

# ASK THE PRO

ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS

## Church Management Software



*Church management software is a tool, and it should make your life easier, helping you get tasks done faster. How do you find one that is good for your church? Looking for software can seem like a difficult task. The software you pick will be used for many years, so you should take some time to choose the one that is right for your church.*

Before you start your search, you should consult with others and make a “wishlist” of what you want the software to do. The next task in this decision-making process is to evaluate various products and companies.

### **WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK A COMPANY WHEN I'M DECIDING WHETHER TO BUY THEIR SOFTWARE?**

To make a good decision, you need to have information about the product and the company. Many of the questions about the product can be answered by looking at the company's website and downloading a demo version from the company's website. Or, you may prefer to simply call the company and ask them a few questions. Let's split the questions into three categories: functionality, support and cost.

#### Functionality

Look at your wishlist and see if the software can do what you want it to do. If you can't find the answer from the company website or trying the demo version, call the company. Just ask them, “How to I do a report of...” or whatever you are not sure of. Keep asking questions until you are satisfied that the software will do the job. Or, you may find that the software is not suitable, in which case, you should try another product.

#### Support

In my experience, no software is perfect – it all has some limitations or areas where the company did not foresee what could happen. This is why the support a company provides is essential. How can you find out what kind of support you will get? You should ask some of the questions mentioned here and see how they are answered.

You should ask at least two questions by email and another two by phone. Your pur-

By Louie Cordovado

pose is to test both the speed of getting an answer and the quality of the answer. You should get an email response within one business day. You should check the spam folder in your email. Often a response is falsely classified as spam, so it seems that the company did not respond to your email. When you phone the company, they should be able to answer your question the same day. If you get a good answer quickly, you can be pretty sure they will be there when you need them.

#### Cost

You should know beforehand what your budget is. How much are you going to spend to get what you need? Look for prices on the company website or ask them what the cost is. Is it a one-time cost or is there a



So, you should ask them, “If I have any problems with the import, will you help and what is the cost?” The answer to this question is affected by the functionality of the software, as well as the support provided by the company and the cost. Depending on the company, the cost of data transfer may be included.

With these questions answered, you will have a good idea of what you can expect when you buy from a company.

One other question that may come up in your search is:

**I WOULD LIKE SOFTWARE THAT CAN BE USED BY SEVERAL PEOPLE. WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?**

This magazine ran an article in a past issue that provided three ways to do this:

- Desktop software with data shared by backup/restore

- Log into main computer (such as at the church) from other computers
- Use web based software

(See the January 2011 issue: Local or Web-Based Church Management Software?)

There is another option you should consider. With desktop software, you can use data sharing services such as DropBox, Synclicity, or SugarSync. Each of these enable you to synchronize the data on several computers.

You install a small program on each computer that monitors any changes done to the data. Whenever a change is made in any file, the same change is transmitted to all the other computers. You usually cannot have people accessing the data at exactly the same time, but this may not be a priority for you.

And you can't complain about the cost – each of these companies offers a free version. The desktop software will need to be setup with these data sharing services. The company you are buying the desktop software from can help you with the setup. Please be aware that you should still make backups; if the data on one computer becomes damaged, the errors will likely be duplicated on all the other computers. RPN

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yearly/monthly fee?

Also ask how many computers you are licensed to install the software on. For web-based software, what is the cost per user?

One question that involves all three of these categories is importing. To save yourself time, it would be best if you could import the data from your previous software. Often you can import using the demo version. Sometimes you will need assistance from the seller.