

# Take your church's bookstore to the next level

Point-of-sale and inventory management software helps church bookstores run efficiently.

Everyone knows that new technologies can assist churches in a myriad of ways: from church management software, to Web technology, podcasts, security programs — you name it — there is a solution to meet nearly every church need. One such technology — point-of-sale (P.O.S.) has been created to assist your church bookstore operation and vastly improve this church resource.

For some churches, bookstores exist to provide sermon tapes and specific books related to Bible studies. However, there are churches that use bookstores as a significant part of ministry. Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA, aims to use its 2,000-square-foot church bookstore called The Chapel Store to meet the needs of its 30,000 member congregation while drawing in customers from its Bible college, K-12 school and the community at large.

"Our goal is to really meet the needs of our congregation and give them proper tools to evangelize to their community," says Susan Graves, bookstore manager for The Chapel Store. "Our store's profits are used for outreach and missionary funds. We aim to build up the body of Christ and assist people in sharing the gospel in and around their community."

## Purchasing trends

Using a P.O.S. computer system and Bookstore Manager inventory management software, The Chapel Store has successfully taken its store to the next level by keeping on top of customer purchasing trends and closely monitoring its inventory.

Graves says, "You're really not helping your customers until you're tracking your trends. This program is my brain. If you put in data, it's not going to get lost, it's going to track all information and give you reports. You'll see the direction that your store is moving — and this helps you keep up."

Without valuable systems in place to keep track of inventory and customer buying habits, running a profitable church bookstore can be

a tough thing to do. It can be difficult to have a church store that puts a drain on the church budget and isn't capable of supporting itself.

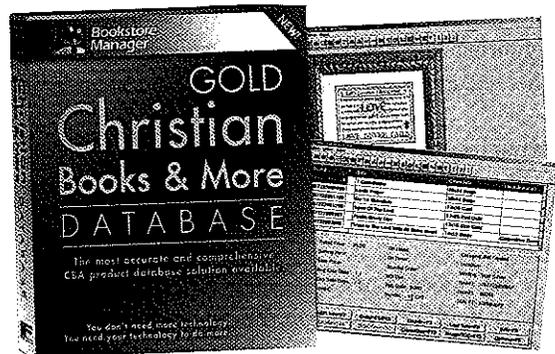
When Graves began working at the Chapel Store in 1997, she wasn't familiar with the bookstore industry and didn't even know how to use a computer. Graves says, "I didn't know anything about bookstores, and I didn't even know how to turn on a computer. I couldn't tell you where the 'on' button was."

## Opening more bookstores

Slowly Graves learned about the operation of bookstores and computers, and more specifically, how to use her inventory management software. "I lived with the manuals and customer support and networked with other Bookstore Manager clients. We tried to stay in touch with each other — there are so many nuances within the system that I'm continually learning," Graves says.

Through its Bible college and school ministry, Calvary Chapel trains pastors and sends them out to plant more Calvary Chapels, meaning more church bookstores are opened every year. Graves now travels to many new stores to assist them in getting up-to-speed with their inventory management software and P.O.S. system in order to get them moving in the right direction.

Additionally, Calvary Chapel churches have their own distribution organization called Calvary Distribution, which provides books, Bibles, music and gifts throughout the world. For new stores — even those that don't yet have a store front — church stores can set up an account with them and begin ordering product. "Once a church store is strongly on its feet, Calvary Distribution recommends using Bookstore Manager because stores



## What's a P.O.S. system?

A Point-of-Sale (P.O.S.) system is similar to a traditional cash register in that it rings up sales and balances the cash drawer. The most noteworthy difference is that a P.O.S. system will capture, maintain and automatically update a significant amount of information. Real-time information is critical in order to be an effective steward of the resources your church has allocated to your store.

While a cash register may keep track of your cash flow for the day, it can't provide insight into inventory management or quickly identify best-selling or out-of-stock items. The detailed sales analysis offered by P.O.S. software is a powerful tool for managing inventory and increasing turnover while also reducing excess stock. This software enables you to instantly see what specific product has sold each day and how many of each item you have left on the shelves.

By knowing what inventory is on hand, you'll have a better understanding of which products you need to reorder and which products you need to put on sale. This allows you to keep your inventory wide and shallow, preventing under or overstocking. Keeping only what you need on the shelves enables you to better manage your capital, and in turn, avoid becoming a drain on the church budget.

By Lauren Hunter

can electronically order through the program and make distribution and ordering easy," notes Graves. "It also gives small stores the same distribution capabilities that larger stores have access to."

### Control inventory

Having the ability to control her store's inventory makes all the difference in the world to Graves. Without a computerized system to view books that aren't selling and product in great demand, The Chapel Store would not be as successful as it has been.

"I can see what people purchased after the last church service, or by days, weeks, months, years ... I'm always running reports to monitor trends. I can easily order what I need based on my reports. I'm looking not at industry trends like retail stores; I'm looking at church trends. Inventory control is different for a church because we don't care what's popular; we care about what is important to our congregation's needs. Reports allow me to see what's selling and make inventory adjustments accordingly."

Strong reporting features within Retail Management Solutions (RMS), the inventory management software by Bookstore Manager, allows The Chapel Store to view trends and purchasing habits in a variety of ways that give store managers critical information to running their stores effectively. "By having inventory management software in place, you need fewer employees to handle the day-to-day operations of a church store. Computerizing your store can help you avoid taking hours to have someone do inventory control — a huge time waster," says Graves.

Graves traveled to Calvary Chapel of Salt Lake City early last year to assist them in setting up their P.O.S. system. Store manager Alberto Ortiz was used to using a cash register to make transactions and was pleasantly surprised by the in-depth knowledge he gained by computerizing his store. For him it made sense to install a computerized system because it was affordable and gave him tools that will grow with his store as he expands and adds more products.

"When I began working at the store, it was as if I had been in the dark as far as what to order and what was on the shelves. I had an idea of what we were capable of accomplishing through our store, and knew there was a way to reach our potential," Ortiz says. "Since calling Susan for training, we have moved a lot of product and are better able to keep track of purchasing trends. There are so many variables to keep track of — we set goals and keep track of sales daily. All the information I need is right at my fingertips in the system — it's very handy."

Whether your store is small or large, inside a church or on its own, it can benefit from modern technology that enables bookstores to keep track of every detail in order to assist in meeting its goals. This is what technology is supposed to do.



Lauren Hunter is a trade writer and public relations consultant in Roseville, CA for faith-based and nonprofit technology markets.

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