



# The Benefits of Online Small Groups

This article is written by Allen White from [ChurchLeaders.com](http://ChurchLeaders.com).

**While some people may feel forced into their groups meeting online, there are some definite benefits of online small groups. Online small groups aren't new. After all, I started my first online group on CompuServe® in 1994. They aren't new, but online small groups are next.**

Apart from the technology, there are many commonalities between online small groups and offline small groups, yet they are not exactly the same. In both types of groups, the members want to become more Christlike, seek spiritual answers, or find support and recovery. Most small groups are formed around a Bible study with a focus on applying the truth of God's Word to their lives. The members are there to deepen their relationships with each other, serve together, and reach others for Christ. Online or offline, these group purposes are very similar. How do we follow up for spiritual growth?



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There are some distinct differences, however. In an offline group, there are usually side conversations before or after the meeting. In an online group, everyone is all in one video conference, conference call, or other format. All of the conversation involves everyone. Of course, group members can discuss things offline as well.

## **Online small groups are portable.**

Group members can gather regardless of their geographical location. They can become a group even if they live in different cities, states, or countries. And, if the group members move or have to travel, the group is still available to them wherever they go.



### **Online small groups can keep snowbirds connected.**

A snowbird in the U.S. is someone who spends the summers in a northern state and the winters in a southern state. Having worked with churches both north and south throughout the years, often the arrival or departure of their snowbirds factors into their small group launches. With online groups, snowbirds can stay connected to their northern or southern group regardless of their location.

### **Online small groups are a great way for people to dip their toe into small groups.**

They might start with an online asynchronous group, like a private Facebook group, where they communicate with the group through a message board. Eventually, they may warm to the idea of meeting via audio or video. But, initially the anonymity helps them get started.

### **Online small group meetings are typically shorter than offline groups.**

There is no travel time to the group meeting or back home afterward. Groups can meet at various times of day. Group members may want to meet a little later in the evening after their children have gone to bed. That takes care of the childcare issue. The only downside is that members will have to bake their own brownies.

### **Online small groups shouldn't be limited to meeting online only.**

Groups can meet offline for socials, service projects, or open houses to invite new members if they live in the same geographic area. If group members have only known each other online, then the first offline meeting could be a little awkward, but they will resolve that awkwardness quickly. They know each other!

Some people complain of Zoom fatigue. We've heard this a lot during the coronavirus pandemic. Part of me wonders if Zoom fatigue is the replacement for the old "I don't have time for a small group" excuse. The good news is that online groups can meet on video platforms, audio platforms, or asynchronous message boards. If members just can't look at another computer, they could talk on the phone. If they are tired of video conferencing, then they could write back and forth in a private Facebook group. Most people are on Facebook anyway; why not use it for their spiritual growth?

The coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying quarantine showed churches that there is a whole world they can reach online. An online group can provide community to people who participate in the church's online worship services. Several ministries like Celebrate Recovery® at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, and the Alpha® course at Holy Trinity Brompton in London, England, have reported increased participation from a more diverse group of people once they put their groups online.

Whether an online small group is a necessity or an opportunity for you, you will discover a new way to serve others and grow with your online group. Online small groups are not perfect, but then again, no small group is perfect—online or offline.

