

Why People Trust Strangers Over Your Church - Part 1

Have you ever used Kijiji, Uber, Airbnb, Tinder, online dating or GoFundMe?

Billions of people have taken a leap and used these systems to trust strangers.

How trust flows through our society is changing dramatically. We've stopped trusting institutions and started trusting strangers, as [Rachel Botsman observed](#) in her TED talk.

I listened to Botsman's insights a number of months ago, and my mind has been churning on it ever since. Churches must pay attention to this trend.

If people trust strangers and not institutions, what does this mean for the local church?

I'll share a few of Botsman's ideas below, and then I'll unpack some preliminary thoughts on what it might mean for the church in a second column.

She highlights for us that technology is creating new mechanisms that enable us to trust unknown people and ideas.

Think of Uber - you are taking a major trust leap by getting in a car with a stranger, trusting they'll take you where you want to go and keep you safe.

Trust, as defined by Botsman, is a confident relationship with the unknown.

These new apps and systems have figured out ways to help us trust strangers by enabling us to see other's names, a little bit about them and their reviews. The apps reduce some of the unknowns for us.

People have stopped trusting institutions. It is not just that people have seen scandals and corruption and so have lost trust in institutions. It is also that

institutional trust was not built for the digital age.

Trust is no longer top-down and central but is increasingly distributed trust. Distributed trust is more transparent, inclusive, decentralized, accountable and bottom up.

Isn't this good news for a people that believe in the priesthood of all believers and freedom of conscience?

I think this is a great opportunity for the church, if we'll invest the time in seeking to understand what is going on when we use these platforms that allow us to trust and share with strangers. Why do we do it?

Here are five explanations I've come up with by examining my own motives:

1. Some of it is financial: If we can spend less money, then "Yes, please."
2. These platforms allow us to connect with more possible options than just our small network of family, friends and colleagues.
3. We prefer our money to go to a person and stay more local rather than our money going to an unknown institution.
4. We want to be in control of our choice and tailor it to our needs and schedule. For example, we can choose exactly where my Airbnb is and what features it has, or we can share a car trip with a stranger rather than have to stick to the bus or train schedule and its stops.
5. We're willing to take a trust leap because these sites have found a way to reduce the risk and unknowns. It's not blind trust; there is built-in accountability. We can find out lots about other users, see reviews from others, see pictures and more, long before we commit to the next step.

This is a fascinating phenomenon to watch.

Hopefully, it is not just reducing humans to commodities to be exchanged, but allows humans to help one another, share with one another, be more dependent on one another, have greater accountability among one another and can fuel an

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entrepreneurial spirit that helps us see we can work together to make good things happen.

If trust is what enables change and innovation, we certainly need it in the church today.

What then does all this mean for the church? I'll offer five suggestions tomorrow.

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Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series. Part two is available [here](#).