

# MINISTRY AND TECHNOLOGY

How Today's Top Organizations Are Using  
Technology to Expand Their Reach

Presented by  **THE A GROUP**  
marketing | technology

# IT IS NO LONGER A QUESTION

of **IF** ministries must embrace technology; it's a question of **HOW**. Audiences are already using brand new ways of communicating, connecting and giving. Is your organization meeting them where they are?

We surveyed 50 top ministry leaders to learn how their organizations are embracing online strategies, using digital communications, and fundraising online. We've also included success stories from ministries who have embraced technology and seen amazing results, growth, and reach. These responses paint a picture of the current landscape of technology for ministry, the ways ministries are using it well, and where we can continue to grow.

Take the chance to learn from your peers, see where you stack up, be inspired by their ideas, and learn about the top five tech trends you must embrace this year.

# Online Strategy

Technology is a critical ministry tool, and most organizations are using some form of it. However, the majority of ministries lack a comprehensive strategic plan.

# Online Strategy



**36%**

of ministries have a written strategic plan for using technology.



**95%**

Have a website



**5%**

**DO NOT**  
have a website

The majority of organizations post new content to their sites an average of once per week.



**40%**

Update their site every two years or less

**60%**

Update their site every two years or more

**46%**

of ministry sites are optimized for mobile viewing

**59%**

of organizations do not have a single employee whose sole job is related to technology

**73%** of ministries outsource technology resources

# The Church at Brook Hills

At Brook Hills, we're passionate about not just being a place people come on Sunday mornings. We want to encourage and equip our congregation (and others) to interact, learn and connect with God throughout the week. With so many people using their phones for everything in life, from coordinating their social lives to managing money, we knew it made sense to create a mobile option where people could continue to grow in their faith, from their phone, anytime, anywhere.

We partnered with The A Group to build an app for The Church at Brook Hills. We chose an app because we didn't just want this to be a re-creation of our website. We wanted to create a unique offering that a user could go to for an easy-to-use, personal Bible study resource.

The app features the weekly audio and video teachings from David Platt, Jim Shaddix and others. Users can also access a daily Bible reading plan, family worship guide, and scripture that supports the latest teaching. The week's events and news also populate into the app, giving the user a full picture of what is happening during the week at Brook Hills.

We view this app as a way to enhance ministry and increase reach. It's not just a platform for people to find out about us, but a resource they can use to become dedicated followers of Christ.

# TWR

TWR has always employed cutting-edge technology to bring the Gospel to the world. From the beginning of our ministry, we relied on radio to reach the ends of the earth with the truth of Jesus, in the people's native language. We realized that technology wasn't just an avenue for communicating but a powerful ministry tool that allowed us to reach places that were difficult to reach, where Christians were persecuted, or where missionaries would never be allowed.

With the internet, the world is even more open to the Gospel. We knew broadcasting our programs both through radio and online would increase our reach, but we faced the challenge of how to manage and distribute content in more than 200 different languages. Each country could manage their own websites and media, but we found our brand was being diluted and our media resources were scattered.

We partnered with The A Group to develop two key software platforms that would allow us to minister globally while staying organized and consistent. The first platform lets us duplicate a main global site, both in design and functionality, to create a separate site for TWR partner ministries. In each site's admin panel, we can easily translate the partner's site into their language. The second platform, LinguaDMS, is an online repository that houses all of our media including broadcasts, videos, images and marketing materials in one online platform with no language barrier. With LinguaDMS, we can manage and archive all of our digital files in all languages, and distribute these around the world to any platform or device.

Broadcast technology is what lets us reach the world. Behind the scenes, cutting-edge software platforms built uniquely for us allow us to do what we do. By investing in the technology tools we need, we are able to further our mission.

# Digital Communications

Ministries are actively using email and social media for communications. These tools are very effective, and will benefit from being part of a larger strategic plan. Text marketing is becoming an increasingly important communications tool that ministries must embrace.

# Digital Communications



90%

of organizations use email for newsletters and other supporter communication



ONLY

22%

have a text marketing strategy



95%

Use social media in some form or another

89%

Plan to increase use

HOWEVER

the percentage of organizations with a strategic plan for social media is only

59%

Percentage of organizations using:

Twitter: 82% | Facebook: 100% | Pinterest: 41% | Blogs: 59%

# The MET

Last fall, The MET opened our second church campus in Cypress, a quickly growing, affluent suburb about 30 minutes from our home campus. With new families moving to Cypress everyday and without many churches in the area, we saw a huge opportunity to minister to the families here. For months leading up to the opening of our new campus, we focused on active outreach, letting the Cypress community know we were there for them.

We partnered with The A Group to create a campaign themed “Because you’re here, we’re here.” and worked together to create all the branding and visuals for the campaign. We made sure that our social media platforms, from our Twitter skin to Facebook cover photo, were branded with the We’re Here campaign. These platforms became great avenues to keep people up to date on construction, prayer requests, and opening weekend details.

Beyond just using our platforms to spread the word about the new campus opening, we equipped the congregation at our existing campuses to use their personal platforms to invite friends and build buzz about our Cypress campus. We organized an official street team and provided them with Facebook photos and shareable graphics to post on their platforms. As the launch got closer, we posted shareable invitations and countdowns that our congregation could take and post on their own pages to invite their friends to join us.

We ended up having more than 1,700 in attendance on our first Sunday in Cypress! So much of ministry is social and personal. It’s not just about leadership ministering to a congregation; it’s about all of us being the Church, loving our neighbors, and inviting our friends to join us in the hope we’ve found. Social media creates another avenue for people to connect, and by equipping our church to tell our story on their platforms, we help them to minister to those around them.

# Ministry Matters

Ministry Matters, an initiative of The United Methodist Publishing House, provides thousands of free and paid Christian resources in a digital format to pastors, teachers, and worship leaders. With new content added continuously, we rely heavily on email to keep our readers and subscribers up-to-date on available resources and to encourage people to subscribe.

Recently, we have focused on finding ways to grow our email lists. Email is ultimately about widening your supporter base so we intentionally create reasons for people to engage with us. For example, we offer free content such as a spiritual gifts survey or Sunday morning sermon ideas on our website but require that someone enter their email address to access it. Because we're offering something of value, we find that people are very willing to sign up. Our email list has grown from 1,500 subscribers to more than 34,000. Twelve thousand of those have joined just in the last few months.

We also put a lot of thought into the content and design of emails we send out each week. We include timely and practical articles, which get the most engagement, and pair those with stories about products we're offering. We even make sure to design our emails in such a way that encourages people to scroll down and read the whole thing. We typically have about a 29% open rate and 28% click-through-rate.

Most importantly, we don't just focus on email in a silo. We integrate it with all of our digital communications, posting our emails on Facebook with sign up links, including social media links and call outs in our emails. Through cross-promotion, we give people several different ways to engage and go deeper with us.

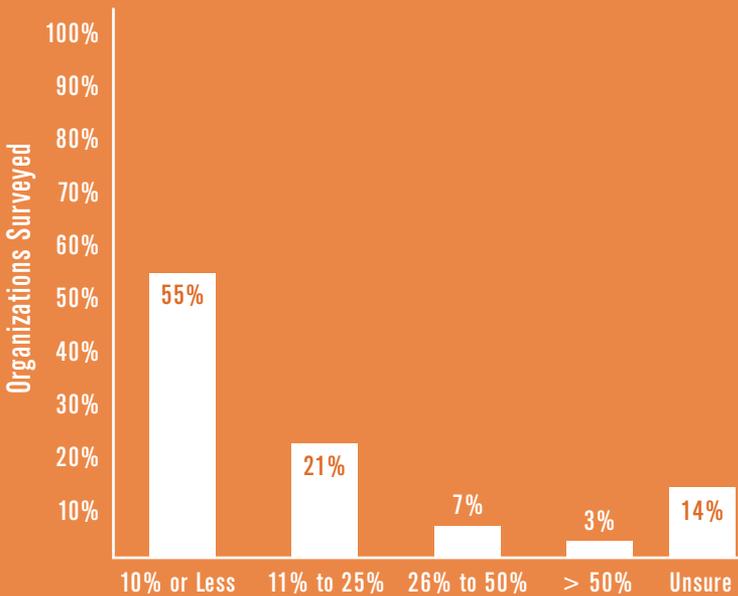
Email can be an incredibly effective way for ministries to reach supporters, whether it's sending life-changing content out to people, sharing stories of how God is working, or encouraging people to give. It continues to be an important part of our communication strategy.

# Online Fundraising

The majority of organizations do have online options for giving, but many do not measure what percentage of revenue comes from digital sources. There is opportunity to grow online fundraising, as well as mobile fundraising options such as text-to-give. These outlets do not just represent alternative options for giving; they represent untapped revenue sources.

# Online Fundraising

**72%** of organizations accept online donations.



Percentage of revenue from online donations.

Only **30%** use text-to-give for donations.

# Soles4Souls

Shortly after founding Soles4Souls, we found that support for the organization was growing rapidly, especially among young, passionate audiences. This group of supporters wanted to help, and wanted to go beyond simply writing a check and moving on. What they lacked in disposable income, they made up for in social network reach, the desire to make a difference and willingness to advocate for a cause.

We had to figure out how to engage these supporters and empower them to support our work. We partnered with The A Group to build an online fundraising platform that equipped supporters to create and manage their own fundraising campaigns and collect donations on our behalf. Using the platform, supporters could create a personal profile and fundraising page, share their story and fundraising goals, and accept donations to their campaign. The donations were sent directly to us while the supporter was able to track and share their fundraising goals.

To create brand advocates, we also added the option to host team fundraisers and to create shareable graphics and email the campaign out to family and friends or post on social media.

The payback was almost immediate and the viral use was an instant success for building the brand. People all over the world were exposed by our participants, making them brand evangelists, not to mention the fact that supporters have raised more than \$3.5 million on the platform. Technology not only became a critical tool for fundraising; it put power in the hands of our supporters, creating participants and advocates instead of just donors.

# Cross Point

Our church ministers to a relatively young and tech-savvy congregation, and we make it a priority to stay up-to-date on new technology and communications tools, from Instagram to text messaging. We recently created a text marketing and giving strategy and used Textify Mobile, a text marketing service, to facilitate our database, group management, text messaging, and text-to-give.

Having a text system in place makes it really easy for us to communicate with our congregation quickly when the need arises, from a service cancellation to a reminder for a volunteer team. With the ability to manage groups, we can send messages to specific people or lists, such as youth, parents, staff etc.

The biggest results we've seen using text messaging are in text giving. We recently launched text giving by encouraging everyone in our congregation to give a small amount, such as \$5, in order to illustrate how when everyone gives a little, great things can happen. We took a traditional offering as well as offering a text-to-give option. We had more than 700 first-time donors donate via text in one day! Not just 700 who gave via text, but 700 NEW people who had never given before. Not only is text giving proving to be a great option for a modern audience that doesn't carry cash or checks, but it opens up the door for people who have never given before to join in and support organizations.

# State of the Union

As today's ministry leaders are finding, organizations must embrace new technology to stay relevant with a modern audience. These ministries can improve their marketing and increase their reach by creating comprehensive strategic plans for using technology in communications and fundraising.

Technology creates incredible opportunities, not just for fundraising and communications, but for enhancing your mission and reaching more people.

**“There have been some instances (all isolated and not coordinated with other parts of the organization) where people have ventured out and tried new technologies. The results have varied and success is mixed. Much of this can be attributed to a lack of a comprehensive plan up front.”**

**“People seem to want both traditional and technological answers.”**

**“We have been able to make our church more accessible by streaming our services online, posting sermons on our website, listing upcoming events, and allowing our church members and those who are looking for a church see what we are all about on their own terms and timelines.”**

**“We have success with the areas of technology that we do use. We just don't use all the avenues available...nor as efficiently or effectively as we could/should.”**

**“We're heading in the right direction to not allow technology to hold us back but instead to use it for the benefit of the mission.”**

**“If it weren't for technology, we would not be doing what we do today in ministry.”**

THE

TOP 5 TECH TRENDS

YOU MUST EMBRACE

IN 2014

As technology continues to advance, it can be difficult to know where to start or what to embrace next. Websites, social media, email and the other items that were once all the rage are now expected. Ministries can no longer simply dip their toes in the technological waters and expect to stay relevant. They must dive in, building the foundation with online presence and tech strategy, then making sure they are up-to-date with today's tech trends.

# Here are our top five trends that ministries cannot ignore in 2014:

## 1) Integrated Marketing

Marketing and technology are no longer two separate disciplines. They are closely related, each influencing and supporting the other. Create an integrated marketing strategy that includes technology tools, such as sending out an email alongside a direct mail piece or running a pay-per-click ad campaign in addition to print ads.

## 2) The Marketing Technologist

As marketing and technology strategies merge, the need for a “marketing technologist” on teams is on the rise. Having someone on your team, whether an internal employee or outside agency, who can understand both marketing and technology is critical. This person will help close the gap between the two areas to ensure your implementation of technology will support your marketing efforts.

## 3) Mobile First

Ninety-one percent of people on earth own a mobile phone, and 50 percent of mobile phone users use their phone as their primary internet source. Not only must websites be optimized for mobile viewing through a mobile or responsive site, but designers must take a “mobile first” mindset. Assume that a user is viewing the site on a mobile device and plan all features accordingly.

## 4) Personalized Content

People no longer view technology as impersonal. As the primary source of communication and social networking, technology is not seen as a barrier but as a connector, and users expect their technology to be personal to them. From customized ads to personalized emails, ministries must tailor content for their audiences through data-driven marketing.

## 5) Text-to-Give

As fewer people carry cash and checks, it is critical to create an easy-to-use mobile giving option. Audiences are quick to embrace text-to-give opportunities, and ministries are seeing amazing results. Through services like Textify Mobile ([textifymobile.com](http://textifymobile.com)), churches have raised nearly \$10,000 and acquired 700 first-time donors in just one day.

# ABOUT THE A GROUP

Great strategy. Greater reach.

Through marketing and technology, we help nonprofits, churches and ministries get results.

We are a full-service strategic solutions company. With everything we do rooted in strategy and a passion for mission, our goal is to offer our clients creative and effective solutions to their branding, technology and communications needs. We work hard to understand their challenges and opportunities and successfully navigate the marketplace, which has been radically transformed by new technologies.

For case studies of how organizations like Metro World Child, Soles4Souls, TWR, and the Christian Leadership Alliance are using social media and technology to expand their reach, raise money, and minister online, visit [www.agroup.com](http://www.agroup.com).

# Services

## **Marketing**

Marketing strategy and brand development

Full-service marketing campaigns

Graphic design

Content creation

Social media management

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## **Technology**

Strategic technology partnerships

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Easy Content Management

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Web platform development

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