



ChurchHelper - The Name Says It All!

An interview with Steve Davis of ChurchHelper

By Steve Hewitt

Over the years, I have heard a bit here and there about a ChMS that went by the name of ChurchHelper. However, it seems I never actually made contact with them until recently. Steve Davis contacted me when he heard about last month's ChMS Overview issue and I spent some time on the phone with him learning about the history and the many features of ChurchHelper. I decided our readership would like to know more about them as well, since we have never featured them in Christian Computing. So, this month, check out my interview with Steve and learn the history of ChurchHelper and what makes their ChMS offering unique!

When and how did ChurchHelper start?

ChurchHelper started in 1985, when I began volunteering for a large church in Hermosa Beach, California. The church was growing and had recently undergone pastoral changes. Up to that point they had been using a well known ChMS product for maintaining their mailing list and contributions posting, which took a minimum of 25 hours a week. It was difficult watching them work so hard to do such simple tasks - they had numerous piles stacked about for adding, editing, and posting. I started

working from home to develop a solution for them, and within two months the process was streamlined, thereby eliminating many of the time consuming steps they had been using. This new process cut their weekly processing from 25 hours a week to 7 hours per week – an over 300% increase in productivity!

Shortly after this I was hired full-time to head up their IT department which had over 100 users and managed over 10,000 records in the church mailing list. It was during that time I began to understand my calling to develop a quality, user friendly Church Management System, and TABS® (The Active Branch System) was born! As the sys-

tem grew and developed, it was provided to over 25 daughter churches, and in a short period of time over 200 churches nationwide were using TABS®. After almost 12 years of working on staff I was hired by our District Office which oversaw 225 southern California churches. During this time the opportunity arose to further develop TABS® software. We provided TABS® FREE to all the churches in the District, while also providing training to pastors, church staff, and volunteers.

Eventually TABS® software was used by two Districts with more than 500 churches. In 2000, TABS® was completely redesigned for the Internet in Microsoft's ASPX.net with a SQL backend database. TABS® was enhanced and offered additional features such as an online church financial reporting system and online camp registration modules. Churches could now enter their financial data online—saving the district office over 40 to 50 man-hours per month. One benefit was that the Districts could now provide their churches financial analysis for loan reviews and approval over the phone in minutes rather than the days it formerly took to research and consolidate the information manually. The new camp registration module allowed people to register and enter their camper registration information online. The District could then view and finalize all the camp rooming, payments, and reporting process online, saving another 20-30 man hours monthly.

TABS® was further developed, making updates and enhancements that kept up with the latest technology. A few years later I was hired by our denomination corporate head quarters to develop and oversee a Change Management Office and manage the Help Desk Center. These departments supported and serviced 450 corporate office personnel, three national regional offices, and over 1,800 churches



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ChurchHelper and TABS® were developed and designed specifically to enhance and simplify administrative tasks for all aspects of ministry from startup churches to mid and mega churches, to district and/or corporate environments.

What are some of the major changes you have seen in your product/service over the years?

Our TABS® ChMS has gone through several enhancements and platform design changes. Our primary goal has always been to provide our customers with relevant applications that take advantage of current technology. For example, as early as 2000, ChurchHelper offered a PDA (mobile devices) connection to the TABS® database for our district personnel. This gave them access to pastors and church information online long before mobile connectivity was popular.

Our TABS® modules have also undergone quite a few changes over the years, and our most popular TABS® modules continue to be 1) Contacts and Groups - with simultaneous emailing and text messaging capability 2) Visitors Care Response Card processing - with team follow-up call assignments, and 3) Donations processing.

Customers say that our donations, visitor's care

response cards, and email and text messaging features are far easier and faster than anything they've ever used or seen.

There are many ChMS choices available today. Why do you believe your customers have picked ChurchHelper TABS® over other options?

The most frequent answer our customers give us for choosing our system over others is the ease in which they can process and retrieve relevant information. Our method of processing and displaying information means their data is always fresh and relevant for today's ministry needs and doesn't simply become stagnate information or a repository for storing irrelevant information.

Customers say they enjoy having quick and easy online access to accurate information. They can determine at a glance whether individuals or families have been active or inactive - giving them clear insight of how to best communicate and follow-up with everyone who attends their church.

Our competitive pricing is also hard to beat. Churches and districts often choose TABS® Online because they receive huge savings on both our products and services—often 50-75% compared to other ChMS products and services.

Sometimes it seems that ChMS is all about administration and data. How can ChurchHelper and TABS® support and enhance a church's ministry?

We've been serving churches, districts, and corporate offices' ministry and administration needs since 1985. Everything we do is with the focus of promoting pastoral care in peoples' lives. ChurchHelper TABS® also has many special features which are not available with other products.

Although TABS® Online is a Web-based system, it is designed to look and feel like a desktop application. Other Web-based ChMS are designed to have the individual scroll up or down while doing data entry or retrieving data. This can be both time

consuming and tedious. By making our modules a one-page design, we've eliminated the need for scrolling, and dropdown or pop-up menus which are often confusing and awkward.

Retrieving information

Searching for data in TABS® is like no other. Users can perform searches from any of the data entry fields and screens – there is no need to go to



another page or window. For example, our Visitor's Care Response Card module shows that searches can be performed from any of the yellow highlighted fields. You can also switch screens by clicking on the "Notes" or "Contacts" button and continue to search for any information entered into any of these fields. Based on any search criteria, you can generate reports, labels, and letters, or send personalized emails and text messages simultaneously to any individual or group! This method of searching is standard throughout the entire TABS® Online system.

We proudly offer customer service which focuses on customers' needs – above and beyond. We've even assisted church employees with administrative tasks when the regular staff was unavailable.

When customers use our software and services, we like to think they are actually hiring us to be an extension of their team. Our no-worry policy ensures customers have the freedom to call whenever needed, without fear of being charged for support services. All online support and training is FREE!

Consolidating and centralizing information

We've witnessed time after time ministries that have reverted back to maintaining their contact/group lists in a separate spreadsheet instead of con-

tinuing to use their church's ChMS system. We're told they do this because the system they have is just too difficult to use, and it's more work than it's worth!

Our goal to alleviate this frustration is to offer a system that is: 1) simple to use, 2) powerful to access/retrieve information, and 3) a solution that is ministry focused. We want our customers to feel good about opening up TABS® Online! If people shy away from using a ChMS, ministry may suffer, and peoples' lives are impacted. Our purpose is to help churches facilitate ministry in people's lives.

Ministry and Accounting in ChMS

Ministry and vision are fluid—even more so with today's technological advances. Ministry can grow very rapidly, while accounting processes and procedures are primarily a supporting role to a church's vision and ministry. A church should be able to grow and change tactics when needed to fulfill their God given vision.

Our experience has shown that many churches struggle with balancing ministry and financial administration procedures and processes. Some ChMS offered a ChMS with both ministry and accounting functions integrated. Although intentions were good, inevitably the very things which were meant to bring balance ended up causing problems since these two departments have clearly different purposes. Often, ministry was hindered as one department or the other simply tolerated the software which was really not a good fit for both.

We've also seen where a church's ministry has outgrown or become dissatisfied with their ChMS application, but continue using it because the accounting functions are such an embedded aspect of the church's administration. The accountants don't want to change the ChMS because of the accounting processes and the functionality it has for their department.

When necessary, we've also encouraged customers to continue to use their ChMS accounting system if they must, but use a different ChMS system for ministries so the vision and relationship aspects of ministries can flourish. ChurchHelper's TAB Online can export data in various formats which can then be brought into most any account

package. The bottom line: a win-win for everyone! With separated functions, each can grow separately and change at their own pace as needs demand, and the church's God-given vision can grow as directed by the ministry leadership. Since God gives vision for ministry to his people, shouldn't it be the ministry that drives the ChMS features and functions? We believe that having a ministry focused ChMS will help the church achieve its goals, while allowing them to be good stewards over the vision God has given them.

Relevant and Integrated Information

The key to effective ministry administration is having accurate, relevant information available to leadership, staff personnel, and ministry volunteers.

People who attend a church also want to feel welcomed and recognized by those on the church staff or leadership. By having personalized and accurate information available in the ChMS, church administration and staff can have confidence knowing that the information is accurate and relevant – which can be critical in establishing or further developing relationships with them.

When sending letters, emails, or text messages, the accuracy of the information used within the



ChMS system is critical. TABS® Online updates some data automatically so your ministry, leadership, and people can rest assured that TABS® Online is maintaining both accurate and up to date information.

Here are a few examples of how TABS® Online works behind the scenes to make the process of retrieving accurate information possible.

Whenever contributions, attendance, group activity, event registrations, or response cards, discipleship, etc... information is posted, the household's last activity date is also automatically up-

dated. This shows that this particular household was active within the church at that time. You'll be able to define when a visitor is a regular attendee by the number of times they've given donations or attended your church.

These simple features are beneficial when determining if visitors, regular attendees, or member households have or have not been active within the church for any time period.

Listed below are just a few of the many possible searches from within all TABS® solutions:

- Visitors, regular attendees, members, from last year (or any period of time) who are either active or non-active
- Visitors, regular attendees last year, the past 6, 3 months, etc... and who are now members
- Who is in leadership and active or inactive
- Who are contributors and active or inactive
- Who is in leadership and are or are not contributors

The ease of accessibility of information about activity involvement of families and individuals within your ministries is a powerful feature. From



these same screens or searches, you can generate personalized letters, emails and/or text messages as needed. You can also create and send mail merged letters to weekly visitors or to families for any reason.

The Groups solutions offer all these benefits and more! With two mouse clicks, you can see all the individuals involved within your church's ministries and know instantly how many families/households these individuals belong to.

In the Visitors Care solution, follow-up team members are automatically sent emails of people assigned to them for follow-up, and conversation

notes can be reviewed by pastoral staff or administration personnel. These might include notes about evangelism or baptism, small group interests, personal comments, or any topics you deem necessary during your follow-up calls with individuals.

Each solution module also integrates with Internet mapping functionality for accessing directions to specific addresses or locations. The same ease and powerful functions are throughout all TABS® solution modules.

What are some features you are planning for the future?

We've designed our system around customer needs and highly value the feedback we receive from them. This is why we often provide customization and enhancement solutions for our TABS® Online customers.

ChurchHelper is a very agile development environment, so requests from customers often become part of the system features or functions. We believe this helps make a richer experience for the end user.

Here are just a few of the features we are working on now:

- Online Response Card solution—very soon individuals will be able to submit response card decisions, interests, or request information online. They will also be able to submit prayer requests or edit their address and family member information.
- Further integration with social media services will become a part of TABS® Online
- Integrated, customizable newsletter module—churches will be able to completely design their own newsletters within TABS® and mail merge information from their database directly within the newsletter, or choose to interface with other services
- Customizable reporting application— we often offer report customization services for FREE to our customers

Along these lines, we also provide complete software development and customization services. We work with organizations and churches to develop solutions to meet their specific needs.

To receive an online presentation or to receive more information, call 951-398-5008 or email us at info@churchhelper.com. We are available to assist and serve you and your ministry.