

# 'TECH' THE TECH COMMANDMENTS

## 7 GUIDELINES FOR USING TECHNOLOGY IN MINISTRY

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# Technology is part of congregational reality.

In 1998, as part of our work with congregations, the Indianapolis Center for Congregations began its innovative Computers and Ministry Grants Initiative (CMGI). This program helped congregations address the challenges in using computer technology for ministries with their members and constituencies. CMGI worked with 102 congregations and awarded almost \$2 million in matching grants for hardware, software, training, service, and support. Since its inception, the Center has worked with more than 500 congregations in the area of technology.

Our work with congregations and technology over the last seven years has taught us that regardless of size, denomination, socio-economic status, or budget, congregations have realized that technology is an indispensable tool for ministry. Having and using these tools is no longer optional if a congregation wants to be an effective faith community in the 21st century.

While we could write volumes about how congregations use technology (and we have written one—*40 Days and 40 Bytes: Making Computers Work for Your Congregation* [Alban Institute]), there are some best practices that have emerged. We offer here seven practices toward planning for technology that every congregation needs to implement to make their technology use successful.

## 1 CREATE A TECHNOLOGY TEAM

What is a technology team? Well, it is *not* a committee of techno-geeks. Rather, it's a group of people charged with:

- Determining what your congregation wants to do with technology,
- Prioritizing and shaping these wants into needs,
- Creating a specific plan and timeline,
- Following through with the purchase, installation, and training needed to make the plan a reality,
- Monitoring and evaluating the newly acquired technology as it's put into use, and
- Doing it all over again.

Each of these steps is necessary in a successful technology implementation.

Why create a technology team?

Because there's a lot to do if a congregation is to use technology wisely.

Our experience shows that using the technology team approach works! It enlists the ideas and support of all aspects of a congregation as it plans how to use new technology tools. A technology team also builds wide congregational support. A technology team creates new opportunities for volunteer involvement, especially among younger members. It gets many stakeholders involved. Working in this way ensures that your plan is not just one person's idea.

Make sure that this team represents all major ministry areas of your congregation; include all who have a stake in what happens in your congregation. The technology team should have representatives from the administrative and pastoral staff, and ministry leaders—both paid staff and volunteers. Don't forget to include financial secretaries, youth program

leaders, and committee leaders from your governing board.

## 2 USE PROFESSIONAL HELP

Our experience has confirmed the anecdotal belief that volunteers aren't always the best implementers when it comes to technology. Professionals used judiciously will actually save a congregation money. Professionals can quickly assess your current usage and then make implementation recommendations. Consultants can suggest vendors for both hardware and software. Some professionals can even manage your installation project. Enlisting this kind of help on the front side always saves money—it keeps a congregation from >>>>

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making mistakes, which are most often errors of omission. This is not to say there isn't a place for volunteers. Indeed, volunteers working in conjunction with professional integrators is the most effective way of handling a congregation's technology needs.

## 3 TRAIN, TRAIN, TRAIN

Budget money and time for more training than you think you'll need. A common and disheartening scenario for congregations is that they budget only for necessary hardware and software. Then after it's installed they discover that no one knows how to use it to its potential. Make sure staff and volunteers have adequate access to initial and ongoing training.

## 4 TALK WITH OTHER CONGREGATIONS

There's no better resource than the church or synagogue down the street that's already done what you are planning to do. Find out how successful they are at using hardware, software, consultants, and training venues. Be sure to talk with more than one person. We say that because we've found that many times the pastor's perspective is much different from the administrator's or secretary's. Make sure you talk with the people who actually use the technology.

## 5 BUY JUST WHAT YOU NEED

Don't worry about technology advancing past you. It will. But if you purchase current hardware and software, it's likely that you can still be using the same equipment three to five years from now. Some upgrading will be necessary along the way, especially with software. The personal computer industry is in large measure governed by the consumer who plays high-tech games. Unless your staff is going to be playing games in the office, today's technology will work just fine for several years!

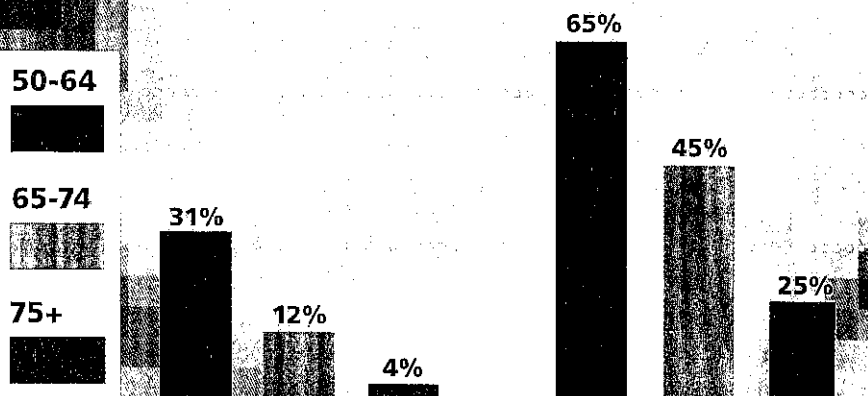
Be careful not to budget just for equipment; make sure you budget for maintenance and upgrades as well. Studies

have shown that just 20 to 30 percent of the total cost of owning a computer is attributed to the purchase cost. The remaining 70 to 80 percent comes from operational costs such as maintenance, administration, and support.

The cost of ownership rises as a computer ages. After four years, the primary issues contributing to a PC's operating costs are hardware failures, driver issues and updates, virus and security problems, application conflicts, and multiple generations of support personnel. Also, these usually become problems after the warranty has expired. Technology professionals look at TCO—Total Cost of Ownership. When they factor in the various scenarios and statistics, they find it's always cheaper to replace computers regularly—at least every three to five years. >>>>

## The Burst of Gray Online

Us old folks are catching up with the young 'uns on the use of the Internet. From 1998 to 2005, the number of 50- to 64-year-olds using the Internet more than doubled, the number of 65- to 74-year-olds more than tripled, and the number of 75 years and older grew more than six times.



Source: AARP, The State of 50+ America, USA Today