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LIVE STREAMING 101

How to Get Into the Game

by Ray Hollenbach

Y ou want to share your Sunday morning service with the world. You've been told, "It's a Hillsong world, and the rest of us are just living in it." So, you take 20 minutes to browse for [information on live streaming](#) and decide you will need advanced degrees in information technology, engineering *and* video production.

Well, maybe you do need all that—if you're in charge of Hillsong's world-wide Internet empire, but basic live streaming—Live Streaming 101—is surprisingly within reach. After all, nearly anyone can upload videos to YouTube these days. The difference between YouTube and a live stream webcast is basically sending your audio and video out as it's actually happening, and for that there are a few absolute necessities.

> THE ESSENTIALS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION WILL NEVER CHANGE; BUT THE **CHURCH'S METHODS HAVE CONTINUALLY CHANGED OVER THE CENTURIES.**

1. Your Internet Connection

Not any ol' Internet connection: a *great* one. Before you do anything else, make sure your connect is as fast and reliable as it can possibly be. Step one is an ISP audit. Is your connection rock-solid reliable? Is it (reasonably) fast? Live streaming requires 5Mbpz per second at a very minimum, and really, 10 Mbpz should be your base rate. These two issues are the beginning: reliability and speed. Make friends with your Internet Service Provider—good friends. The most expensive gear in the world is worthless without a great Internet connection.

2. Get Your Gear

Like nearly all technical innovations, live streaming is gear-heavy. It's better to start with high-quality gear and keep things simple rather than trying to make a big splash by using tons of equipment, only to find out

you didn't need it, or it's not very good quality. Here's a start-up list:

Camera or (better yet) Multiple Cameras

So many choices! If your only concern is your Sunday service (always in the same room, always with the same lighting) you might go with fixed-position webcams, which has the advantage of saving money. Webcams sell cheap, but then, the image quality may be cheap, too. You could scroll through Amazon endlessly looking at models from Logitech or ProStream, spending from $50 to thousands of dollars—OR—you could reach out and shop the old fashioned way by connecting with a knowledgeable customer service rep from a company like Full Compass Systems (a Ministry Tech business partner). At the entry level to live streaming, it's best to pick up the phone and talk to a real live person.

External Microphone

Seriously: Don't use built-in mics that come with most cameras. In a live stream environment audio quality is just as important as video quality. External microphones are dedicated devices that are sure to make your audio quality rock-solid. A quick trip to Amazon reveals a dizzying array of hardware, but beginners can start with something like the Samson G-Track Pro series. Entry-level products from Audio-Technica, Neewer or Marantz are also solid choices. Be sure to browse around for all the necessary accessories: mic stands, connective wires and cables, and windscreens.

HD Box/Computer/Broadcaster/Video Encoder

There's no shortage of names for the function of putting together your audio and video and then formatting all the data for streaming. It's the work of transcoding devices (or "encoders"). Matrox (another Ministry Tech partner) has a range of devices to ensure smooth switching between input sources and options among data streaming protocols. After making sure your Internet connection is rock-solid, this may be the most important hardware choice you make. That's another way of saying it's a choice you shouldn't make alone, especially if you're a novice, and also a choice you shouldn't try to save money on.

The folks at Blackmagic offer a variety of hardware and software compatibility choices in this area as well. Whatever vendor you choose, make sure their hardware and output is compatible with nearly every live streaming platform including YouTube, Facebook and Twitch (there are more than a *dozen* livestream platforms!).

There are also laptop-based software solutions for this task: With an HDMI or SDI video source, you can immediately stream your video content by plugging it into a web presenter and your computer, enabling you to broadcast professional-quality live streams.

3. Don't Forget the Accessories.

Wouldn't it be embarrassing to lose battery power during a live stream, or have someone drop a camera at a critical moment? Create a gear bag with every imaginable back-up item: batteries, lenses, cables, tripods or anything else that may be a requirement unique to your location. The more varied the settings and locations, the more accessories you're going to need. (And never forget duct tape, because it fixes anything.)

Like so many hardware-based systems, some of the learning curve comes through practice and experience, which leads us to the final component necessary for every live stream launch:

4. Know-How

Once you decide on equipment and work-flow, make sure you have a dedicated full-time or volunteer staff to assist in production and streaming. Start with an experienced hand and you will avoid broadcasting your mistakes around the world! For some churches this may mean hiring a professional to get up and running; other churches may have tech-geniuses in the congregation and not even know it!

Next, make it part of this person's job description to cross-train other techs. A commitment to live streaming means consistently presenting your webcasts at predictable times. This means having more than one person with the know-how. Otherwise, you're just one sick-day or unexpected event from missing a webcast.

Finally, take time to research the experiences of other churches. Vimeo's subsidiary Livestream (another Ministry Tech partner) has an outstanding downloadable PDF resource that not only details the nuts-and-bolts decisions of gear and gadgets, but also provides case studies, which will allow you to see how other congregations have expanded their reach beyond their physical locations. (Livestream also produces innovative hardware like Mevo, where cameras and streaming are combined in one unit.)

Live streaming multiplies the reach of your church. While there may be certain aspects of community worship that will always require face-to-face fellowship, you can serve the marginalized through technologies like live streaming. The essentials of the Great Commission will never change: We should go into all the world and make disciples; but the church's methods have continually changed over the centuries. Live Streaming is one more modern change to help the church fulfill its unchanging calling. **MT**