

5 Lessons about Church Giving that Amazon Can Teach Us

Way back in the mid-1990s there were a lot of companies gunning to be the leader in “online retailing.” (Who remembers [Pets.com](http://pets.com)?) Amazon was an early leader. Since then, it has cemented its place as the “everything store” by offering a massive selection of items that are delivered at a shockingly quick rate.

Google is the search engine for knowledge. **Amazon is the search engine for purchasing.**

In fact, 44% of all online shoppers go directly to Amazon to make purchases. [\[ref\]](#) When people give, our churches’ digital giving interfaces are being compared to Amazon’s. We need to learn about how this e-commerce retailer handles their customers and apply those lessons to our donors.

- **Reduce Friction** // Have you ever noticed how easy it is to purchase something on Amazon? Over the years, they have focused on reducing the friction in the online shopping experience to encourage more people to spend with them. It’s beautiful to watch all the various pieces working together. Amazon Prime removes the “added shipping cost” from the “shopping cart” so we don’t slow down at check-out. They store multiple credit cards so you can decide where you want to charge individual purchases. The [Amazon Dash](#) buttons allow you to push a button and have common items ordered and shipped to you. The latest tool, [Amazon Echo](#), literally allows you to call out orders from your home and they’ll ship them to you! Is your online giving system complex and hard to follow? Are you asking people to go through extra hoops that add to your convenience but to their annoyance? Is it easy to find how to give to your church on your website?
- **Send More Emails** // If you are a regular Amazon shopper, you get a tremendous amount of email from them. Every time you order, you receive a confirmation email, a “your order is shipped email” and an “order arrived” email. You also receive regular marketing emails about categories of products they believe you might be interested in. If you browse certain items but don’t purchase them, Amazon will send you “recall” emails to bring you back to the site to purchase the item you were thinking about. You might not like all this email ... but it works. It drives the behavior they are looking for. Most churches don’t send enough email. They are afraid to junk up inboxes. I’m not advocating sending the same amount as Amazon — just yesterday I received 8 emails and I didn’t purchase anything! — but I am saying churches need to send more. Obviously an acknowledgment email ... but what about monthly statements rather than waiting for quarterly ones? Emails that show the impact of giving, or ones that show how people can set up a new aspect of online giving? These may move people from regular “one-time gifts” to “recurring donations.” Send more emails ... it’s okay.
- **Invest in Long-Term Solutions** // One of the things I admire about Amazon is their commitment to investing in long-term customer satisfaction rather than just chasing short-term trends. They have steadily sped up the delivery of their products over the years, reducing the time they call “click to ship” from days when they started to minutes in some instances today. This is an impressive feat for a company with 244 million

customers. [\[ref\]](#) Investing in your digital giving solution is wise over the long haul. People are moving closer toward this approach than traditional donor channels from the past. It might take you a while to get it right, but people will be using this system for years. Gather your team and start working on this for your church. It's not a short-term fad but a long-term shift that you need a solution for.

- **Don't Miss Mobile** // The Amazon app is a beautiful experience. It has a UPC scanner where you can walk into traditional "bricks and mortar" stores, scan items and compare the cost to purchase it on Amazon. I've purchased many items over the years after looking at them in the store and then buying them online. Mobile is the way people increasingly interact with the web. Your site needs to be "mobile optimized" so it works cleanly on a wide variety of phones, tablets and other interfaces that people carry around. In fact, your digital giving solution really should be seen from a "mobile first" perspective because all the trendlines are pointing toward that being where most people will interact with you.
- **Be Customer "Obsessed"** // Amazon is crazy-obsessed with making people happy. They work hard to ensure customers love their service more than any other online store. It's [the first of their fourteen values](#) and it permeates how they talk about and live out their mission. We know that when people give to your church, they are giving to what the Lord is doing — but sometimes it can feel like we ignore our donors out of a false sense of not wanting to show favoritism. Everyone who chooses to give anything to your church is vital to your mission. They are as important in making your services happen as that core volunteer who is "first in, last out" every Sunday. We go out of our way to treat volunteers with love and care ... we need to do the same with our donors. On top of that, some of them have the spiritual gift of giving and, like other gifts, we want to see it exercised well within our churches. If we ignore people who give, we'll miss the opportunity to develop those gifts!

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