



STATE OF CHURCH TECH 2023

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FOREWORD BY **ERWIN RAPHAEL MCMANUS**

The Church has always had a revolutionary relationship with technology. Most of the time we hear about how the Church is resistant to change and to the modernization of technology. Though there is a lot of truth to this, it is only one part of the story. Throughout history the Church has been at the epicenter of technological change and advancement.

The written text is an early technological innovation and both Judaism and Christianity made it normative and even essential to read. The Gutenberg press was a revolutionary technology that was designed and embraced largely due to its ability to rapidly reproduce the Bible. The expansion of the Church allowed for technologies like microphones, sound systems, stage lighting, even smoke machines, to become common features of the everyday lives of millions. The Church was at the forefront of radio and television and livestreaming.

Another technological advancement that has benefited the Church so powerfully has been Pushpay. Pushpay has revolutionized how followers of Jesus can use technology to support the movement of Jesus through the Church. One of the great challenges that the Church is faced with in the modern world is the realization that even the most committed followers of Christ do not attend every week. This has much to do with the nature of work, family, travel, and discretionary leisure time.

One of the incredible solutions to the significant financial dilemma the Church faces is that Pushpay has made it possible for people that do not attend every week to still give, and now with the addition of Resi, enables people to participate via livestream when in-person isn't possible. This is one of the best ways of seeing how technology can enhance the Church and advance the movement of Jesus.

The Church will also be a pioneer in the metaverse and whatever technologies are yet to come.

But not all the Church has had that mindset.

Much of the Church will lag behind the revolutionary techniques to come, fearing their effect on the sacred and spiritual. But there is always a remnant of the Church that leads the way, that breaks new ground, that takes the risks for the rest of us. They will at first be seen as renegade and even worldly. Yet the day will come when their innovation and adaptability will be the saving grace of the Church.

Despite the proven utility of technology for churches, many of us may harbor fears that we will be replaced by Xs and Os. A study by Princeton University on the future of technology and AI provides some insight into the future of the relationship between technology and humanity. Their conclusions were that technology and AI will replace virtually every aspect of human skills and abilities except for one. Technology and AI, no matter how advanced, will never replace the power and effect of human communication. In effect, it can never replace you. It's a tool and a gift from God that complements your authenticity and humanity and enhances the power of your ministry.

This report shows us just how important technology can be to the Church and its mission.

Erwin McManus is the author of *MIND SHIFT* and the Founder of *MOSAIC*. His recent work includes the creation of the masterclass series, *The Art of Communication* and the *Seven Frequencies of Communication*. To access a free episode focused on the power of language, visit [The Art of Communication](#).





INTRODUCTION

The foundation of the Church has always been people. It's a community of believers who worship, explore and expand their faith, and support one another in their spiritual journeys.

Of course, a church is also a physical location where those people can meet—but it's never necessarily been about *where* people meet, simply *that* they meet. In a sense, the four walls of a church are a tool, used to foster faith, connection, and belonging in the community.

And tools evolve over time.

In recent decades, churches worldwide have embraced technology's power to complement in-person activities, by enhancing a ministry's reach and its ability to serve communities. In this era of smartphones and screens, digital solutions are powerful tools to forward the mission of the Church.

But the world moves fast. Church tech is advancing quicker than ever, with new upgrades and features announced almost daily. And on the flip side, the wants and needs of churches are constantly shifting as they discover which tools are aiding their ministry, what they can live without, and which features they want to see in the future. How can a church leader hope to keep up?

That's the motivation behind our 2023 State of Church Technology report. This second annual study identifies the priorities, concerns, and expectations of church leaders, so that like-minded ministries can explore the latest digital trends and see data-driven insights for the future of church tech.

Some statistics didn't change much over the past year. 94% of churches still maintain that technology is important to their mission, and 53% define their ministry as "progressive" when it comes to technology (Figure 0.1 and 0.2). As you'll see in the coming pages, many of the digital tools churches have come to rely on in recent years will remain important to their ministries moving forward.

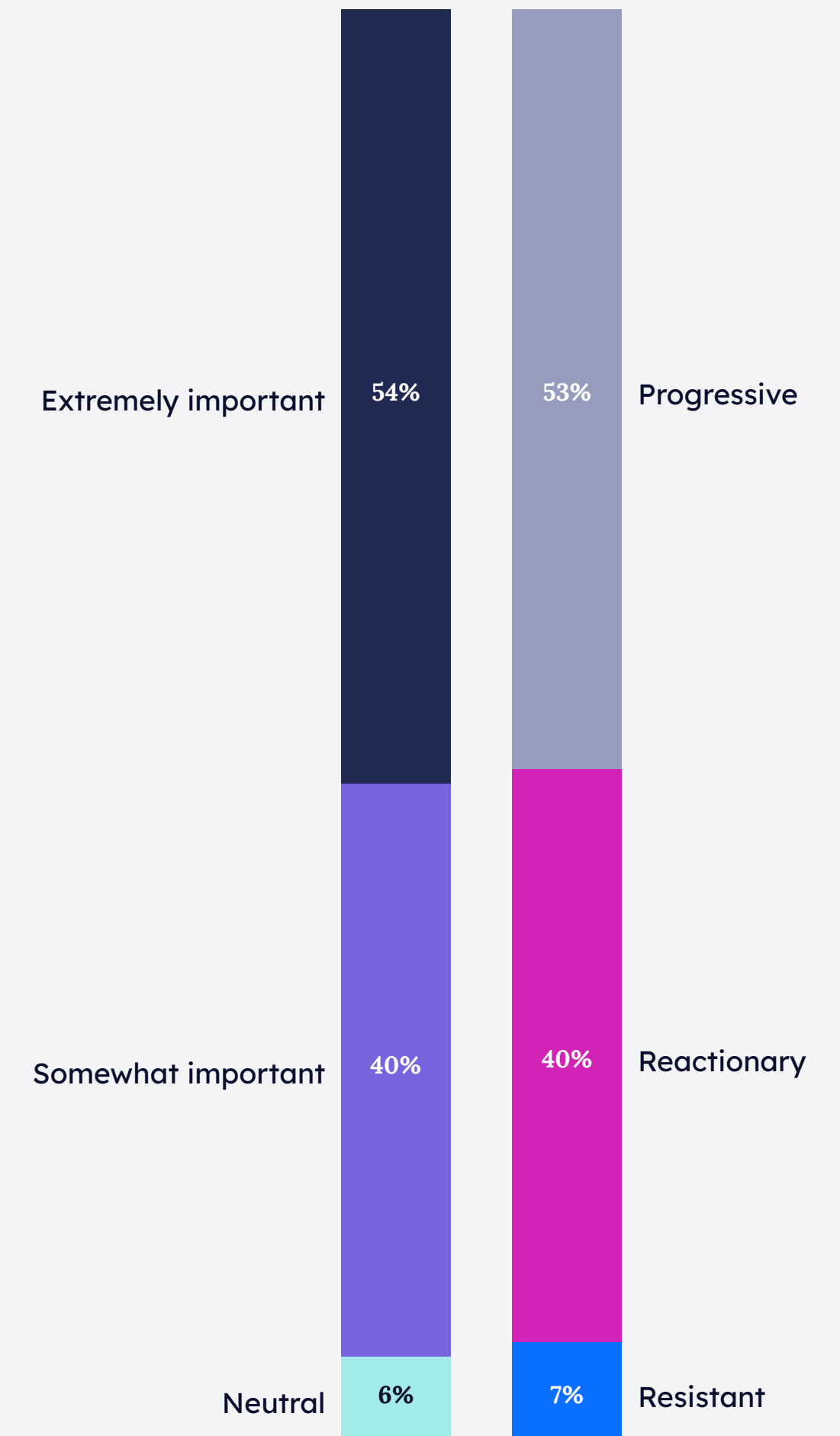
Other data, however, points to significant shifts in the mindsets of church leaders. Decision makers have never been more savvy with technology, nor more knowledgeable about what they're looking for from providers. Change is on the horizon for the Church, in more ways than one.

But two things will never change: the mission of the Church, and the honor we feel at Pushpay to play a small role in supporting its great work. Our hope is that the following data and insights will help all of us chart a course forward together, so we can continue to build community, connection, and belonging in 2023 and beyond.

FIGURE 0.1
Importance of technology in achieving church's mission



FIGURE 0.2
Church's approach to technology



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The second annual State of Church Technology report is derived from a September/October 2022 survey. We reached over twenty-two hundred church leaders from every corner of the United States—an 11% increase in participation from the previous year.

Every respondent either described themselves as a ‘decision maker’ or ‘influencer’ regarding technology purchases within their church. These results reflect the views of the leaders who are choosing if, when, and what tech their ministry will adopt. Notably, 60% of this year’s respondents were new to the survey, having not participated in last year’s report.

The churches included represent ministries of every size (Figure 0.3), across all branches of Christianity (Figure 0.4). Roughly two-thirds of the participating churches operate on an annual budget of less than \$1 million (Figure 0.5), and they commit widely varying amounts of that budget to technology each year (Figure 0.6).

FIGURE 0.3
Weekly Attendance

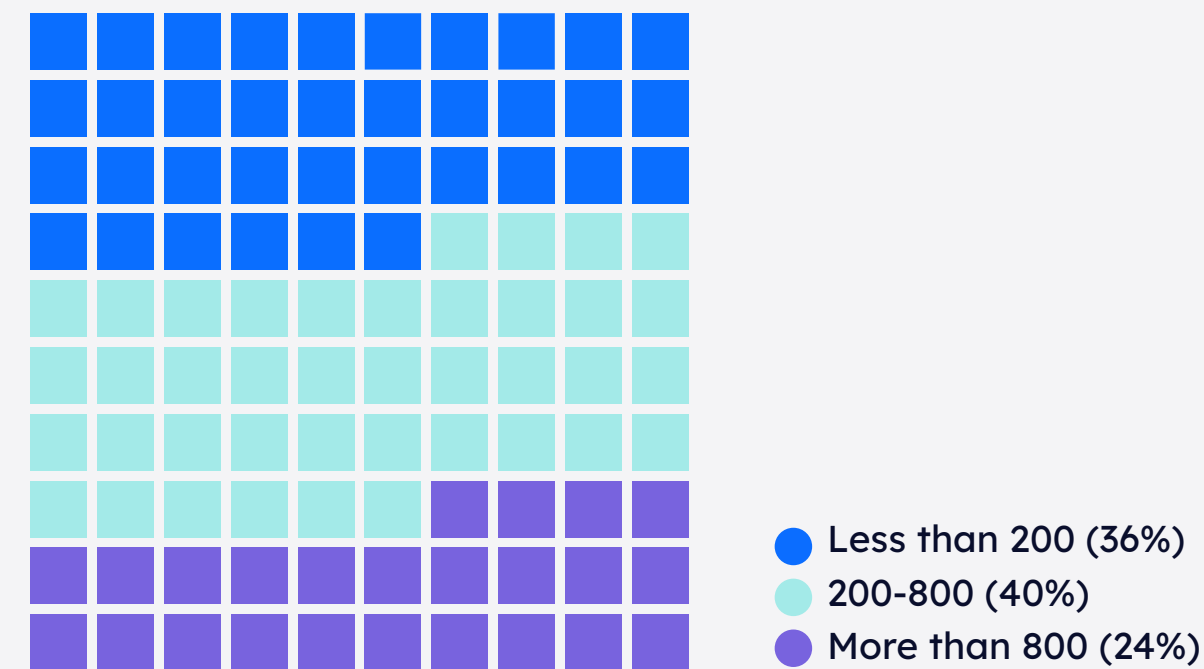


FIGURE 0.5
Operating Budget

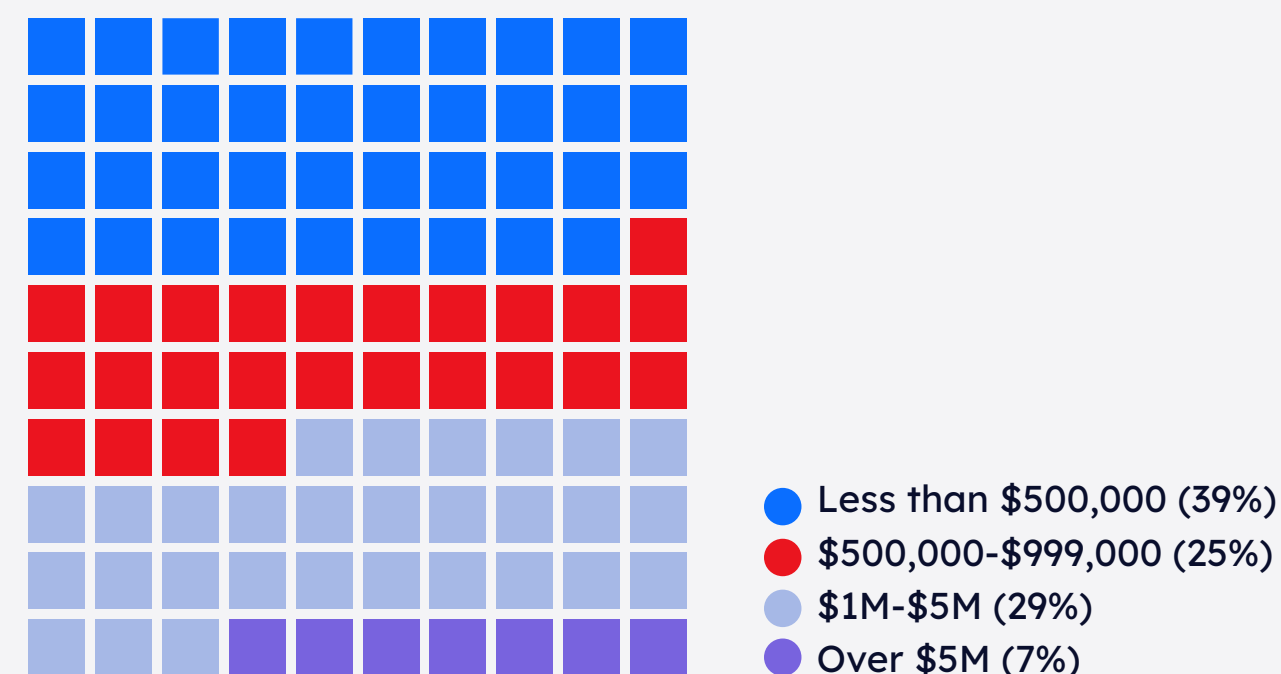


FIGURE 0.4
Denomination

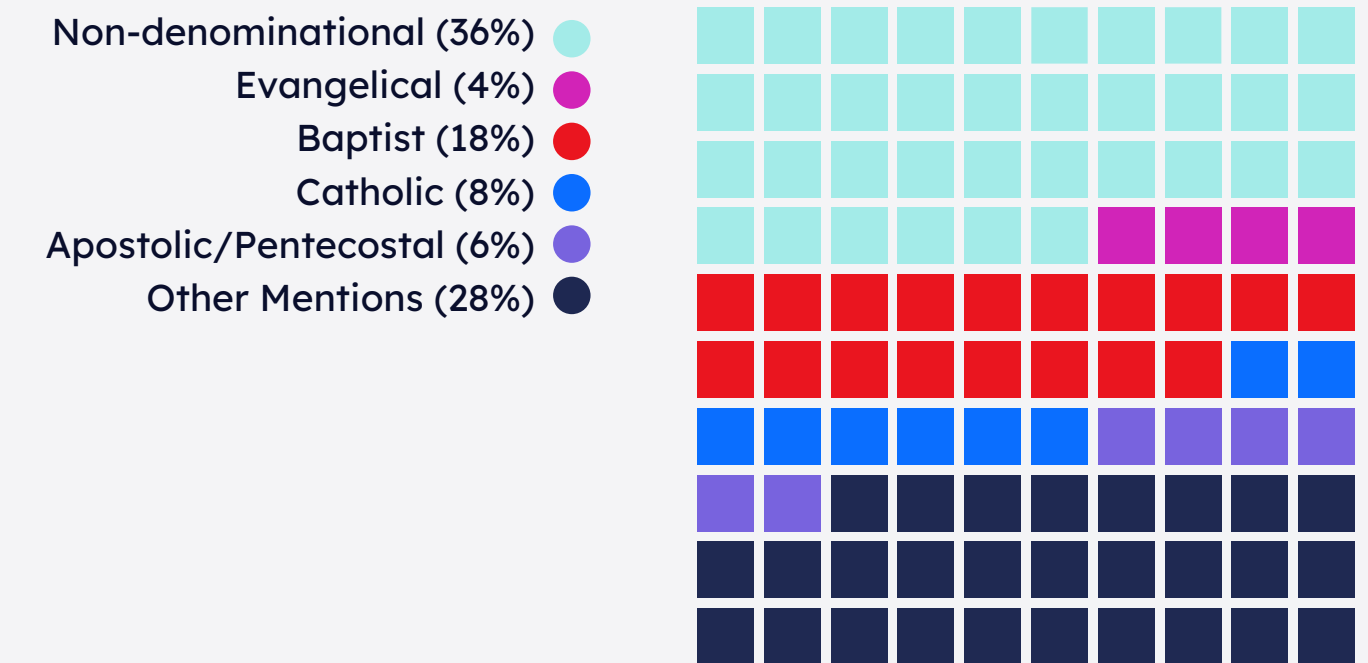
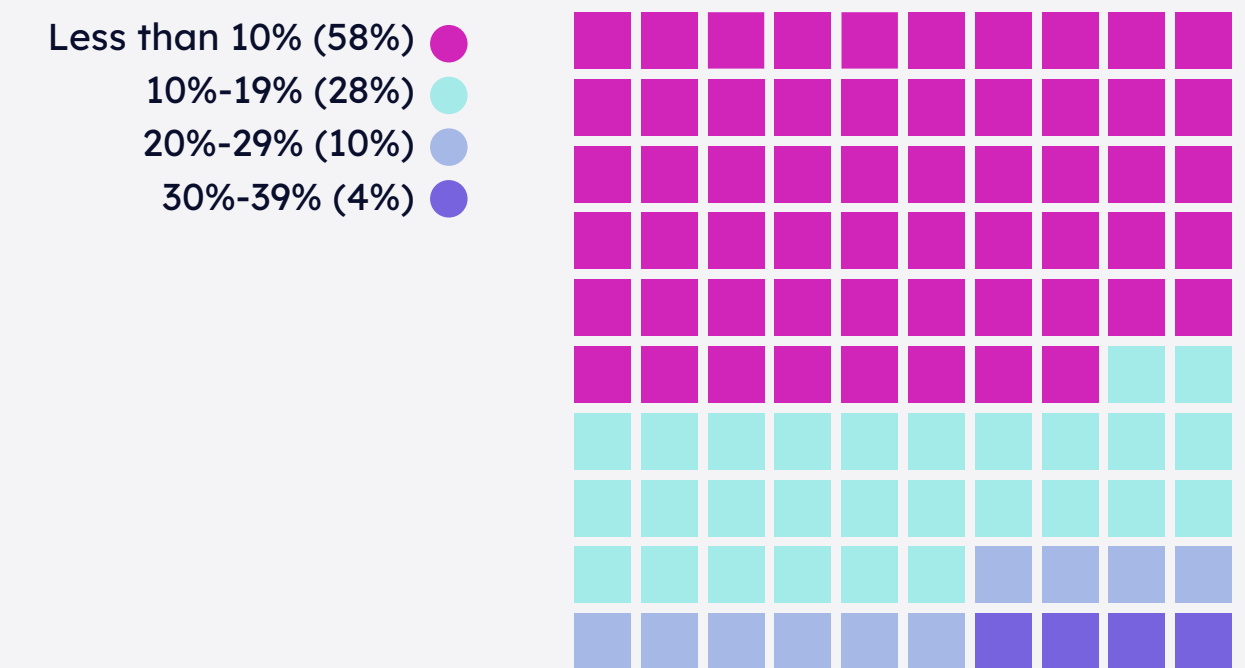


FIGURE 0.6
Percentage of budget allocated for tech

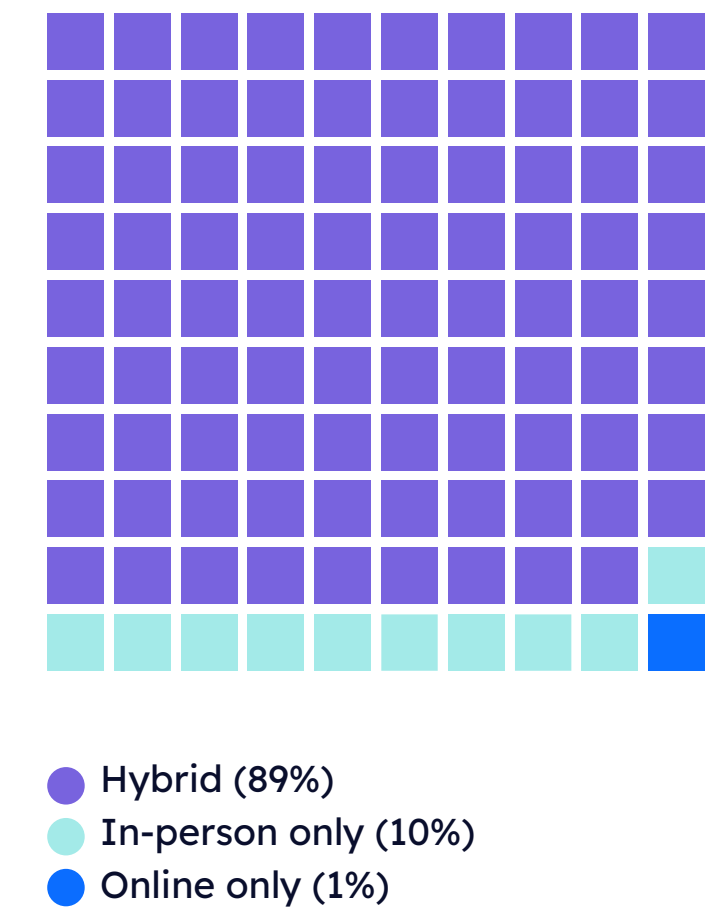




HYBRID
IS STILL
FLYING
HIGH

The pandemic rush to adopt a mixed model of church may have been born of necessity, but the vast majority of churches are sticking with hybrid in the foreseeable future.

FIGURE 1.1
What types of worship services do you currently offer?



In 2022, fully 89% of churches employed a hybrid model, with only 10% reporting as in-person only (Figure 1.1).

Interestingly, when asked to speculate on how their church might operate one year from now, that hybrid figure slides down to 81%—but online only and metaverse spike upward significantly. So the lower hybrid figure doesn't necessarily mean churches are abandoning digital church, but rather that they're considering new tech-driven opportunities.

The spirit of hybrid church is leveraging technology to increase flexibility, adaptability, and inclusivity in ministry. Out of the myriad of tools churches are using to further their mission, a few solutions have become especially popular...

LIVESTREAMING

The number of churches livestreaming worship services remained steady from last year at 89%.

Perhaps not surprisingly, churches that consider themselves “progressive” with technology are far more likely to take advantage of livestreaming—and they’re overwhelmingly happy with the experience. When given a list of 19 popular church tech solutions and asked to select which they were satisfied with, respondents ranked livestreaming worship and classes second, only behind online giving.

There also appears to be a trend emerging: of all the churches currently livestreaming, 91% use social media, but nearly half embed streams on their website, and over a third are using event hosting platforms and/or a mobile app player (Figure 1.2).

But when you look at the technology churches consider strategically important in the future, social media ranks lower than livestreaming by several percentage points. And sure enough, when churches that currently livestream were asked where they’re planning to stream moving forward, less than half said social media (Figure 1.2).

This strongly suggests that those 89% of churches currently livestreaming—who are “progressive” with tech and overwhelmingly satisfied with the experience—will be leaning even more on custom video players moving forward.

FIGURE 1.2 Where is your church currently livestreaming worship services?

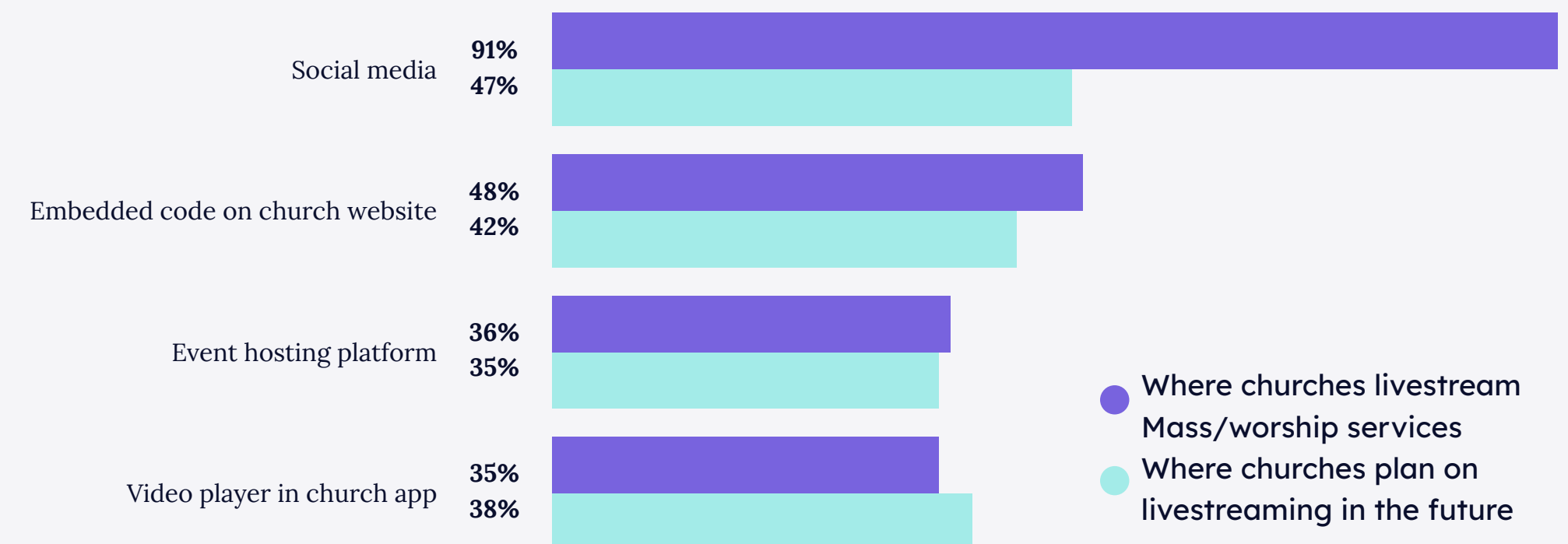


FIGURE 1.3
Popularity of online giving

TOOL MOST SATISFIED WITH	
Online mobile giving	1st
Mass/Service presentation software	2nd
Tool to conduct background checks	3rd

MOST POPULAR APP USES	
Tithing/Financial giving	1st
Calendar	2nd
Content	3rd

MOST POPULAR TECH PRODUCTS	
Social media	1st
Online mobile giving	2nd
Church/Donor mgmt software	3rd

MOBILE GIVING AND APPS

Every figure across the report reinforces the continued importance of online mobile giving. It ranks second behind social media as the most used solution among churches, tops the list of tools ministries find most satisfying, and is by far the most popular feature for mobile church apps (Figure 1.3).

While the number of churches using a mobile app didn't change significantly in the past year—a small slide from 71% to 68%—there may be a growing trend of churches taking fuller advantage of tools within their app (Figure 1.4). For years, giving dominated mobile usage, but now churches seem to be leaning on several other features as well.

Mobile apps ranked fifth in the report in future strategic importance for churches. If churches and their users are coming to depend more and more on their apps, they may be looking for expanded functionality in the future.

FIGURE 1.4
How do you use your mobile church app?



LOOKING FORWARD

Hybrid churches are committed to their digital toolkits. They've discovered the power of livestreaming, mobile apps, and other solutions to propel their ministries. But these proven tools are constantly evolving, as are the innovative ways churches and their congregations leverage them.

To learn more about how churches are using digital tools like these for a more effective ministry, check out our ebook ["Ministry is Hard: 3 Ways to Use Technology to Encourage Meaningful Worship Experiences"](#).





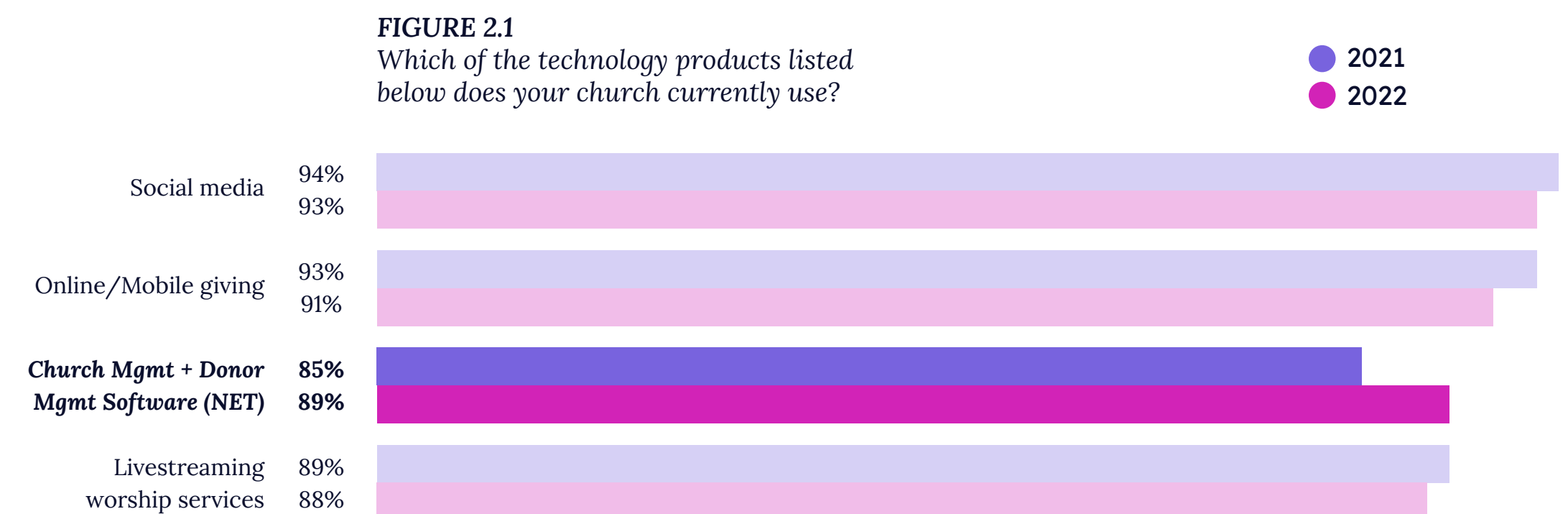
A TECH
RECKONING
IS COMING

If experience is the best teacher, then churches received a masterclass in the need for technology over the past few years. Now they're looking to apply the lessons learned from the pandemic, and are polishing their digital toolkits for the future.

CHURCH-SPECIFIC TOOLS

Unsurprisingly, now that the majority of COVID restrictions are behind us, churches are using slightly fewer digital tools than the previous year; the mean number of tools employed across all churches fell from 7.21 to 6.99.

That trend continues when churches were asked which specific tools they're currently using (Figure 2.1). Every solution's utilization remained equal to last year, or fell by a few percentage points—except Church and Donor Management software, which actually jumped up.



Churches' enthusiasm for consolidated Church Management Software (ChMS) and donor platforms not only accounts for the aforementioned drop in tools across the board, but also signals their priorities: instead of a myriad of tools, they want an all-in-one solution built specifically for ministry.

This meshes with other data throughout the report. When asked what factors are “extremely important” when considering new tech, “best software to solve the problem” ranks high on the list—yet 86% of churches aren't interested in increasing their number of digital tools. Leaders are signaling a migration toward specialized, streamlined, purpose-built tools.

86% of churches aren't interested in increasing their number of digital tools

FIGURE 2.2 Current Satisfaction vs. Strategic Importance for the Future

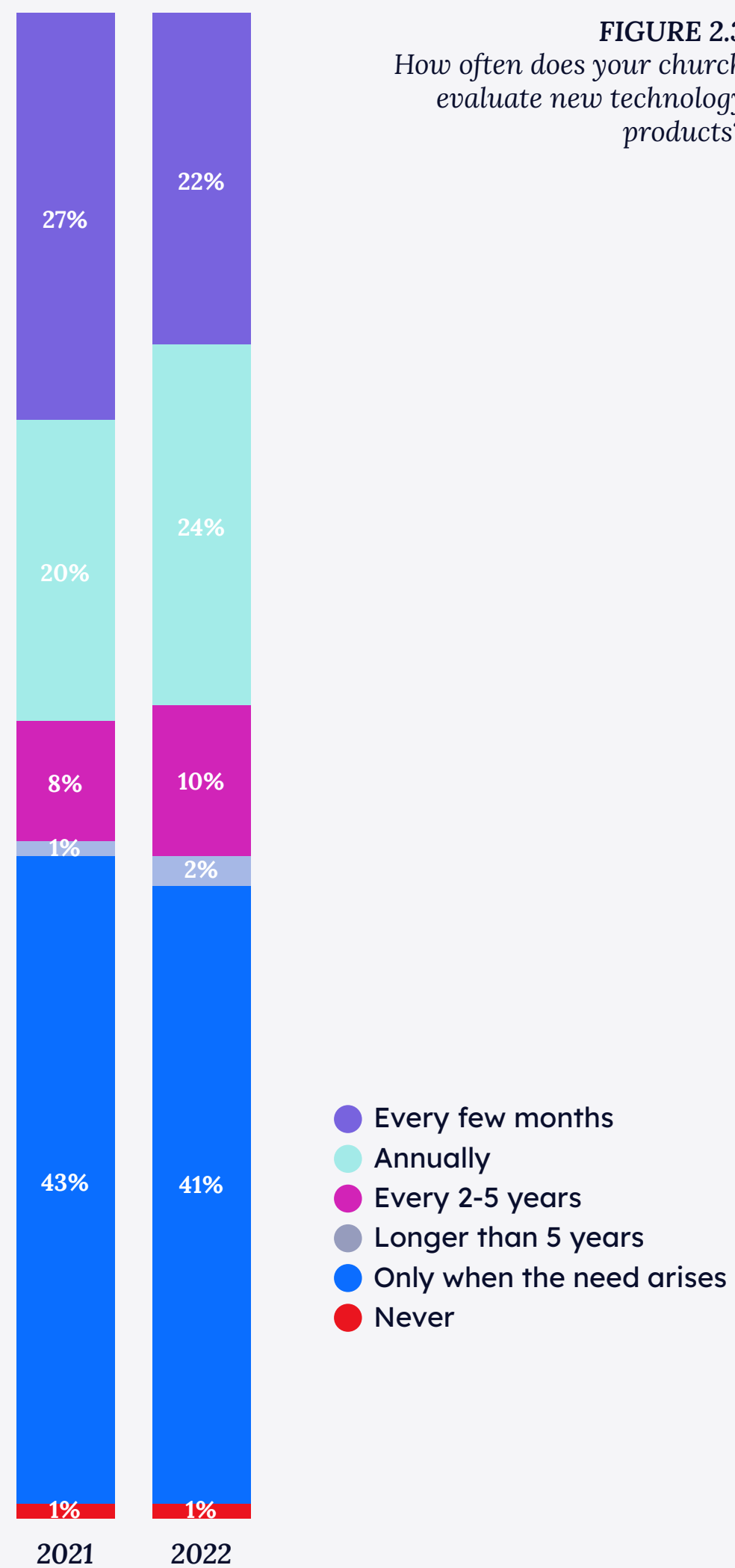
	IMPORTANCE	SATISFACTION
Ministry/Volunteer scheduling	2nd	4th
Tool to conduct background checks	3rd	3rd
Small group/Bible study resources	8th	7th
Tools in multiple languages	4th	18th
Marketing through geotargeting	9th	17th

FEATURES OF THE FUTURE

If you compare the user satisfaction of a feature with that feature's strategic importance for the future, the rankings generally match up (Figure 2.2). Tools like background checks, volunteer scheduling, and small groups follow this pattern.

Other features, however, break radically from that trend. For instance, “Tools in multiple languages” ranks dead last in satisfaction, yet decision makers rank that feature fourth in future importance, ahead of even mobile apps. The same discrepancy holds true for marketing through geotargeting.

This is significant because it shows that, even if churches are not totally satisfied with the current state of a product, tech-savvy leaders are confidently identifying the digital features that will be mission-critical moving forward, and are weaving those tools into their vision for the future.



SMARTER SHOPPERS

Multiple data points in the report suggest that churches are making more informed tech decisions.

When asked how often their team is evaluating new technology products, both those reporting “annually” and “every two to five years” rose, while “only when the need arises” dropped significantly (Figure 2.3). Note that the drop in “every few months” is expected, because churches’ need to rapidly adopt and re-evaluate tech during the pandemic has now ended.

Additionally, churches are placing increased emphasis on digital security (Figure 2.4). More leaders than ever are having open conversations about security with their congregations, and they’re increasingly factoring platform security into their tech purchase decisions.

FIGURE 2.4
Security Concerns on the Rise

Leaders who are discussing security with congregations

+10%

Churches saying IT security concerns **did not** prevent them from upgrading digital tools

-27%

96%

of churches say security and data protection are important when considering tech purchases

LOOKING FORWARD

Churches are still relying on the tried-and-true tech solutions of the past—particularly a fully integrated ChMS—but refining their toolkits is more front of mind than ever.

Leaders have improved their knowledge of the tech space, but there are still strategies to employ and pitfalls to avoid when exploring the market, making the ebook [“Church Tech Buyer’s Guide”](#) a must-have when considering new technology.





WHAT'S
HOLDING
CHURCHES
BACK?

Church leaders have never been more well-informed and passionate about technology, but uncertainty about the future of their ministries is slowing forward progress.

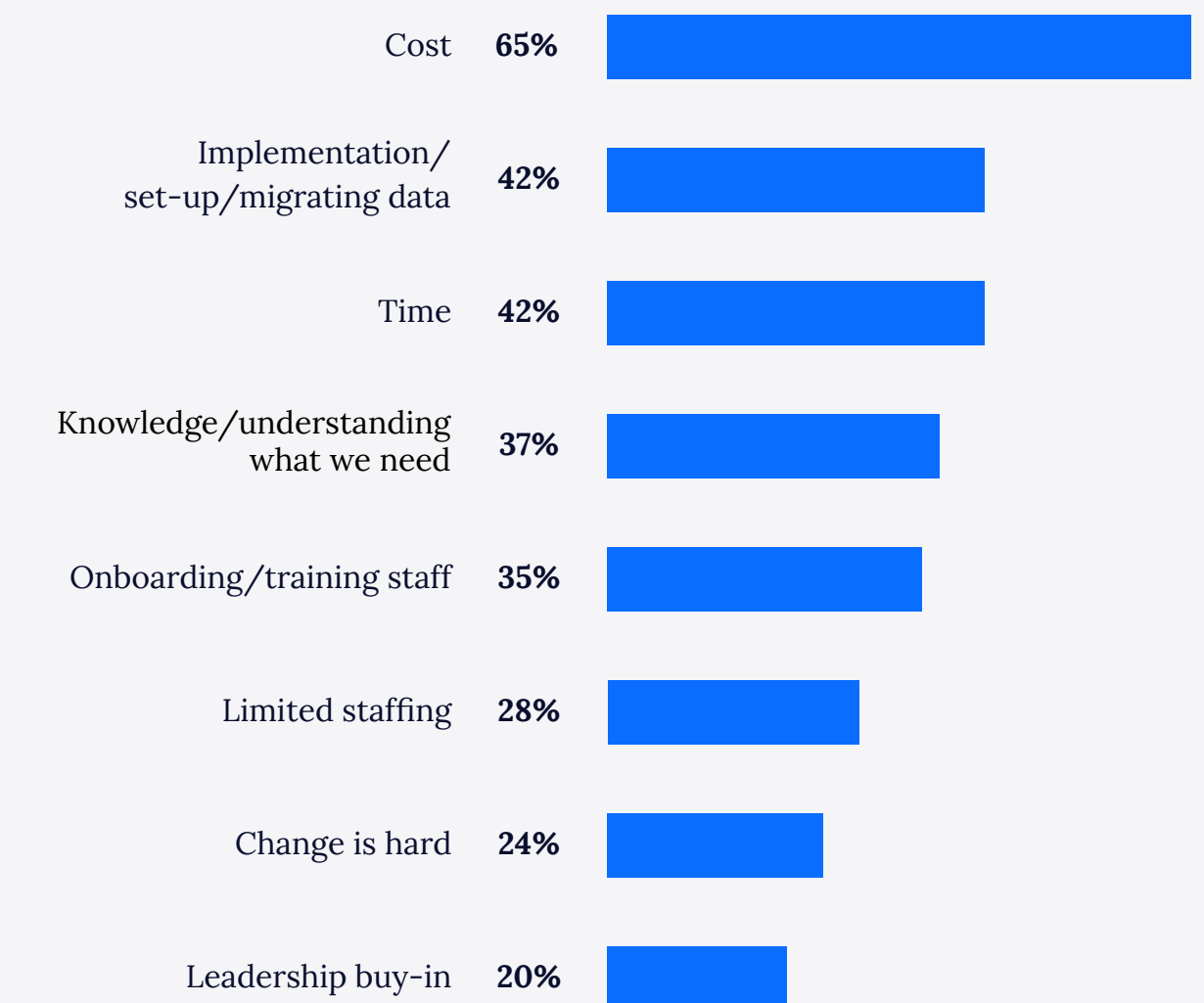
COST IS KING

Once again, church decision makers overwhelmingly report cost as their biggest obstacle when adopting technology, by a 23% margin above the next largest concern (Figure 3.1)—and that dynamic is intensifying.

Of the top five factors considered “extremely important” when considering new tech, only price was judged more important versus last year. Notably, further down that list, there was also a large uptick in the importance of usage-based pricing.

One possible explanation for this trend is the economy at large. At the time of the survey, churches were just emerging from a pandemic that likely strained their balance sheets, and they may be buckling down for an anticipated recession in the near future.

FIGURE 3.1
What are the three biggest obstacles to adopting a new technology product at your church?



UNCLEAR DIRECTION

Another question mark for churches seems to be what the future of their church will look like.

Respondents were asked, “What types of worship services do you think your church will be offering 12

months from now?” (Figure 3.2) Surprisingly, instead of selecting a single answer, hundreds of respondents selected two or more options. This indicates significant uncertainty about what their ministries may look like in a year’s time.

That level of doubt hampers a church’s ability to make informed tech decisions. Adopting new digital tools should be grounded in a vision of the future—but at this inflection point, that may be difficult for many ministries.



A MORE PERSONAL TOUCH

Outside of cost, leaders continue to report that time and implementation weigh heavily on decision makers’ minds when they’re considering new digital tools (Figure 3.1).

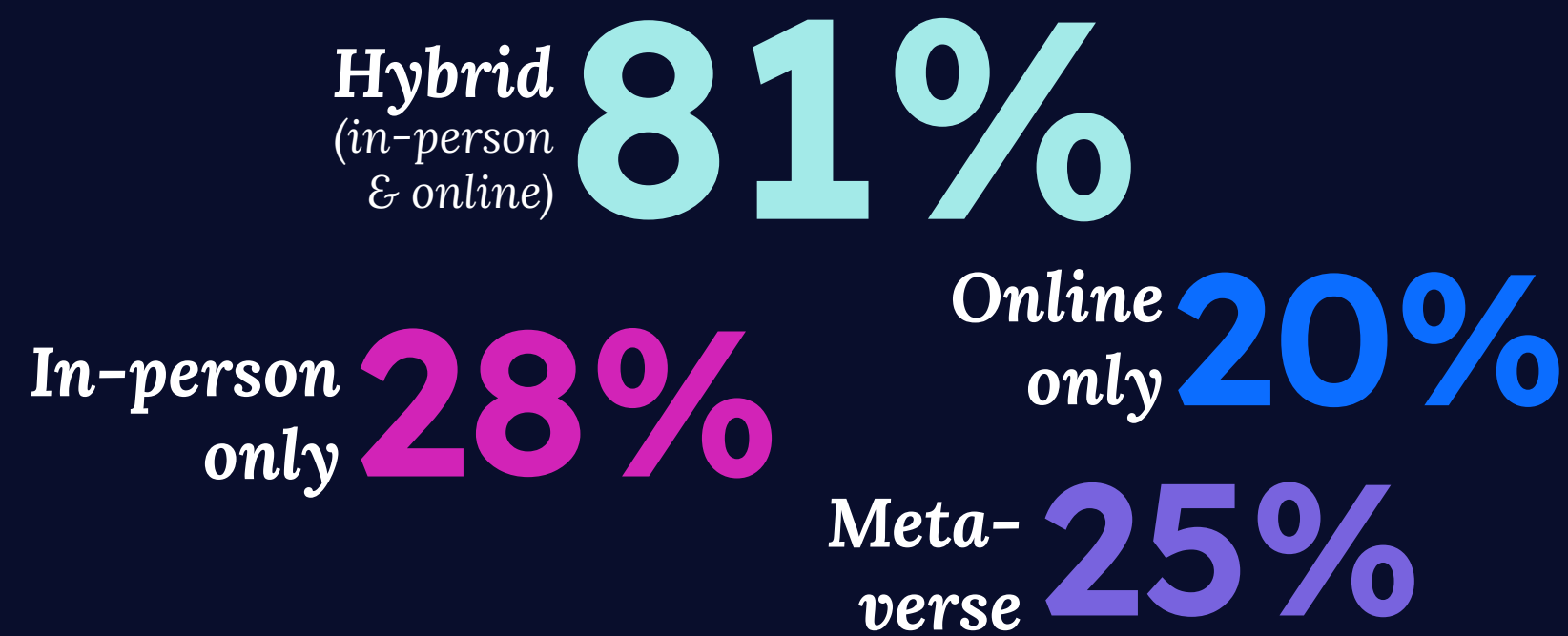
However, there is a parallel trend this year: provider support is more important than ever.

On the list of “extremely important factors” when considering new tech, ease of use remains on top by a wide margin—but a help desk, dedicated support person, and self-service help center from the provider all trended up from last year (Figure 3.3).

This affirms that, even with

all the tech proficiency churches gained during the pandemic, tech knowledge and the need to train staff remain huge obstacles to adopting tech (ranked fourth and fifth on Figure 3.1, respectively). Therefore providers must establish themselves as trusted partners and advisors moving forward.

FIGURE 3.2 What types of worship services do you think your church will be offering 12 months from now?



LOOKING FORWARD

During this time of unprecedented financial constraints for churches, leaders will likely be more particular than ever when adopting tech. When they commit to a provider, they will expect top-tier digital security and customer support to get them up and running as soon as possible.

Churches can set themselves up for success by identifying their digital wants and needs before speaking with providers; our blog [“How to Reevaluate Your Church’s Tech Toolkit”](#) is your guide for doing just that.



CONCLUSION

If the pandemic was responsible for accelerating the mass adoption of church technology, the next few years will be defined by refinement. Leaders are polishing their approach to digital tools, honing their priorities to help their church thrive—and, more clearly than ever, they're communicating their wants and needs to providers.

It's an exciting time for churches and tech providers alike. This report is just the beginning of our journey together to explore the ideas, strategies, tools, and features that will propel ministries into the future, so that together we can continue to build community, connection, and belonging.

CONTINUE THE **CONVERSATION**

Join Pushpay's State of Church Tech webinar to hear Matt Engel, Executive Director of Ministry Innovation at Gloom, and Randy Deal, Lead Director at Rock Point Church in Arizona, break down the data and trends from the report that are critical for churches to consider when plotting their own tech roadmaps.

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