

Alpha Online Platform FAQ's for Churches

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Contents

Overview	2
The Alpha Online Pilot.....	4
Training for Churches	4
Functionality in the Pilot version of the Alpha Online Platform.....	5
Getting set up on the Alpha Online platform?	6
Help Desk Operation	7
Reporting a Bug.....	10
Giving Pilot Feedback	10
Security and Privacy	10
Governance	11
E-Safety and Protection of Vulnerable Peoples	12

These FAQ's are intended to support churches in answering questions about the Alpha Online Platform pilot.

Overview

1. Question: What is the Alpha online platform and what are its benefits over anything else out there?

Answer: The Alpha online platform is a video conferencing platform that has been customised for Alpha. It has been branded to look and feel like Alpha, and the functionality has been designed to mimic the Alpha experience in a simple and easy to use flow. Eventually it will seamlessly integrate with MyAlpha (January 2021 launch). For example, eventually the platform will automatically pull the Alpha Film Series videos from My Alpha into the sessions and so churches won't have to worry about whether they have the most up to date version. This is not possible with Zoom.

We are also able to offer it for free which will be of particular benefit to the many churches who may not be able to afford costs like Zoom Pro accounts.

Here are the benefits summarised:

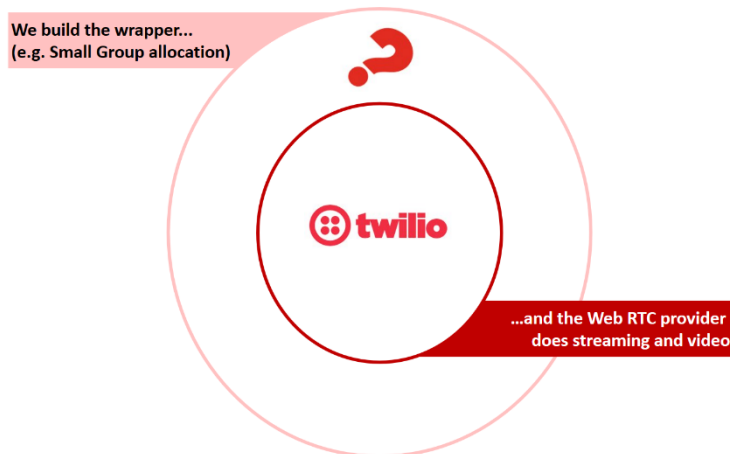
1. One of the biggest challenges churches have had is how to best share the Alpha Film Series during the online session. Currently churches either screenshare so guests can see the video (which typically comes through blurry) or direct guests to another website to view the video. This means that guests must open a new window to watch the video which results in guests not finishing the film at the same time.

With this new platform hosts, helpers, and guests can view the film clearly without leaving the platform as the video is broadcast into each of the small groups

2. Zoom requires churches to take out a Zoom pro subscription. For many churches across the globe, it is a prohibitive cost especially during these difficult times. With generous support from our donors we can offer this platform to all churches for free.
3. Online technology requires data and we are working on getting data usage levels as low as possible. We will focus on that optimization in future releases as we look at internationalization.
4. The wellbeing and security of Guests is of high importance to Alpha given Alpha's need to create a safe space for guests to share openly. Building our own platform allows us as an organization to maintain the highest security standards.
5. We aspire to offer people a seamless online experience. Technology like Zoom prevents a seamless integration into My Alpha. Utilizing a technology that we can customize allows us to continuously make improvements to ensure running Alpha online is as easy as possible.

2. Question: We have heard about something called Twilio. Is the platform called Twilio?

Answer: The platform is not called Twilio. It is the name of the technology company we are using to build the platform around.



There are two parts to a video conferencing platform. The webcam squares that you see (Real Time Communications or 'RTC' technology) and the things around it that you can interact with like the assigning guests to groups, streaming video, chat box, etc.

Twilio is an RTC provider of the technology that allows us to see and hear other people's web cams. We are taking their product and designing the 'wrapper' that goes around it that users can interact with.

The main advantage of this to Alpha, and all the churches we support, is that the 'wrapper' can be customised to the Alpha experience while we use world class technology for video. It also allows us to offer the product for free – unlike Pro accounts with Zoom.

Twilio is a New York stock exchange listed, USD1.1bn capitalization, technology company with clients including Lyft, Airbnb, Deliveroo, Dell, Twitter and Uber.

3. Question: Is Twilio's technology secure?

Answer: We have performed high level technical due diligence on Twilio, and we are confident in their security protocols: encryption, data security, location and routing of servers etc.

4. Question: What happens if better technology comes along?

Answer: The platform has been built to allow us to swap Twilio out for another Web RTC provider. However, Twilio is responsible for the ongoing development/investment in the technology and it would be commercially critical for them to keep their technology up to date. If they do not, we can switch out the underlying RTC technology from the Alpha platform (i.e. switch Twilio for another RTC provider, such as Agora or Vonage) for a relatively low cost.

5. Question: When will we launch future versions of the platform?

Answer: Version 2 of the platform will be launched in January 2021. It will be launched in English and Spanish and have additional functionality based on the feedback from the pilot as well as integration into MyAlpha. Other languages will follow by March 2021.

The Alpha Online Pilot

6. Question: When will the Alpha Online platform be ‘turned on’ for churches and how will this happen?

Answer: Churches will be sent their login details and access to a training page a week before their Alpha starts. This information will be sent from Alpha International. We will send the platform out to churches in batches depending on when they have told us they are starting. This is so that we don't overwhelm the help desk initially as it gets up and running. They will also get access to a Q&A Workshop in order to be able to ask any specific questions.

7. Question: What will churches need to do during the pilot?

Answer: We are asking churches to do three things:

1. Use the pilot version of the platform to run their Alphas (churches with a large number of small groups can choose to test the platform on a few groups only if they wish)
2. Access the [online platform training](#) materials and train their teams
3. Give us regular [feedback](#)

8. Question: How long will the pilot run for?

Answer: The pilot will run until mid-November.

Training for Churches

9. Question: How will churches be trained?

Answer: Churches will be trained in three ways. The first way is that churches will receive a pack of training materials.

The second way is that for the pilot phase, a new webpage has been setup to host the platform training materials along with some new and existing training materials on how to run Alpha online: including 7 good practices for Alpha online, e-safety and the team training videos. All pilot churches will have access to this at www.alpha.org/aotraining.

The third and final way will be through a Q&A troubleshooting workshop offered to churches after they have been sent the platform.

10. Question: Do we have any advice for churches on how to train their hosts and helpers?

Answer: We want to encourage churches to train hosts and helpers every time they run Alpha using the two training videos that are available for this (How to Host Small Groups and Prayer on Alpha). Please find these on the pilot church training page at www.alpha.org/aotraining/resources-for-team-training

The main difference to the training for hosts and helpers for Alpha online (as opposed to a face-to-face Alpha) is an additional focus on e-safety and an introduction to the code of conduct for hosts and helpers. These can also be found at www.alpha.org/aotrainning/resources-for-team-training/#safety

These materials will be updated throughout the pilot to better reflect the running of Alpha online using the Alpha online platform. We envisage that from 2021 these materials will then be made available, as usual, through the regional MyAlpha platform.

Functionality in the Pilot version of the Alpha Online Platform

11. Question: What will the pilot version of the platform be able to do?

Answer: Churches will be able to create groups, assign guests to those groups and issue invitation links (via email) for participants to use. During an Alpha, hosts will be able to see and talk to other participants. People will be able to mute themselves, turn their cameras on and off and most importantly watch one of the Alpha Film Series episodes.

It will be possible to 'broadcast' individuals into all of the small groups simultaneously. This allows the Alpha Leader to host the session 'live' rather than pre-recorded. Guests will not have to move 'rooms' or platforms to break out into small groups.

12. Question: What will the pilot version NOT be able to do?

Answer: There will be no chat box functionality or prayer rooms at the start of Version 1. Hosts will not be able to mute or turn off guest cameras.

13. Question: Why is there no chat box?

Answer: As we move to respond the need of churches running Alpha online, functionality needed to be prioritised. A chat box will be released partway through the pilot but was not possible for initial launch on September 7.

14. Question: Will the Alpha Online platform be available everywhere?

Answer: The Alpha Online platform makes use of a number of third-party supplier technologies. These are mainly American. In doing so, the Alpha Online platform is required to adhere to export control laws as governed by the United States of America. At this time, the Alpha Online platform will not be accessible in:

- Iran
- North Korea
- Syria
- Cuba
- Crimea region of Ukraine/Russia

This list is subject to change and could likely be larger than the initial countries listed.

In the countries listed above we will geo-block the platform so that it is not accessible by IP addresses from those countries.

15. Question: Can we show anything other than just the Alpha Film Series episode?

Answer: In the pilot version, any video from the Vimeo video platform can be played. No other video platform is supported. This could allow a church to have a worship video in Vimeo played to guests before the Alpha Film Series is played. A church would need to manually cut and paste the link into the appropriate area of the platform before broadcasting and then do the same again with the Alpha Film Series link.

In future versions, we will have the ability to queue multiple pieces of content.

Getting set up on the Alpha Online platform?

16. Question: How will a pilot church's Alpha be set up on the Alpha Online platform?

Answer: The church will provide an email address to set up their account. We will create an admin account and password for them. This will be sent to them by the Alpha online team along with a link to the platform. The church will be responsible to create their Alpha and assign guests to groups.

17. Question: How do I change my password?

Answer: After logging in, look at the top right corner for your name.

Click on your name and then choose "Settings" as shown in the image below:



On the settings screen you will see a section where you can enter a new password called "Change Password" as shown below:

Enter your new password and then click the red 'Save' button which can be found in the bottom right hand corner.

18. Question: Can I use another email address to the one I gave to Alpha International?

Answer: No, the email address that you provided to us is the unique login for your account, and you will not be able to register a new account.

19. Question: How do Guests log in?

Answer: The email guests provide churches when they register to join an Alpha will be the email that guests must type in when trying to access the platform. Churches should remind guests about this. There will also be clear instruction on the Alpha platform.

If for some reason a guest does not have this email available to them when trying to join their Alpha session, the Alpha Administrator may set them up 'on the fly' with a new email. However, they will need to add the new email into the Admin area of the platform and assign the guest to the correct group as if they were setting them up for the first time.

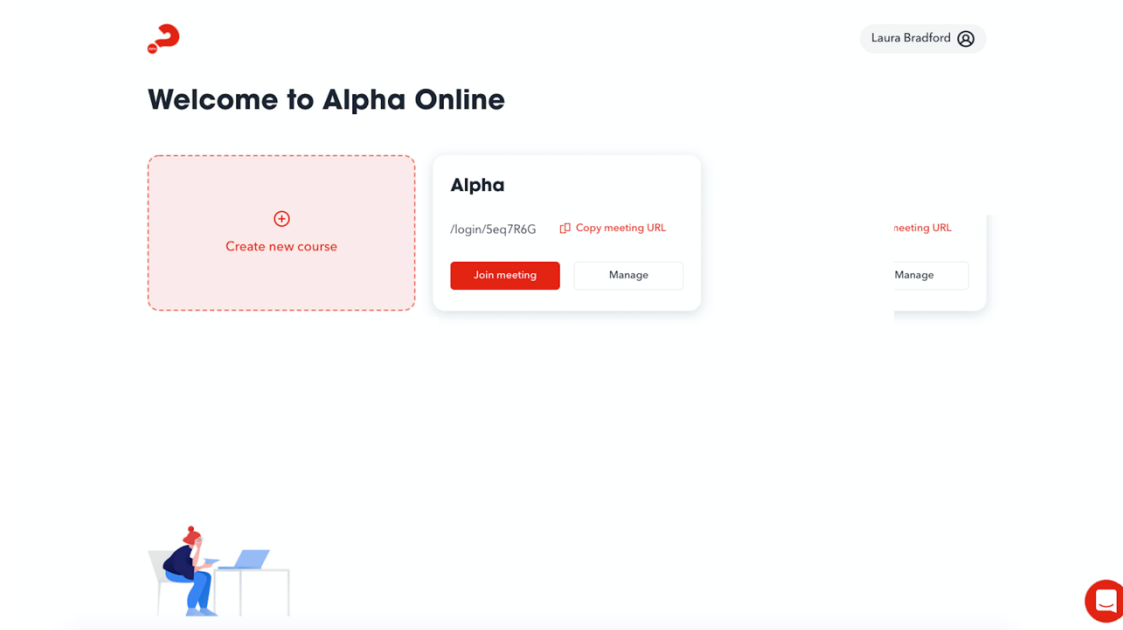
Help Desk Operation

20. Question: How will users of the platform get support for any technical queries?

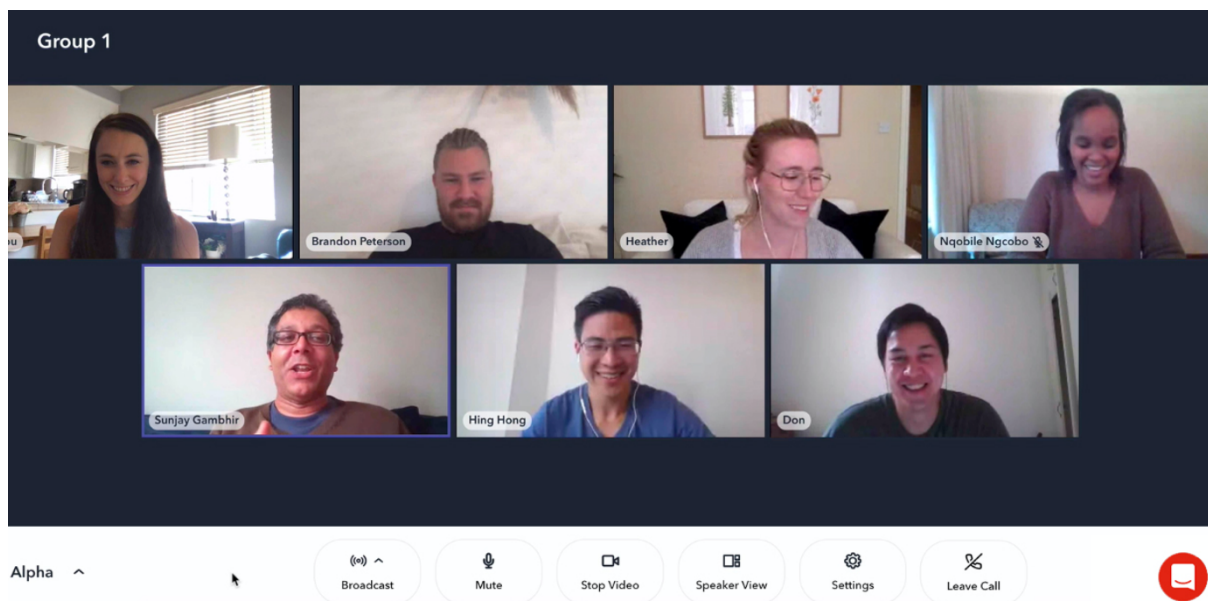
Answer:

- Guests, Host & Helpers: should visit the help page on the alpha.org site (this link will be available in the welcome email that they received when they were added to the system) to work through the troubleshooting section. If this does not provide a solution they should contact their Alpha Leader/ Alpha Administrator for any further technical queries.
- Alpha Leaders/ Alpha Administrators: Alpha Leaders and Alpha Administrators will also be able to access the help page on alpha.org. If the Alpha Leader /Alpha Administrator is still experiencing technical difficulties for themselves or any of the guests, hosts or helpers they can then access the Help Desk. This is available in 2 ways: 1) when logged into the platform with the Admin account there is a help desk icon on the Admin page and the Session Page (see diagrams below) and 2) Via a link on the [Church Training Page](#).

Help Desk Icon on the Admin page



Help Desk Icon on the Session Page



21. Question: Who can contact the Help Desk?

Answer: For any technical queries that cannot be resolved via the self-help pages, Alpha Leaders and Alpha Administrators will have the option to contact the Help Desk for live support. They must be logged in using the Administrator account that is issued to their church (1 account per church).

22. Question: Will the Help Desk be 24/7?

Answer: We are working towards having 24/7 Help Desk support available. At a minimum, we will have live agents available during each Alpha session during the pilot phase. Even if a live agent is not available, there will be a way to log a query for the team to follow-up.

23. Question: What languages will support be offered?

Answer: During the pilot phase, only English will be supported on the platform, including the help page and the Help Desk. Additional languages will be considered for future deployment phases.

24. Question: What if I have an Alpha running and there is a system outage or my query can't be resolved immediately?

Answer:

If there is a system outage, planned or unplanned, it will be communicated to churches in two ways:

- 1) Through an email alert system. The church administrator will receive an email from Alpha notifying them that the system is down and an ETA of when we anticipate it will be back up. They will also be notified when it is running again.
- 2) Through the announcements section on the Church Training page

If a query can't be resolved and it is non-technical related, Help Desk agents will have a redirect matrix to determine if the query should be redirected to the church or elsewhere.

If the query is technical but cannot be resolved by the agent (e.g., platform bug), he or she will escalate the query to the third-line support for technical expertise (Digital team). These escalations will be tracked in a case management / ticketing system.

In any of the scenarios above the church may find themselves in one of two situations:

- 1) The issue is not a showstopper (merely inconvenient) and the Alpha can continue on the Alpha online platform as the issue is worked out.
- 2) The issue is a showstopper. We would recommend that the church switches to their backup platform.

As churches use the platform during the pilot, we recommend that they have a back-up plan, in the unlikely event that they are unable to access the platform. We have extensively tested the system – but as with any pilot it is prudent to have a backup. For Example, this could be a Zoom setup, with pre-assigned groups and the Zoom links ready for emails/WhatsApp to go to guests, host and helpers.

We appreciate this is extra work for churches as a result of being part of this pilot and are very grateful.

25. Question: Who is working in the Help Desk?

Answer: For the pilot phase, the Help Desk will be resourced by internal staff (e.g. Alpha Online project team members, Digital team members). We are looking to build a help-desk team post pilot and are determining whether this will be in-house or outsourced.

Reporting a Bug

26. Question: What is a bug?

Answer: A bug is when the platform functions incorrectly due to an error in the programming. For example, receiving an error when you are trying to create a course that is preventing you from proceeding, even though you have correctly filled out the form. Or, seeing glitchy video or being unable to hear one individual correctly, even though everyone else can hear them fine.

27. Question: What do churches do if they find a bug?

Answer: Bugs can be reported in two ways. Via the Help Desk as described in the *Help Desk Operation* section. Or in the feedback loop as described in the *Giving Pilot Feedback* section

28. Question: Will I hear back from the Alpha Online Project Team if churches report a bug?

Answer: Updates on bug fixes may be shared with other impacted churches and platform users if they are affecting the immediate operation of the platform. This will be done via the announcements section of the pilot church training page.

Giving Pilot Feedback

29. What type of feedback is the Pilot team looking for?

Answer: There are three types of feedback: usability of the platform, bugs or defects and potential future functionality.

30. Question: How and when will Churches give feedback?

Answer: There will be two ways to capture feedback, via a survey or over the phone. This will occur on a weekly basis for the first three weeks of a church's Alpha after which it will switch to every other week. The feedback will stop on the 16th November.

Security and Privacy

31. Question: What security features have been built into the Alpha Online platform?

Answer: Guests can only join using their email address if they have been added by the Alpha Administrator in the administrative area. The Alpha Administrator has a login with a password that secures their access to the platform. One email will allow one person to use the platform and can not be shared amongst multiple people.

32. Question: Is the platform GDPR compliant?

Answer: Yes. We have limited the information we are storing and have stored it securely. We are operating within the UK's jurisdiction. This has been approved and designed in partnership with the GDPR team at Alpha International.

33. Question: Where and how is personal data stored?

Answer: Personal data is stored in our application database alongside the other application files. It is stored securely, and personal information is limited to an email address.

34. Question: How frequently is personal information deleted?

Answer: We store guests emails for no longer than 120 days from the start of their Alpha at which point it is deleted. Alpha Administrator details are kept for 2 to 3 years or until the Alpha administrator deletes their account.

35. Question: Do churches need to do anything around privacy?

Answer: Yes they do. Churches are making the choice to use a 3rd party software to run their Alphas, which requires them to input their guest's personal data into a database that doesn't belong to them. Churches need to inform their Guests, Hosts and Helpers about this.

Alpha International can provide specific wording for churches to use on whatever registration system they are using for their Alphas. The wording is:

How Alpha International Will Handle Your Details:

Alpha International processes your data on behalf your church who hosts your Alpha group. Your church will provide us your email address so we can send you login details for the start of your Alpha group on the Alpha online platform. We will delete your information 120 days after your Alpha group has begun. If you would like to know more about how we look after your details, please visit our [privacy policy](#).

Aside from the wording given on how Alpha International will process the information, Alpha International cannot advise churches on how to explain this to their guests.

Governance

36. Question: Where does Alpha's responsibility stop and where does the church's responsibility begin?

Answer: We have taken reasonable steps to ensure the safety and security of the platform. It is the responsibility of the church for what happens during an Alpha and the behaviours of admins, hosts, helpers, and guests.

37. Question: Do I need my own policies or Terms and Conditions for the Alpha online platform?

Answer: As a global product of Alpha International, the Alpha Online platform will contain one set of Terms and Conditions outlining the terms of use for all end users of the platform. The platform will be governed by the policies and terms set forth by Alpha International.

38. Question: What can the Alpha Online platform be used for?

Answer: The Alpha online platform is intended to be used for Alpha products only. We ask that churches refrain from using the platform for anything other than running Alpha. With the help of our generous donors, Alpha International is able to provide the platform as a free resource specifically for running Alpha.

39. Question: What policies relate to the Alpha Online platform?

Answer:

Terms and Conditions: As a global product of Alpha International, the Alpha Online platform will contain one set of Terms and Conditions outlining the terms of use for all end users of the platform. The platform will be governed by the policies and terms set forth by Alpha International. These can be found within the platform itself and apply to all instances of the platform in all countries.

Safeguarding Policy: Alpha International policies for [Safeguarding](#) apply to the Alpha Online platform. Host and Helpers will be required to adhere to a Code of Conduct (link here when available).

Privacy Policy: Alpha International policies for [Privacy](#) apply to the Alpha Online platform.

40. Question: Where can I find the policies that relate to the Alpha Online platform?

Answer: Terms and Conditions for the Alpha Online platform can be found within the platform itself. The Alpha International policies for [Safeguarding](#) and [Privacy](#) can be found on our alpha.org site.

E-Safety and Protection of Vulnerable Peoples

41. Question: What steps are taken for e-safety and protection of vulnerable peoples?

Answer:

All host and helpers will be asked to read and sign up to a code of conduct when they first log into the system which explicitly outlines their roles and responsibilities in keeping themselves and guests safe online. In addition to a code of conduct, Alpha Administrators will be able to remove guests from groups in situations of inappropriate behaviour. When additional features are added, the platform will ensure there is no 1:1 guest-to-guest capabilities in order to protect participants in a vulnerable environment.

42. Question: Can Alpha Youth be run on the pilot version of the Alpha online platform?

Answer: No, we will not be running Alpha Youth for the pilot version of the Alpha online platform. We anticipate running Alpha Youth in the 2021 January launch after proper technical due diligence has been done in order to make sure the necessary safeguarding precautions are in place.