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Leading Worship in the Age of COVID-19

How to Engage Your Congregation Via Livestream

David Ryan Cook

Worship Leader | SEU Worship, Rockharbor Church
A COVID-19 Resource | cepnet.com



Church Extension Plan

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It was just three weeks ago that life and church as we knew it was as normal as could be. Nothing could have prepared us for how quickly our weekend services and the method of ministry would change. Overnight, we went from experts to students all over again. What a challenge this has been.

But, perspective is everything! I believe this entire COVID-19 pandemic, though hard, has also presented an incredible opportunity for innovation and creativity as we navigate next steps in ministry. In the context of worship, I'd like to share with you a few valuable tips on how to engage your people via livestream.

1. Plan and Roster Differently

For our first weekend of going fully online, we had three days to prepare! So, we setup a few cameras in our empty sanctuary and had our normal six-piece band and four-piece frontline of BV's and worship leaders. Then, we hit record.

It was the best we could do with the little preparation we had, and, while it may have worked, it was too much for the new model of livestream we were now in. Knowing that you are broadcasting, the presentation of your band and worship leaders needs to translate as much as possible. But in order to do that, you may want to re-think your instrumentation and overall sound.

Realizing this was our new normal, the following week we went back to the drawing board. We started revising the flow of our service and even changing what the band and vocals looked like. Week two included a total of four team members on the floor of the sanctuary — not on stage — with a bit of a stripped back musical approach.

Let me be clear: No drums and no bass does not have to equal a subdued acoustic set. In the same way, less people does not mean less energy. But, don't feel the need to re-create what you used to do in a live room packed with people. Be intentional! **Ask yourself, "Are we just doing what we're doing because this is the way it's always been done?"** If so, maybe it's time to consider a

new approach, tailor-made to your new worship environment.

2. Keep it Short

If you're used to a 25-minute worship set at the top of the service, I would recommend cutting that in half. Try 10-15 minutes up front, followed by a 5-minute time of worship and response on the back end of your pastor's message. **Less time does not lessen the power of the presence of God.** In fact, it offers an even greater opportunity to keep your people engaged. It will challenge you to be intentional and creative, to compile 2-3 powerful songs that still create a moment of connection between your people and God's presence!

Please understand me: I am not saying there is no place for a 30-minute digital worship set in this current time. There is! Prayer, worship, and intercession are needed now more than ever! However, you can often achieve that same feel in other ways and also avoid cutting into the overall online experience of church.

For example, here are two ways I am resourcing my church outside of the weekend worship set:

- Create a worship playlist via Spotify or Apple Music, full of soaking moments and extended worship, to send out to your church members midweek.
- Use your social media accounts for some live worship and prayer segments that you encourage your church to engage in!

God is not limited by our time frames, but our people are. In this time of navigating online church, less is more. Guide your people to His presence. God will take it from there.

3. Integrate More Scripture

Our people are looking for answers now more than ever. In response, I believe we should be utilizing more Scripture in our worship!

Instead of just singing the songs, study

which Scriptures the song was inspired by or is referencing and use it to encourage your congregation. Maybe you can share the Scripture during an intro or a bridge instrumental. Or perhaps, you can reference those verses in prayer between songs. I encourage you to dig deeper into the Bible than you ever have. This will serve you, your team, and the overall online experience as an anchor of truth that everything else can point towards.

The Word of God is alive! Let's allow it to lead us as we lead our people.

4. Be Energetic, Not Extra

Have you ever practiced singing or playing your instrument in front of a mirror? It sounds silly, but you'd be surprised at what you find. Watching back at our first fully online service a few weekends ago was pretty cringy for me! From my facial expressions to my lack of energy, there was a lot to learn.

As we begin to accept the digital interface as our new medium of weekend ministry, we've got to learn how to improve what is presented. However, there is a fine line between bringing energy and being "extra." **Even though the "camera, lights, action" approach has become our new reality, it doesn't mean we are suddenly performers.** Quite the opposite, actually! In our attempt at creating an exciting and engaging online experience, I believe we can do so without becoming an empty production. We need to be mindful of the experience and worship from a place of truth and authenticity.

5. Be Yourself

This is a lesson that must be applied in the midst of any and every forthcoming ministry trend. How do you remain different in a sea of the same? Be true to yourself and your church's identity! What set you apart before this season? You now have the incredible opportunity to re-discover that all over again in this online context!

I also encourage you to research how other

churches are operating right now. Be inspired and take note of different models. But please, do not copy and paste someone else's formula. **The unique identity that the Lord has given you has not changed in this new model of church!** Remain confident in who you were created to be! Stay close to the presence of God! This is your greatest edge right now — not how excellent your online production is.

In your attempt to achieve such excellence, do not lose yourself!

Growing Amid Change

With strict guidelines from the government and the CDC, the model of Church has changed drastically! As hard as this has been, I believe it has leveled the entire landscape of what churches are now capable of offering. It doesn't matter if you were a mega church of thousands or a church plant of dozens. With the right people and approach, you can be as effective as any other ministry right now!

I encourage you to not only think of this as a season, but as the new normal of our present and future! This will allow you to pray, dream, and innovate in a way that motivates your people and prompts them to follow! In this digital age, be encouraged, lead and engage your church in genuine worship, and lean into the genius of the Holy Spirit!

Praying for you and cheering you all on!
Be blessed! ■

Originally from Florida, David Ryan Cook is an alumnus of Southeastern University. After his time at SEU, David worked as a recording artist in Nashville and later joined the city campus of Hillsong Church, based in Sydney, Australia, as a worship pastor. Under the leadership of Cass Langton, the global creative director of Hillsong Church, David had the opportunity to assist Hillsong worship teams in the writing and production of various award-winning projects. In 2016, David and his wife, Corina, relocated back to the States, where they began to lead SEU Worship into its current sound and season. Now based in Costa Mesa, California, David serves as the worship pastor at Rockharbor Church and continues to work with SEU Worship as an artist and songwriter.

For more info, visit: [SEU Worship](#) and [Rockharbor](#)