

# Do More in Less Time

Accessing Member Management  
Software via the Internet

By Cindy Streett

**W**e all know that information management software helps organizations operate more efficiently by organizing key information into a database. These software systems enable organizations to manage their data with greater control and complexity, allowing them to monitor information such as member profiles, activity groups and attendance history, and to generate reports that detail the various aspects of the life of their organization. It is no secret that these software applications are crucial to the life of our organizations.

But can their capabilities be increased? *Absolutely!*

New technology makes information management even more efficient than ever before. We are all aware by now that the Internet has made the speed of information transfer nearly instantaneous, revolutionizing the way we communicate. And now software developers have created a way to harness the speed of the Internet and combine it with the capabilities of desktop software.

### How Online Member Management Works

New technology allows you to access your membership database via any Internet connection. Designated users can log into the database through a password protected portal on your church Website. The benefits of accessing data through the Internet are numerous. Take a look at how online membership management eases the strain of managing large amounts of information.

### Share Information Management With More People

Desktop-only information management systems can only be used by the organization's staff during normal business hours while on the premises and at the specific PC

containing the software. Wouldn't it be easier if everyone who needed access to the information could get to it? Many more individuals need access to member information besides church staff. Lay leaders, volunteers and even members often need access to data for Sunday school rosters, volunteer shut-in visitation and even to change personal information like phone numbers and emails. By allowing these individuals and groups access to the information they need, it saves the church staff a tremendous amount of time in gathering and reporting on the information. More recent developments in the online applications allow groups of all sizes to join groups and sign up for events online.

### The Benefits of Online Membership

Online membership should allow designated staff members to:

- ▶ Look up information anytime and anywhere
- ▶ Distribute information about people in a new way
- ▶ Share the information management workload
- ▶ Tap into your desktop application via the Internet

### Advantages of the Internet

There are a number of reasons why organizations should consider taking their information management and communication efforts online. Here are just a few:

- ▶ More people can gain access to information.
- ▶ Information is available wherever they are: home, work, or on the road.
- ▶ Always on - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ▶ Reduces the cost of distributing printed information.

### Overcome Geographical Limitations

As mentioned previously, geographical limitations prevent church staff, lay leaders, volunteers and members from accessing data, but they are also limited by where the desktop application resides. Wouldn't it be great if designated individuals and groups could access the database away from the church?

Most lay leaders and volunteers have other responsibilities that can often take precedence over their work in the church, and they would benefit tremendously from being able to work from home. Eliminate trips to the church just to access database information by allowing individuals to access the information from home. For example, the choir director can manage his choir member records via the Internet from home. He or she can even send emails through the online application telling the choir about a rehearsal reschedule. Pastors can also benefit by accessing information about members while traveling or in the case of an emergency when a trip to the church is not possible.

### Resolve Time Limitations

Organizations need to expand access to the data contained within information management systems, not only in terms of the location and number of users, but also in terms of around-the-clock access. Again, relying on volunteers who have other responsibilities means allowing great flexibility in their work times.

Using Internet-based database management software allows your volunteers to work, not only wherever, but whenever they can. The increased flexibility is likely to increase productivity among these busy individuals because they are more easily able to work at night and on weekends during their free time. The ability to access information at any time will also be useful to church staff members when information is needed at inopportune times. Forgot to remind the ushers it was their turn for duty and it is 8 p.m. on Saturday? No problem. Access their contact information via the Internet for a quick reminder phone call.

### Decrease Communication Costs

It is widely known that e-mail and the Internet have saved people and businesses countless dollars in paper, stamps and man-hours. Online member management can save churches even more. Instead of mailing members address update forms, which are returned to the church for staff to manually enter the changes, allow members limited access to their personal record in order to make their own changes. Not only does it save the church in mailing costs and man-hours, but it increases the efficiency of information transfer because members can update their records anytime without having to wait for the church to initiate the change. This way they consistently receive communication from the church, which saves the church the additional costs in returned mail. Online applications also allow members to access their contribution records for the year, allowing them immediate access to tax information.

### Use the Internet Beyond E-mail and Websites

Being online is an essential part of doing business in the 21st century, regardless of whether you operate in the

public, private, or nonprofit sector. While most people are familiar with how larger for-profit companies such as Yahoo!, eBay and Amazon.com have used the Web to transform the shopping habits of millions of Americans, the Web also has the ability to transform the ministry and communications efforts of faith-based organizations regardless of their size or mission. The Internet is not going away, and its impact on the faith-based community has only begun to generate momentum.

Ask your software provider representatives if they have the ability to provide online access to your membership data. It is the way of the future, and as technology continues to advance, you will be able to perform more and more tasks within your software application through the Internet. ❖

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