



Supporting Your Investment



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With the speed in which technological advances are occurring, America's religious institutions are engaging technical support in unprecedented proportions.

The increasing adoption of support may be attributed to two factors:

- 1) The growing awareness among institutions that support can be vital to accomplishing key missions.
- 2) Improved support programs among church management software developers that decide to focus on this offering.

"Churches tend to spend their money very carefully," notes Hal Campbell, CEO of ACS Technologies. "Purchases are made with great scrutiny, and members typically insist that they be assured of a solid return before a dime is spent."

*"One problem can pay
several months' support fees"*

*Drew Altom
Rosemont Baptist Church
Colorado*

"Convincing clients of the mission-critical value of comprehensive support programs has been a steady effort at ACS," says Mr. Campbell. "Once a client signs on for support, they stay with it and use it extensively," he says, "but clients not yet using support tend to ask a lot of questions before they commit. They want to make sure support will truly help them in fulfilling their missions."

Over the quarter century since ACS first introduced its industry-leading church management software, the firm has striven to deliver a support program that meets the wide variety of its clients' requirements. Along the way, ACS has learned a great deal about what the client wants when it comes to support.

Jennifer Sandberg, Director of Support for ACS Technologies, lists three areas of focus for the company's support offerings:

- **Breadth.** Offer a broad and comprehensive set of support services to meet the needs and preferences of varied users.
- **Innovation.** Improve support offerings with new technologies wherever appropriate.
- **Expertise.** Set high standards in both professional knowledge and customer service among support staff.

"Churches and religious bodies tend to be very demanding groups to support," says Ms. Sandberg. "They are doing work they consider of critical importance, and their time is limited. Oftentimes, the person requesting support is a volunteer or part-time staff person who isn't a software expert, so an effective support program has to serve them effectively at their level of knowledge."

Support features that have worked particularly well for ACS clients include:

- A toll-free support line, staffed 11 hours per day
- Training for support representatives that matches the instruction certified ACS trainers undergo – with ongoing training at least three hours every week for every representative
- An emphasis on "first time resolution" – finding the permanent solution to an issue, not just fixing the problem for the moment.
- A commitment to new technologies when they can be used to cost-effectively enhance support. Examples include database tracking of a client's issue through multiple support calls, and desktop streaming, which enables the ACS support representative to take charge of the client's desktop remotely and work out the solution while the client watches.
- Offer a wide variety of options for obtaining support. At ACS, these options include email support, regularly-scheduled User Group meetings, and the online ACS Knowledge Base. The "Kbase" boasts 7,000 entries, and receives thousands of visits every month from Support clients who need a quick tip or a better way to get something done.



“They Saved My Life!”

For those who rely on support for their church management software and systems, the return on investment is obvious – in terms of time saved, spending reduced, and missions fulfilled:

“Without support, it’s a much longer learning curve,” says Drew Altom, Student and Education Pastor at Rosemont Baptist Church in Colorado. “At any point, if there’s something I can’t figure out, I can call.”

Drew adds that the investment in support can be quickly made back in staff and minister time saved. “One problem can pay several months’ support fees,” he says.

Support has also proved critical to Bethel Assembly of God in Oroville, California, where Pastor Jerry Whitten often requests support.

“We were stuck a number of times,” he recalls. “They weren’t big things, just questions about how you do it, what you do.”

As other users of support have claimed, Pastor Whitten insists that help from support, compared to the staff and volunteer hours it might take to work the issues out on their own, more than justifies the investment in the service. “It’s already saved us considerable time,” he says, estimating the time saved as several days worth. “It just makes sense.”

On other occasions, the help support can provide does more than save time – it makes something possible that probably could not have happened otherwise.

Suzie LaMonda, school registrar and systems administrator for the Washington, D.C., Hebrew Congregation Religious School, found great time savings with ACS People and ACS Financial suites, but was unable to produce reports in the same format as she had with another system.

These reports on class attendance, class lists, confidential student records and other matters are presented regularly to administration, teachers and directors of the school and are considered vital to the school’s management and operation, Ms. LaMonda recalls.

After tinkering with ACS’s robust reporting features herself, Ms. LaMonda placed a call to ACS Support, and she quickly had what she needed. “They showed me

how to group things so the reports would come out the way I wanted them,” Ms. LaMonda says. “If it hadn’t been for support, I couldn’t do the reports I’m doing now.”

A similar experience was reported by Sarah Adams, administrator at St. Catherine’s Episcopal Church in Jacksonville, FL.

Ms. Adams was new to the church and unfamiliar with the ACS system. Compounding her challenges, the church bought her a new computer, and she needed to transfer the ACS software and all the corresponding files to it. “I had no idea what I was supposed to do,” she recalls. “There was nobody to show me what to do. I didn’t even know where to begin.”

So she turned to support to help her through the challenges, by sending emails and getting on the phone as she worked through the project.

“I didn’t know anything about what I was trying to do,” she says, certain that she would never have been able to accomplish the task without the help of support. “They saved my life!”

Evaluating a Support Program

A comprehensive church management software support program should offer many or all of the components listed in the following table. You may want to use this table to track the available offerings of a support program you are considering. Please see the following section for descriptions of many of these components.

Support Components Assessment

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Free support trial period | <input type="checkbox"/> Email support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toll free support phone line | <input type="checkbox"/> Online knowledge database |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extended support hours (at least 10/day) | <input type="checkbox"/> Regular users group meetings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active training for support representatives | <input type="checkbox"/> Active software update program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emphasis on complete problem resolution | <input type="checkbox"/> Seasonal guides (for annual reports etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support incident tracking database | <input type="checkbox"/> Wide range of additional support options |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Remote desktop control/streaming | |



The following support components offered by ACS are most appropriate to a church, private school or other type of faith-based organization. While the names of some components may vary among software vendors, the concepts are universal:

Knowledge Base

Available 24 hours seven days a week, the ACS Knowledge Base (KBase) offers more than 7,000 detailed entries for ACS, Access ACS, ACS for the Web and HeadMaster. Additional entries are created whenever an issue arises, ensuring that users of the Knowledge Base benefit from the combined questions and insights of ACS's more than 12,000 customers.

Like any resource of this kind, the ACS KBase is designed to be easy to use, with a comprehensive table of contents and natural language search functionality. The full text search allows wildcard expressions, Boolean operators, and nested expressions; three functions that permit advanced and more efficient searches. Thorough information about using these search tools is provided in the Knowledge Base.

The Knowledge Base is a popular offering among support clients, recording more than 4,000 hits per month.

User Groups

Facilitating gatherings of church software users is considered an ideal way to foster interactions among these users, as well as between the users and the company. The user group program, sponsored by ACS, includes regular meetings around the nation, typically directed by an ACS representative, and has permitted the extensive sharing of ideas, techniques, questions, and experiences. The meetings are also good places for ACS to gather the concerns and input of users.

Downloads

As new technological capabilities, user suggestions, and ongoing product improvements contribute to the evolution of software programs, newer product versions, patches and revisions become an important part of keeping the client up to date. Therefore, ACS provides several dozen updates per year for its various products, with most available for download from secure support Web pages.

Spotlight: Remote Desktop Control

Based on the same technologies that are being used to deliver live and pre-recorded sound and video to the computer, remote desktop control/streaming delivers interactive support to the client by enabling the support representative to access the desktop from a remote location.

With desktop streaming, ACS staff can do more than tell a client how to fix a problem – they can show the client how it's done, taking control of the computer over the Web and walking the user through the problem while he or she watches.

"We knew the technology was right for ACS as soon as we learned about it," says Jennifer Sandberg, Director of Support for ACS. "Desktop Streaming allows us to put the support representative in the customer's seat – even if they're thousands of miles apart. We use it hundreds of times every month, and people still tell us, 'Wow, I had no idea you could do this!'"

Cindy Hollis, Secretary at the Calvary Baptist Association in Phoenix, Arizona, was introduced to the technology when she called ACS Support for help getting started with ACS software.

"All I had to do was give her my site number and go to an Internet page," Cindy recalls. "She just took control of my mouse while I watched."



FAQs

Any comprehensive support program should offer a detailed list of “Frequently Asked Questions.” Typically abbreviated “FAQ,” this section answers those inquiries that most often come up among users. For ACS, its online FAQ resource supplements the Knowledge Base and focuses on questions regarding downloading and installing updates to ACS Technologies software.

Tips & Tricks

A tips and tricks section incorporates shortcuts and productivity-boosting ideas – often made by users of the software – for getting the most out of a software package. ACS maintains its tips and tricks section online in a section available only to support clients. Step-by-step instructions and illustrative screen shots are included with many of the section’s listings.

Seasonal Guides

Every industry has times of the year when certain types of reports, government filings, and statements must be issued. For churches and other religious institutions, the end of the calendar year is often the busiest time, with W2’s and tax summaries due and budgets to close out. ACS produces an annual Year End Guide that helps the organization through this process.

Multiple Support Options

Different users will want to access support in different ways, either due to usage style or because of the nature of the support required. A comprehensive support program should provide a variety of means for support clients to seek assistance. ACS’s offerings represent an effort to provide a broad range of options:

- Searching the *F1 Help* within the ACS software.
- E-mailing question to ACS Support at Support@acstechnologies.com.
- Faxing the question to ACS Support at **800-644-5786**.
- Speaking with an ACS Client Support Representative (CSR) by calling **800-669-2509**.



About ACS Technologies

For 25 years, ACS Technologies has developed outstanding software products and services for faith-based organizations.

By actively serving over 12,000 clients, we are able to develop a broad selection of solutions that work together to address the every day needs of faith-based organizations. We continually listen to our clients and make deliberate efforts to partner with them as we design new or improved solutions around their feedback. As a result, we can confidently offer a mixture of products and services that will increase operational efficiencies and reduce unwanted redundancies.

ACS Technologies has become an integral part of our clients' operations. Our company-wide commitment to excellence is one reason 7,000 clients have been with us for more than 5 years and a third of those for over 10 years. And because of our impact within the industry, we continue to receive notable recognition for outstanding dedication to our client relationships. Find out more about ACS Technologies online at www.acstechnologies.com.

To learn more about Client Support and our approach to helping organizations maximize their software investments, please call 1.800.736.7425, email us at support@acstechnologies.com, or visit www.acstechnologies.com/support.

It's our hope that reading "Supporting Your Investment" has provided you with some critical insight into your software support options. Empowering your church, school, or faith-based organization with the right support is paramount. There is much our Support can offer to benefit your organization and its mission, and we are here to help you identify how. We encourage you to continue pursuing ways of supporting your software investments. Please feel free to ask us about anything – we're here to help.

