

Welcome to this month's Leader's Circle backgrounder. I want to frame up something that I think is going to be really, really important. Digital, as you know, is changing everything. And there's a temptation for churches, there's a temptation for businesses, there's a temptation for every leader, now that we're moving into a post-pandemic era. At the time that you're probably viewing this, it's not maybe quite here yet. It'll show up, though. The temptation will be in the future to let your foot off the digital gas pedal. My encouragement is don't. You don't want to treat your online customers, your online attenders, your online clients as second-class. Actually in the future, some of your most engaged people may not be in the room.

Some of the most engaged people at your church may not be in the auditorium. Some of your most engaged customers may not be in the room. If you run a restaurant, some of your most engaged clients probably aren't going to be dining in. They're going to be doing take-out and taking it home and telling their friends and everything. And so, it can be super, super challenging for leaders who are used to leading physical organizations to think that no, in the future, the future is hybrid. So you want to get your head around that as a leader as you get ready to roll this out with your team. And then what I'm going to share with you in this month's training is a digital engagement funnel.

This is an introduction to it. If you Google digital marketing funnel, all kinds of variations of what I'm going to share with you will show up. I've adapted this specifically for churches, but it works for businesses, as well, small businesses. And what you'll realize is that most organizations and probably your organization, as well, is still at step one. If you run an online business, now you've probably got all the steps in place. But the big pivot over the next year or two will be to make sure that you've got a complete, functioning digital marketing funnel. You have one for your in-person business. How do you make a first-time attender become a second-time attender, become a third-time attender, become somebody's who's baptized, fully assimilated and growing in their faith?

If you have a customer in your physical store, it's like well. How do we turn a browser into a buyer? What is our strategy? You've got that for your in-person. Now you got to figure it out for digital. So this'll help. And one of the questions I'm getting a lot these days is well, how much of my staffing and my resources should I actually devote to online? And my answer is, about 30 to 50 percent of your staffing dollars and your overall resource dollars should go to your digital presence. Now that probably sounds like a pipe dream for a number of you. You're like, like I'm lucky if I have five percent going to digital. Great. Well, work it up in the budget every year so that perhaps within three to five years, you're at 30 to 50 percent of your staffing online.

We live in this interactive world where a lot of our lives are this hybrid life. Right? You're on your phone one second, texting your friend, and the next you're talking to your daughter in real life. That is the future. And so, if you really want to reach people and you want to grow, being online is really important. And if you don't have the budget right now to get to the point where a lot of your staffing is going to online and your resources, here's a little cheater hack. Okay? Find a 15 to 25-year-old or a group of them to lead the charge. They're digital natives, they get this stuff, they understand it. And if you want to recruit, could be your kids. It could be teenagers. It could be anybody 15 to 25 years old. The college intern, whatever. And say, "Hey. We want you to integrate some of this material with our strategy." They'll be tremendously helpful with that. So with that in mind, let's jump into this month's teaching.

Welcome to this month's Leader's Circle. In this video, I want to share with you all about a digital engagement strategy. So let's start with a question. What would you say the goal of posting content online is, right? Building a website to posting a message online, a video online. You know what the easy answer is? The easy answer would be, well, it's consumption. Right? I just want a lot of people to see this. I want my video to go viral. I want our website to get 1,000 views a day, 10,000 views a day. I mean, you pick the number. Right? The temptation is to say it's consumption. I want to have that viral TikTok. I

want to have the YouTube video that gets viewed 100,000, a million times. Right? Consumption, consumption, consumption.

And in so many ways, that's understandable. But I want to suggest to you that that actually doesn't deliver nearly what you think it does. Think about some of the viral videos that you've seen. You're like ha, ha, ha, that's funny. Made you laugh for two minutes, you showed the people around us, shared it with your team. And then you went on. And if I asked you an hour later, "So who's that TikTok from?" You'd be like, "I don't know." That YouTube video. You know, those kids who are like, what about them? I don't know. It was just funny. It's like, right? When you're trying to figure out how to tie a canoe to your car, or you're trying to figure out how to fix your fireplace or your dishwasher, you went on YouTube. You searched it out. You found this guy who's like, "Here's how you disconnect your dishwasher." You're like, "Awesome."

Do you even know his name? You don't know his name. Did you subscribe to his stuff? No, you didn't subscribe to his stuff. So that video may have 10,000 views or 100,000 views, but you're no better off. You don't have a relationship with that person. And that is the challenge with consumption. All right? Now consumption is great. I would rather have 100,000 views on something or 1,000 than one view or no views. So don't get me wrong. Okay? But we have this obsession as leaders with numbers. We have this obsession with customers. We have this obsession with attenders. And I think in the case of church leaders, where I've spent a lot of my time, the obsession that church leaders have developed with online views is like the obsession that pastors have with church attendance.

See, attendance doesn't produce devoted disciples. Attendance, merely being at a restaurant, being at a gym, doesn't necessarily produce clients or loyal customers. You know what does? Engagement does. So if you want to grow, stop trying to attract people. Start trying to engage them. If you engage people, you get them to come back. Get them to serve. Get them to give. Get them to volunteer. Right? Get them in a small group. If they're engaged, they're going to want to come back. Right? If you go to a gym, and you're like, "I don't even know how to use this equipment. I don't know what to do. I tried lifting a little bit. I'm not even sure I'm doing it right." Are you going to go back? You're probably not going to go back. Right?

Hook that person up with a trainer or a mentor or a buddy, they're probably going to come back. Get them into a routine, give them a workout plan. They're like, "Okay. Now I'm engaged. I'm going to go every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday afternoon." And all of a sudden, you have somebody who's engaged. So you got to think about your digital content in the same way. That the goal of digital content is connection, not consumption. You want people to engage. So it's not the number of followers, it's not the number of views, it's not the number of minutes watched. It's not the number of likes, and it's not even the number of comments. All of that is good. All of that is great. But it's not enough. Make the goal of your digital content connection and community, not consumption.

So then the question becomes great. Okay, I get it. How do we do that? How do we actually do that? You see, content itself doesn't lead to engagement. But community and connection do. So for years, we've operated in an old model. And this is true of churches, it's true of a lot of organizations. It's like, we want you to come out, we want you to attend a physical building, want you to sample our experience. Did you enjoy it? Hopefully you like it, and then hopefully you come back. Right? And that's what we hope for. And we also know the odds of that are about 10%. That 10% of the people who show up for the first time, experience it, like it, will actually come back.

And so you do some things to try to get people to come back. It's like okay, how do we turn a first-time person into a second-person into a third-time person? And the challenge with that is we were already getting reduced returns. We knew that getting people to attend church was harder decade after decade after decade. If you're starting a new business, getting people to come out and then come back and take

a monthly subscription or show up three times a month as opposed to once a month. That was getting harder and harder. So I want to share with you something I'm really excited about. And that is the digital engagement funnel. And it's got five steps. And I want to walk through them one by one.

You'll see them come up step by step on the screen. So number one is explore, number two is offer, number three is connect, number four is commit, and number five is share. Now I want to explain what all of those mean. Okay? So explore, most organizations, most businesses, and definitely most churches have only ever really discovered step one. And that's understandable. For a lot of organizations, what? You got online in 2020. You've been at this just over a year, okay? So you're trying to figure all this out. But the problem is, a lot of organizations just leave it there. That's all they ever do, it's like yeah. We're just going to be on social. We're going to have a website. We're going to have some key social media accounts. We're going to post our content to YouTube. We're going to share some helpful how-to videos.

And they leave it there. So that's great. But all that does is it allows people to find you online. And maybe they're going to watch your content. Right? And that's where you see views. It's like, wow. 1,000 YouTube views or 10,000 or a million or whatever your metrics are. Right? And you're like, that's really cool. But it's only the beginning of the digital engagement funnel. Because you don't really know these people. Maybe they comment, maybe they follow, maybe you're like oh, it's Jake again. And you have a nice conversation with Jake every Sunday or every week or something. But they're not really bought in. That's why step two is so important. Now as soon as I share this with you, you're going to realize this is how the internet runs, because this is how the internet runs. Okay?

But you need to have an offer. And an offer is something that you give to a person who's on your website or on your social in exchange for their personal information. Usually that's a name and a good email address, a working email address. So if you visit my site, careynieuwhof.com, you'll see three or four times on most pages, I am trying to do exactly this. I'm giving you an offer. Download the free preaching cheat sheet. Or wish you had 1,000 more hours back? Get my free High Impact Leader calendar. Or something else like that, right? Here's five tips to leading a better team. So I'm trying to give you something of value in exchange for a personal connection. So you're not just one of the thousands of people who visits my website every day. All of a sudden, you're Emily. All of a sudden, you're Jake. All of a sudden, you're Sarah. And we can get to know.

And that's through an offer or an opt-in. And this is where you start to move into some really great space. This is where you start to connect. So you're not anonymous, you've connected with a person, you can get to know them. Now I have permission to talk to you directly because you've given me your email, you've given me your cell phone, whatever information you're collecting. And then that moves, and this is the space you can't really control in the church and you can't control in business, to commitment. All right? So somebody makes a decision to commit. In the spiritual realm, it's like somebody decides to follow Jesus or to rededicate their life to Christ. In a business, it might be somebody decides to buy.

It's like, okay. Gave me this free stuff, I'm going to buy a course. I'm going to join the Leader's Circle. I'm going to buy your product or whatever that happens to be. So there's a commitment that's made. And again, that's nothing you can really control or manipulate. It's just something you can create the conditions for that to happen, but you can't really control it. And then finally, the fifth part of the funnel is when the person themselves, now that they know you, now that they have a relationship, starts to share your content on their social with friends. So some of that could be like face-to-face, word of mouth. Hey, found this great church. Or man, I took this course and it's changing my life. Or I love this, or you should get in.

But often that happens on social these days, right? Where somebody shares a YouTube video or somebody re-posts something on Instagram or someone says, hey, I'm absolutely loving this series that my church is in. You should check it out. And they post a link. So if you study that funnel in a little more detail, you'll see that there's really three zones in the funnel. And the first zone is what we call rented space. So this rented space kind of governs step one or two. And here's what you already know. You don't really control who sees what you post online. The algorithm does, right? If you post something on YouTube, you'll notice that sometimes it gets 50 views and sometimes it gets 5,000. What's the difference?

The difference is often the algorithm. YouTube is controlling that. There's this sophisticated algorithm that decides a certain number of people engaged, and the algorithm's a mystery and it's changing every day and you can't really figure it out. Right? But some posts do really well. Sometimes it's because they're well-written and it's good content. But sometimes you can put some really good stuff out there and it doesn't get any traction. That's all algorithmically driven, and you only have so much control over it. You can think of it as rented space, because you don't own it, and the landlord changes the rules pretty much every week. So it gets frustrating, it gets discouraging.

But once somebody opts in, once somebody takes that offer, which is still controlled by an algorithm whether they see it or not, you start to make a personal connection. And then, you move through that connection to relational space. And with relational space, it's no longer rented. You own that. And you want to use some common sense here. You don't want to email people 17 times a day or call them 18 times a day. But you want to make appropriate contact with them to say, "Hey. It's so good to know you, Carey. Let's hang out. I'd love to send you a daily leadership tip, or I'd love to send you some emails from time to time that let you know about events that are happening. Are you interested?" Or "let me sign you up for my free course" or whatever it happens to be.

But basically, it's relational space. And that is something you own. And that is beauty of having a digital engagement funnel and a digital engagement strategy. So connection turns rented space into relational space. And that moves you from unpredictable connection to personal connection. And I think that's where all the magic happens when it comes to your online digital engagement. So I want to break down each of the phases one more time in a little more detail. So what can you do at the explore stage, okay? That's where you provide engaging content people love. That's your Sunday sermon. That's a short video. That's an inspiring quote. It's some cool graphics that communicate an idea. That is algorithmically controlled, and you can give it a little boost sometimes by paying for a promoted post or a promoted video or something like that.

You also want to SEO optimize that content, so when people are searching how do I get closer to God or how to lose 10 pounds in 10 days, they find you. And you can read all about search engine optimization. It's a whole industry to itself. And then obviously you got a website, too, that you want to optimize for that. So you want people to be able to find you and explore you without even really connecting with you. And then you move to the offer stage. So that is where you offer helpful, free content that actually has value. And I mean real value, okay? We have a saying in my company. We want our free products to be better than other people's paid products. So when you get that free download, it's not something I put together in 13 seconds and looks like it was made in kindergarten. Okay?

You want it to be not cheap, high-value, so that when people get it, it's designed well and they're like, wow. This really, really helped. Okay. Here's some ideas. This is what you can use for your offer. You can do a checklist. I do a preaching checklist, okay? So you want to know? Are you ready for this? I do a burnout quiz. That's another thing that has really worked well over the years. You can do quizzes, checklists, you can do opt-in for a free video series and then professionally shoot it and make it really good. But here's a free video series that you can use. You could do an ebook, a short book based on

perhaps some content that you've already produced. You can do cheat sheets. I have a cheat sheet for writing a sermon that's had thousands and thousands of downloads, maybe tens of thousands.

And it's just like if you're producing a sermon, these are things to keep in mind. And it's of real value, and people use it every day. Could be a recipe, for example. Right? Could be a workout plan. Or if you're a real estate agent, a curb appeal checklist. Here are five things you need to do to sell your house at top price. But just think about things that are really valuable, beautifully designed, and I give you my email, and in exchange, you give me something of real value. Then at the connect stage, where you have my email or my phone number, there's individual follow-up. So you can email people, you can message them, you can make a phone call. You can do a personal invitation. And again, use your emotional intelligence not to burn that relationship or move too quickly. But don't make the mistake of ignoring it, either.

And then you move to sharing. Okay? You can't really control the place where people make a commitment. But in sharing, that's where it goes from random to personal. The invited become the inviters. And so what you want to do here is you want to provide content for your people to share. Maybe downloadable graphics. Maybe say hey, if you enjoyed this, put the link in your social. Or text a friend and let them know about this. Now the algorithm favors personal connection. So when I as an organization or a content creator post, the algorithm often suppresses that. Why? Because they want you to give them money, right? You pay Facebook money, you pay Instagram money so you promote your post or whatever. But when a person posts on her personal account, the algorithm says, oh. This person actually really cares about this. I'm going to share that a little more often.

So you get the network effect. So that is an introduction to a digital engagement funnel. You go from aware to an offer to connect to commit to share. And most leaders only really think about the first step. But leaders who finish the funnel facilitate changed lives and renewed mission. So there's a lot to do in the team application guide, and honestly, you could spend months on this. I hope you will. We've given a lot of thought to the questions. But remember this. This is the big idea. The goal of digital content is connection and community, not consumption.

Well I just want you know, we'll be sharing a lot more content on this as time goes on. I think this is going to be really, really important for a lot of leaders. And I want you to think through, as well, the potential for distributed gatherings. Right? A lot of you have discovered over the last year that you have fans and clients and congregation and attenders now from all over the place because the internet breaks down geography. So when you're thinking about digital engagement, this is a way for you to start connecting, because you know from Google Analytics that you've got people in Wyoming who are watching. Or you've got people from Tennessee who are engaging, or people who don't live near you who are engaging.

This can be an opportunity for you, as you get to know them through this digital engagement funnel, to say, "You know what? There's 15 of you watching from Nashville right now. I wonder if you could do a meetup over there." So I think this is going to be really key to distributed gatherings in the future. And another reminder for you, and this is true for churches and for businesses, is your most engaged people may not be in the room. And you just have to remember that. They are not second-class citizens. They're not people who just need to be dismissed or they're extra or bonus people. And don't let the size of your vision shrink to the size of a room you can fill. It's going to require a lot of experimentation, a lot of innovation. We'll be doing some future sessions on this, as well, in the Leader's Circle. But I really, really hope this helps. I'm very excited to see what happens to your team as they begin to work through the questions and the application steps in the team application guide.