Small Groups = Big Needs

ACS Technologies Offers Integrated Solutions to Manage Small Groups and More

by Lauren Hunter

Churches are continually looking for new ways to engage their attenders, communicate their mission and vision, and care for the needs of their church body. More than ever, churches are turning to small groups to provide this effective environment for spiritual transformation and growth. But how does a church go about increasing ministry efforts in this and other areas when perhaps their church has grown in size and there are more members with which to communicate? The trend is for churches to increase the numbers of small groups that are offered as their organizations grow in size and number.

Meeting in groups at churches, in one another's homes, in coffee houses, and even people's places of business makes it possible for people to stay connected on a more personal level and for churches to increase ministry impact. Whether a church serves 300 or 3,000, small groups can be extremely effective at drawing people in and caring for their needs. But as the number of small groups increases, so does the need to manage their activity.

In order to provide congregations with tools to effectively increase these ministry efforts and maximize small group activities within their churches, ACS Technologies (**www.acstechnologies.com**) has recently released a new package of solutions that combine Access ACS™ (**www.acstechnologies.com/products/accessacs**) online tools and real life ministry implementation. The result is Small Groups Complete™, (**www.acstechnologies.com/totalsolutions/smallgroups**) a valuable choice for churches that wish to manage and organize small group ministries more efficiently and effectively.

For example, when Calvary Community Church (CCC) in Westlake Village, California (**www.calvarycc.org/**) grew rapidly over a period of a few years, the church realized that they were quickly losing contact with its members, both new and old, and were searching for ways to increase communication, encourage small groups participation, and get people involved in outreach at all levels. With nearly 5,000 people in its congregation, and a desire to expand the numbers of its small groups from 115 to 750, CCC came to a point where they realized that its way of organizing small groups information wasn't working. Spreadsheets just weren't cutting it any longer; information was nearly out of date by the time updated lists were sent to leaders.

Since CCC uses ACS for their church software management, the staff decided to add the company to the list of technology providers to review in order to find the best solutions for managing small groups. After forming a technol-

ogy task force to review all options, CCC selected ACS Technologies' Small Groups Complete package because it offered the best tools for small groups management and integrated with their existing ACS applications. The membership information that was stored in ACS on their desktops communicated with Access ACS, the Web-based tool used to perform effective outreach, increase stewardship, manage small groups, and collect tithes—all online.

"We were confident that ACS Technologies had what CCC was looking for: the power of robust, proven desktop applications to run the complete back office while empowering and enabling Web-based tools to allow them to rapidly expand involvement of lay leaders, members, and guests," commented Cindy Streett, product manager for Access ACS.

With Small Groups Complete, ACS Technologies was able to not only provide the management tools to keep track of small groups activity, it provided the implementation services to help bring CCC's small groups campaign together successfully.

While some companies simply provide the technology tools and send you on your way, ACS Technologies doesn't stop there. With ACS Implementation Specialists, churches can have their small groups processes up and running in 30 days or less. From the initial assessment of needs, to planning, to installation, to training, to the big launch and follow-up, ACS Technologies can do it all. From valuable insights and knowledge gained from the numerous experiences in helping 22,000 churches over the last 28 years, ACS Technologies can be an incredible ministry partner.

"Access ACS together with ACS Implementation services have allowed us to do exactly what we wanted to do—grow the church, nurture the people and be examples of Christ," says Sam Gallucci, key member of the technology task force for Cavalry Community Church and industry pio-

Organize Your Small Groups

Most churches struggle to get their small groups established, staffed, and populated. Coordinating schedules, selecting curriculum, communicating meeting times and locations, keeping up with attendees—the details seem endless. And then there's the question of effectiveness—are your cell groups measurably improving your church's inreach and outreach?

With more than 20,000 clients, we understand the impact small groups can have on a ministry. If you're interested in starting or improving small groups for your church, let's talk.

Free Total Integrated Solutions White Papers ►

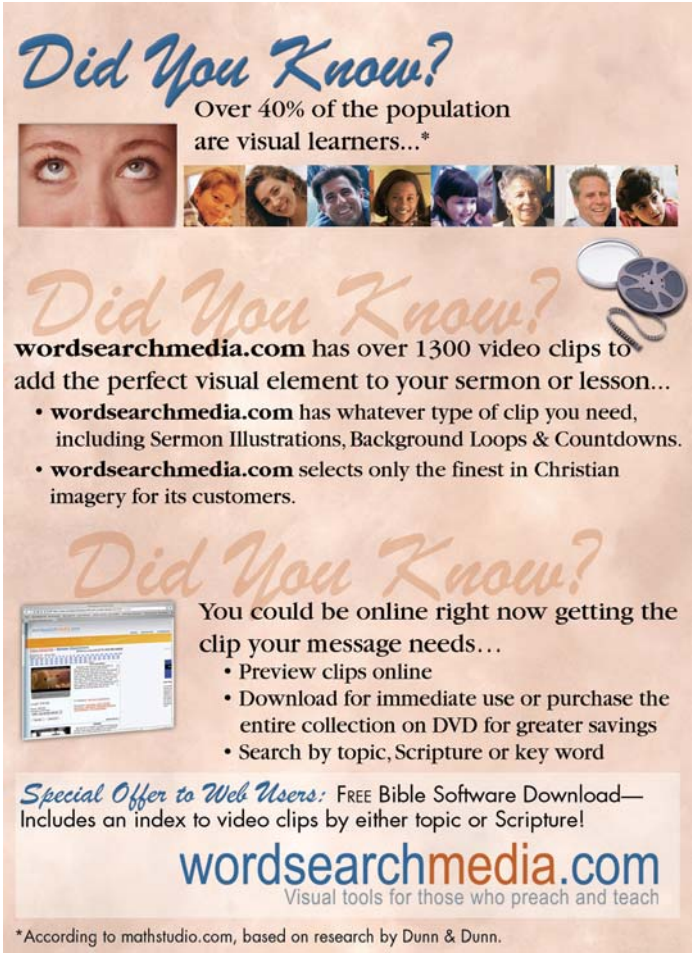
To learn more about how ACS Technologies software can

ply for their small groups Web pages if they don't wish to use Extend for their church Web site.

In October, ACS Technologies launched ACS Google Gadgets, (visit **www.acstechnologies.com/company/news/article14416.htm** for an article by ACS on this feature) created to help church staff, small group leaders, and attenders to stay better connected to their churches. The ACS Google Gadget gives attenders and staff the ability to view outreach assignments; small group leaders can view connections with attenders that need to be made; and everyone can view their events. ACS Google Gadgets are bits of information that can be placed on one's "Google Personalized Home Page" (**www.google.com/ig**) to get information delivered where access is most convenient. Gadgets are the first in a series of small bite-sized delivery methods to enhance communications and deliver content where church attenders and staff spend their time.

"The Web allows us to expand the boundaries of church communication and makes it possible for increased involvement, better communication and enhanced outreach," adds Hal Campbell, President and CEO of ACS Technologies.

Overall, people want to stay connected with those they care about. By combining powerful technology tools together with good small groups leadership, attenders can feel like they belong, which is a critical component to having a successful and lasting ministry within your community.



Lauren Hunter is a trade writer and public relations consultant specializing in the faith-based and nonprofit technology markets. For additional information, please visit **www.laurenhunter.net** or email Ms. Hunter at **lauren@laurenhunter.net**. To access more small group resources including a white paper and full success story on CCC, visit **www.ideastoimpact.com/smallgroups**.

Six Keys for Setting Up Small Groups Structure

From the ACS Technologies Implementation Team

1. *Put it on paper.* Write out or draw a structure tree that shows how your groups are organized. If this isn't possible, consider reorganizing your groups.

2. *Keep it simple.* The structure should be organized enough to function, but simple enough for people to understand. It should make sense, even to people who are not involved.

3. *Plan for growth.* Consider where your small groups ministry will likely be in two years. Make sure that the structure you put in place now will accommodate the needs you will have.

4. *Structure for success.* Make sure that the structure you put in place works in conjunction with the expectations you have for your groups and leaders. For example, if you want coaches to mentor and train leaders, make sure that the ratio of leaders to coaches is appropriate (usually no more than 7:1).

5. *Define the roles.* In writing, clearly communicate the guidelines, expectations, and responsibilities of the people involved in the small groups ministry. Coaches, leaders, assistants, and participants should all know what role they are filling.

6. *Allow for change.* Ministry needs change. Congregations change. Your small groups ministry will need to change to maintain its effectiveness. New groups will need to be formed. Existing groups will need to split, adapt, or fade away. There should be processes in place for handling these changes.