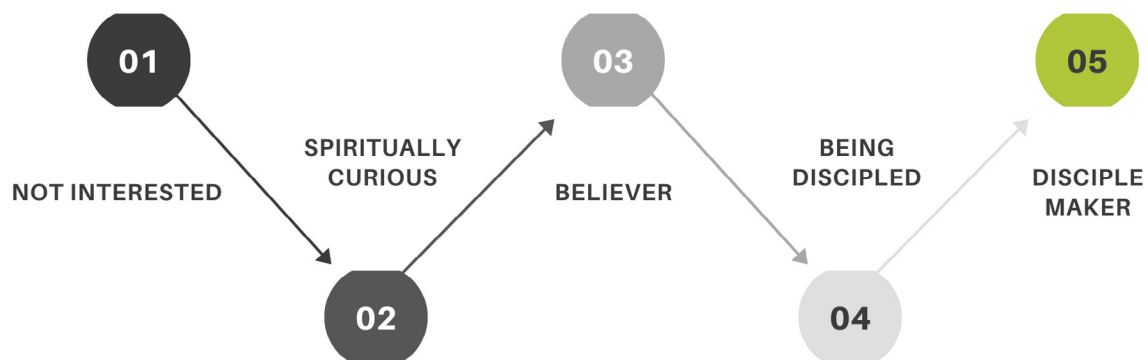
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## SPIRITUAL CONDITION

Unchurched, Dechurched, Spiritually Curious, etc?



*\*This visual is how we define the stages of a person's spiritual journey*

*define spiritual condition.*

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## and... LIFE STAGE

Single, Married, Parents, Empty Nesters, Retirees, etc.?

*define life stage.*

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From there, we want to learn more about our mission field, their needs and what they value. We've included a visual below to help you dive into answering these questions:

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

What is the need?	
What's the key question the person is asking related to that need?	
How should we respond to that need?	

One final note...

**This is not about exclusion; this is about focus.**

At The Unstuck Group, we've learned that the more clarity churches have about who they are trying to reach the more likely the church is to reach a broad cross-section of their community—and the reverse does not hold true.

Looking for an example as you take your next steps? [Check out this example here.](#)

NEXT STEPS

Define your mission field. What's their age? Their lifestage? What is their primary need? Next, fill in the How Do We Respond? chart. This will help you start defining your content strategy.



# WHAT + WHERE + WHEN



Once you've defined big picture strategy, you're faced with the next challenge:

## How do we actually get them to **engage**?

Our world is noisy and our markets are saturated with too much content. How do we get our content in front of the people we're trying to reach?

There are a few key components as you build your digital engagement strategy that will ultimately help you get your audience to engage:

### 1. **Clarify the engagement goal** for each step along a person's spiritual journey.

Reference the 5 phases of a person's spiritual journey above.

It's important to begin with the end in mind: Before you build a strategy, you need to define the goal. What is the ultimate win for them in this phase?

As an example, the goal for someone who is Not Interested may be to simply introduce them to the church. For someone on the opposite end of the continuum, a Disciple Maker, the engagement goal might be for them to build relationships with people outside the faith.

You have to define these goals so you ultimately target the right people with the right content.

## 2. Determine your content strategy (primary message) for each step on the continuum.

For someone who is Not Interested, as an example, our strong encouragement is that you build your content strategy around providing help and answers for living life and addressing the opportunities and challenges they are facing in their daily lives with things like relationships, parenting, emotional/mental health, purpose, financial health, etc.

In order to do this effectively, before you build your content strategy, you need to clearly identify who you are trying to reach and what their needs are (opportunities and challenges).

## 3. Determine how you are going to deliver that content (the primary platform) for each step on the continuum.

It's not just about creating the right content, it's also about engaging people where they are rather than where we want them to be.

For people who are Not Interested, we want them to be in church. That's not where they are today. That means we have to provide this practical content on the platforms where they are living life and use the mediums that they are engaging with. We need to speak their language in their environments.

- Think *digital content* rather than online services.
- Think *shareable online* rather than a requirement to show up in-person.
- Think *Facebook, Instagram and YouTube* rather than your sanctuary or a church classroom.

## WHEN TO POST

It's true that social media is saturated with content, but there is research that can help you determine the best times to post.

We've linked a few resources like [How Frequently Should I Publish on Social Media](#) and [The Best Times to Post on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest](#).

As you start, these are helpful resources. But ultimately, you will get the most effective information by studying the habits of your audience. For example, as you post content, pay attention to this kind of data:

- What time of day does your content get the most attention?
- What day of the week?
- What content topics perform best?
- What type of content performs best?

Studying the analytics on each platform will help you understand your audience better, and ultimately connect with them best.

## NEXT STEPS

Define the 3 keys components of your digital ministry strategy above. Our team hosted a conversation on [social media best practices](#). As you dive into your social media strategy, we recommend giving it a listen.

# WHAT TO MEASURE



So, we're online... but how do we figure out what to measure when we're doing ministry online? How do we know if what we're seeing is good? Or if it's even strong engagement?

**Our take on metrics is that everything you measure should help you make better decisions and refine your strategies for reaching people and helping them take next steps in their faith journey.**

As a foundation, your team needs to be monitoring some of these things so they can help you decide which things are working to help people take their first steps and next steps:

## **Are we reaching new people?**

(e.g. new vs. returning visitors to your website, new followers on social media, etc.)

## **How many people are taking their first steps?**

(e.g. first time they give you their email address or mobile number, etc.)

## **How did they take that first step?**

(e.g. specific content series, form to join a group, new app account created, etc.)

## **How are people finding us when they take a step?**

(e.g. organic search, Facebook ad, Instagram link tree, friend passed along a direct link, etc.)

## **Which strategies are converting people from “first steps” to “next steps”?**

One of the best things you can borrow from marketers is the idea of having a primary call-to-action and a transitional call-to-action.

Let's say your ultimate goal is to connect every person in a group, but you recognize that's a big first step for someone new. You communicate over and over again that you want them to join a group, but you test-drive lots of lower-barrier-to-entry calls-to-action (e.g. sign up for this free email series, subscribe to our podcast, take our poll, etc.) that are easier for people to take and a smaller next step than joining a group. And after they've taken the simpler action, you point again to the bigger step of joining a group.

## Are we actually connecting with our primary audience? Secondary audiences?

This requires that you develop ways to learn more about people. We're always surprised to find out churches don't have segmented email lists that allow them to communicate strategically with different subsets of people in their congregation.

One of the simplest ways to do this is with strategic questions in your connection forms. Another way to do it is with hyper-tailored content.

For example, let's say you start an opt-in email video series to encourage young moms. You can be pretty confident most people who opt-into that are young moms, even if you never explicitly asked. That series can be a first step, but it can also give you insight into how to tailor your message to that group of people about their next step.

With digital strategies (and particularly social strategies), it's always about testing and measuring and more testing. However, we recommend not test-driving anything new until you know you can measure whether it helped someone take a first step or a next step first. And from there, you're...

- Testing
- Measuring
- Revising/rethinking
- Testing again

## NEXT STEPS

Our team had a really practical conversation on [clarifying digital engagement](#). We dove into conversations about metrics, but also more practical content that we think will be helpful as you get started.

# REAL CHURCH EXAMPLES + ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you ask 10 pastors to define “digital engagement,” you’re likely to get 10 different answers. The interpretation can seem vague, confusing, and sometimes just impractical.

And while we’re finding that few churches are very far along in developing an effective strategy, there are some who are already out in front, leading the way, and finding best practices.

Before we send you off, we want to highlight some of those best practices and stories from real churches who are implementing a digital ministry strategy.

[Connexus Church](#) (Canada) - Traditional contact cards (even online versions) weren’t working. They pivoted to an eBook on Experiencing God Personally and saw great results. Connexus was kind enough to provide this eBook for reference! [Download it here](#).

[Grace Church](#) (Massachusetts) - Started hosting [Webinar Wednesdays](#) on topics like overcoming fear and anxiety, talking to kids about racism, starting a thriving business, and keeping your kids safe online.

[Crossroads Church](#) (Ohio) - Revamped its website to reach an online audience, positioning themselves as “spiritual outfitters” to help people take steps on their spiritual journey. Check out their [30-day trial](#) to equip people with resources to begin the journey.

[Westside Community Church](#) (Oregon) - Launched a new podcast... only it’s not your typical church podcast with a replay of the Sunday message. Lead pastor Gabe Kolstad and his wife Melissa have started a podcast called [Marriage Monthly](#) to help marriages that are under pressure in this season, and ultimately help the church connect with new people.

[Sun Valley Community Church](#) (Arizona) - Hosted a digital marriage retreat—more than 900 couples participated, and one third of them were brand new to the church.

We hope these examples spark your creativity. I think you’re going to find some practical things you can implement right away, as well as clarity around the longer-term picture of where your church needs to make pivots.



## DIGITAL MINISTRY BEST PRACTICES

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- [article] [A Real Digital Ministry Strategy: Where to Begin](#)
- [podcast] [Clarifying Digital Engagement](#)
- [article] [What Should Churches Be Measuring? 4 Questions You Need to Answer First](#)
- [podcast] [How to Build a Digital Engagement Strategy](#)
- [podcast] [Best Practices for Digital Ministry Strategy](#)
- [podcast] [Social Media Best Practices for Churches](#)
- [podcast] [Why Church Communications is Stuck in 2004](#)
- [article] [Does The Unstuck Group Help with Digital Strategy?](#)

## REACHING NEW PEOPLE

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- [podcast] [The Key to Reaching NEW People in a Digital World](#)
- [podcast] [Nona Jones on Engaging People in Digital Spaces, and Jeff Brodie on the Digital Shift at Connexus Church](#)
- [podcast] [3 Strategies for Connecting New People to Faith + Church](#)
- [podcast] [Insiders + Outsiders: Two Types of Engagement](#)
- [article] [The Content Battle: When Google Has the Answers to Questions the Church Should be Addressing](#)

## STAFF + STRUCTURE

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- [podcast] [LEADER, then STRATEGY, then STRUCTURE](#)
- [podcast] [Trends in Online Viewing, In-Person Attendance, Staffing, and Digital Strategies](#)

# CONCLUSION



**Your weekend experience is no longer the front door of your church. Your digital ministry strategy is.**

Do you feel unsure about how to move from putting your usual service online to actually creating both a successful digital ministry strategy to reach new people and an experience that is designed for digital audiences?

If you don't know where to start, how to grow your church's digital "front door" or what to measure, then you're in the right place.

Through this [strategic planning for digital ministry](#), we help you **assess your ministry's online service experience**, [clarify your church's digital engagement path and strategies](#), create the **team structure and action plans** to apply an integrated digital ministry strategy, and **learn what to measure to evaluate your strategy's effectiveness over time**.

We don't give you a lot of advice and no way to execute. We help you identify the obstacles and opportunities you have as a church and develop a practical, strategic plan to accomplish where you feel like God is leading you in this season. Your Unstuck Coach is in the trenches with you, growing your church's impact.

**We'd love to partner with you as you navigate the future of your ministry.**

**[Let's talk.](#)**