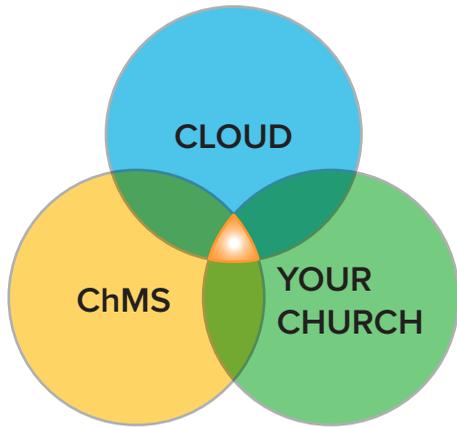


**NO MORE CONFUSION:
A 3-STEP GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING
THE CLOUD AND
CHURCH MANAGEMENT
SOFTWARE**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Few of us can name more than a couple of the ten types of clouds. Fewer of us still could tell you at what altitudes the different types occur or what they signal for the state of atmospheric conditions. Technology has given us an eleventh type, *the Cloud*. Though we've all been using Cloud technology for years, some of us don't know it from a cirrus or an altocumulus, particularly as it relates to the tremendous variety of products that claim to be "Cloud-based".

The genre of technology known as *Church Management Software* (also known as ChMS) is no exception. Many of these products make the same claims or tout the same features, but differentiation is confusing because you're comparing those proverbial "apples" and "oranges."

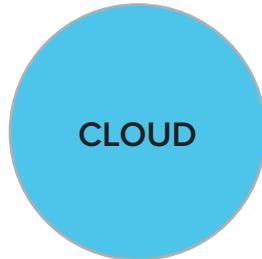
While your ultimate desire is to know *your church*, more and more that task seems to include knowing as much as possible about the Cloud and Church Management Software.

We've written this guide to bring clarity to the intersection of the Cloud, church management software, and your church. You may discover that there is no intersection and that you can manage your church for now with non-Cloud-based products, or without church management software. Or, you may realize that the infrastructure of your current product is limiting your efficiency, but lack the information you need to move forward.

Join us as we look beyond features at the world of the Cloud, Church Management Software, and the needs of your Church:

1. THE CLOUD SIMPLIFIED
2. CLOUD CONCERNS
3. MINISTRY MANAGEMENT
4. MINISTRY CONCERNS
5. CHURCH MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE (ChMS)
6. ChMS CONCERNS
7. VENDOR CHECKLIST
8. FREE TO MINISTER

The CLOUD SIMPLIFIED



True Cloud computing means that everything exists remotely and can be accessed remotely from any device, not just from your computer.

WHAT DOES “THE CLOUD” MEAN?

If you researched current technology offerings, you would discover quite a few that market themselves as “in the Cloud.” What that actually means is—excuse the pun—a bit “Cloudy.”

The phrase seems to include everything from 100% web-based applications to back-up storage on the Internet. In fact, the term “Cloud” has incorrectly become synonymous with the Internet.

To differentiate the two terms, think of the water supply system. Water is stored in tanks in your city and delivered to your home through pipes. For our purposes, the Cloud is the collection of tanks. The Internet is the system of pipes that bring you your water.

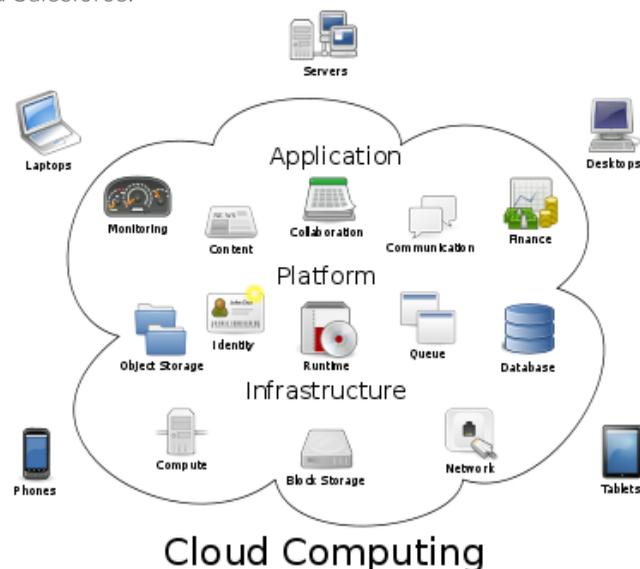
WHAT IS CLOUD COMPUTING?

To keep it super simple, Cloud computing is the delivery of technology and its operational overhead (upgrades, repairs, and backup) as a **service** rather than a *product* that is installed on your computer. The software and data are stored on servers somewhere else and provided to computers and other devices through the Internet.

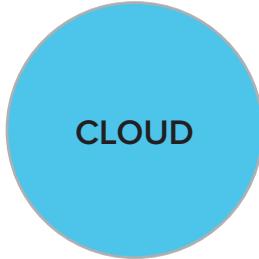
The following Wikipedia illustration contains the three basic kinds of Cloud products:

- **Software as a Service (SaaS):** the application you use
- **Platform as a Service (PaaS):** a framework on which you could build your own SaaS without having to start from scratch
- **Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS):** an offsite, blank server on which a company stores its or its clients’ data

The focus of this paper will be **Service as a Software**. Examples of a SaaS are Mint, Quicken and Salesforce.



The CLOUD SIMPLIFIED



“Most small businesses simply don’t have the time, expertise or money necessary to buy, deploy and manage the computing infrastructure needed to run these solutions on their own. Cloud computing shields you from these complexities.

As a user, you see only the self-service interface to the computing resources you need. And, you can expand or shrink services as your needs change.”

Laurie McCabe
Small Business Computing.Com

WHY 100% WEB-BASED IS BEST

Most SaaS products are not strictly 100% web-based. In some cases, this is practical and beneficial because browsers don’t communicate well with devices and hardware, so an app or driver may be required for communication between the information stored in the Cloud and a scanner, for example.

These apps are referred to as “thin-client” applications, meaning that very little is required of the computer that hosts the app. There is nothing to maintain, purchase or upgrade and such a product is still considered a SaaS, or Cloud-based because data is stored, managed, shared and accessible via the Internet.

However, a product can *interact* with the Cloud and not be a SaaS. In that case, some component of the product must exist “on premise” somewhere, which means that:

- Software must be purchased, installed, licensed, and upgraded.
- A unique server must be maintained by either the organization or the service provider. This server can be accessed via the Internet, but there are downsides to these “hosted” configurations.

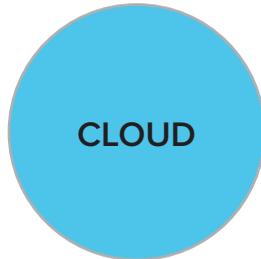
These products have bolt-on technology that connects existing software to the Cloud, becoming “cloud-like.”

The short of it, however, is that most customers don’t care. If you can access your data at Starbucks, does it matter how this was made possible? As long as the product allows you the highly-desired “anytime, anywhere” access you crave, does it matter what kind of streamlined or—conversely—patched-together process is going on behind the scenes?

The answer is YES, because ultimately, the provider’s behind-the-scenes process will determine the efficiency, security and scope of your product. Understand that every aspect of technology costs *somebody something*. Either you assume that responsibility for all functionality, security, upgrades and storage, or you pay someone else to assume the cost. “Cloud-like” capabilities mean more steps are necessary to access the Cloud, and that any savings earned here mean trade-offs somewhere else. It also means that “anytime, anywhere” may not mean on “any device” (such as your phone).

“Cloud-like” technology may also lack the internal controls needed to prevent fraud that 100% web-based technology, built from the ground up to perform a certain way, has. This is particularly important if you’re dealing with a ChMS that includes an accounting component. Unless it utilizes a true fund accounting system, it may lack the security you need.

The CLOUD SIMPLIFIED



VERSIONING

One complication of Cloud-like products is VERSIONING. If a software company releases a new version of its product, not everyone purchases the new version. Bugs* (an unfortunate but inescapable reality of software development) that are discovered in the various versions of the software after release are addressed through patches and updates the user must download. It is the customer's responsibility to stay current with these fixes and new features.

Everyone is operating with different combinations of product and updates. Imagine how much smoother things flow for the customer when the vendor can direct its resources to one product. In that scenario, when a new release occurs and a bug is discovered, the repair can occur within hours, before some customers have even experienced a problem!

CONTINUOUS RELEASE

One marvel of the Cloud is the concept of continuous release, which is exactly what it sounds like. The Cloud allows the software to constantly be upgraded, improved or debugged, hundreds of times per year, often without the user's knowledge. Access to new features and functions is seamless, free and effortless.

THE TOP 4 FEATURES THAT MAKE THE CLOUD POPULAR

In the simplest possible terms, the top 4 benefits of 100% Cloud-based products are:

1. Scalability and Pay-As-You-Go

You can instantly use more—or less—of your provider's resources as the need arises, just like you do with your cell phone provider or your water company. You pay for what you consume, just like with water or electricity.

2. Self-Serve

You can increase or decrease your level of usage automatically without purchasing or installing anything.

3. Flexibility

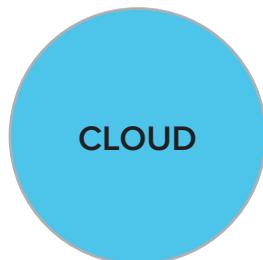
The Cloud makes it possible for different kinds of applications to work together through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). We'll discuss those as we go along.

4. Accessibility

Data can be retrieved anytime, anywhere there is an Internet connection.

*A software bug is an error, flaw, or failure in a computer program or system that produces an incorrect or unexpected result, or causes it to behave in unintended ways.

CLOUD CONCERNS



Is the Cloud safe?

“The Cloud is more secure than most internal data centers that companies maintain...and certainly almost all church IT-related infrastructure efforts... mostly because Cloud provider(s) that create & sell their solutions invest much more on security than any church could ever afford on their own. This enables the church to **leverage safety measures already in place** without the huge cost to implement for security.”

Bryan and Shannon Miles
Miles Advisory Group (MAG)

1. “IS OUR DATA SAFE?”

This concern strikes right at the core of our primal fears: our safety and security. Companies that offer Cloud-computing solutions take security very seriously. They know that any breach in security would be extremely damaging to their reputation. You should ask every company for details about its security infrastructure, encryption methods and disaster recovery plans. These security measures should meet and/or exceed all regulatory standards, which is far beyond what any church could afford to do for itself.

Having said that, this does not mean there are no risks with Cloud computing. Companies can go bankrupt or have unscrupulous employees (as can churches). The risks of “on premise” data, however, are far more likely: physical damage, hacking, system failure and insufficient backup. One look at churches destroyed by fires, floods and tornadoes will convince you that storing your data offsite is an absolute MUST to ensure the long-term security of your data.

2. “YOU LOSE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR DATA IN THE CLOUD.”

Simply stated, your data is, well...your data. Any vendor should explain its policies to provide you with your data if you terminate the service or if it goes out of business. Cloud vendors are required to provide a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for paid service. This contract will document service requirements.

3. “WHAT IF OUR INTERNET CONNECTION GOES DOWN?”

This concern was particularly relevant a decade ago but access to a fast, reliable Internet connection is now nearly ubiquitous. Today, an Internet outage is rare. Losing access to electricity during a critical time would, in fact, be more disruptive than a temporary Internet issue.

4. “CLOUD-COMPUTING APPLICATIONS ARE NOT RELIABLE.”

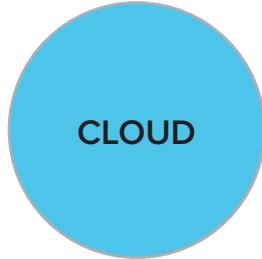
A Cloud-based system can be highly reliable if properly constructed and monitored. Years ago, companies were still learning how to build fully redundant, self-healing infrastructures. The hardware, tools and monitoring systems that are now available can greatly minimize the risk.

No system is foolproof, but it is reasonable to expect 99.95% uptime from today’s Cloud computing systems. That means 4.37 hours of unplanned downtime per year. (Additional, planned offline periods may occur.)

5. “CLOUD-BASED APPLICATIONS ARE SLOWER THAN A LOCAL SYSTEM.”

There is no reason that properly designed web-based systems cannot be just as fast or faster than a locally hosted one. There are many factors that can contribute to speed: from your local network configuration, to the Internet, to a performance issue within the application itself. If your web-based system is slow, something is wrong and—most likely—easily corrected.

CLOUD CONCERNS



“The biggest benefit to churches for Cloud computing still remains the **costs savings**. While business & companies plan out what their technology needs will be ahead of time (as a capital expense)... churches can leverage Cloud computing as more of an operating expense... sort of a pay-per-use model...which typifies how they mostly handle their cash flow as an organization.”

Bryan and Shannon Miles
Miles Advisory Group (MAG)

6. “CLOUD-BASED SYSTEMS ARE MORE EXPENSIVE.”

Not necessarily. You have to consider the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO). Comparing a Cloud-based system to one you host yourself really is like comparing apples to oranges, so you have to be careful. To host a system yourself, you need to factor in all of the costs related to extra personnel, hardware, backups, security, redundancy, maintenance, upgrades, and more.

It is impossible to fully know that cost upfront, because there are always unexpected obstacles. With a Cloud-based system, these features are built into the access fees and are provided at a far lower cost in comparison to doing it yourself, a cost that you know upfront and can include in your budget.

Another cost that is difficult to determine is the cost of disruption and data recovery if these safeguards are not put in place. Unfortunately, most organizations, especially churches, are comfortable choosing to not pay the price for the things Cloud providers offer. They choose to “save” money by not being highly available, not performing backups, and not streamlining their administrative tasks.

Cloud-based systems are definitely more expensive on the surface than operating inefficiently, but the cost of inefficiency exists, whether it is tallied or not.

MINISTRY MANAGEMENT



“Any volunteer organization has the potential to be very inefficient, and churches are no exception. New software and mobility solutions have the potential to improve communication and workflow in ministries today.”

Scott McConnell

Director of Lifeway Research

YOU WERE CALLED TO SERVE PEOPLE, SO HOW DID YOU END UP SERVING DATA?

Many pastors are “people people” who are overwhelmed by technology decisions and the management of data. Ministry is your core competency, not database management, but data exists nonetheless. Pretending it doesn’t—or that it will take care of itself—won’t keep it from becoming your problem.

For some organizations, data is thought of in terms of numbers or dollars, demographics or marketing contacts. For churches, the data you capture represents people, literally the souls who attend your church. As such, it’s priceless. The data helps you to serve your congregation. It tells you their names, displays their photos, gives you details about their families, shows you their involvement in the church, directs you toward opportunities to minister to them, and so much more. That’s why it’s so important to understand the value of data and find ways to protect and maximize it.

Used properly, ***your data is actually your most valuable ministry asset***. Exceptional people-care is impossible without exceptional data.

UNDERSTANDING MINISTRY STRUCTURES

Ministry involves the oversight and empowerment of these four basic groups of people, each with a different set of needs as it relates to data:

- The Assembly (includes visitors, attendees and members)
- Workers (includes volunteers and lay leaders)
- Staff (includes ministry leaders)
- Executive leadership

► The Assembly

This is everyone who comes to your church, though their needs are varied:

- Visitor follow-up is critical to church growth.
- Regular attendees need to be drawn into the life of the church.
- Members need to be supported, challenged, utilized and developed into leaders.
- Many of these will need intensive care.

All of that takes a lot of administrative organization on your end, without which, people *will* fall through the cracks.

On their end, people are increasingly operating in a digital world. They want to be able to give, register, find and register for volunteer opportunities, and search for Small Groups online. This, also, is a data issue.

MINISTRY MANAGEMENT



“Ministry at its core is paying attention to what’s going on in peoples’ lives. With the F1 app, I have member information literally at my fingertips. That makes ministry very specific.”

Brady Boyd
Senior Pastor, New Life Church,
Colorado Springs, Colorado

► Workers

Members who get involved with serving in the church need tools not only to find those opportunities, but also to communicate to leadership the details of the work they do. Small Group leaders, for example, stand in the gap between the assembly and the staff. As volunteers with limited time, they need efficient ways to bridge that gap.

► Staff/Ministry Leaders

Every member of your staff needs access to certain data in order to be effective, but they need different types of access:

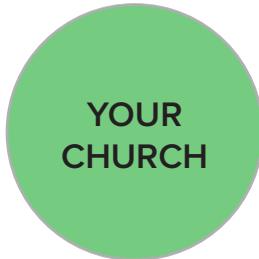
- Sensitive data needs to be limited to just a few key people
- The ability to work from home allows productivity despite car trouble, schedule conflicts, or sick children
- Most administrative responsibilities can be done in a fraction of the time using the new software tools that are available
- Sometimes it is imperative to be able to access data at a moment’s notice, anywhere you happen to be, whether it’s the office, at home, at a coffee shop or even on a mission trip. Having contact information, family members, notes, and more right at your fingertips can literally be a matter of life and death
- Ministry opportunities happen on the go. Being able to connect someone you just met at the gym with a small group before even ending the conversation lets you capitalize on those ministry moments
- Youth leaders can download and print vital release forms from any available computer in case of an accident on a retreat or mission trip
- Anyone with permission rights needs to be able to use any Internet-connected device (PCs, Macs, iPads, mobile phones, etc.) to view and even update data

► Executive Leaders

Visibility into the three groups just named is vital for a leader:

- Automated tools for managing allow leaders to focus on high-level concerns
- Aggregating and mining data for information about trending patterns allows leaders to truly shepherd their flock and lead for growth and health of a congregation and its staff

MINISTRY MANAGEMENT



ARE YOU ON BOARD?

Miles Advisory Group reports that “according to a Pew Research Center study, (The Future of Cloud Computing), 895 IT stakeholders were surveyed and responded that Cloud computing will continue to expand and eventually dominate information transactions...’because it offers many advantages, allowing users to have easy, instant and individualized access to tools and information they need wherever they are, locate-able from any networked device.”

“Additionally, the survey went on to conclude that most tech experts say they will ‘live mostly in the Cloud’ and not on applications.”*

Cloud-computing is everywhere and it’s here to stay. Despite that, and the fact that virtually everyone in a church benefits from Cloud-based data management, churches are a little behind that curve:

- A September 2010 survey sponsored by the creators of Fellowship One, a partner in LifeWay’s Digital Church initiative, found that only 12 percent of Protestant churches use Web-based church management software to share information about their church members and ministries.
- A March 2011 survey conducted by LifeWay Research found that “very few churches are thinking about ‘the Cloud’ as anything more than fluffy, white vapor hanging in the sky.”

As individuals and organizations’ dependence on mobile technology increases, churches will be forced to adopt Cloud-computing if they want to stay in touch with their people.

THE COST OF WAITING

Many church leaders, fearing they’ll make the wrong decision, sit at the crossroads of new technology, holding their legacy systems together with duct-tape and a prayer, and waiting for companies to work out the bugs of new products after-market launch. They reason that this technology will be cheaper next year or the year after: “We’ll let the early adopters pay the cost of vetting the software.”

This choice implies that there is no cost to waiting. In reality, the cost of operating inefficiently or losing ministry opportunities is incalculable, but real. This cumulative financial leak can be considerable over time. The speed of technology ensures that “later” there will be something newer and better that will keep “late adopters” in this place of indecision.

How many potential members are lost to other churches because a church can’t keep up with its visitors and attendees or offer 21st century conveniences like online giving and registration?

It’s really about the value proposition of the tools you consider. Dollar for dollar, Product A may be cheaper, but what is the true cost of lost opportunities?

*<http://www.magsays.com/category/web-internet-it/page/3>

MINISTRY CONCERNS



“Traditional communication tools are still helpful, but increasingly, people expect to be able to interact with information about people and ministries in their church when they need it. One reason churches go to the cloud is accessibility.”

Scott McConnell
Director of Lifeway Research

1. IT'S GETTING HARDER AND HARDER TO STAY CONNECTED TO PEOPLE.

This is true. People are busier and less loyal to “church” in general, but it’s also easier than ever to stay connected to people if you have the right tools and the knowledge of how to use them. In today’s world, that means getting onboard with the technology that drives peoples’ lives, or be left on the side of the road.

2. I CAN GAUGE THE GROWTH OF MY CHURCH BY ATTENDANCE NUMBERS, BUT HOW CAN I KNOW IF MY FLOCK IS GROWING SPIRITUALLY?

Actually, attendance numbers don’t give you the full picture of even numerical growth because you could have a back-door drop-out rate that is slightly less than your new visitor rate and still look like you’re “growing.” Attendance numbers can’t capture that type of data.

To know if your members are growing, a good ChMs will not only allow you to gain insight into several possible predictors for growth, such as:

- Consistent giving and attendance
- Increased engagement in the life of the church via:
 - small groups
 - volunteering
 - event attendance
 - progress in a planned spiritual growth track (from “crowd” to “core”)
- Leadership development

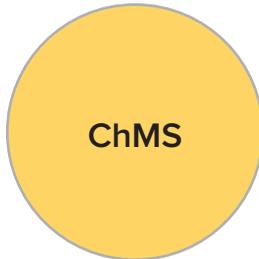
To know if your church is really growing, you’d need to be able to access your data and have it presented in ways that allow you to discern who is engaged, and how.

3. EVERY MINISTRY SEEMS TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY; HOW CAN I INTEGRATE ALL OUR MINISTRIES TO WORK TOGETHER?

The only way to prevent ministry siloes is with a single, authoritative data source. That one database must have a gatekeeper (which could be a team) and the cooperation of all who touch the data.

This allows for 360°-visibility of individuals, no matter which ministry representative is inputting the data. For example, Mary may attend the women’s Bible study, volunteer in children’s ministry, and host a small group. Even though three separate people record her involvement, it should all show up in her profile.

CHURCH MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE (ChMS)



Can you trust the Cloud?

“Some businesses, such as Google and Amazon, already have most of their IT resources in the Cloud. They have found that it can eliminate many of the complex constraints from the traditional computing environment, including space, time, power, and cost.”

Judith Hurwitz, Robin Bloor,
Marcia Kaufman, and Fern Halper

Once upon a time, church management software consisted simply of a server-based accounting system with a database for housing contact information and tracking contributions.

Next came systems that operated completely or in conjunction with the Cloud.

The industry then saw a flurry of Cloud-based products with a heavy emphasis on connecting members but no solutions for church operations.

Today, companies that provide church management software can:

- Provide tools for building community within the church
- Manage the operations of church for staff members
- Allow offsite access to data for ministry leaders on-the-go
- Equip leaders with strategic and tactical education for creating healthy church management processes
- Give detailed insight into the church’s health and growth through custom and core reports
- Integrate with products that complement the core function, such as social media platforms, fund-accounting systems, and automatic background investigation
- Deliver continuous software releases

IT

Technology is not the core competency of the church; ministry is. Do-it-yourself technology can become more of a hindrance to ministry than a help.

Though many churches have talented IT teams, few of them have the level of expertise required to build, maintain and implement an in-house system with the kind of security required for the storage of personal information and financial data. Those who try often end up spending much more than they expected. They often experience less functionality, more expense and more headaches than they bargained for.

NO SILVER BULLET

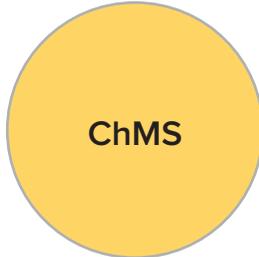
Let’s get something straight. **There is no one product that provides every tool a church needs.** Your best bet, then, is to find a product that provides a platform to unite as many of the tools you need as possible.

APPLICATION PROGRAMING INTERFACE (API)

An API is that platform.

APIs allow different systems to communicate with one another. Only 100% Cloud-based products can do that.

CHURCH MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE (ChMS)



“The synergy of online tools working together is what maximizes productivity and visibility.”

Rene Lacerte,
CEO and Founder of Bill.com

With an API, third parties or churches can write custom add-ons and applications to extend the product's core feature set and utilize the church's database with the new product. An example of this is the ChMS [Fellowship One API](#), which feeds a specific set of a church's data (Groups, in this case) to [The Table Project](#), a church social media tool. Though it is a separate company and product, it allows Fellowship One users to have a social media product that uses the church's existing set of data.

The process is highly regulated to ensure data integrity and safety. No company concerned with data security will risk an information breach. Naturally, every church has the choice to participate with outside API vendors.

► The API Ecosystem

In nature, an ecosystem is complex community of living and nonliving components that interact as a system or network. The new Internet ecosystem, whereby vendors seamlessly connect to one another to form a mash-up of applications, ultimately increases the value to the end user far beyond what one vendor can do alone. Examples are Google, Facebook and Salesforce.

The user experience is not dependent on any one product, but the richness, robustness and complexity of the sum of the parts means the original product will continue to grow in value and functionality, which might not happen if the software makers diverted their resources from their core competency to try to build their own versions of the various add-ons.

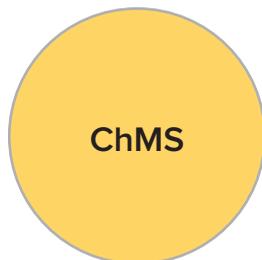
The best value is in API-enabled products that are also 100% web-based because they:

- work without the need for additional software to be installed
- leverage the power of the latest web technologies and standards
- are powered by companies whose expertise is in developing, managing and securing Internet applications

► When?

Many companies already recognize the opportunity for expanding their own products by building on the APIs of other established companies. As time goes by, more and more products will be enhanced through this type of partnership.

ChMS CONCERNS



Nothing but a glorified database.

1. ISN'T ChMS JUST A "GLORIFIED ROLODEX"?

The question below was taken from an online forum. It epitomizes what many people believe church management software is, just a "glorified Rolodex."

"I have been looking into various church management software, and I am having a hard time swallowing the pill of their price. Both software and cloud solutions seem very pricey for what you get. (At the end of the day, these are mostly glorified data bases.)"

I would be interested to hear from folks who are using these software systems, and particularly those who are using a cloud solution like Fellowship One."

In part, the sentiment endures because that's all some ChMS solutions provide. It's also because that's all some churches use their software and databases for, even when they have one that is made to do so much more. And, as the commenter pointed out, both software and Cloud solutions seem too pricey to simply function as a Rolodex.

This viewpoint is not a product failure. This is a vision failure.

In reality, if all you're going to use your ChMS for is attendance, communication, giving statements and on-the-go contact information, you should go with the cheapest one you can find.

► Data is a Ministry Asset

Those who see data as ancillary only need a Rolodex, but data is so much more. One-source data management systems with robust reporting capabilities and 360°-visibility into every aspect of your member's involvement are a literal gold mine for the forward thinking, proactive church leader who wants to know how to grow his church in more ways than just numerically.

For the leader who wants to see functional, abundant lives in his flock, rather than families crippled by the same maladies that rule this world, a comprehensive set of strategies and tools are needed, especially as churches grow in size beyond the scope of a few hundred people. These tools can allow leaders to mine their data for the **real information**, the real stories of the people in the pew. They can see developments over time that are invisible in the day-to-day.

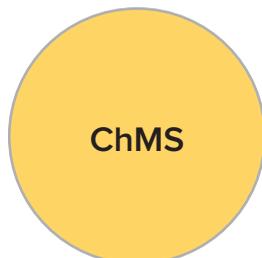
2. CAN WE KEEP WHAT WE'VE GOT AND JUST UPGRADE IT?

Sometimes, one more of the components a church uses exist outside the Cloud. These "legacy systems" are older programs, methods, and technology that weren't designed for the Internet.

You may decide to keep your older solution because you paid a lot for it, but find that:

- The vendor may no longer support the technology, which creates support and maintenance challenges

ChMS CONCERNS



- The system may provide for your church's needs, but less efficiently than newer technology could provide
- Usability issues between older and newer technologies can create frustration

► Are You Flying a Zeppelin?

Technology is changing more rapidly than ever before. It took more than 100 years for phones to progress from corded phones on party lines to mobile smartphones with cameras, web-access and music storage. Music devices evolved from 8-track players to MP4s over a 40-year period. Personal movie-viewing modes advanced from VHS to live streaming in 30 years.

Your 8-track player may still be working, but over time, you've had to get onboard with the new century in order to purchase the music you want to listen to. Similarly, with some church management software systems, you may be in the Cloud, but you won't move very efficiently if you're flying a zeppelin. And eventually, as technology evolves, you might not even be flying at all.

3. CAN I GET BY USING GOOGLE DRIVE (FORMERLY GOOGLE DOCS), EXCEL, OR A CRM LIKE SALESFORCE?

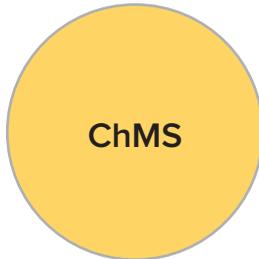
Google Drive and Excel can be beneficial tools for churches starting out. The problem with them is that:

- They're spreadsheets and documents, not databases
- They can't scale to the needs of the church as it grows
- It is impossible for separate ministries to completely integrate their data, so siloes form or persist
- It requires fastidious and error-free double entry and a level of record-keeping and sharing that is seldom found in organizations without a central gatekeeper and a high level of staff buy-in
- Data integrity is easily compromised with multiple data entry methods
- Gatekeepers must be equipped with configuring restrictions so that private data is not visible to everyone
- They cannot easily integrate with other platforms
- Manual data entry is required for information such as background checks, tithes and offerings and for consolidating separate ministry information updates

The problem with Salesforce is that it was not created for churches. It doesn't provide the resources churches need. Worse, its terminology is not "church intuitive" (i.e. It uses language like "lead" vs. "attendee", "target" vs. "contact"). This cheapens—and may even offend—the high calling of those whom Pastor Joe Champion calls "the Keepers of the Names."

Data integrity is easily compromised with multiple data entry methods

ChMS CONCERNS



The only way to prevent ministry siloes is with a single, authoritative data source.

4. ISN'T A COMPANY THAT OFFERS "ANYTIME, ANYWHERE" ACCESS ONLINE AND OFFLINE PROVIDING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS?"

There are some features for which this is true, but, ultimately, such a product is going to create issues with redundancy, synchronization and security.

Here's the problem: To be available online, the data must be stored in the Cloud. In order for the data to also be available offline, it must be stored onsite too, thus opening the church up to additional storage, security and IT expenses and risks.

You now also have the dilemmas of how efficiently the two databases sync, payment for double storage, and the reality of an inferior security level that a church can provide compared to what a reliable company can supply. You end up missing out on the best of the Cloud by insisting on keeping one foot on the ground.

5. HOW CAN I GET ALL MY DATA INTO ONE CENTRAL LOCATION?

We call this 360°-visibility. A ChMS must utilize a single, authoritative database so that no matter which ministry representative inputs the data, it's all together. It should be able to organize a person's total involvement, from attendance to volunteerism, engagement in events, and giving.

6. ISN'T IT HARD TO KEEP A DATABASE ACCURATE?

Insufficient database management is a primary reason for ChMS failure. Because the power of the ChMS rests on accurate data, a ChMS provider should include not only the latest technology with internal controls, but also training in best practices for accomplishing superior data management, including:

- Data Collection
- Organization
- Refreshing/Scrubbing
- Storage and Accessibility
- Top-Level Security

Database management should be part of the provider's core competency. They must excel at providing custom reporting capabilities and education on how to mine your data.

VENDOR CHECKLIST

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN USE AS YOU EVALUATE THE VARIOUS CHURCH MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE OFFERINGS:

☐ To access the ChMS, does it require that software be installed on your local computer?

A pure browser-based solution allows you true anytime, anywhere access regardless of whether it's your computer at work, your spouse's laptop, a public computer at a local library or coffee shop, or even an iPad. All you should need is a web browser to get up and running.

☐ Does the ChMS run equally well on PC and Macintosh computers?

Macs are becoming increasingly popular, especially in churches. A pure browser-based solution built on web standards should run well on both.

☐ Is the ChMS easy to use?

The application should be written with simplicity in mind. Yet, keep in mind that complex functionality and simplicity of use are a trade-off. You can't have robustness and control in a product that is brain-dead simple.

For example, if John contributes \$100 and all you want to do is record the amount, that is a simple step. If John wants half of his offering to go to the Capital Campaign, that requires more steps in both the set-up of "funds" and data entry.

The more functionality the ChMS offers, the more vital it is that help and training are easy to get.

☐ Was the ChMS designed and developed from the ground up specifically for the Internet?

A firm foundation is essential in order to provide the right security, scalability, reliability, performance and efficiencies that are the key elements to a successful Cloud-based offering. The proper database architecture (multi-tenant), application architecture (web-based from top to bottom), and systems infrastructure (data center, monitoring tools, etc.) are essential.

☐ Does the vendor utilize "continuous release" for true "no-touch, no cost" upgrades at regular intervals?

A key factor is a Cloud-based solution's ability to deliver regular upgrades to features and rapid fixes to any issues that arise, without requiring the client to manually download or install the updates.

☐ Does the ChMS vendor have not only an open-source API, but also the reputation and market reach to appeal to other companies that would want to expand the reach of their own products through that API?

As we've mentioned, it is imperative that the vendor is building on a technology platform that can allow it to compete and thrive in the new economy, bringing you such additional features as:

- Automated background checks
- Text-to-give apps
- Social media for churches
- Fund-accounting

☐ Are Cloud-based solutions the vendor's core competency or do they offer them as simply one option among others?

A pure Cloud-based company focuses 100% of their time and talents from Development to Sales to Consulting to Support on delivering and improving their native web solution.

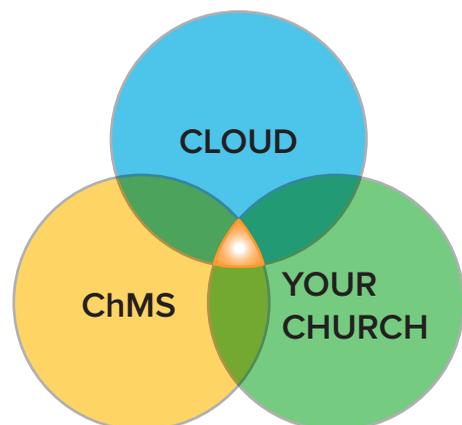
☐ Does the company offer support options that complement their ChMS?

A Cloud-based application should be accessible anywhere, any time, and that availability is the responsibility of the vendor. The vendor should then provide extended support hours to meet the expectation of availability 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year.

☐ Is the product browser-neutral or at least supported by multiple browsers?

A browser-specific product increases the possibility of downtime from browser crashes and limits users from using their default browser.

ChMS IN THE CLOUD FREES YOU UP TO FOCUS ON MINISTRY



Church, Church Management Software and the Cloud, together, are undoubtedly greater than merely the sum of their individual parts.

The Cloud alone is simply untapped potential. Ministry without software or the Cloud is doable but eventually inefficient.

Church management software without ministers is just bits and bytes. Church management software without the Cloud is doable, but also inefficient.

The three together are a dynamic, synergistic force for taking Kingdom purposes to their highest potential.

The benefits of this trifecta are many, and every church management software website lists them, so let's conclude with a true story instead.

One Sunday morning the pastor stood, as he always did after his sermon, in the foyer near the front entrance doors. Members and visitors—some coming, some going—mingled in the lobby around him, many pausing to shake his hand, compliment his sermon or bring him up to date on some aspect of their lives. One of them handed him a note and moved on. He slipped it into his pocket and went on to preach his final sermon for the day and greet a few hundred more people .

As the crowds thinned out, he remembered the note and was immediately galvanized into action by its contents:

Pastor, I'm done. I've screwed up my life beyond repair. Lost my family, my job and my reputation. I'm going to end my life today, but I just wondered if you would pray for me?

There was no signature.

He wracked his brain, trying to remember who had given him the note and when. He had talked and prayed with so many people that morning. How would he find one out of nearly 10,000 people?

As he described the encounter to his executive pastor and the database administrator, details became clearer to him, although he could not remember the man's name. He knew he had seen him at least once before, so he wasn't a first-time visitor, but he was too new to be a member. The man was taller than the pastor, had dark hair, had been wearing a blue shirt, and...what was his name?! It was a common name...John? Jeff? Dave? Ron? Mike? Steve?

They performed a database search for male visitors who had come alone over the last few weeks. With no pictures to identify, he could only pray that the Spirit would give them a nudge when they came to the correct name. They scrolled through the short list. He was able to eliminate several names he recognized from other encounters. It came down to three possibilities: Mike, Sergio and Travis. It had to be Mike.

He punched in the numbers from Mike's contact information. To everyone's relief, they were able to reach the man and get him the help he needed to save his life.

Can your existing solution do that?

PARTNER WITH US

Connect with one of our church management software specialists today

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