

# 8 Top Trends

## What's On the Horizon for Church Software

**THE HOTTEST SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY TRENDS** can help your church become more efficient. Consider all the different ways tools like these can assist you in reaching more people, both in your congregation and beyond! Here are the top eight:

### 1. Software as a Service (SAAS)

Another name for software as a service (SAAS) is application-service provider, or ASP. Both acronyms basically mean that software is provided as a Web-based solution provided on the Internet. Churches can save both time and energy, and trust the experts to do 99 percent of the work.

What's great about implementing software tools that are Web-based is that no programming is necessary. Whether you want to give church leaders access to membership data online, or offer members access to update their personal information — or to implement online payments or donations — using software that's Web-based is the new “way of life.”

### 2. CRM Model for Churches

Another major trend is customer relationship management (CRM) software. CRM software allows you to span various departments and business functions across a church to share a single view of everything about that member.

The main difference between CRM and traditional church management software, or CMS, is that you're no longer just collecting the data about the member, but sharing it and allowing everyone to view and edit their parts of it as needed. This allows people in different ministries or departments to track and monitor the shifting needs and interests of its members. In other words, different ministries or departments can use the data from the same single record in different ways to meet their needs.

Some CRM software has been customized to meet the needs of church leaders. Some vendors only provide a desktop software package, and others only provide a Web-based package. The best vendors, however, provide both online and offline software packages to ensure everyone will have the tools they need, whether they have updated hardware or not.

### 3. E-mail Newsletters

E-mail newsletter software services are another hot trend. This service combines the first two trends by delivering software as a service and providing tools to use the CRM system to communicate with the individuals in the database. Whereas it was once unique for an organization to communicate via an e-mail newsletter, now this type of communication has become standard.

With increases in technology, programs can be customized and integrated with existing software; e-mail addresses can be uploaded from a variety of programs (including church management software,

Outlook and other e-mail programs); and specific information can be requested by users so that they receive only the news they want. All these tools take communicating with church members to new heights, and they offer major benefits. Even better, e-mail newsletter service providers often offer tools to track how many people opened the e-mail, forwarded the e-mail, and more. Marketing data such as this can be very valuable to your church.

### 4. Online Ticketing and Registration

Church leaders are looking for solutions that assist them in increasing traffic to events without increasing the administrative time it takes to sell tickets and register people. As such, online ticketing and event registration software is hot.

By using a software vendor that integrates ticket-selling and event registration pages into your website without any programming, in just moments your church can be selling tickets to special events and registering people for missions trips with ease.

People expect convenience, and now they can have it. Online ticketing services allow users to print out electronic tickets, or request tickets by mail or will-call. The bottom line: no more standing in line. Everything can be done via the Web for maximum efficiency, both for the church and for the user.

### 5. Online Payments and Donations

Taking things a step further, churches can accept payments for special classes, seminars, youth events, mission trips, regular tithing and more through online payment and donation software services. The best software services in this area will be totally Web-based and integrate into your website with ease.

Establishing online donations also makes it convenient for members to give by providing them with alternate means of contributing. Some people have jobs or other commitments that keep them from regularly attending, so let contributors set up and manage their giving through your church website.

It's possible to set up one-time giving, or set up an automated payment that's deducted from the giver's account each week or month, depending on their preference. For payments that are set up to automatically deduct money from a bank account, an e-mail reminder can be sent before each contribution is made.

These types of online donation services are really amazing and can assist your church in meeting its financial goals.

### 6. Security Products

Security for all things software and Web-related is definitely on the hot list. With hackers, worm threats, Trojan horse viruses and even threats of physical violence on church premises, you simply can't be too careful.

Many software vendors now have entire categories on their websites explaining security products to their clients. Automated data backup programs are hot, as are check-in/check-out childcare programs.

For Web-based programs, providing proper login and user password identification requirements are important, as are as firewalls and spam guards for e-mail and e-newsletter communication tools.

### 7. Small-Group Management

Managing small groups has come a long way from a simple roster list that gets filled out by the leader and turned into the church office. Through online access to church management software, leaders now have the ability to log in from their home computers and manage small groups.

Some programs provide ways to communicate with members via e-mail, mark attendance, set up tasks and reminders and more. Software even provides a way for the staff in a church to track people who have expressed interest in groups and see which groups they join — or haven't joined — to determine who needs assistance.

### 8. Online Calendaring

Software vendors seek to meet the overall needs of churches while at the same time implementing new

technologies that offer advancements. One of the simplest ways to use technology tools to encourage your church members is to keep a continuously updated calendar available on your church website. One survey found that 70 percent of church website visitors were seeking event information. Displaying the latest event information on your website and keeping it current is a must in this day and age.

Hopefully, these eight trends will help you plan your technology implementations this year. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Do your research. Talk to customer service departments at any technology company to find out what the level of service will be like. And most of all, don't forget to ask your staff if the technology tools you choose are indeed meeting their needs.

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