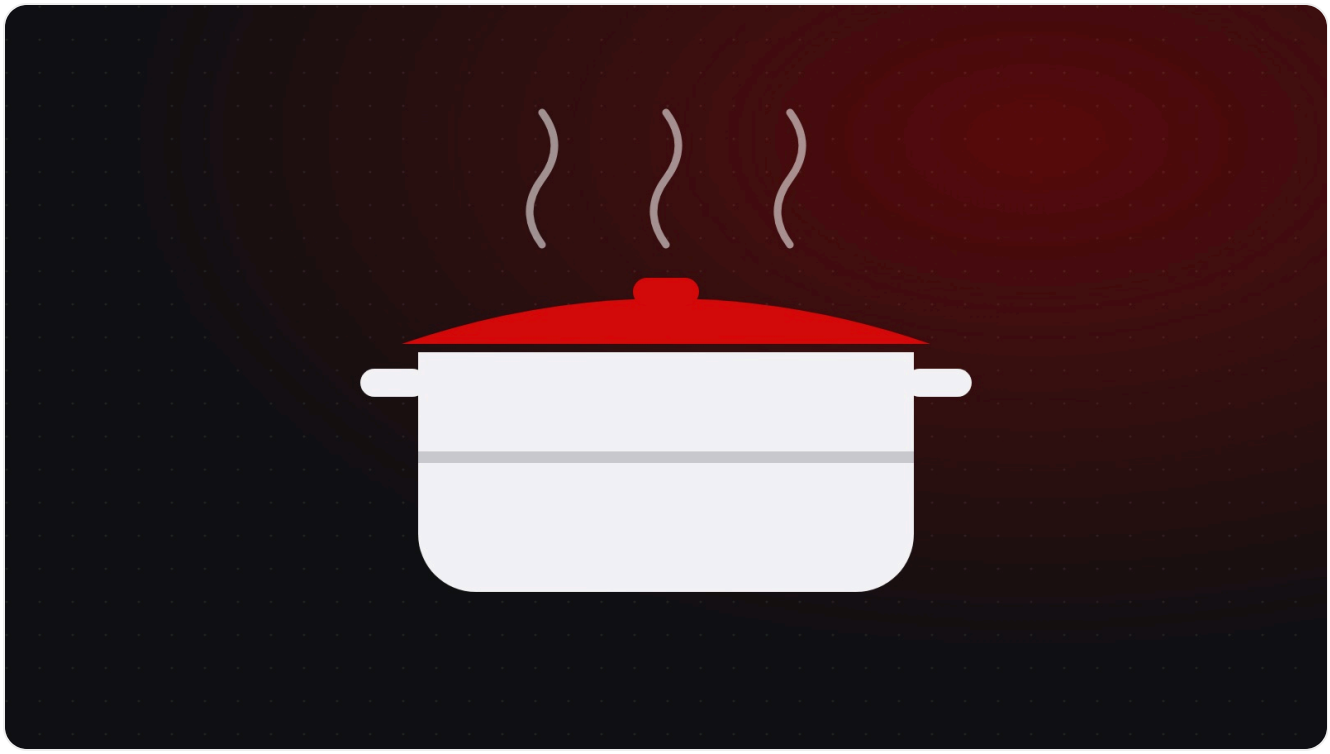
Issue 014 • ON AI AND REVENUE • SEPTEMBER 14, 2026 • 6 MIN READ

You Do Not Need a Budget to Find a New Revenue Stream.



By Tommy Lee

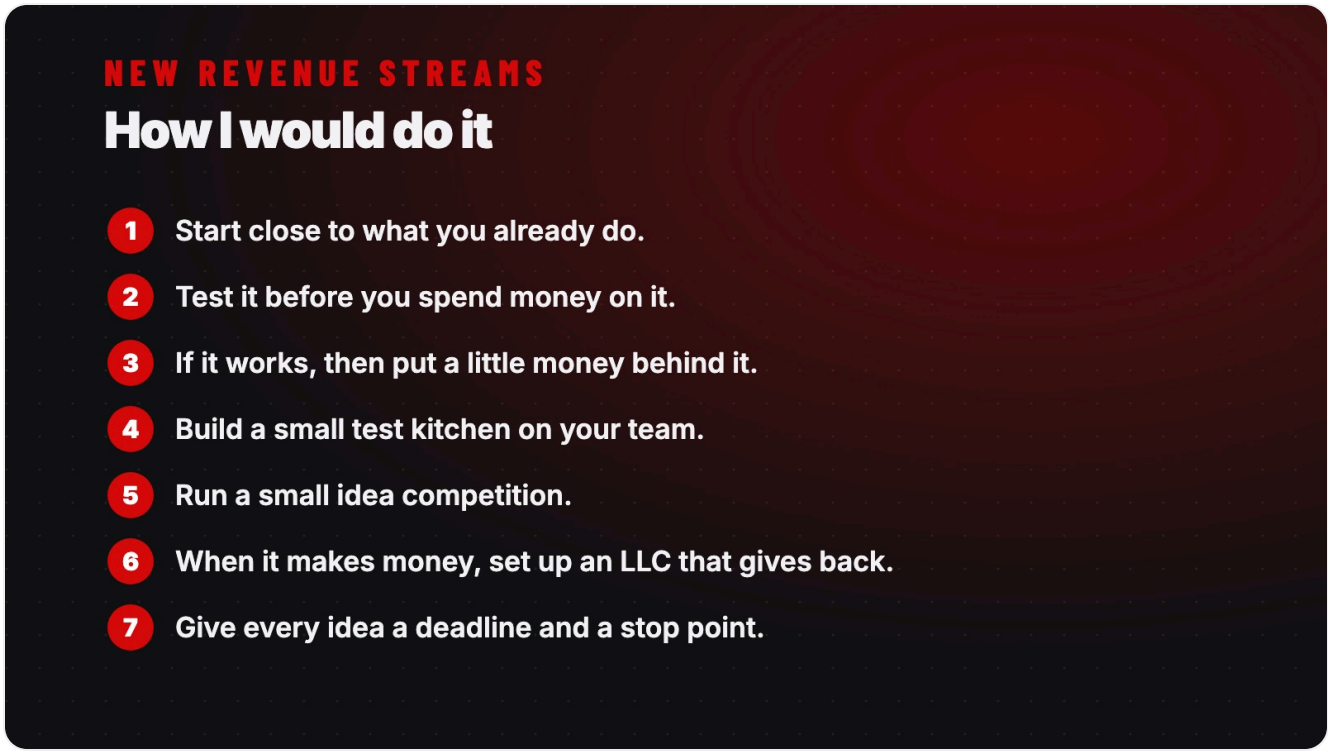


I want to talk about something most small and medium sized ministries never let themselves think about. New revenue streams. When I bring it up, people get nervous. I get it. It sounds like money you do not have and a new team you cannot afford, and it feels risky. For most of us, this work has always been about donations and asking people to support the vision. Anything else feels a little off. I used to feel the same way.

I do not anymore, and here is why. AI has changed what is possible. You can take an idea, build a rough version of it, and see if it works before you spend any real money. If it does not work, no big deal. You just try the next idea. You do not have to risk the whole budget to find out if

something is worth it. And you do not have to do it alone. Start a small innovation team inside your organization, or just ask your own people to come up with ideas and build them. And when someone builds something that works, reward them for it.

Here is how I would do it.



- **Start close to what you already do.** Do not chase an idea from a world you do not know. The best ideas are close to what you already do, something you know and already have relationships in. If it is too far from what you know, it will be really hard to do. For example, Pokémon cards are very popular right now. I am not telling you to go build an app that finds every store near you that still has the rare ones. Unless you really know Pokémon cards, that is not the thing for you to build.
- **Test it before you spend money on it.** This is the most important part. Do not build the finished thing. Build the simplest rough version that shows you if people even want it. AI makes that almost free now. You can sit down with Claude, Gemini, or ChatGPT and have a simple landing page or a working demo done in a day. Put it in front of ten real people and listen to what they say. Take their feedback and make it better. And sometimes, after a few weeks, you will know it is not going to work. That is fine. Bring it back to your test kitchen and try something else. It is ok if it fails. That is what this stage is for. You are not risking any real money yet.

- **If it works, then put a little money behind it.** Notice the order. You do not fund it and hope. You prove it works while it is small, and then you put money in. A little money on something that is already working is better than a lot of money on a guess.
- **Build a small test kitchen on your team.** Give one or two people the freedom to try things. Their job is to come up with ideas and test them, knowing most will not work. That is what a test kitchen is for. You try ten small things to find the one that becomes a real dish. Keep it cheap. Keep it quick. And do not make people feel bad when their idea does not work. Or let people work on ideas on their own time and bring you the ones they believe in.
- **Run a small idea competition.** Your volunteers and staff have ideas you have never heard. So ask them. Make it a simple competition. Have people send in their ideas, pick a few of the best, and give each one a small budget and a few weeks to test. You will hear ideas you never would have thought of. Your people will feel like it is theirs. And it costs you almost nothing.
- **When it makes money, set up an LLC that gives back.** Once something is really making money, set it up the right way. The simplest way is to start a separate LLC that runs the idea as a business and gives the profit back to the ministry. It keeps your books clean and protects the nonprofit. And it gives you a real way to grow the ideas that work.
- **Give every idea a deadline and a stop point.** Decide up front what working looks like, and by when. Run it for four to eight weeks. One group. One place. If it works, grow it. If it does not, stop it quickly and move on. You are not trying to keep every idea alive. You are trying to find the one that works.

None of this takes a big budget. It just takes a willingness to try small things and to be honest when one of them is not working. AI made trying almost free. So build your test kitchen, ask your people for ideas, and test the best one this month. See what happens. You might be closer than you think.

Note: Do not let a money idea pull you off mission. If it does not serve the work God called you to, walk away from it. No amount of money is worth that.

Tommy

Issue 014 · On AI and Revenue · September 14, 2026



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tommy Lee is the founder and president of Resource Global, a network that teaches, mentors, and connects emerging Christian marketplace leaders in cities around the world. He writes about faith, leadership, work, and AI at tommyplee.ai.

Read more issues at tommyplee.ai