



Having It All

How integrating church management software with social networking can create a 'win-win' for leaders.

By Tony Ferraro

Being a pastor or church leader has never been an easy job. The constant demands on time and resources can be a drain, making it difficult to cut through the clutter and keep up with bigger picture issues affecting the church. This includes today's ever-changing technological landscape, which has been populated with the growth of social networks like MySpace and Facebook that attract millions to their sites every day, due in part to people's inherent need to be deeply known and not alone.

As God's servants, already faced with so many challenges, how do we respond to this rise in social network participation, the explosion of information available to us, and the pervasive availability of access that the Internet has ushered in? How do we manage these interactions without letting vital conversations "fall through the cracks" be it on a Sunday morning, via email or within a social network?

Having already invested in church management software, does it make sense to add or integrate a social networking component?

As a lay pastor and co-developer of Logos360, the first integrated church management and online community solution for churches, I have a unique perspective to share. I believe churches have a great opportunity to take advantage of powerful technologies that can streamline their processes, while empowering stronger relationships within the church. By integrating my company's 360Connected Church social networking solution with Logos Management Software's Logos II Church Management, our companies have created a

"one-stop-shop" for leaders to manage their church information, while creating a safe, relationship-building community to meaningfully connect leaders and members.

But before we explore this integration idea further, we must define a few terms.

At the risk of oversimplifying, the role of a church leader is to be "a servant", using one's gifts to shepherd, encourage and challenge those under our care. Whether a leader's role is paid or voluntary, the charge is the same: to serve. Church leaders serve the saints in their charge by equipping them with every good thing to do the work that God has for them.

Church Management Software ("CMS"), such as Logos II, automates record keeping, accounting and database management. These tools were invented to relieve the burden of keeping track of

people, conversations, delegation of communication tasks and follow up. A good CMS takes this mental burden and puts it efficiently into software that tracks attendance, giving and conversations, thus freeing church leaders to focus on what's truly important: people.

In simple terms, a social network (e.g. MySpace, Facebook, or an online church community) is the communication space where relationships can grow. Today, social networks are no longer the sole domain of college kids, as the recent surge in church communities in Facebook have shown. As of January 2009, its user base had grown to 150 million. It is the digital place where relationships are started, continued, fostered and grown. Friends hang out, interact and share their lives together by posting status updates (answering the question "what am I doing now") or posting photos of their latest social event. It is a communication place. Recent research has shown a decline in email volume as people prefer to communicate via texting or leaving messages on friends' "walls."

So, a key question is: How does using a good CMS help a church leader do their job and serve their people better?

One way is tracking relational tasks, which may be as simple as assigning someone to a small group. The leader must be notified that there is a new person for their group, and the inquirer needs to be contacted. For the person looking to join a small group, this represents a big step; it is risky to reach out and there may be some anxiety about meeting new people and finding a good fit. Prompt and friendly communication from the group's leader is critical to alleviate a newcomer's fears. That's where Logos' group assignment and follow-up tracking

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helps. Church leaders, rest assured that those seeking resources like a small group connect with the appropriate people. A church leader effectively serves the needs of a person seeking connection in a small group by making sure they get "plugged in" where they need to be.

The next question is: How does participating in a social network help a church leader serve better?

In the course of serving, a large part of knowing how to direct one's gifts and bring the appropriate help is listening and responding. This is where social

media (e.g. like Facebook or a church's private social network such as Logos360) comes in. As status updates are displayed for all to see, an astute and sensitive leader will monitor these for indications of need and respond accordingly. Youth pastors and college leaders from all around the country have been mining MySpace pages for insights into their kids for years. And now that social networks have become more mainstream, church leaders are able to listen and respond to the "lifestreaming" of a broader cross-section of church goers. Status updates provide a wealth of information to someone listening for opportunities to serve or encourage. Participating in social networks also empowers church leaders by equipping them with valuable intelligence about the people they serve. Leaders are able to listen and respond to needs like never before.

So how would integrating these two tools, a CMS and a social network, help a leader to serve better?

First, integration streamlines the communication process. Remember the example of assigning someone to a small group? What if the inquiry came through an interaction on your church's social network and you wanted to assign the job of follow up? The old way of doing it would be to write a note or call someone and let them know they have a new member interested in their group. With the integration of Logos II and Logos360, assignments and follow-up can be made easily within that linked environment.

Another very recent example of how integration of CMS and online activity benefits a leader is in short-term mission fundraising and reporting. As a leader charged with teams that solicit friends and family for fundraising, calculating funds raised to date gets complicated when you consider the disparate ways that funds come in: via checks mailed to the church, cash-generating events like bake sales, online donations, etc. These all represent various pipelines into the financial pipeline managed by the CMS, but are not always integrated into it. A simple question such as: "How much has my team raised by individual?" can take more than a week to answer. This simple question requires someone in the office to run a query for giving in order to match this up with an individual recipient, as well as track the givers. All this tedious tracking represents time not spent elsewhere. Integration of the two environments, Logos360 and the online giving option, speeds up answers. Additionally, leaders are able to quickly provide answers to questions raised by volunteers, thus serving them effectively.

Finally, integrating Logos II (CMS) with Logos360, results in greater efficiency, allowing you to be good stewards of the precious resource of time. If something can be done faster and with less human intervention, or if redundancies can be eliminated, aren't you giving the body you serve the gift of time? Having an easy way to get information out to your leadership teams or easily connecting newcomers with small groups, will free you to do what you love, which is to serve others.

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