

How Do I Measure the Effectiveness of Virtual Church?

By Rev. Casey Carbone

Some time has passed since we first started worshipping virtually. And now, you might be wondering how your virtual services are being used by members of your congregation and community at large. Video analytics is only a compilation of numbers until you establish a goal. What is your video streaming or publishing goal?

- Do you want to drive engagement and create online communities?
- Do you want to grow your virtual audience and reach?
- Do you want to access new demographics?

Before you dive too deep into crunching the numbers, you may want to set a goal first. The numbers are there to help you achieve your goal and optimize your outreach and community impact. For example, if you notice there is a gap between people who play the stream and watch your entire service, you may want to reconsider how you can improve or optimize your virtual ministry strategy.

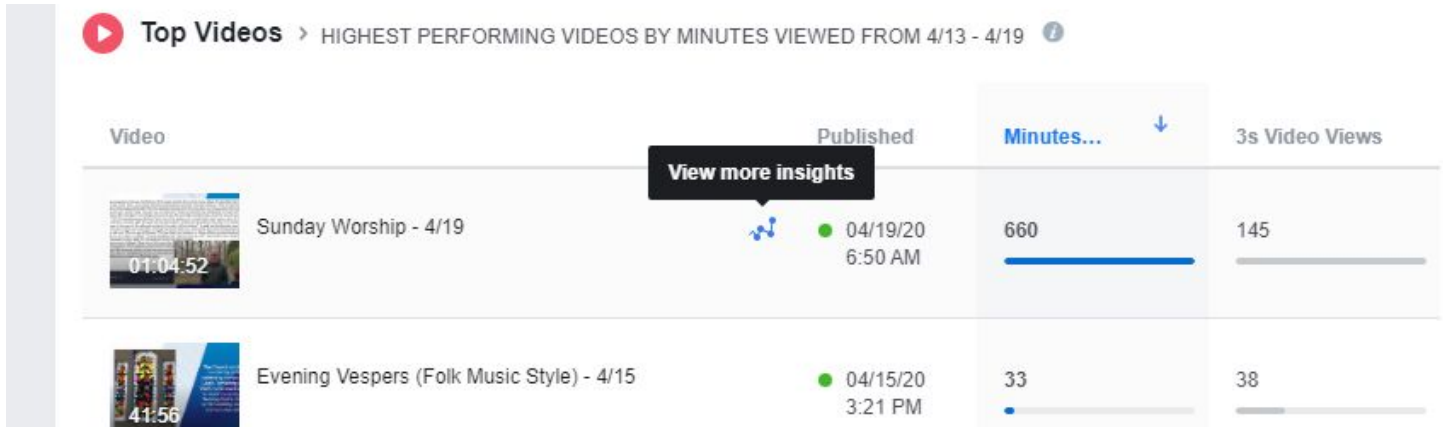
So now you have your live video stream or pre-recorded service ready to go, and when it's finished, how do you know who watched it? How do you measure the effectiveness of your outreach during this time of social separation? To help you break down the numbers, I compiled a short guide to assist in deciphering live video streaming and pre-recorded media analytics.

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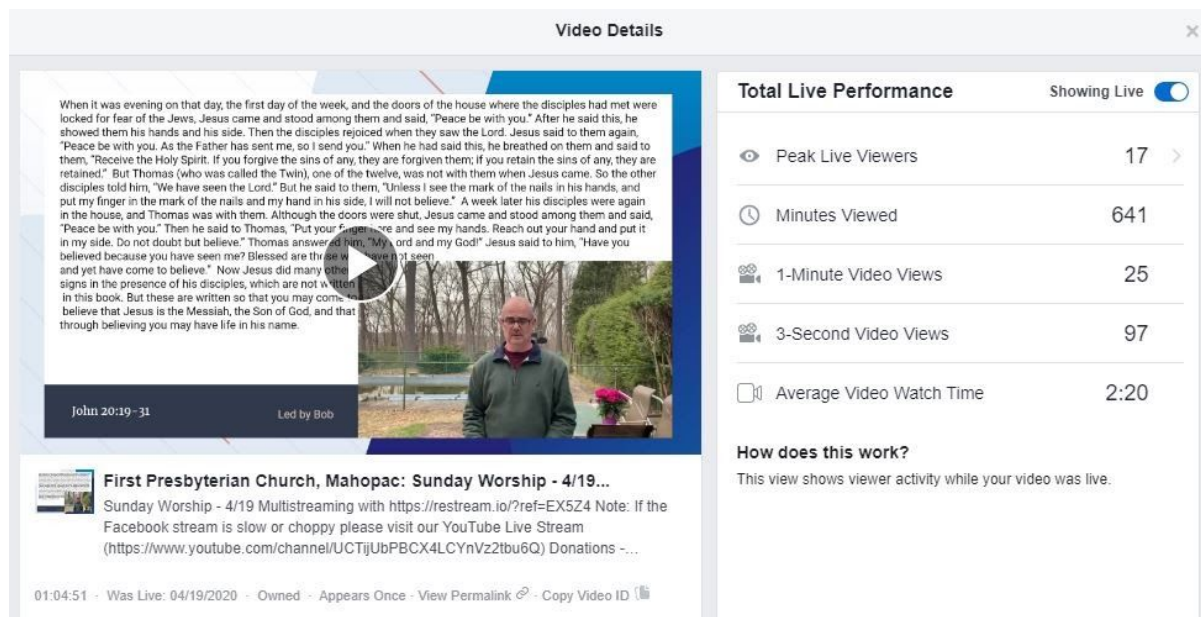
Accessing Live Video Streaming / Pre-Recorded Video Statistics

- Step 1: Go to your church's Facebook Page.
- Step 2: Click "Insights." If you are using an older version of Facebook, it will appear at the top of the page right under the white search bar. If you are using a newer version, it should appear on the left-hand side.
- Step 3: On the left-hand side in the grey area, find and click "Videos."
- Step 4: Scroll down to find the video you would like to look study. Once you locate it, you will find an option to "View More Insights" next to the "Published" information. See the picture below for an example.



Live Video Streaming Analytics

Having followed the steps above, you will see the following window that is related to the past live video stream you produced:



To see the actual live video stream analytics make sure that the "Showing Live" is enabled in the upper right-hand corner. You will now be looking at live video streaming numbers when you see "Showing Live" and the blue marker.

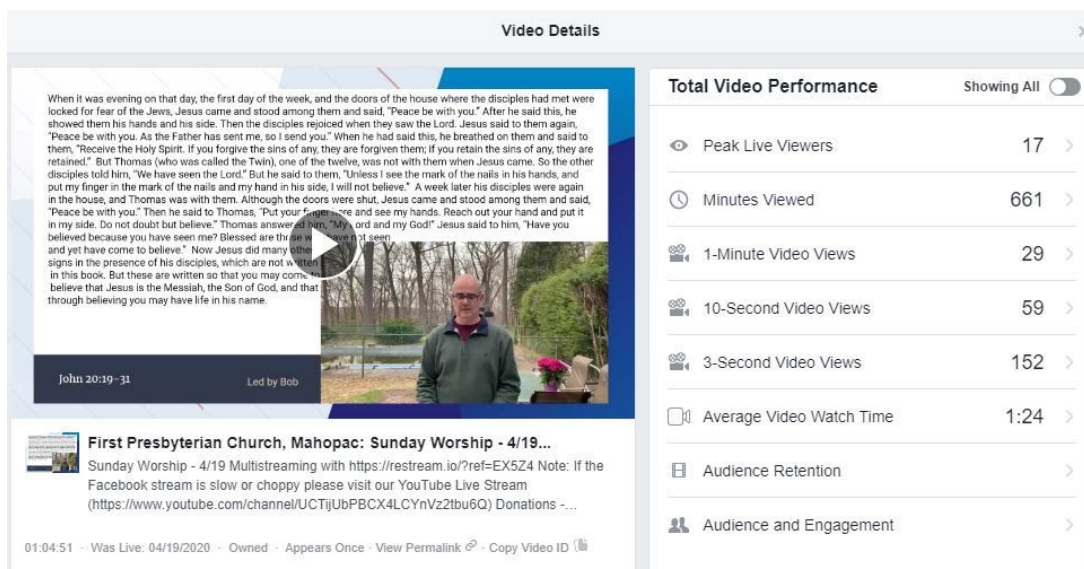
The “Showing Live” analytics will breakdown viewership by several different categories, some of which allow you to dive deeper to learn more:

- “Peak Live Viewers” is the max number of people who watched your live video stream. Clicking the arrow next to this option will reveal viewer retention. (See Example)



- “Minutes Viewed,” “1-Minute Video View,” and “3-Second Video Views” are metrics that indicate the performance of your live stream. For live worship, they may not be helpful unless you want to obsess over the meaning of every parameter.
- “Average Video Watch Time” is not referring to how long people watched your live video stream. Facebook counts 3-second views or longer as one “view.” Anything over 15 seconds is considered a robust live video stream.

After viewing the data for your live video stream, you may also turn off “Showing Live.” This will show you the statistics for your saved live video stream and allow you to access demographic information:



Clicking “Audience and Engagement” will allow you to see an overview of demographic information about those who watched your service.

Summary for Live Video Streaming:

- Focus on your “Peak Live Viewers” and audience retention to gauge how your worship services are going.

Pre-Recorded Video Analytics

Following the steps listed in “Accessing Live Video Streaming / Pre-Recorded Video Statistics,” select the pre-recorded video you wish to analyze. Once you are looking at the “Video Details,” you will see below “This video is used in 1 post.” Click the video post linked in that section, and it will bring you to a similar looking page (I know, it’s confusing even for me).

The screenshot shows the 'Video Details' page for a video titled 'EASTER SUNDAY - 4/12/2020' by Hudson River Presbytery. The video thumbnail features three painted Easter eggs with religious symbols. The right sidebar displays various analytics: Minutes Viewed (1,020), 1-Minute Video Views (53), 10-Second Video Views (142), 3-Second Video Views (320), Average Video Watch Time (1:45), Audience Retention, and Audience and Engagement. Below this, a section titled 'This video is used in 1 post' contains a table with the following data:

Posts	Posted Date	Estimated Reach	3s Video Views	10s Video Views	Unique 3s Video Views	Post Engagement	Average Video Watch Time
Hudson River Presbytery Hudson River Presbytery - Easter ...	04/12/2020 10:00 AM	469	320 100%	142 100%	247	31	1:45 / 45:18

Once you click through, you can select “Audience and Engagement,” which will show you the number of unique viewers, and “Audience Retention” will show you how long people stayed.

The screenshot shows the 'Performance for Your Post' page for the same video. The 'Video' tab is selected. The right sidebar displays the same analytics as the previous screenshot: Minutes Viewed (1,020), 1-Minute Video Views (53), 10-Second Video Views (142), 3-Second Video Views (320), Average Video Watch Time (1:45), Audience Retention, and Audience and Engagement. The 'Peak Live Viewers' metric is also visible, showing 15 viewers.

Remember that Facebook will count 3-second views as one view on your video, so it is crucial to keep track of audience retention and unique viewers. This will help you gauge how many people are watching and whether they are watching for the entire time.

Summary for Pre-Recorded Videos:

- Focus on your unique viewers number and audience retention and remember that Facebook counts 3-second views as one view.

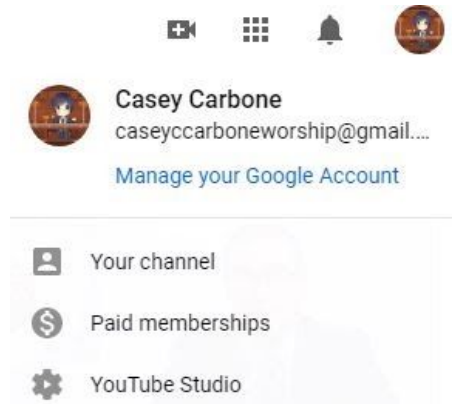
Overall Facebook Take-Away:

While having 500, 600, or 700 plus views on your video or live video stream is an accomplishment; you will want to take a closer look at the numbers to assess member and community engagement. Audience retention and unique viewership should help you discern how you might continue to accomplish your ministry goals or give new ideas.

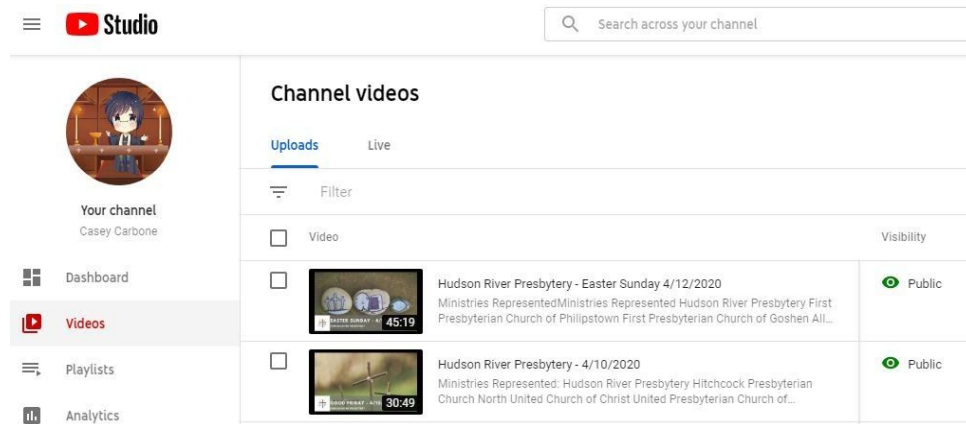
Also, if you do not use Zoom, you may wish to encourage participation in worship by encouraging people to type in the “chat” for various elements of worship (i.e., Passing the Peace, Joys & Concerns, etc.). Promoting this type of participation in a live video stream will promote retention and overall effectiveness.

Accessing Live Video Streaming / Pre-Recorded Video Statistics

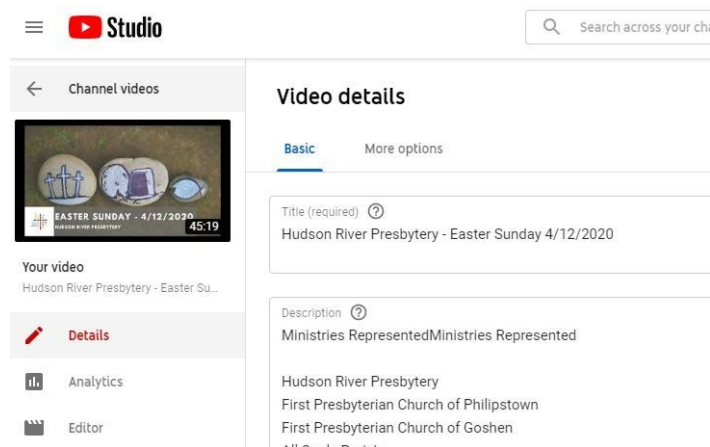
- Step 1: Go to YouTube and sign in.
- Step 2: In the upper right-hand corner click the circular icon, which will open up a menu.



- Step 3: Click “YouTube Studio.”
- Step 4: On the left-hand side, there is a menu, find and click “Videos.” It is located underneath “Dashboard,” and above “Playlists.”
- Step 5: Locate which video you would like to study. Note that pre-recorded videos are under the “Uploads” section, while live video streams are under “Live.” Once you find your video click on it.

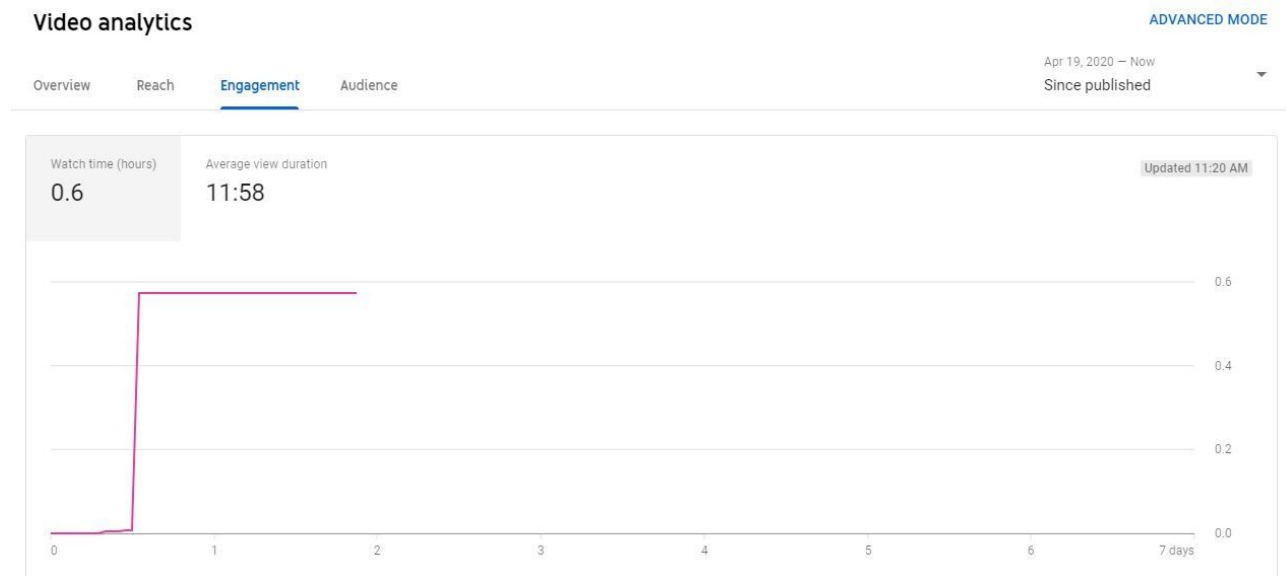


- Step 6: After you click on the video you would like to view you will see an option for “Analytics” on the left-hand side.” Click it to learn more about your video.



Pre-Recorded & Live Video Streaming Analytics

Similar to Facebook, once you locate the video or live video stream you want to assess, YouTube will present you with a variety of option:



Clicking on "Reach" or "Audience" will reveal the total number of unique viewers who watched your video or live video stream. The "Overview" section will show you other information like retention. If your video or live video stream is recent, YouTube may not have the information right away so you can check back at a later time. And unlike Facebook, YouTube will not provide you with basic demographic information unless your channel meets certain benchmarks (i.e., having a certain number of views, subscribers, etc.).

Why does this matter?

You may be asking yourself why any of these numbers matter and truth be told they don't. They only matter if you have set a goal for your ministry context, and you want to use these numbers to help you achieve them. These numbers also do not take into consideration the emotional or spiritual impact your message on Sunday brings to those who watch and listen.

Yet while these numbers may not mean a whole lot on their own, we should pay some attention to them. For those of us who do a live video stream to Facebook or YouTube, we may want to focus on our "audience" participation or engagement. Encourage people to type in the live chat, and to share the video or stream. There are ways that we can make worship meaningful and participatory in a virtual space.

The last note I want to offer is that you should not feel down if the numbers are not what you initially thought. As I said, 500, 600, or 700 plus views on a video is great! It means that you most likely have a large unique viewer count as well, but we would want to pay attention to other metrics like retention and watch time.

So use these insights as you will help you gauge how you might continue to explore virtual ministry in these changing times. I know that in my context, we have cultivated a good enough group to pursue a specially designed online worship even after we can meet in person.

May God bless you as we all continue in this digital landscape, and when we emerge, may it have provided us with an opportunity to do a new thing that God can work with and use!