



The Cornerstones of Post-Pandemic Church Technology



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1 Introduction

Even as churches have faced unique challenges in confronting and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, countless opportunities have arisen to embrace and adapt to technology that can keep congregations connected, no matter what.

How have churches adapted? Are they missing out on valuable technology to support the recovery phase of the pandemic? What's most important?

Ministry Brands – the leading provider of software, services, and information platforms for churches, ministries and those they serve – launched a nationwide survey of churches of all sizes, in all geographic regions of the country, to determine attitudes towards technology in the wake of the pandemic, and how churches view the importance of specific technologies as they move forward.

Just over 1,200 church leaders responded, giving firsthand insights into how technology, such as church management systems, websites, online giving platforms and more, has been critical to sustain and rebuild their programs.

How does your church compare?

There's no doubt digital tools are the “new normal.”



95 percent of respondents say their reliance on digital tools and church software has increased from before the pandemic began to now – with 68 percent saying their usage has increased significantly.

Survey data was compiled from 1,200 churches nationwide between April and May 2021. References to church size throughout the e-book reflect:

- *Small: under 100 total weekly attendance (~30% of respondents)*
- *Mid: 100-600 total weekly attendance (~40% of respondents)*
- *Large: 601-1000 total weekly attendance (~15% of respondents)*
- *Mega: greater than 1000 total weekly attendance (~15% of respondents)*

2 Church Technology Overview

Technologies that Matter Most

As organizations continue to recover and rebuild from the pandemic, the top five most important church technologies are:

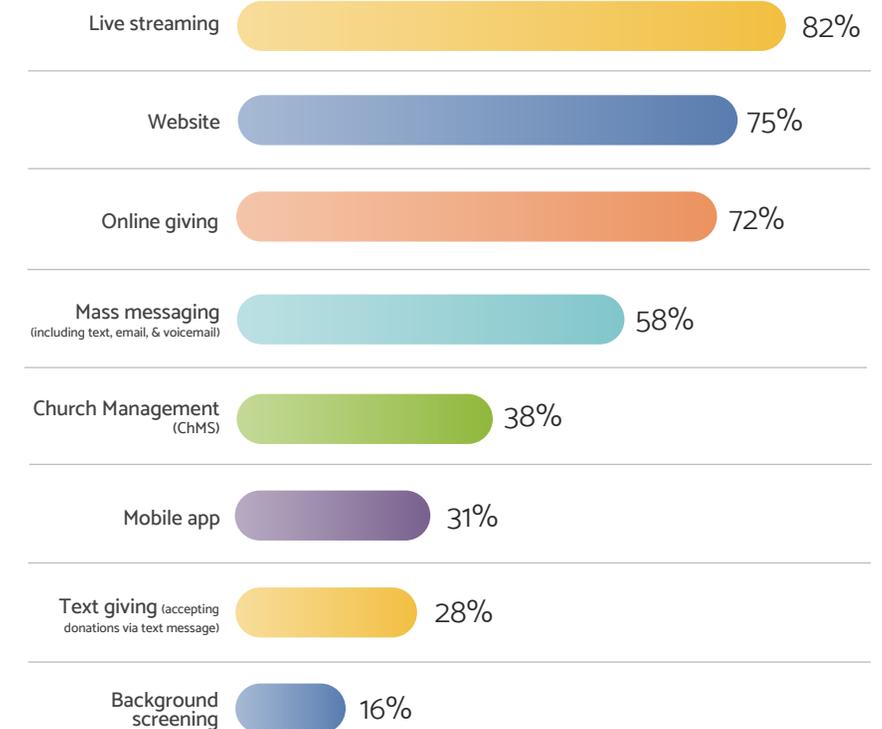
- Live Streaming
- Websites
- Online Giving
- Mass Messaging (including email, text and voicemail)
- Church Management Systems (ChMS)

These results are consistent across small, medium, large and mega churches with only one slight variation: mega churches rank online giving slightly higher than websites. It is notable that these go-forward tech trends represent an overwhelming consensus across all church technology users.

A Vote of Confidence

Churches of all sizes report high confidence levels in their current technology solutions supporting overall operations as pandemic recovery continues. Confidence levels increase slightly as church size increases, ranging from 84 percent to 92 percent.

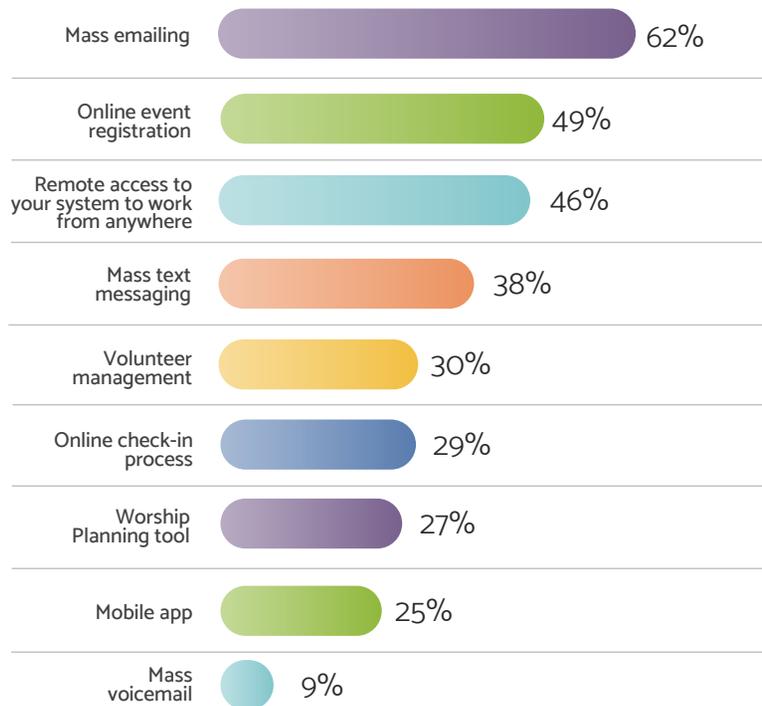
Most Important Church Technology Moving Forward



TECH TIP: With such a range of important technological considerations confronting churches, full-service solutions that encompass a complete spectrum of church management, operations, engagement and communications capabilities can bring the most benefit to churches of all sizes.

3 Church Management Systems (ChMS) are Here to Stay

Most Important ChMS Features



A full 95 percent of respondents say that church management systems (ChMS) are important to their organization in recovering and rebuilding from the pandemic, which is consistent across churches of all sizes.

Notably, almost 30 percent of respondents say they didn't have a ChMS before the pandemic, and still do not – primarily reported by small churches. At the same time, 54 percent say they made no changes to their existing ChMS. This suggests an understandable reluctance to change among churches grappling with the pandemic – but also missed opportunities to improve and enhance church operations.

Mass emailing, online event registration and the ability to access the tool remotely are seen by churches as the most critical ChMS features, with mass texting, online check-ins, worship planning and mobile apps seen as emerging features that can also benefit churches. These priorities dovetail with the many demands of the pandemic – better communications, capacity management, and contactless operations.



TECH TIP: Churches understand the importance of ChMS. Now is the time for church leaders to demand the best from their providers – abundant features, full integration, and accessible customer service shouldn't be bonus features. They should be the baseline for a useful ChMS.

4 Websites are Where It's At

Not surprisingly, churches' reliance on websites has risen dramatically during the pandemic, with 60 percent of respondents saying that internal usage of their existing website has increased from before the pandemic began to now. It's worth noting that small churches report only a 45% increase in website usage, but still a significant upturn.

Web strategies reflect the dynamics seen with ChMS. About 45 percent of respondents say they made no changes to their existing website, while many churches upgraded their existing service or uncovered new tools.

Churches that did launch a new website or completed a web redesign during the pandemic saw improving communications with members as a top priority – and many sought out a more modern design as well as options for sharing resources such as video sermons.

Overall, a strong web presence is now seen as essential by churches. About 95 percent of respondents list their church website as important moving beyond the pandemic, which is consistent across churches of all sizes.

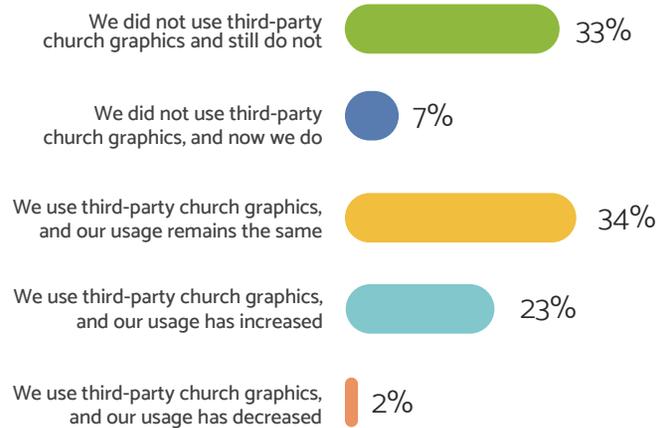
More than half
of churches
report increased
use of their
website during
the pandemic.



TECH TIP: Web technology has flourished during the COVID-19 pandemic. Churches that have been hesitant to change are missing out on new technologies, and those using a “basic” web service with limited service options may be unaware of ways their sites can be improved.

5 Digital Assets for a Digital World

Change in Reliance on Third-Party Digital Assets



TECH TIP: About one-third of respondents report not using third-party digital assets before or during the pandemic - revealing a missed opportunity for churches to enrich online programs and experiences.

Churches that were making use of third-party digital assets – including church graphics, worship videos, mini-movies and print graphics – prior to COVID-19 remained relatively consistent. About 23 percent of respondents report increasing their use of these digital resources, which was primarily led by small and mid-size churches.

In addition, almost half of churches that transitioned to online Sunday School and/or VBS during the pandemic found third-party digital assets such as church graphics, online kids lessons and videos important to their programming.

Overall, about 72 percent of respondents say that third-party digital assets will be important as their churches recover and rebuild from the pandemic with an emphasis among small and mid-size churches.

6 Live Streaming is #1

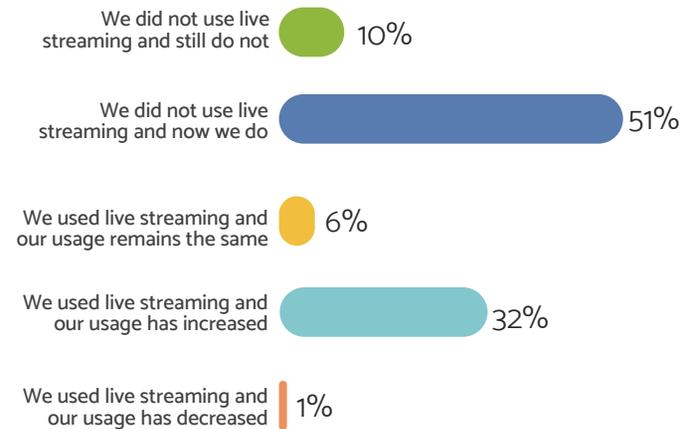
Increased use of live streaming is one of the most profound results of the pandemic. Over half of respondents say their churches did not use live streaming before the pandemic, but do now – while about a third say that they did use live streaming prior to the pandemic, and that their usage has increased.

This represents another “new normal” – 93 percent of participants say that live streaming will be important to church life moving forward, which is consistent across churches of all sizes.



TECH TIP: Live streaming has quickly come to mean more than simply broadcasting a church service. New tools are available to connect with first-time viewers and engage with existing members watching remotely, and there are new opportunities to encourage giving, small group signups and other participation in church life. Churches should make sure this important worship tool is working hard for them and their congregations.

Change in Reliance on Live Streaming



7 Mass Messaging Tools are Growth Opportunities

65 percent of churches rank mass text messaging as important moving forward.



TECH TIP: Churches should reevaluate voicemail-based contact, even as email and text messaging appear to take precedence. Though technology is evolving, there may be significant numbers of church members who could be unreachable through text or email.

Looking Ahead to Mass Text Messaging

A significant growth opportunity for churches is mass text messaging. Forty-seven percent of respondents report not implementing this communications tool before or after the onset of COVID-19. Small percentages reported having a mass texting system in place before the pandemic, while just 11 percent of survey participants indicated that their church established a new texting system in response to the pandemic.

Overall, about 65 percent of churches rank mass text messaging as having some level of importance moving forward, which is consistent across churches of all sizes. These churches stand to be better connected to their congregations and communities in the years to come.

A Miss for Mass Voicemail Messaging

One communication resource that did not appear to gain traction during the pandemic (or even before) is mass voicemail messaging. Seventy-five percent of respondents say they didn't have mass voicemail capabilities prior to the pandemic and still don't, and only small percentages indicate consistent or heightened use of existing programs. Almost half of survey participants rank mass voicemail messaging as unimportant to their future communication plans.

8 Online Giving is a Given

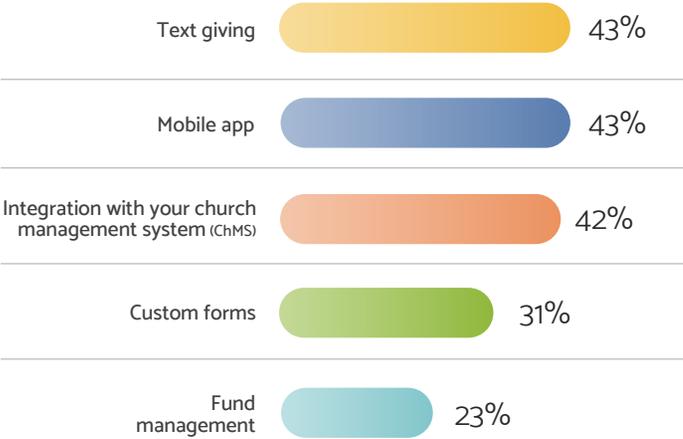
It should come as no surprise that online giving surged in importance as COVID-19 restricted church attendance. A remarkable 62 percent of churches reported increased use of their existing online giving platform, with a strong presence within the mid-size church communities. A significant number of churches that didn't have online giving before the pandemic quickly implemented it in response, which was led by small churches.

While many churches upgraded their existing giving platform (13 percent of respondents) or uncovered new tools in their existing service (almost 20 percent), the vast majority of survey participants indicated that they made no changes to their online giving solution, suggesting a reluctance to change course during the upheaval of a pandemic.

As churches adapted to increased use of online giving, text giving and mobile apps were two of the most widely-used features to encourage greater participation. Integration with church management systems (ChMS) was also seen as vital by many organizations.

Moving forward, it is widely understood among churches that online giving is now an essential tool for churches of all sizes: an incredible 90 percent of survey participants rank online giving as an important priority for the future.

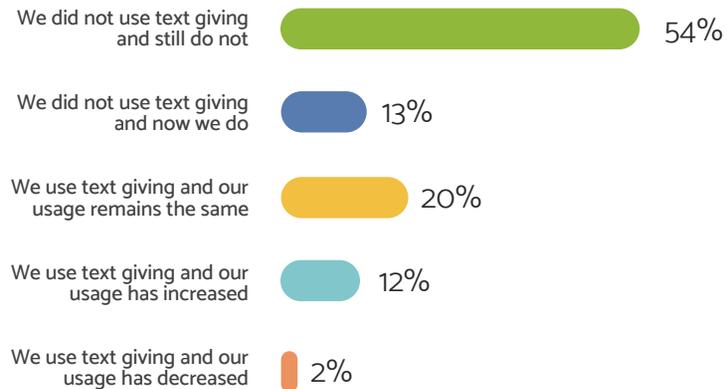
Most Important Online Giving Features



TECH TIP: Though keeping the status quo is an understandable instinct in a chaotic situation like a pandemic, it is critical for churches to evaluate the performance of their online giving platform and determine what needs to be adjusted, what can be improved, and whether a completely new approach is needed. Learning from the past year and making improvements that strengthen online giving will be a pivotal step in recovering from the pandemic.

9 Looking Ahead to Text Giving

Change in Church Reliance on Text Giving



Looking at text giving specifically, it remains an emerging technology that churches have not fully embraced, even as it grows in importance. Most responding churches report not using text-to-give capabilities before or after the pandemic, but over half rank it as an important priority moving forward.



TECH TIP: Text-based giving is an essential component for giving programs that seek to empower supporters to give whenever they feel inspired. Churches that don't offer it will increasingly be missing out on generosity and engagement.

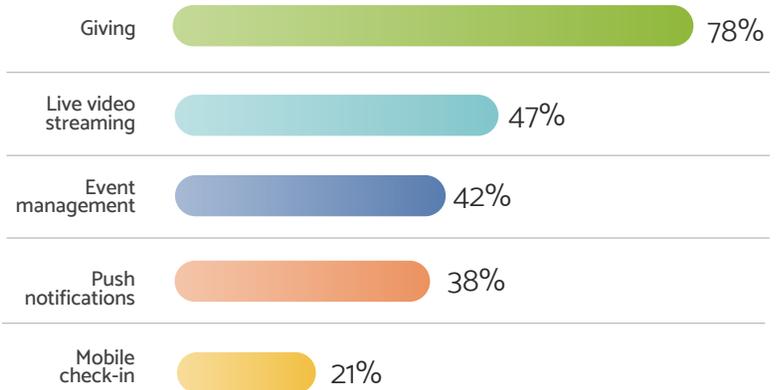
10 Making the Most out of Mobile Apps

The pandemic helped develop a better understanding of how churches want to use mobile apps for their ministries. Over half indicate that they did not have a mobile app before the pandemic and have not had one created subsequently, but at the same time, about 55 percent of churches say that a mobile app will be important to their recovery. Mid, large and mega churches lead the way for mobile app adoption.

In terms of how churches are using mobile apps, giving was far and away the most prominent utilization, as indicated by a full 78 percent of survey participants – ahead of live video streaming (47 percent) and event management (42 percent).

Survey responses indicate the extent to which organizations have increased their reliance on donations through a mobile app from before the pandemic began to now. About 35 percent of churches that were accepting app donations before the pandemic have increased their usage, while 27 percent have maintained consistent levels of utilization. Another 17 percent indicated that they began accepting donations through a mobile app in response to the pandemic.

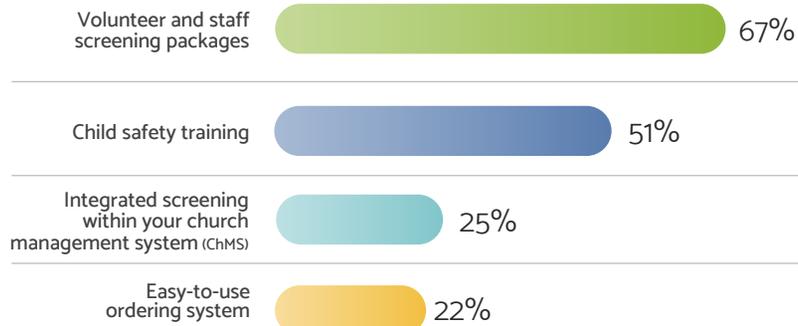
Most Important Mobile App Features



TECH TIP: Families now use mobile apps for everything from ordering food and making dinner reservations to buying groceries, clothes, gifts, and plane tickets. They will increasingly expect church engagement to be available via mobile app as well. Churches that quickly respond with a thoughtful app solution will be seen as more proactive and innovative – and will lead to more involvement.

11 Bringing Back Background Screenings

Most Important Background Screening Features



TECH TIP: After more than a year of social distancing, virtual services and limited programming, background screening may have lost urgency for some churches. As in-person events and programming resume, this aspect of church safety must once again take on increased importance alongside health concerns.

Background screening services are becoming an increasingly critical component within a church's technology toolset, as the desire for integration with church management systems rise.

Churches' use of background screening services has remained consistent throughout the pandemic, with 60 percent of respondents saying they had an established screening solution and their usage remained the same. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as in-person interactions were brought to a halt, a very small number of churches reported implementing a screening system in response to the pandemic. It is startling, however, that almost 30 percent of participating churches still do not use a background screening service – a considerable safety gap for church communities.

In considering background screening services, three priorities stand out for churches: volunteer and staff screening packages, child safety training and integration with church management systems.



Full-service, integrated software solutions with solid customer service and educational resources such as tutorials and webinars are better positioned to help churches adapt, compared to “basic” digital tools. Smart, simple, integrated solutions save churches time and money while driving missions forward in a digital world.

As a family of software companies dedicated to empowering churches, ministries, and faith-based organizations in a digital world, Ministry Brands is excited to continue leading a national dialogue on the challenges and opportunities facing churches in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Feel free to visit www.ministrybrands.com/contact to share your interest in any of the Ministry Brands solutions.

