

Meagan Ranson ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to the church. Feel podcast, insanely practical conversations with real pastors and real church leaders to equip you to lead healthy and growing churches. [inaudible] Hey, what's up everyone. Welcome back to the church fuel podcast right now, as this podcast is being recorded most, if not all churches are still meeting online. And even when we get back to normal online church will and should be a large part of our overall strategy. So how do we do it and how do we do it? Well, like how do we reach people online? That's what this entire season has been about. And today wraps up our final and last episode and I am joined by Kyle Ranson. He is at crossroads church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and full disclosure. He is my brother-in-law and I told him that if he didn't come on our podcast today, he wasn't going to get a Christmas, Christmas gift. I'm just getting, I never give him Christmas gifts. We stopped there a long time ago. Yeah, that doesn't happen. How are you, Kyle?

Kyle Ranson ([01:10](#)):

Oh, great. Thanks for having me on. I'm excited to be here.

Meagan Ranson ([01:13](#)):

Well, I think today's going to be a really good conversation. It's something that's on all of our minds, as you know, there's a light at the end of the tunnel here of, we might be able to get back to in-person services completely 100% soon. And what do we do with the way that we've been having running church? And do we continue to have an online church experience? Are we even able to do that? Doesn't even make sense. Is it biblical to have an online church experience?

Kyle Ranson ([01:37](#)):

It's not biblical to have electricity. So, I

Meagan Ranson ([01:39](#)):

Mean, listen, so how do we do both, right. Do we, do we do in-person and online? And what does that look like? And Kyle, I'm really excited to hear all the things that you have to say, say about it because this is what you do.

Kyle Ranson ([01:54](#)):

Yeah. It's what I've done for four years. I mean, for us, we started just history. We won all those fastest growing church awards. We became super giant and that was all really, really exciting for us. But when we really looked at it, then we look at every other church in America that was growing really quickly. We noticed something alarming, which was most of our growth was being driven by the addition of new sites, not within each of our sites. And we're a multi-site church it's probably worth mentioning have 12 or 13 different different sites. And that was concerning because it was like, well, wait a minute, w w what's happening? This isn't really what we're after. We're trying to change the communities where we're at. We're trying to reach new people where we already are. Why isn't this happening? And that's kind of what started us down the road of looking for new and fresh ways to reach people who weren't willing to walk into a village.

Meagan Ranson ([02:48](#)):

When did you guys start doing online church?

Kyle Ranson ([02:51](#)):

We started in 2015, we did a large capital campaign and we spent our first, probably 18 months at it, really wrestling with the question of is, is it biblical? I think this one you can't just skip through. Right? because for us, we felt like, well, we're giving people this option to not come to church. Is that healthy for them? And because, you know, the classic argument is watching a video online is not the same as church, which is community and people and belonging and all those really critical, important things. And all that's very, very true. And so we had to rustle through those hard questions and eventually we came to the place where we went look, our, our job is to, is to go. Our job is to reach people and where people are is online. That is where they will discover us. And that's where they will discover Jesus. And if we're not there, we're not really being effective missionaries. We're not really fulfilling the call that we have in the communities where God's placed us.

Meagan Ranson ([03:48](#)):

Well, that leads me to my first question. Before we dive into like the nuts and bolts of what it looks like to actually run an online church. I'd love to hear what you think about online church. Like, what does it look like for you guys

Kyle Ranson ([03:59](#)):

First? I think it's important to, to, to call out that we're, we are still learning like everybody else. I do not believe there is an expert that exists on online church yet. It's very much in the innovation phase. The place you reach people is always moving. It is never static. And if you envision it as static, you're going to find out that everybody moved on and your still where everybody used to gather. And so Mars Hill was the place when Paul was there, but it wasn't a thousand years before, or a thousand years later, or a hundred years later, it, it shifts and moves. You know, you see buildings open up and then they close back down. There's, there's a, there's a simple lesson to get there. And what it actually looks like, you know, for me, as one of the hats I wear now is our community pastor for crossroads church online. And the promise I make to people that I just filmed a video yesterday. That's going to go out on Christmas. No, not Christmas new year's Eve in which I made three commitments to people about the coming year. And there are based on, we have a vision for what we want this to be for you, but it's not there yet. And the vision that the promise I want to make to people is crossroads is a movement you can belong to no matter where you live.

Meagan Ranson ([05:16](#)):

So do you see that digital church model for other churches? Do you see that as like a temporary thing or something that can be led longterm?

Kyle Ranson ([05:24](#)):

For us it's absolutely. Long-Term. I mean, for me, it's the, it's what I'm quite literally betting my career on at this point, by the way, it doesn't mean we're shutting down our buildings. I fully believe in the power of buildings to reach people still, but they're not

Meagan Ranson ([05:44](#)):

Buildings.

Kyle Ranson ([05:45](#)):

Absolutely. We're, we're, we're still doing it. It's where the majority of our staff time resources, energy is spent still on buildings. And at this point we've got about half of our sites up and, and reduced capacity. But we're seeing far more engagement online. It's easier for people to find you, the cost of coming to your building is pretty great. You've got to get your car, you gotta drive there. It's a big time commitment. You gotta fight through the awkwardness of, ah, I might know one person who invited me, but I don't know everybody else. That's pretty awkward. You know, there's 200 people here. 200 is a lot of people. I feel, I feel unsafe in a way, versus my friends sent me this link and all I did is click it just like I do all day long with everything else, you know?

Michael Lukaszewski ([06:30](#)):

And I've been listening to this and I love this conversation. And actually I love starting from the, is it the local, you know, that Kyle mentioned that. I think that's so smart. And it's funny when we talk about that, we're like, well, this is what Paul did, or this is how Luke wrote or this is what all these different people did in the first century. And sometimes I think we forget that those were individuals that were living at a unique time in history, and we turn their approach into like gospel truth or a process for today. And, you know, it's like, I think there's some room in all of this conversation, physical, digital, all this stuff. There's room for both personal preference and organizational calling, you know? So how one church chooses to live in this tension and may be different than how a different churches church does it. But like, I love the question you asked is like, what do you think about online church? And that's that's really interesting because I have personal, I have personal preferences, but if I'm a pastor of a church and I turned my personal preferences into our church wide strategy, I've made a giant colossal mistake.

Meagan Ranson ([07:39](#)):

Sure. No, that's good. So some of the, some of the nitty gritty things here that I'm sure people are wondering about when it comes to online church in the what's the first one being, what about discipleship? How do you disciple someone towards Jesus from a distance?

Kyle Ranson ([07:55](#)):

That is an excellent question. Thank you. I want to be really clear. The, the easiest part of online church is reaching people every, every church. I mean, to, to the, to the biblical question, right? It's really, it's really God, who are you calling us to? Are you calling us the people in our community who are willing to walk into a building that could be the case awesome, double down on building, make it amazing, make it the place that people want to be every Sunday morning, and then some, or God are you calling us to the community? And if it's the community, then I would just gently suggest where the, where is the community currently looking for answers, gathering together having conversation. And the answer is online and that's not driven by the pandemic. It it's maybe amplified. So you're encouraging people that watch, that consume

Meagan Ranson ([08:56](#)):

Your content online, to do it with a group of people and to not do it alone. No, it's like, no. Okay.

Kyle Ranson ([09:03](#)):

I could care less if you watch our content in the same room with other people I would actually argue, it takes a bit of the convenience factor adamant. What, what people want is they want to consume your content, how they want it when they want it, where they want it. Right. So like Sarah, my wife, she does it while she runs on the treadmill. Amazing. Great. Yeah, don't fight that. That's wonderful. But I don't

think you have to watch at the same time. I don't know that there's, that there's magic and, and that's some people do, you know, we don't, we don't discourage that. We have groups around the country and they have watch parties and they get together every Sunday and they, they watched together, but that's not the kind of connection talking about watching a show together. It's got to go beyond that. And you know, you, you watch on Sunday or on Tuesday because that's when you have time. Great. What I care about is that you're connecting together on Thursday now, how do you decide from a distance? Well, I mean, Paul knew it,

Michael Lukaszewski ([10:04](#)):

Right? He wrote letters to people that were hundreds of miles away,

Kyle Ranson ([10:08](#)):

Right? He walked the Roman roads and where there weren't roads. He climbed mountains, which by the way, when you go to Turkey and you look at his life, that's what jumps out. Holy crap, the Rocky mountains, they're tricky. Paul climb the Rocky mountains to get to place to place, you know, like, so he was, he was writing letters and he was climbing mountains and walking and walking on roads. He had no tools at his disposal to decipher from a distance, but he did it.

Michael Lukaszewski ([10:29](#)):

The very book of Ephesians that we get together in our homes and study was a letter written from a distance to a group of people. Paul was actually discipling people from a distance using the same letter that we say we have to get together in person. And talk about there's a little bit of irony there. Oh, that is ironic. I mean, it was a letter and it was delivered and it was like, they all, you know, it's like, that was distanced discipleship back in the day.

Kyle Ranson ([10:54](#)):

Here's the thing with, with production. Cause you mentioned that it's dumped in my mind, production value matters. Infant testimony, less than content excellence. You don't need to go for production value. You need to go for content.

Meagan Ranson ([11:09](#)):

Spell infant, Tessa, Molly. That's a good word. I like that. I have no idea.

Kyle Ranson ([11:13](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I'm gonna, I'm gonna remember that for my next minute. Sermon. Look at that one.

Meagan Ranson ([11:17](#)):

No, that's a good, sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you. I just got distracted by the infant testimony. No, that's a good point. Product content. You didn't even say it right? Megan infinitum. Intestinally Anyway. Okay. Sorry. I didn't mean, I didn't mean to distract. It matters a product to the production matters less than content. Yeah.

Kyle Ranson ([11:38](#)):

You can have the slickest best looking, most amazing pile of nothing meaningful and, or you can have something that looks raw and has deep meaning in that sometimes by the way, I will intentionally

choose low production value. So in defense of the idea YouTube is where I consume most of my content. Now I watch more YouTube than I watch television. And if you look at these YouTubers, the ones who Excel are not, and there's no equation to production accents. One of the guys that lost the most, he has three channels all with more than a million subscribers he's got, I don't know, six or 8 million on his tocino. And most of his videos are shot in his iPhone. It's just him holding his iPhone, pointing at him and him talking. But he's excellent. He's learned how to talk to a camera, which is very different than talking to a room full of people from a stage.

Kyle Ranson ([12:31](#)):

If anybody's out there senior pastors and you're, you're, you're looking to sharpen your skills. I just proposed to you. It is not the same. There is a new skill set you need. And the best way to do it is to watch YouTube videos, just how people interact with the camera, how they reference things without eye contact, they make, they, they don't make how they lean into the frame. But the Lena out of the framers, all these little things and tips and tricks, you can pick up intuitively and you can reapply. And none of it has anything to do with the budget you have for camera gear or video editing or lighting or any of that stuff. And in fact, that can get in the way. So I just, yesterday recording the video, that's going to go to our online church folks for year. And given, I actually had a big, fancy video shoot right before I filmed this video.

Kyle Ranson ([13:19](#)):

So I couldn't, all those people work for me, cameras, lights, the whole thing. And I could have had them just say, Hey, rip off this four minute video edited, ship it out. But I didn't. Instead what I did is I got into my car. I left the shoot and I recorded myself talking while I was driving because I wanted people. I wanted to give people any more personal expression for me as a personal story. I emphasize the fact that they, they, they spoke that blessed me personally, my friends, how they had changed my friends' lives. I thanked them. And Oh, by the way, one of the tips I learned from YouTube is that people watch stuff that they're like, huh? Why is he in a car that as dumb as that sounds, I would get many more people to where they get this email to watch the video, because they'll think why is Kyle in the car?

Michael Lukaszewski ([14:14](#)):

Yeah. That's why I saw them. All my videos from a train. There you go. Yeah. When something unexpected, it's like the Tik TOK videos where somebody is like holding a jar of nuts while they're standing in their bathroom. And you're like, what are you doing? Like what they're talking about has nothing to do with the bathroom. Where's the jar or box. Yeah. Like this one girl just carries pickles around. You're like, why are you do that? But I want it. And we're talking about it now on a podcast. It's amazing.

Kyle Ranson ([14:44](#)):

That's right. Well, one of the, one of the guys, who's part of our church who I've been fortunate to get to know over the past couple of years has gotten into tension wire. He owns and operates a company called video creators, video creators. They're on YouTube. And he is the nation's leading expert on YouTube, which is really handy thing to have as a it's handy. And the biggest thing he's emphasized with me as I'm like, how do you make stuff? People want to watch, you know, what gets watched them? What does it he's like you have to, and your thumbnail and your title and your first six seconds plant a question in their head that they need to have answer. That's it, that's all you have to do. That could be as simple as why it's piloted car. You know? So just little things like that, again and again, just to push on

that has nothing to do with your budget, for lighting, video camera, editing software, any of that stuff, it just has to do with content excellence and the drive to go.

Kyle Ranson ([15:38](#)):

I'm called to reach people who are online and just like, you know, here, Sukkot and seminary, or in my first job, when I was a youth pastor, how many of us were youth pastors verse? Right? And I started learning how to talk on a stage. I had to acquire these skills. So to get people to pay attention. And it's the same, there's a new set of skills that are easily acquirable. You can go to Tim's YouTube channel and you can watch video creators for free. And you can pick up 10 things within 10 minutes that you can immediately.

Michael Lukaszewski ([16:12](#)):

That's a really good action step right there, honestly, for anybody listening to this, you know, cause we've been talking about the question, is this, is this something temporary? Is it going to be around for a term? I think we all realize some version of everything we're doing is not just going to be around for a long-term, but going to become exponentially, not infinitesimally more important. Right? This is like, this is not just the future. It's like the wave of future is going to come again and again and again, but what you just said, I think it's so important. Literally take out a Google doc or a post-it note and go, what five digital skills do I want to skill up on in 2021? And you mentioned learn how to talk to a camera that would be brilliant for most pastors. Because you think, you know how to do it and you don't know how to do it, but why would you know how to do it?

Michael Lukaszewski ([16:57](#)):

There was no class in seminary called how to talk to a camera. You know, so what four or five things, three things or whatever do you want to get better? And if you just write those down and then go, how do I learn how to do this? That, that there's a YouTube video about it. There's a course about it. There's a, you know, you can, you can actually skill up in these, in this digital area, this digital sandbox in a way that would be very meaningful. You know, in the next few years of ministry,

Kyle Ranson ([17:24](#)):

I think he did, to that point, it'd be very useful the next years of ministry. And then if you look at the latest research coming out of Barna, right? What they say is that most people are going to be hybrid what they call hybrid church users. So this is the thing don't brace. Even if you go like, you know what, my church, we're not really called the online church ministry. We don't want to stand alone online church. That's not, that's not our deal. Cool, totally get it. Don't no, no sweat. The different, totally different mission fields. I would propose to you and no matter what church you're in right now, which church you're running your church members will want to use you as a hybrid church. Meaning they'll want to come sometimes, but they'll also have this like subconscious expectation of being able to engage with you online when or where they want to as well. And if you, and if you look at it that way you go to like a great question to ask might be how might online experiences, connections, tools, opportunities, compliment, and be additive to our current building based church model, such that we're not driving people away from the building. We're keeping more people more highly engaged all week long with our church. And there's loads of ways to do that. Look at that.

Meagan Ranson ([18:56](#)):

So just to create some clarity here, do you guys create a separate experience for online than you do in person because you're doing both. So how does online look different than what your in person looks like?

Kyle Ranson ([19:08](#)):

Yeah, we do. So we created a completely different one. We same message, completely different delivery. And now since the pandemic began in March, we now make an every weekend a two camera film message. And then at our buildings, we have, we do a streamed stage message. So this past weekend, the online message was me that it was in our Christmas series, Christmas time, 2020, where you world rejoices was that was their tagline. I taught the online version. The week was about Jesus, his board. So you can go on it's on YouTube. You can watch what I did for that message. We filmed them on location at a church because I wanted to describe that Jesus is a different type of Lord. And specifically he's different when it comes to what house he wants to dwell on then and where he wants his rules and what all that means. So we went to a cathedral, we filmed there. Biggest thing last time, it was around the whole thing in our sites. One of our other teaching pastors, Chuck Mingo delivered inside the same series, Christmas time, 2020. And we're what, Joyce's a message about Jesus is Lord. And because we filmed the stuff ahead of time, I sent Chuck my outline. And so all the sites got his video message of him on a stage.

Meagan Ranson ([20:36](#)):

Okay. That's so that's cool that you have, it's something completely different for your online versus your in-person and recognizing that those need to need to be different experiences. And that's a scalable idea though. So like here's

Michael Lukaszewski ([20:48](#)):

The thing you like hear that Gar will, that'd be great. We don't have all those people do that. Yeah. But if you preach the message, if you're a pastor, you preach the message for 30 minutes in a room. I mean, yeah, you can put the whole video on YouTube or Vimeo or whatever you normally do with it, but why couldn't you in your car? Like you talked about Kyle after the service is over hit record on your iPhone and do a four minute recap of that and create that kind of content just for a digital audience. So there's so many ways to do this. It's like you recognize that this is made for digital. This is made for in the room and this may, you may have something that's a hybrid. That's fine too. Like NFL games or hybrid experiences there there's a, in the stadium experience. I mean, not right now, but there used to be. And in the stadium experience, and then there's a TV experience and then there's a whole social recap pre lead up and lead away from experience. And like that model we can absolutely do in church.

Kyle Ranson ([21:46](#)):

Absolutely. Yeah. It it's just of asking the question. When people show up here, what are they expecting to see, watch whatever, you know, when Paul should have. And Marcel was like, Oh cool. We read poetry to each other. Sweet. Okay. So I'll start with that, I guess. You know, and, and it's meaning that, that basic expectations so that people will listen to the message, but you have to, you have to pay attention to the media. One of the, one of the mistakes we made early on when we started filming these screen, first weekends is we would play them back in our buildings and everyone was at a building. It was like, you're like a watching a TV show. I don't want it. I want to church. And within that is, I want a person on the stage talking to me live. And so like, Oh, okay, cool. We can give you that. But when we put the person on a stage talking to a room full of people, we put that online to people who don't want

to go to that room or can't go to that room for whatever reason, what we inadvertently communicated to them was this is a church you can't belong to show up. Yeah. We just went, Oh, what you expect online? Is someone talking to the camera to you? You're expecting that. You're the primary audience, not the secondary audience.

Michael Lukaszewski ([22:58](#)):

Yeah. That's so smart because as people get back together, you know, in this next year or whatever, you know, whatever, it's like, you're going to have people in the room and you better figure out how to make them feel like they're the only person there, but you're also going to have people online, maybe live maybe later and you better make them feel like you created that for them as well. Awesome.

Speaker 4 ([23:16](#)):

Well, I think this was a great episode. Thank you, Kyle, for sharing all of your wisdom and insight and the things that you guys are learning at crossroads doing this online church thing. I know you guys have been doing it a while. You've learned a lot. You're still learning a lot. I'm excited to see how this grows and changes over the next year. Cause it's, it's, you're just taking this over. Like this is like your big thing now, right? Yeah, yeah, absolutely. It's been the kind of a side project and now it's becoming my main thing, your main focus. So I'm excited to see what happens and I'll put all the links so you guys can check out what crossroads is doing in the show notes. You can go look at that and, and learn a few things. If you have questions, you know, feel free to reach out. We'd love to answer them for you. Put them in the comments and we will see you guys in 2018, 21. Holy cow. Yay. Love it. Praise God. That's right. All right. Thanks everyone for listening. And we'll see you next year. Goodbye. All.