

Speaker 1:

This episode is part one of our five-part State of the Church series, designed to provide encouragement, insight, and forward-looking tips for navigating the impacts of 2020.

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In today's podcast, our CEO and Founder William Vanderbloemen speaks with Troy Pollock, chief ambassador of Pushpay, the leading organization in church giving and technology, on the acceleration of technology since COVID-19, and how those accepting change will experience success. Tweet your takeaways from today's show using the hashtag #Vandercast, and join our Facebook group where we post behind-the-scenes content. We'll even post today's show notes and a behind-the-scenes video from this conversation in that Facebook group.

Speaker 1:

Without further ado, here's William's conversation with Troy Pollock.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well hey, everybody. So glad you're here today, and thanks for being a part of what we're doing to try and learn from this moment that God has given us in COVID. We're continuing to see these trends in the State of the Church, we've even seeing how business owners can learn from churches right now.

William Vanderbloemen:

One of those trends is acceleration of the adoption of technology, particularly giving technology. Today, I want to reintroduce some of you, and introduce some of you, to my friend Troy Pollock, who's with Pushpay.

William Vanderbloemen:

Troy, thanks for making time for us today.

Troy Pollock:

Thanks, William. Always a joy to talk with you, big fan of you and what you're doing there at Vanderbloemen, so it's an honor to be a part of this conversation.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. We've actually had a chance to work with Pushpay, my church uses Pushpay. I know all about it, but people may not know. Can you give us the quick and dirty on who you guys are, and what you do?

Troy Pollock:

Absolutely, the quick and dirty. So back in 2012, we had this revolutionary idea to bring world-class technology to the faith market. Back in 2012, this was a revolutionary idea, to make giving to a church as easy as buying a song on iTunes. Now, I know we're here in 2020, and so that seems like a lifetime ago, but that's really, William, where we started. It's been an incredible journey ever since.

Troy Pollock:

These past eight years, we've experienced incredible growth, we're partnered with over 10,000 churches across Canada, US, New Zealand, Australia. Our original goal William, you'll like this ... Our original goal back then, in 2012, was we wanted to see \$1 billion of brand new given to the church, \$1 billion with a B. Well, just last week we processed our 15th \$1 billion dollar.

William Vanderbloemen:

Oh my goodness.

Troy Pollock:

So we undercooked that goal, just slightly.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's awesome.

Troy Pollock:

We had to re-forecast that. It's not so much about the dollars, it's about the stories on the other side of the dollars. It's the lives that have been changed, it's the buildings that have been built, it's the people that have been fed, it's the people that have been clothed, medical debt paid off. It's just those types of stories that are truly remarkable.

Troy Pollock:

But, that's the quick and dirty on Pushpay.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's awesome. What's cool, for me, is some folks may know, I started working with churches in 2008, helping them find their staff and I founded Vanderbloemen in 2010, so not too far from 2012. I was introducing a new idea to the church.

William Vanderbloemen:

I remember I was at home, I came home from my job at an oil and gas company and I'd seen them go through succession using this thing called a search firm. I thought, we need to try this in church. I said, "Hey babe, I think I'm supposed to quit my job and start something new for churches." She just looked at me and said, "That's because churches love new ideas, right?"

Troy Pollock:

With that face, right?

William Vanderbloemen:

Exactly, with that face. She's a smart lady. Bad taste in men, but a smart lady.

Troy Pollock:

I beg to differ.

William Vanderbloemen:

We joke about it. She actually gets credit for starting the company because she should have said, "I love you, you're such a visionary, go back to work." And instead, she said, "Lets give it a try."

William Vanderbloemen:

Interestingly, you guys were starting a new idea for churches, not too far apart from when I'm starting a new idea for churches. We ended up, at the front end, I knew one of your former colleagues fairly well, and it was like we were always talking to the same clients. Because it was these innovative churches that were willing to take a risk and try something new, which almost always meant they were the largest churches. We were working just with larger churches.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well, what we've found in the last six years, and particularly since COVID, is now the normal size church is saying, "Hey, wait a minute. Now, we're ready for a new idea." Are you guys seeing the curve of adoption of a new idea accelerate because of COVID?

Troy Pollock:

Absolutely, a very similar trajectory to what you've experienced there.

Troy Pollock:

When we hit the ground in 2012, it's the big churches, the disposable income, they can take on risk and try these crazy ideas, whether it's a search form or a technology. Well here we are, COVID happens, and that just completely leveled the playing field because in the church faith market in order to survive, you have to leverage digital giving because you no longer have in-person gatherings.

Troy Pollock:

So the churches and the organizations that were maybe on the back half of that adoption curve that you just talked about, maybe a little bit resistant to change, or resistant to adopting this new technology, they actually have to have it, it's incumbent upon them to keep the lights on and the doors figuratively open. We've seen tremendous growth from that back half of the adoption curve.

Troy Pollock:

The great thing is, is we're hearing stories from them saying, "Gosh, I wish we would've adopted this earlier, it's so easy. You mean, we can have giving come through Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday? Or, we can get somebody on a recurring contribution, so when they're away at the mountains, or the beach, or sick, their contribution can still come through?" It's like, "Yeah, this is what we've been trying to tell you."

Troy Pollock:

You know, the CEO of Microsoft recently said this COVID might have brought what was going to take two years up to about two months, in terms of the advancement of technology, and how we're all having to adopt it in every asset and facet of life. well, I was talking to a church leader, well-known ministry down in Atlanta, Georgia just last week and he said, "What was going to take five years in the faith market has just been brought up to five months."

Troy Pollock:

So a lot of churches are scrambling William, to adopt this. But once they get through that starting gate and get it plugged in, they're seeing tremendous fruit and success from adopting technology.

William Vanderbloemen:

If you can step all the way back to December in your mind, okay? I know you're not in the weeds with brand new clients all the time. But, what's the size of a church, of a typical new client, versus now?

Troy Pollock:

Originally, our adoption curve was similar to you. You'd get the bigger ones, the bigger fish, the bigger wells. And then, as it takes time you get more of the middle America church.

Troy Pollock:

We've segmented the church market into three segments, small, medium, and large size. Now, this may be something that is irrelevant to your audience, but we call small zero to 200, in average weekly attendees. Middle size church would be from 200 to about 1100, in average weekly attendees. And then, a large church would be 1100 or more. What we're really seeing is the middle size church coming to us. It's the folks that are seeing 250 or 500 people come through their doors on an average week, who are adopting the technology.

Troy Pollock:

So back to December, we were still going after those top large ones. But coming into March, April, May it's now the middle size churches that are actually ringing us and saying, "Hey, we thought we were okay." And even the small ones, in fact. "We thought we were okay with having in-person plates where you pass the bucket, and you drop off your contribution at the little door slot, we actually need technology now." It's definitely more of the smaller and mid size churches that are ringing us.

William Vanderbloemen:

So do any stories come to mind? I mean, you don't have to name a church unless you can. But, any cool stories of, "We just never thought we'd do this, but now we're here, and we're here to stay?"

Troy Pollock:

Yeah, it happens all over the place. We'll keep them anonymous right now.

Troy Pollock:

But, in fact there was one in the Northeast that was a smaller size church, and definitely traditional, resistant to change. Been around for 80 years plus and have been going well, and had their 250 people that were strong, and have been handing down succession in the family and so forth, and didn't really think that they needed it.

Troy Pollock:

Now, their in-person gatherings were shut down, obviously because of COVID, and so they rang us, and they rang us because they heard good things about us. Sure enough, we have a team that came alongside them, and helped them get implemented, and set up for success. They're just raving about, "This is so easy, we wish we would have adopted it sooner."

Troy Pollock:

The kicker here is they're getting recurring givers. It's people not just giving a one-time contribution digitally, it's actually setting up a recurring contribution to come out weekly, monthly, biweekly. That really fits within the behavior of people in 2020, like our mortgage payments, like our rent, like our gym membership, our phone membership, our auto payment, our internet, it's coming out on a monthly basis, whether we think about it or not. This church, particularly, has seen a double in recurring giving, just in the last couple months, because now this tools is available and somebody can set it and forget it, so to speak. We hear stories like that, all the time.

Troy Pollock:

On the higher end of town, the bigger churches that really have a strong digital strategy in place, they're seeing 10, 15, 20 percent increase during this time, because they're attracting brand new members to their online services.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. I think what I've seen and heard ... We were in the center. We will into it, but once we fell into it we ran with it. We were in the center of helping churches and Christian schools get PPP loans from the government, which are now grants for many of them. We've now been able to survey them all. "What's your giving been like, and how's it been?" The common story is March hit, and a few donors stepped forward and said, "We're going to make a significant contribution to help the church." But then, what sustained them once that went away, that big gift, was summer giving that was recurring giving. I'm thinking of your church, the anonymous church in the Northeast.

William Vanderbloemen:

When I moved up to Princeton to go to seminary, I remember being shocked that church would just pretty much shut down in the summer. I mean, they might have one service and no Sunday school, but not two services. And sometimes the church would just say, "See you after Labor Day." I would imagine there's some great stories of how summer giving has changed, as a result of digital giving. Have you got any stats, or thoughts, or stories that go along with that?

Troy Pollock:

Yeah. I can give you some stats and some stories.

Troy Pollock:

I'm on the board at my particular church and we use Pushpay as our giving solution. We saw a similar trend that you saw. Right when March, April hit, there was some large donors that stepped up, and took responsibility, and helped financially contribute at a higher level to keep it going. But then, it flat-lined and it began to go down. Well, inject the recurring giving through our church that I'm a part of right there, and we've seen about a 5% growth, even during summer. Now, the number of households are giving down, but people are giving at a higher level and that's feasible, by just adjusting your recurring giving or setting that up.

Troy Pollock:

I would say, at large, the summer slump is no longer a thing so much, like you experienced when you were at Princeton. Churches, they've all shut down to be honest with you, across America. And some are

reopening, and trying to figure out what that looks like. But the summer slump is almost a misnomer now, because you can still enjoy the mountains with family, and the beach with family, but still have that revenue stream coming through even though people aren't walking through your doors.

Troy Pollock:

Yeah, that's a quick little story about the church that I'm a part of. We've seen growth, even through the summer time, of recurring giving.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's awesome. Where do you guys see the next wave adoption? As you're looking out over the next six months, what are you guys anticipating, in terms of how your client base might change, or grow, or constrict?

Troy Pollock:

We're really focusing on that middle size church.

Troy Pollock:

Late last year, in December 2019, William, we just acquired a church management software system. This is similar to a CRM in the marketplace. Because what we saw was this point solution that Pushpay was, is no longer going to be the way of the future, people want an all-in-one solution. They want to be able to check their kids in, they want to be able to offer giving, an app, also have admin dashboards on the backend system. They want to be able to track brand new members, they want to be able to follow-up with first-time attendees, so this all-in-one solution. That was a very strategic move by us, because we're going after that middle size church in America, that is definitely in need of an all-in-one solution.

Troy Pollock:

Because that's where it's going, we see that churches are going to continue adoption technology in a brand new way. We've invested a lot into combining these two solutions, so now they talk through APIs and through integrations. So that you can track that person that maybe checked in their kids for the very first time, and actually follow them along the entire journey, to see them become a leader and a giver in your church.

Troy Pollock:

We're really focusing on the mobile app, so we build church apps as well, too, that's William Vanderbloemen-centric. Your branding, your coloring, your audio, your podcast, your videos, because that's how people are engaging with church, through this at-home experience right now. So we're really focusing a lot on this customizable, personalized experience for each church. And then, the visibility and the data into their people, because it's no longer seeing them eyeball-to-eyeball every Sunday, and asking William how his kids are doing, and remember the soccer game or the softball game. Now, you've got to do it all through technology because you don't have the ability to see people in-person as much as we used to.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yeah. Well, hopefully that's just for now.

William Vanderbloemen:

We launched a new company this week, christianteams.com, that's a virtual-based search. It's limited to support roles in the church that don't necessarily require as much face-to-face interface, so we're seeing it as well. But, I do think, my big theological takeaway from virtual is if virtual really worked, Jesus would have just Zoomed it in. Why bother being born in a manger, if you could just hit Zoom and get it done that way?

Troy Pollock:

That's hilarious.

William Vanderbloemen:

There's something about face-to-face that still matters. So thankful for the way you guys are stepping in. Who'd have guessed that churches would actually come to like new ideas, because of this terrible pandemic? It's almost one of those things that somebody meant it for evil and God's using it for good.

Troy Pollock:

Thankfully.

William Vanderbloemen:

Thank you Troy, for the work you and Pushpay are doing to help churches thrive during this time. We're seeing, and maybe it's just the churches that applied for PPP, but of all the churches and faith-based organizations that have received PPP money, we interfaced with over 20% of them. We got a really good sample size and most people are saying it's within 90% of where it was this time last year. A lot of credit for that goes to how God's used you guys, and I thank you for it.

Troy Pollock:

Thank you, William. Isn't that surprising? It's fascinating to see. We thought Doomsday was going to happen when we first got into this, but through the power of digital giving and technology, it's really enabled churches to continue to receive contributions and stay afloat during this time. It just shifted from 50% digital to 50% cashing checks, to pretty much 95% now digital. They're seeing all their income come through digital.

Troy Pollock:

Thank you, it was an honor to be on this, and have this conversation. Thank you for all that you do, William, and your team there.

William Vanderbloemen:

Thanks, Troy.

Speaker 1:

Thanks for listening to our series on the State of the Church, as we reflect on lessons learned during 2020, and navigate the future of ministry together.

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