

Alpha Online

How to run your course online



There are many solutions online that will enable churches to stream Alpha episodes and host small group discussion time. Services we recommend are **Zoom**, **Google Hangouts**, and **Skype**.

Choose your format

Format A:

Have all participants dial in to one web conference to watch the video or talk. After the talk is finished, break out into individual groups for the discussion.

Not all web conferencing services allows for breaking out into sub groups, Zoom does have this capability.

We recommend using this model if the total number of Alpha participants is under 75, as assigning guests to the correct breakout group can be tricky with a large number of people.

Format B:

Provide the session's video to all hosts in advance and have each small group join into their own web conference, organised by the small group host.

We recommend using this model if the total number of Alpha participants is over 75.

The Alpha weekend

Consider whether it's possible to meet in person in smaller groups, but if running the Alpha weekend or day online, here are some tips.

Plan the day

We recommend:

- Watch all three videos in one day
- Include live or pre-recorded testimonies to create an authentic and personal environment
- Make sure to add fun elements into the day! Surveys, games, humorous videos – the day should feel varied and creative

Prayer ministry

We recommend:

- Break out into smaller groups and pray for each other
- Breakout one-on-one and pray individually
- Invite guests to request prayer from the group host via chat or email. The group host can then reach out individually to the guests to setup time for a quick prayer

Tips on running Alpha online

We reached out to churches already running Alpha online to get their tips for running a great course.

Hospitality

Even though groups are meeting online, churches can still put a strong emphasis on hospitality.

Engage from the start: Make sure either the course host or group host is engaging right from the beginning of the online session – saying hello to people, asking questions, telling jokes. Avoid the silence and keep excitement and enthusiasm high.

Chat lots: Encourage hosts, helpers, and guests to utilise the chat functionality to comment and ask questions during the video as well as during discussion time when others are talking.

Logistics

Internet Connection: Make sure you have a strong internet connection. If possible, plug directly into an ethernet cable.

Short and Sweet: Churches have found that in an online format, people start to lose interest at around the one-hour mark. We recommend keeping the full session to around one hour.

Email more: In a digital setting, more communication is needed than usual:

- Send weekly emails re-capping the talk and ask guests to share their thoughts via email.
- Check-in if someone missed a night

Host preparation

Be prepared: Hosting online is a different experience to hosting in person, make sure your team are ready by ensuring they have access to all video files, discussion questions, and fully understand the digital solution the church has chosen.

Be aware: Churches have found that guests tend to feel more vulnerable online than in person. Prepare your hosts so they can expect this.

Quality discussion

- Ask all guests to be on video, not just audio
- Ask all guests to join in a quiet environment if possible
- Ask all guests to unmute during discussion (unless in a noisy setting). This allows for more organic, free flowing conversation
- Ask guests to not use green screen backgrounds, to help create a more natural environment