



DYNAMIC CHURCH TRENDS

CONNECTING YOU TO THE TRENDS IN THE MODERN CHURCH

DIGITAL GIVING IS SUCCESSFUL GIVING

INCLUDING:

*3 KEY ELEMENTS TO SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL
GIVING STRATEGIES*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Churches are finding new ways to create giving opportunities for members, visitors, and even their communities by adding online and on-site digital giving solutions. This document explores trends in churches that have implemented digital donation options and provides insight into new giving strategies for growth.

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, 38% of surveyed churches declined in giving while 29% showed no change according to the “State of the Plate” report. Yet 33% of the surveyed churches showed an increase in giving during a down economy. Clearly, there are factors such as the size of the community and the industries in each community that will have a great effect on unemployment, but the trends with churches experiencing a growth in giving show promise for overcoming some of the common issues related to low or inconsistent giving.

This paper provides insight from experts, both in churches and those working in the private sector, around the topic of giving in churches. Digital giving has a substantial positive affect on churches. This document highlights the giving practices in some of today’s healthiest, growing churches. The areas that will be addressed are:

- 1. Increase Consistent Giving – Create an environment of generosity**
- 2. Decrease Individual Debt – Churches can help people get out of debt**
- 3. Trends of Online Giving – From Credit Cards to Debit Cards to E-Checks**
- 4. Giving Kiosks – Real-world examples from churches using giving kiosks**
- 5. Mobile Giving – Understanding text-to-give limitations and the future of Mobile Giving**

INCREASE CONSISTENT GIVING

While every church certainly desires consistent giving, the motives of the leadership must not be to simply increase cash flow. “The heart of the leader is seen by the attendees,” declares Casey Graham, founder of Giving Rocket, a company focused on helping churches with financial stewardship. “When a leader lives a generous lifestyle and the staff does, too, the result is a church that’s generous,” says Graham.

The culture of generosity is caught as much as it is taught. According to Dave Moore, Finance Director of Granger Community Church in Granger, Indiana, the church believes, teaches and promotes the tithe. The church has a culture of generosity and “one of leveraging the latest technology to advance the Kingdom of Christ,” said Moore.

Graham said that his journey on staff Mountain Lake Church, ranged from playing bass in the band to managing a multi-million dollar budget each year. As the Chief Financial Officer, Casey saw the need for all churches to do two things well:

1. **Create more “beans” for ministry: Increase operational revenue so the vision of the church can be funded.**
2. **Count the “beans”: Properly manage and steward what God has provided for the church to the highest bookkeeping standards.**

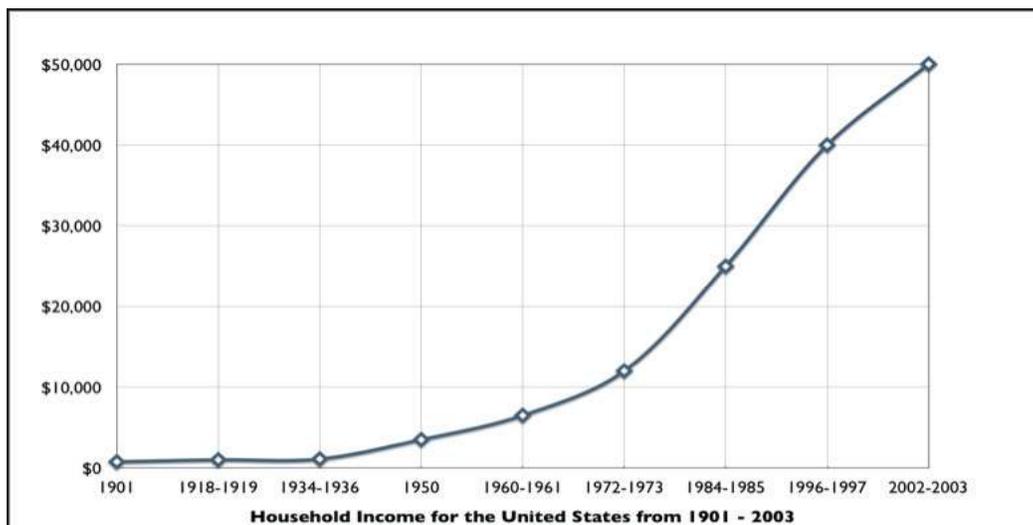
During his time at the church, he saw the growth skyrocket from two to nearly 2,000 people every weekend. “We taught faithful giving, no matter where they were in their spiritual journey,” says Graham. “Helping people move from tippers to tithers and from tithers to generous givers means having a motive of helping and blessing, not about getting more consistent offerings or just increasing giving.”

DECREASE INDIVIDUAL DEBT

The stats are in: the American family has more disposable income than ever before. In 1901, the average U.S. family income was \$750. Just over 100 years later in 2002, the average family’s real income, expressed in 1901 dollars, would have increased three-fold to \$2,282 – that’s about \$50,302 in today’s economy!ⁱⁱ Yet, even with more disposable income, Americans are over \$2.5 trillion in debt as of 2009ⁱⁱⁱ. That averages to about \$8,100 of debt for every man, woman and child in the U.S.

According to Mintel, a business intelligence firm, 36% of Americans claim to have had trouble paying their bills in the past two years. Of those adults, less than 40% sought help from a lender or credit consolidation agency to try and modify their loans.^{iv}

The U.S. is still a very generous nation, we just need to tap into it.



The need to provide sound advice on financial stewardship is a significant opportunity for

local churches. Two of the most popular parachurch organizations, Crown Financial^v and Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University^{vi}, create curriculum and training for local churches to share and counsel with their members and attendees. Like many similar services, there are a number of helpful, free tools available for immediate download, making it easy for both churches and individuals to start on the path of proper financial stewardship.

Churches have a unique opportunity to help not only with financial debt relief, but also to offer believers the ability to follow God's plan for giving. Freedom from debt provides the freedom to freely give.

TRENDS OF ONLINE GIVING

In spite of the bad news about debt for a portion of the U.S. population, there's a significant number of financially healthy people who are using credit cards to pay for nearly every purchase and then pay off the entire balance each month. The result is no finance charges, no debt and, for many, benefits of 'reward points' associated with many credit cards.



Studies have examined how the spending habits of Americans have changed and where the current trends are leading. As shown by Javelin Strategy & Research, despite the sluggishness of the global economy in 2008 and 2009, domestic e-commerce [in the U.S.] climbed 10.8% from 2008 to 2009^{vii}. The study indicates that 70% of U.S. consumers made an online purchase during 2009, indicating that buying electronically is on the rise.

Paying bills online has also come of age, according to research conducted by ComScore, an online intelligence and research firm. Their study cited that a clear majority of U.S. consumers – 64% – now pay bills online. Year-over-year, that represents an increase of 19%^{viii}.

“Online is the future,” says Dave Moore. “Our online giving has grown about 5% per year since we started it in 2007. Most people no longer carry cash or a checkbook around with them,” he explains, “so online giving makes a lot of sense. We love online giving because it allows three ways to give: credit card, debit card and eCheck.”

Aaron Goin, the Finance Director at Faith Promise Church in Knoxville, Tenn., agrees, “Online giving has revolutionized giving at our church. 33% of general giving happens online now.” Goin shared that in the past year there was an instance where services were cancelled due to inclement weather, but with online giving, 60% of the regular weekly offering was still given online. “In a sense, those bad-weather days are another method to introduce people to online giving,” surmised Goin.

Recurring giving is another positive aspect of online giving. Goin cites consistent increases year after year. “35% of our online giving occurs through recurring, automatic contributions. Online giving is our preferred method of giving because it virtually eliminates manual error on the side of our



church. It also allows individuals to see their contribution statements and set up recurring contributions,” says Goin. Moore concurs, “Online giving is secure, it’s donor directed, it allows for weekly, bi-weekly or monthly contribution schedules, reduces check processing and provides consistency.”

Moore also believes that providing members with choices reflects the same choices they have in their everyday life and at church: “Our members are used to multiple options for services, multiple choices of classes, multiple opportunities to take steps in their walk with Christ. So, we make sure that they have multiple options for making donations.”



Online giving can be tied into a church’s member management software, such as [Fellowship One](#), which is a fully online, web-enabled church software solution. “One of the attractive features of Fellowship One is the online giving tool,” comments Moore. “We like that it is donor directed and integrated directly with the members’ contribution data.” At the end of the year, a summarized

contribution statement can be printed out by the members, saving the church the cost of printing and mailing them. For a large church with 12,000 attendees, an estimated savings from not printing and mailing year-end contribution statements was approximately \$65,000 for 2009!

GIVING KIOSKS

A newer trend that is showing up in churches is giving kiosks. These are electronic systems similar to ATM’s (Automated Teller Machines), but with the stated purpose of allowing people to give money directly to the church. The first company to do this was [SecureGive](#), started by Dr. Marty Baker. In 2004, Dr. Baker researched the possibilities of adding giving kiosks to his own church, Stephen’s Creek Community Church in August, Ga. “I researched and researched trying to find a giving kiosk option for churches..., but was unable to find any,” he recalled, “so we started SecureGive as a way to do this for our own church and other churches.”



Dr. Baker shared insights and interesting trends he’s found through the utilization of giving kiosks. “People tend to donate 20 minutes before or 20 minutes after church services. A fast, 30-second process is all it takes. Plus, we’ve found that people who’d never given were willing to give through the kiosks.” In fact, 27% of kiosk donations at his home church were first-time givers.

“Giving kiosks help people do what they want to do anyway,” says Dr. Marty Baker. “The church may be the only check a person writes anymore, mused Baker, “so we believe in kiosks and online giving.”

Aaron Goin of Faith Promise Church has also had success with the kiosks. “We constantly hear stories about how people have wanted to give for a long time, but all they has had was a debit card. Another benefit of giving kiosks is how they have provided our members the opportunity to be faithful in their giving,” he said.



Dave Moore of Granger Community Church offered data from their experiences with giving kiosks. “Success with the kiosks depends a lot on your church culture, how the kiosks are introduced to your congregation, and where the kiosks are placed,” he counseled. Granger rolled out the giving kiosks in the last quarter of 2009. By the end of the year, Granger’s kiosks allowed 63 new people to give who had never given before, with a total of \$95,500 given through the kiosks.

The giving trend for Granger Community Church continues to increase. According to Moore, in 2010, the church saw 143 new givers through the kiosks, representing 12% of all new donors to the church.

“However, giving kiosks alone are not what has increased giving opportunities in churches,” says Dr. Baker. “You can have a church full of giving kiosks, but, bottom line, you’ve got to have hearts that are tender through the Lord that want to give and leadership that makes giving not about money, but about blessing and ministry.”

Over the past six years since their launch, SecureGive has placed over 400 giving kiosks in churches and parachurch ministries. Dr. Baker supplied some helpful information for churches researching giving kiosks for the first time:

- *No records are recorded in the kiosk; all data is sent to secure servers*
- *Only credit and/or debit cards are utilized; no cash or checks are in the kiosk*
- *Kiosks can be used wirelessly, but hardwired connections are recommended*

SecureGive’s Baker believes the trend for both online giving and giving kiosks will only increase. “People are using online banking and are used to paying from their checking accounts with credit and debit cards, so we’re simply providing them with the tools they already use. The result benefits both the church and the end-user, who now can give the way they want without having to remember to bring their checkbook,” he said.

MOBILE GIVING

While online giving may be the latest trend to see adoption in churches, mobile phone giving is also on the rise. From online banking apps on smart phones to buying online through a phone's browser to texting donations, the cell phone is becoming a new tool for e-commerce. CTIA, the International Association for the Wireless Telecommunications Industry, recently published stats that show there are over 285 million Americans with a cell phone, or about 91% of the country, a 15% increase from the previous year.^{ix} With such overwhelming usage, it is easy to see the frontier of giving through mobile devices is next on the horizon. The ubiquity of mobile devices begs the question: do people use their mobile devices for purchases? The answer is yes, and the trend is increasing.



Though over half have no plans to purchase via their cell phones today, history has shown that the early adopters and early majority will eventually pull the late majority to do so in the future.

Online banking has been around since before the turn of the century, but mobile banking, or m-banking as it's called in the industry, is growing. Global Industry Analysts predicts the global customer base for m-banking will reach 1.1 billion people by the year 2015. In the U.S., Bank of America is a leader of m-banking. Launched in May 2007, it now has 1.5 million subscribers.^x 54% of smart phone owners are active mobile bankers, according to Javelin

Research.^{xi} With such a significant increase in the pervasiveness of mobile banking, churches have the opportunity to position mobile giving as a natural extension of the existing behavior of their attendees.

In the wake of events such as the natural disasters of Katrina and the Haiti earthquake, the public is also becoming aware of the ability to instantly give through text messaging. However, a major restriction for churches is that text-to-give, which is paid via the cell phone carrier and shows up on the monthly bill, is the limitation of \$5 or \$10 donations.^{xii} The Mobile Giving Foundation is the go-between for non-profits and the wireless industry, meaning churches cannot arbitrarily set different donation amounts.

There are, however, some organizations beginning to find alternate ways to leverage the power of mobile giving. One such organization is [MobileCause](#), a company that provides several mobile giving options including "Text2Give" and "App2Give" (smart phone applications). MobileCause does offer micro-donations (\$5 and \$10 donations) through text messages and macro-donations (nearly any size donation) via smart phone apps.

3 KEY ELEMENTS TO SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL GIVING STRATEGIES

Though leveraging technology to both increase giving and create more consistent giving for churches is clearly possible, all of the experts we interviewed were quick to warn not to use this technology as a mere means to an end. Instead, the common counsel is to teach on giving, provide discipleship on healthy financial stewardship, and for pastors to lead as generous examples and leverage technology.

Then once you've established your goals and equipped your people, the next steps are critical to creating an atmosphere of giving in your church.

1. Follow Up

- *Send emails that are encouraging, not nagging requests*
- *Call and connect, but don't ask for money; instead, ask to hear how God is moving in their life and if they're considering a new giving opportunity*

2. Say "Thanks!"

- *When they commit, commend them on their step of faith*
- *If they choose not to commit, bless them anyway*
- *What gets rewarded gets repeated*

3. Follow Up – Again!

- *Check up by using notes from the last time your called and re-engage the conversation*
- *Ask how they've seen God bless them through their financial generosity and faithfulness*
- *Solicit feedback and share success stories and learning with the church leadership*

Creating systems that are simple, convenient and visible helps everyone connect to the vision.

CONCLUSION

With the statistics from secular and ministry-focused companies painting an obvious trend towards greater technology adoption, churches have clear options on providing a wide array of methods to leverage digital giving solutions.

Or, as humorist Jon Acuff of StuffChristiansLike.com said in his blog post about the guy writing the check while holding up the collection plate: "Yo, check writer, I'm happy for you & I'mma let you finish, but direct deposit was the best way to tithe last year!"^{xiii}

ABOUT FELLOWSHIP ONE

Fellowship One provides solutions that help dynamic churches of any size or denomination to be more effective in ministry, more efficient in administration, with the essential information to make decisions. Fellowship One is a web-based church management software solution used by ministries around the world ranging in size from new church plants to mega-sized, multi-site churches. For more information please visit <http://www.FellowshipOne.com>

APPENDIX - REFERENCES AND LINKS

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