# Tracking Virtual Attendance Best Practices

## Introduction

Both Facebook and YouTube allow you to dig into the metrics on your videos to understand how many “views” (potential attendees) you have for each video, demographics, and engagements.

By internet definition, a video view is 3 seconds. This includes users who engage at any point in time of the video and remain engaged for 3 seconds or longer. But when it comes to measuring your online attendance, there are several best practices to keep in mind.

## How to Count These Metrics as Attendees

There are three numbers Facebook and YouTube offer to consider in a head-count. 3-second views, 10-second views, and 1 minute+ views. There are secondary metrics that count average time per video. With so many metrics, it can be difficult to determine the best one to choose for attendance counting.

According to most online communities, church leaders are leaning into the 1 minute + view as demonstration of attendance. This is your base number of unique viewers for each video that you can use alone or with a multiplier.

The idea of the online multiplier is that your congregation members do not live in isolation but may be part of a family or community unit. In person, you would count each individual separately, but online this is harder to gauge. You have three options:

* Many churches use 1.7 as a standard multiplier which you could use for your count
* Err on the conservative side and opt to not use a multiplier
* Survey your attendees to get a more precise number for your specific Church to see how many view as a family and how many family members view together. If you survey 1,000 Congregation members and discover you have an additional 100 attendees viewing together you will be able to use this 1.1 multiplier as a standard for your Congregation.

## Determine Your Path and Set Benchmarks

Because there are so many metrics to measure against, it is almost more important that you choose a consistent path than that you choose a specific metric.

Here are three that might help you chart the story of what’s happening online.

* Number of 1-minute views on Facebook, YouTube and LiveStream service (your website). (Eliminating the 3 and 10-second watch gets rid of people who randomly scrolled into you and left.)
* Average Watch Time
* Audience Retention (available on Facebook and YouTube): this is an important number to watch to see not just how many unique attendees you have because this shows you how effectively you are engaging those attendees.

Other metrics to help benchmark your engagement include:

* Likes
* Comments
* Shares
* Subscribes
* Decisions (if you offer responses on these)
* Donations

Select 2-3 of the above to measure as your key metrics to track your engagement and give you a better sense of your impact rather than just the reach of your message.

**Use the sample spreadsheet to track these numbers. Make sure to grab the data since you transitioned online to give you a better sense of your performance so far.**

## Best Practices to Improve Engagement

Don’t get frustrated by low average watch times. This is the reality of online video viewing. Consider this statistic: Over one billion hours of video are viewed on YouTube alone every day. Instead find ways to improve your engagement. Here are some tips that can help.

1. Connect intentionally with your active engagers. Respond to comments, thank users for their likes and shares. When they engage with your content they are opening the door to a conversation. For instance, every time a user likes your page, you could send a personalized message: “Hey Bill, we noticed you liked our page. Welcome! Let us know how we can help! – Pastor Name”
2. To convert low average watch times, take a page from some of the most engaging content can help improve your average times. For instance, in your live videos actively speak to the audience, encourage reactions or questions – either verbally in the sermon or with text cards that you can include in the lower third of your video
3. One of the fastest ways to increase engagement during your livestreams is simply to tell viewers to engage. Consider including a verbal call-to-action at the beginning or end of the service. It can be as simple as "To those watching the livestream at home or listening to our podcast, please be sure to like our page and subscribe so that you can be reminded to join us again in the future."
4. Begin each stream by introducing yourself and welcoming everyone to church online. Just as you would greet people in a physical space, it is important to do so digitally. Make sure your church has at least one if not two dedicated people to your church Livestream conversation thread. Be the first person to comment and let your viewers know you will be the host today.
5. Welcome people joining the Livestream comment thread.As people join and comment, greet them and mention their name. The comment thread is your digital handshake with your Livestream guests. It may become a bit overwhelming as more people join, but adding that personal touch of mentioning a viewer’s name is part of what makes online church actually feel like church. You have an opportunity to interact with people without interrupting worship, prayer, or teaching. Make that personal connection so people feel welcome.
6. Provide directions for how people can engage in the Church. Show people when, where, and how to do the things in the church you usually do. Provide directions for finding links to song lyrics, sermon notes, and online giving if they are on a website landing page for your church’s Livestream. In addition, share those links in the comment thread so people can get to them right there.
7. Point people to helpful resources. Share links to videos, articles, or any other resource related to the sermon topic. Your viewers don’t need to try to write down or remember what the pastor said in their sermon. All they have to do is click a link.
8. Offer care through prayer. During the service or at a specific prayer moment, offer to pray for people. Give the link to a prayer request form and let people know you care. Most importantly, tell people their request can be anonymous. Your members should feel confident to share their praise or suffering. Let everyone know you are there with them along with the Spirit.
9. **Have fun!** Online church is all about engagement. And, it should be fun! Ask people where they are watching. Ask them if they are in PJs, in bed, or together in the living room. Ask everyone to share their favorite coffee mug. Prompt viewers to share a photo of themselves watching church. Find out what song they loved today. Help people enjoy church online in a unique way that could never happen in traditional service.

## 3 Easy Ways to Improve Your Videos to Drive Reach and Engagement

1. **Add a compelling livestream title**

When it comes to creating compelling titles for your livestream, grabbing scrollers' interest is key. While church service titles shouldn't be clickbait, these titles should still convey exactly what a viewer can expect. Such as the passage or topic. The date is also important so people can find it after the fact.

1. **Gather graphics prior to going live.**

Work with your team to determine which lower thirds are required for that week's stream. Then create these lower thirds and import them before the service starts. We recommend creating the following:

* Lower thirds for the pastor and anyone else speaking during the service
* Lower thirds for the specific passages being read
* Lower thirds to highlight key phrases from passages or the sermon
* Lower thirds to introduce each song, unless you already display the lyrics
* Lower thirds for specific engagements such as prayer requests, baptisms, and other decisions or needs from the Congregation.

1. **Upload a transparent .png image of the church's logo**

You can also do this with graphics for any announcements or calls-to-action such as "Subscribe for more livestreams," "Comment to tell us where you're from," or "Share this service with your friends." This makes an easy way for the person running your stream to apply CTAs every 5-10 minutes without disturbing the sermon or interrupting the service.