

BUYER'S GUIDE

What to buy, and when.

A guide to church AV gear in three tiers, from getting on air to a setup built to last. It won't tell you which brand to buy. It tells you what to look for, so you can choose well in your own shops, at your own budget.

What this is

Every part of a livestream setup, sound through screens, with clear guidance for three levels of spend. Priorities, specs to look for, and what to avoid.

Who it's for

Anyone deciding where a church's next bit of AV money should go. No prior gear knowledge assumed. Read top to bottom, or jump to the area you're buying for.

Spend on the right thing, in the right order.

Free to copy for your church

A church AV gear guide • Edition 1
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The three tiers

Start. The least it takes to get on air with clean sound and a steady picture.

Build. More reliable, better quality, fewer things that fail mid-service.

Invest. Robust and able to grow. Multiple cameras, backups, built to last.

You don't need the top tier to be good. A well-run Start setup beats a badly-run Invest one, every single week.

PART 1 • BEFORE YOU SPEND

1 Four rules before you buy anything

These four decide more than any single purchase. Get them right and cheap gear goes far. Get them wrong and expensive gear disappoints.

1

Spend on sound first

Bad sound loses people faster than bad video. Someone will forgive a soft picture, but they'll click away from a service they can't hear clearly. If you only have money for one area, make it sound.

2

Reliability over features

A service cannot crash halfway through. A simple setup that works every week beats a clever one that fails once a month. Buy the boring, dependable option over the exciting, fragile one.

3

Wired over wireless

For anything that matters, a cable beats a signal through the air. Wired internet, wired mics, wired connections. Wireless is a convenience that fails at the worst moment.

4

Buy what you can run

Gear your team can't operate on a tired Sunday doesn't help anyone. Buy for the volunteers you actually have, not the trained crew you wish you had.

2 How to read this guide

A few things to know before the lists, so they're useful to you wherever you are and whatever you can spend.

Three tiers, not one right answer

Each area is split into Start, Build and Invest. They stack: Build assumes you have the Start basics, Invest assumes Build. Find the tier that matches your budget and your team, and start there. You can climb later.

Capability, not brand names

This guide names no products, on purpose. The good ones change, and what's on the shelf differs from country to country. So instead of a brand, you get the thing to look for: the spec, the feature, the capability. Take that to your own shops and choose from what's there.

No prices, also on purpose

Prices move fast and vary hugely by country and currency. Any number printed here would be wrong within a year, and wrong for half the people reading. Map each tier to your own budget, and price the described items locally.

Read this as a map, not a shopping receipt. It shows you what each area needs and the order to spend in. The exact products, and what they cost, you'll fill in where you are.

PART 2 · THE AREAS, TIER BY TIER

3 Sound

Spend here first. If you take one thing from the four rules, it's this. Clean sound is the difference between a service people stay with and one they leave.

● Start

- ☐ One good mic on the person speaking
- ☐ A simple, clean way to get that voice into the stream
- ☐ One clear voice beats a full band mixed badly

● Build

- ☐ A small mixer or interface with a few inputs
- ☐ A separate output that feeds the stream on its own
- ☐ Wired mics over cheap wireless

● Invest

- ☐ A full desk with a dedicated broadcast mix or matrix out
- ☐ Reliable wireless with managed frequencies
- ☐ Proper monitoring for the person mixing

Avoid the camera's built-in mic and the cheapest wireless. A camera mic hears the room, not the message, and bargain wireless drops out at the worst moment. Nothing sinks a stream faster than sound people have to strain to follow.

4 Video

Good enough video, held steady, beats fancy video that wobbles or fails. Buy stability before you buy resolution.

● Start

- ☐ One camera with a clean output, on a solid tripod
- ☐ A recent phone on a sturdy mount can be a real camera
- ☐ One locked, well-lit shot is enough to begin

● Build

- ☐ A dedicated camera with a clean output, no menus in the picture
- ☐ A device to bring that picture into the computer
- ☐ A second angle for variety

● Invest

- ☐ Two or three cameras with matched settings
- ☐ A switcher to cut between them cleanly
- ☐ Robust mounts, not the lightest tripod on the shelf

Avoid a camera that shows its menus or a record icon on the output, and mounts too flimsy to stay still. A clean, steady picture at lower resolution always beats a sharp one that wobbles or has icons burned across it.

5 Streaming and connection

This is where a service goes down mid-message if it's weak. Reliability first, and everything that matters on a wire.

● Start

- ☐ A computer that can run streaming software
- ☐ A wired internet connection with enough upload speed
- ☐ Test it under real load before Sunday

● Build

- ☐ A machine that does nothing but stream
- ☐ Power protection, so a flicker doesn't kill the service
- ☐ A backup way to stream from a phone if the main path fails

● Invest

- ☐ A hardware encoder or a robust dedicated machine
- ☐ A business connection with a backup route
- ☐ Battery-backed power on everything critical

Avoid streaming over wifi for anything important, and one machine doing slides, recording, email and the stream at once. Give the stream its own reliable, wired path and let nothing else share it.

6 Lighting

A face the camera can see clearly is worth more than any camera upgrade. Light the person, softly, from the front.

● Start

- ☐ Use the light the room already has
- ☐ Move the speaker out of shadow
- ☐ Get bright windows out from behind them

● Build

- ☐ A couple of soft, even lights on the front of the stage
- ☐ Aimed at the speaker's face, not the backdrop
- ☐ Soft light over harsh

● Invest

- ☐ A simple stage wash designed for camera
- ☐ Even light wherever the speaker moves
- ☐ Faces lit consistently across the whole platform

Avoid a single harsh light casting hard shadows, and lighting the backdrop while the face stays dark. Light faces first. Everything else on stage can wait its turn.

7 Screens and playback

The words on screen and the clips you play need to come out reliably, every time, without the machine that runs them juggling five other jobs.

● Start

- ☐ A reliable output for lyrics and slides
- ☐ Run from its own device, kept simple
- ☐ A black or holding screen always ready

● Build

- ☐ A machine that only does slides and playback
- ☐ Separate from the streaming machine
- ☐ The service built and checked the day before

● Invest

- ☐ A dedicated presentation system
- ☐ A confidence monitor for the operator
- ☐ A tested backup of the service file

Avoid running slides, the stream and the recording all on one tired computer. When it freezes, and it will, it takes everything down with it. Give the big jobs their own machines.

PART 3 • THE LIST

8 A starting list, by tier

The whole guide on one page. Find your column, read down it, and you have a shopping list to price locally.

AREA	START	BUILD	INVEST
Sound	One good voice mic, a clean feed to the stream	Small mixer, a separate stream output, wired mics	Full desk, broadcast mix, managed wireless
Video	One steady camera, clean output, tripod	Dedicated camera, capture into the computer, second angle	Multi-camera, switcher, robust mounts
Streaming	Streaming software, wired internet	Dedicated stream machine, power protection, phone backup	Hardware encoder, backup connection, battery power
Lighting	Move out of shadow, off backlit windows	Soft front lights on the face	Stage wash built for camera
Screens	Reliable slide output, holding screen	Separate slides machine, built ahead	Presentation system, confidence monitor, backup

Most churches climb this from the bottom, one area at a time, over years. That's exactly right. Get Start solid everywhere before you take any single area to Build.

The order to spend in

If you can only do one thing, do sound. Then a steady picture, then a reliable connection, then light on the face. Most churches spend it backwards, on cameras first, and wonder why the stream still loses people. Sound, stability, connection, light. In that order.

Buy what you can run

The best gear is the gear your team can actually operate on a tired Sunday morning. A simple setup run well beats a complex one run badly, every week of the year. Buy for the team you have, and grow the gear as the team grows into it.

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Get the sound and the picture right, and every service becomes a week of clips waiting to happen. That last part we make easy. **reeluse.com**