

7 Ways Technology Helps Churches Win at Making Disciples

This article is a condensed version of a free e-book made available in full here: <http://www.churchcommunitybuilder.com/ebook>

By Lauren Hunter and Ben Stroup

It's tough to break a cycle. You know this, and I know this. The cycle of not paying attention to the ministry data available through current church management software (ChMS) technology is one that you need to change, like yesterday. No longer can you close your eyes and hope to make disciples within your church without focusing, planning, evaluating, and realizing that church membership software data can work to your advantage by giving you a snapshot of how new members are really becoming disciples within your church.

Ministry is about people, relationships, ideas, and communication, not data analysis and complex algorithms. When I say “church technology,” you cringe and wonder how this pertains to what you do on a daily basis. Let's face it. Those of us who raised our hand years ago and said we felt God calling us into ministry, are probably not naturally drawn to numbers. That's part of what makes us feel like ministry “fits” our personality and natural inclinations.

We spend a great deal of time preparing for such things as pastoral counseling, preaching, education strategy, and effective leadership. The last time I checked there were very few seminary classes on technology, especially how to use church management software to make better ministry decisions.

It's a tough cycle to break. And most will never “do church” differently than what is described above. Many who fill positions of ministry leadership in local churches will serve their entire careers resting solely upon intuition and simply hope for the best.

One way we can do that is by mining the depths of your ChMS. I'm sure you've assigned that responsibility to the IT staff or maybe even the education ministry. I want to challenge you to consider bringing it into the executive staff meeting room and see how this can be a tool to increase your Kingdom footprint in the lives of those God has entrusted to you.

1) Technology helps you build a system.

Engaging with any organization is a process. In some respects everyone knows this except the church leader. We just assume that people will proactively come, find their place, plug in, grow (and grow and grow with no setbacks or special attention needed), and then leave when “Jesus calls them home.”

Instead of approaching disciple making haphazardly, review the membership process in four stages: 1) expansion through outreach and evangelism 2) assimilation as a member starts attending events 3) cultivation when an individual commits to God and to your church and 4) evaluation after a break up has occurred.

By building an offline system to evaluate your membership and disciple making process, you can tailor your church management system to fit the specific needs of your church and monitor individual and church-wide growth.

2) Technology helps you define and measure engagement.

The great lie of church ministry says that if you get more people in the door (and keep more people than you lose) then you will, by default, make more disciples—wrong! This is where many churches miss the boat when it comes to technology. It's not just about tracking attendance, mailing

information, and contribution records. It's about managing your relationship with the member.

Technology allows leaders to find ways to measure what's working and what isn't.

If 80% of the people who have attended a new membership class aren't giving, serving, and connected to a small group within six months of completing the new membership program, that should concern you. It's time to evaluate the content and structure of the program because you didn't accomplish your goal.

3) Technology helps you uncover giftedness.

Assimilation is a somewhat awkward word that leaves many of us thinking about the Borg from Star Trek, but really it's the best way to describe how a new member gets plugged in to the disciple making process. Finding out the members' areas of giftedness, personal communication preferences, family nuances, and more enable you (the church) to better meet them where they are at and walk them through the disciple making process to grow, serve, and lead others to Christ (this should be the goal).

"The secret" to winning at assimilation is to use technology to profile the person, capture their interests and unique gifts, and find ways to build a relationship around their unique interests, skills, and desires.

4) Technology helps you track human interaction.

If ministry is about people, then the church HAS to be intentional about dealing with people as donors, learners, participants, activists, and evangelists. I'm sure you want to do this, but you just aren't sure how.

Do you know who has enrolled in three consecutive Bible studies, but never volunteered to lead one? What happens when a new member gives money for the first time? What happens in your church when someone is actively involved and then suddenly absent?

Church leaders expect people with problems to recognize the "signs" and seek the leader out for help. Most often, the person doesn't even know when the "problem" began or that God might be calling them to something greater unless someone encourages them.

Technology allows us to see what we didn't even know was there.





5) Technology helps you uncover growth patterns.

Very, very few people are going to push themselves to grow spiritually all by themselves. Most of us need someone to challenge us to take the next step.

People are busy. They often find themselves overwhelmed, trying to balance church, work, parenting, marriage, and a million other things and people tugging at their attention and eating away at each day.

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It's the job of the church leader to cultivate the resources God has already provided in the membership to accomplish the vision He has given the leader. Technology gives the leader the information he or she needs to challenge others to take the next step of commitment.

6) Technology helps you evaluate history and plan for the future.

Operating a church is little different from the local nonprofit. You're responsible for program management, volunteer recruitment, leadership development, and that nasty "F" word...fund-raising! Through all these responsibilities, communication is absolutely critical to building community and fostering a sense of connection.

The trick is not to focus on efficiency but impact. It's not about the leader's personal preferences but what motivates people to do something. There is only one way to know this. You'll have to ask, record, implement, test, measure, and do it all over again.

Trends aren't just for an economic conversation. Understanding what has happened in the past is an excellent indicator of what will happen. Your ChMS can help you watch for trends and uncover valuable data that will help steer the ship of your church – determining what programs you run and how to best meet your church members, thereby drawing them closer to their church family.

7) Technology helps you evaluate the results and plan the future.

In order for us to preserve the trust needed to build and foster relationships with our membership, churches must embrace this "new normal" and voluntarily hold themselves accountable to measuring impact and reporting the good news...and the bad.

People don't need your church as much as you need them to be the church God has called you to become.

Technology gives us a tool to demonstrate a ministry "return on investment" to the member who decided to "invest" in your church.

When you can trace the dollar given through the disciple making system that resulted in true life change, you achieve three things:

1. You build trust by doing what you said you were going to do.
2. You pave the way for future investments.
3. You discipline yourself through self-imposed systems of evaluation that ensure "your gut" is matched with data to validate your intuition.

Can you run reports over membership, giving, service, etc. and determine if your church is making more disciples and moving people to deeper levels of engagement?

If you can't, you risk losing the people God intended to be part of accomplishing the vision in your church.

This article is a condensed version of the e-book, "Get Disciple Making Right: 7 Full-Proof Ways Technology Helps Churches Win at Making Disciples," made available for free download from Church Community Builder here: <http://www.churchcommunitybuilder.com/ebook>.

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