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Introduction

For the past several years, Big Data has been a buzzword tossed around in the for-profit world as the "Next Big Thing," so long as you had the financial resources to access the wealth of information in "the Cloud." These days, however, analysis and insights that were once reserved for big business are now accessible to nonprofits and churches. Church leaders should not fear to use the same tools and tactics that business leaders use, but rather see them as valuable assets to be used for the expansion of the Kingdom. "Big Data" is simply a new word for a very old thing — knowledge.

Church leaders have the opportunity to apply God-given wisdom to a wealth of new knowledge about what individuals value, how they behave, and what drives them to commit to something bigger and more important than themselves.

In this resource, we will explore practical ways that churches can leverage the data in their church management system to create deeper engagement with church members, enhance discipleship, and make better, more informed decisions for the future of their ministry.

4 WAYS TO USE DATA TO MAKE BETTER MINISTRY DECISIONS

1 Measure Progress Toward Your Mission, Vision, and Values

Many a sermon has been preached on Habakkuk 2:2 and the importance of putting your vision to paper. Most churches follow this wisdom and create a vision or values statement, print it out, post it on their office walls, and then occasionally glance at it in quarterly meetings. But in order to have meaningful values, it is important to measure progress against them. We have all heard Peter Drucker's famous quote that "what gets measured gets done." This is true for business and church alike.

If your church values, for example, "worshipping God intimately," then a way to measure that would be to track attendance at your worship services. If you value prayer, you can measure sign-ups and attendance at your prayer gatherings. If you value connection, you can measure participation in small groups.

Your ChMS should allow both staff and lay leaders to track attendance through either kiosks, sign in sheets, headcounts, or mobile apps. When tracked consistently, these measurements allow you to better understand how your activities are aligning with your vision and values.

In my life, I have found that tracking metrics helps me remain account-able to the goals I am trying to achieve. It's rarely "fun," and sometimes even painful, but it is always rewarding because it helps provide the disci-pline that may be hard to find on a given day.

TIPS FOR MEASURING PROGRESS TOWARD YOUR MISSION:

» Having a "vision frame" helps you know what is most important for recognizing your ministry is successful.

» Based on those values, what kind of behavior, engagement or inter-action will be the evidence that people are living within those values? Some questions to ask might include:

- How involved are people in small groups in your church?

- What percentage of the congregation is actively serving/volun-teering on a weekly/monthly basis?

- How often are your lay leaders checking in on the people they are discipling?

- Are any classes declining?

2 Create More Relevant Programs for People in the Pews

Most people operate in a vacuum of the self and take experiences from their own lives, run through their filters, and assume that everyone is experiencing what they experience and feeling what they feel. They use anecdotal evidence to support their bias and make a decision, and then are surprised when things don't fall into place like they expected. Data allows church leaders to break through biases and quantify the decision-making process.

Data does not have to dehumanize the discipleship process ... it can enhance it. Knowing more about your congregation at an individual level allows you to create classes or programs to help them in each stage of life.

If your church is seeing an uptick in the number of unemployed members, you can offer support groups with classes on building resumes and mock interviews. If you have a large number of young families in your congregation, you can use that data to offer child care for date nights. If you notice that your contributions are not where they should be, you can offer Financial Peace courses to help your congregation better manage their money.

Your ChMS should not only allow you to find these people, but should also support granular communication, allowing you to target specific groups of people with information that is more relevant to them. Many systems offer built-in email and SMS capabilities.

TIPS FOR REVEALING THE MOST RELEVANT PROGRAMS AT YOUR CHURCH

» Use the data you have about your church members' behavior to tell you what a typical "successful" discipleship journey looks like.

» Once you analyze the numbers, it may surprise you to find that a certain class or ministry is accounting for a large number of people starting down the path of membership and deeper involvement.

» Having a church management system in place that tracks individuals' progress from new visitor all the way to disciple-maker will help you get an accurate picture of what that journey generally looks like. Then you can use the power of that knowledge to properly resource the people and ministries that are driving the most growth.

3 Keep People Engaged Between Sundays

Relationships are key to the life of a healthy church. New people come through the doors and others leave through those same doors.

Attendance tracking not only allows you to measure your church's performance against your values, but also allows you to find the people who are disengaging before it is too late.   TouchPoint ChMS allows you to define someone as connected; that is, if they have attended two times in the last month and given once in the last month they would automatically get a "connected" badge on their people record. The badge status is updated dynamically based on their attendance and giving history with no extra work for your staff. You can then have reports automatically emailed to your small group leaders when their participants have missed 2 weeks in a row, or generate other reports to track people who were formerly "connected" but are no longer.

Data can help you proactively re-engage the members of the congregation and communicate with them before they leave permanently.

» Equip lay leaders with technology that allows them to check people into classes, mid-week small groups, and other activities that require regular attendance. Nowadays there are church apps that sync this data with the larger church database.

» Run regular attendance reports out of your ChMS to see who is dropping off, and have a plan prepared for how to reach out to those individuals.

» Over time, analyze attendance data to see if there are any telling trends. You may discover that certain demographics tend to peak or drop off at certain times of the year.

» You can then use that information to equip lay leaders with strategies to combat lagging attendance or help new members assimilate more quickly and easily.

4 Drive Greater Commitment and Generosity

There are a couple of ways to use data to increase giving and drive people toward deeper levels of generosity. The first is to be purposeful about tracking and engaging with new givers. There is a tendency to believe that if someone gives once or twice, they will continue to give. What we've found in our research is that it takes five gifts before someone gives regularly. Knowing this, and being intentional about walking alongside people from their first to their fifth gift, is a great way to use the data you have at your disposal to drive generosity.

The second way you can use data to drive generosity is to meet with your top givers on a regular basis and share with them information about how their personal giving impacts real lives through the ministry. Many of your church's highest givers have full careers and busy lives that may prevent them from being as active in the church as they would like, but a personal relationship with these members can connect the dots between their career and the ministry their contributions support.

» More often than not, there is someone in your church who could and would increase their generosity if only asked. Use giving data to find who the key givers are at your church, and connect with people who have willingness and capacity to give more.

» Find out what your financial leaders are passionate about. Giving is deeply tied to what stirs our affections, so make time to meet individually with key givers at your church to find out what they value most.

» Once you get those individuals engaged in ministries that are doing work with which they find emotional and spiritual resonance, their finances will follow.

Are You Ready to Eliminate the Guesswork Around Important Ministry Decisions?

Using the right ChMS, you can leverage data to make better decisions to support your church's values, drive higher engagement through relevant programs, and encourage deeper generosity.

FREE TouchPoint Trial

http://try.TouchPointsoftware.com/TouchPoint-church-management-software/

Connect with our team to learn more at *info@TouchPointsoftware.com*

About TouchPoint

TouchPoint provides a robust yet affordable church management software system for mobile devices and computers that enables and equips church leaders to manage their church, engage their people, and fund their vision. The software solution was developed by founder and lead developer, David Carroll, as a way to help his home congregation, Bellevue Baptist Church, manage their members more effectively and efficiently. Today, 285 churches use TouchPoint as their go-to church management system.

About Scott Romig

SCOTT ROMIG
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Scott Romig has always had a passion for the intersection of technology and people. A self pro-claimed "nerd evangelist," Scott has a strong drive to help nonprofits and churches reach donors and raise dollars to further their mission. Currently, Scott serves as vice president of sales/marketing for Technology Products at The Pursuant Group. His strength is to come alongside nonprofit organizations and help them leverage technology solutions to achieve their long-term vision and goals.

Scott can also be found playing on the worship team at One Chapel in Austin Texas or with his band, Dexter Freebish. Scott and his family live in Dripping Springs Texas, the gateway to the hill country.