MinistryTech

TECH TOOLS TO REACH THE
DIGITAL NATIVES IN YOUR KIDMIN

>> IT'S *NOT* THE SOUND GUY'S FAULT: 5 REASONS WHY

>> DISCOVER THE POSITIVE SIDE OF DATA MINING

>> KEEP KIDS SAFE IN 2019— AND PROTECT YOUR MINISTRY

JANUARY 2019

www.ministrytech.com

CONTENTS
01.19

17

14

FEATURES

10

21

24

★ SPOTLIGHTS

IN EVERY ISSUE

Ministry Tech

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR
Ray Hollenbach

Boom!

Just like that it's a new year. In the words of the old rock'n'roll song, "Time keeps on slippin' into the future." It's built into nature at creation. The regular passage of days, weeks, months and, yes, even years, is part of what we see in the Genesis creation accounts: There's evening, morning, and a new day. It's the way God set things up, and what's more, we are promised new mercies each day (Lamentations 3:22-23). I trust that 2019 will be mercy-drenched for each of you!

I'm excited to highlight some new features and changes here at Ministry Tech. Four of our regular contributors will take on the exalted title of "Columnist" this year. They will contribute short, one-page columns to help you spot tech trends in their various areas of expertise: Steven Sundermeier addresses security tech; Mike O'Brien addresses worship tech; Jonathan Smith will talk about Pastor Tech; and Yvon Prehn tackles all things related to effective communication. Each one is a proven expert in their area, and we trust this new, readable (and brief) format serves you well!

We will continue to expand content from valued Ministry Tech business partners. For example, in this issue we welcome our partners at One Call Now and also highlight a first-time contributor, ShareFaith. Their in-depth treatment of how to apply tech to ministry will provide practical wisdom in how to use their products in life-giving ways that serve our congregations. After all, that's the high calling of "ministry."

Finally, we are excited about what new topics and opportunities await us in the coming year. We are already working on articles to serve multisite ministries, live streaming opportunities, and the very best of software and apps to help serve the Lord's people—and these topics will all come your way in just the first quarter of the year.

We are so grateful for the growing readership of Ministry Tech Magazine, and we look forward to exploring the intersections between faith and technology with you.

Happy New Year!

Ray Hollenbach is the Editor of Ministry Tech *magazine. He has previously served as the editor of Outreach's* Better Preaching Update, *and as the editor of the Pastor channel at Churchleaders.com. You can reach him at* rhollenbach@outreach.com.

TECH CHECK
01.19

NOTHING SAYS "THANK YOU" LIKE JAVA

Let's face it: Coffee has become the standard for American hospitality. But coffee isn't just for Sunday morning guests: Have you ever thought of providing a "Green Room" for volunteers, a place where children's workers, worship team members and ushers can gather? It's one way to show appreciation. And what Green Room would be complete without a latte/cappuccino machine. We are serious—this would be a great way to let your volunteers know that they are loved! This month Wired provides your definitive guide to the best latte and cappuccino makers. ∎

FROM THE FOLKS AT PIXAR!!!!

You may not have heard of Renderman, but you've definitely seen the incredible effects it has made possible. From Star Trek to Star Wars, from the Abyss to Terminator 2, and across all of Pixar's animated features—Renderman has changed the world of special effects.

Renderman is for rendering VFX and Animation (and it goes well beyond animation). If you have a team member willing to experiment and learn, this software could change the way you do announcements, children's curriculum, small groups—you're only limited by your imagination. Renderman is available for a surprisingly affordable price: $595. (And just for fun, take a few minutes to see how Pixar helped win 27 of the last 30 Oscars for Visual Effects.) ∎

COM'ON: GIVE YOUR CLEANUP TEAM A ROBOT!
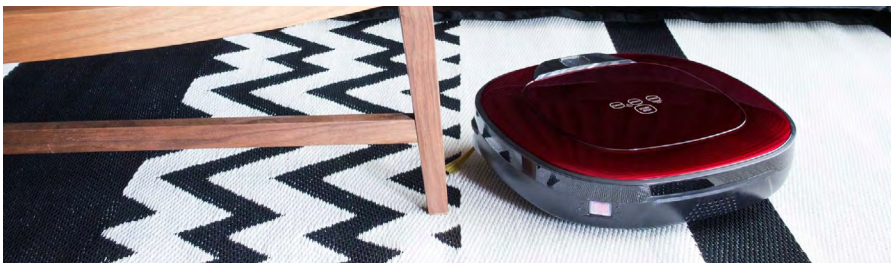
Imagine this: Your Sunday services are over, you turn out the lights, set the security system, lock the door—and a robot (or two) begins the work of cleanup in your sanctuary and classrooms! What used to be science fiction is now commonplace in may homes around the country. So why not put a robotic vacuum to work in your church building? The trustworthy folks at Consumer Reports (yes—they're still on the job!) recently released their list of the best robotic vacuums of 2018. If you have extra budget dollars left over from last year, here's a creative way to spend them! ∎

THE POSITIVE SIDE OF DATA MINING

Data mining has certainly been in the news a lot lately. Every time you turn around another company has been hacked and more of our personal information has been exposed. In addition, many of our favorite social networks are selling our data to big companies who in turn monetize it for profit. It's no wonder why data mining has such a negative connotation. (I wrote about this in the May 2018 issue of Ministry Tech if you'd like to know more.)

While data mining can certainly be used for nefarious purposes it can also be used for good. Churches also collect tons of data (much like social networks and your favorite online shopping website) that can be used for greater Kingdom impact. It might be good to spend some time evaluating the data you already have. Many questions about attendance, giving and serving trends can be found in the data you are already collecting.

Data about giving patterns can help reveal a lot more than just how much money was given. Giving data can be used to help track attendance, and correlated with children's check-in data can show a lot about how a family interacts with your ministries. What does it say if kids are checking in but there is no giving data? What about giving data with no children's check-in history?

Check-in and attendance data also help provide a good picture of how an individual or family is connecting (or not connecting) with your ministry. Obviously you want to see attendance trends for facility planning and discipleship, but there is a lot more to it. Closing the back door to keep folks from slipping through the cracks is a challenge every ministry faces. Data mining, or using the data you already have to help you identify problem spots, is a valuable tool to target discipleship.

Serving data is another way to look at how well folks are being assimilated into your ministry and a great measure of discipleship. Having a clear picture of 'who is doing what" can help you target volunteers for different ministry opportunities. Many times 20 percent of the people are doing 80 percent of the work because the other 80 percent of the people aren't being properly asked or discipled to serve.

And then there's cross-comparing the data: Do you know who's attending and giving but not serving? What about who's giving and serving but not attending? With online giving it is also possible to give and not serve or attend.

We often don't take the time to mine our data to answer these questions and more in order to grow our effectiveness. Corporations prioritize mining data to make money; churches and ministries should mine data to grow the Kingdom of Christ and help equip those they serve to become more faithful disciples. **MT**

> **DATA MINING** TO HELP YOU IDENTIFY PROBLEM SPOTS IS A VALUABLE TOOL TO TARGET DISCIPLESHIP.

Jonathan Smith *is the Director of Technology at Faith Ministries in Lafayette, IN. You can reach Jonathan at* jsmith@faithlafayette.org *and follow him on Twitter @JonathanESmith.*

THE CASE FOR CLEAN

I recently took on an interim worship director position at a 25-year-old church that had several worship leaders before me. One of my self-imposed jobs was to clean out and organize the worship office, the soundboard area and backstage. In the first couple of hours I quickly filled over five massive trash bags with old VGA cables, Microsoft keyboards, countless cheap cables covered in electrical tape goo, stereo systems, and broken, outdated amps. Much of this gear had literally not seen the light in years. It was just taking up valuable storage space.

The Cluttered Church

In the church, we have a unique relationship with the things that collect in our sound and media spaces. Many times people "gift" the outdated gear collecting in their homes or offices; we feel obligated to keep those donated items. A quick web search shows you that 300-foot spool of network cable goes for $12 on eBay—so you think, we need to hold onto this. Often people have purchased things for church programs or events and then leave it at the church; there's a 1 percent chance we might need it again, so in an attempt to be a good steward, we keep it. Sermon illustrations from 1997 are still blocking the door.

One of the chief enemies of creativity in the church is disordered, cluttered and mismanaged spaces. That well-meaning clutter pile needs to be purged. We must take action for a new, functional and creative space for your teams.

> WHEN WE REALLY DELVE INTO THE REASONS WHY WE CAN'T LET SOMETHING GO, THERE ARE ONLY TWO: AN ATTACHMENT TO THE PAST OR A FEAR OF THE FUTURE.
> *MARIE KONDO*

The Case for Clean

Cluttered spaces are like kryptonite for certain personalities. Although some are fine with chaotic spaces, more people will be attracted to and work better in organized areas. Also, in emergencies, it's easy to navigate well-labeled and orderly areas to find solutions.

Training and deploying volunteers is much easier when space speaks for itself vs. only one or two people knowing their way around the maze.

Clean begets clean. People are less likely to use your area as their area when your area is already tidy.

Mission-Minded Space

Organized, labeled and de-cluttered work/storage spaces can serve the mission of a local church. Our computers, sound mixers, guitar cables and draws of tape help communicate the mission of the church. It's actually really important how these tools are used and stored. Yes, we don't want to throw away valuable items the church might actually need to fulfill its mission, but that well-meaning clutter pile might be becoming an obstacle. This is the perfect time to ask: "What needs to be trashed, donated, sold or kept?"

Finally, consider storage space when committing to purchase props for special events. Space is finite and valuable. I recommend this valuable resource: The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, by Marie Kondo: "Clutter is caused by a failure to return things to where they belong. Therefore, storage should reduce the effort needed to put things away, not the effort needed to get them out."

Mike O'Brien holds a B.A. in Music from Kennesaw State University and a Master of Worship Studies from the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies. He has worked as a producer, engineer and mixer at Lucko Sound Studio, and with a collective of 25+ musicians called Poured Out Like Wine. Together, they produced seven albums with over 15 published songs with Vineyard Worship USA. He lives in Atlanta, GA, with his wife, Susan, and son, Ezekiel. You can reach Mike at vineband@hotmail.com
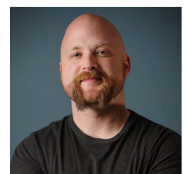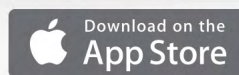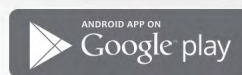
FAITHPLAY

Today's best teaching in the palm of your hand.

Powerful, uplifting messages from today's top Christian podcasters.

faithplay.com

LISTEN TO THE BIBLE
HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN DEEPEN YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WORD

How do you imagine the average Old Testament believer in God carried around all the scrolls needed to learn God's commands? Or how did early New Testament believers study Paul's letters or learn about the life of Jesus? Did they have their own copies of his letters or the newly written gospels to study?

The answer to the above questions, though we seldom think about it, is that for most of church history, very few believers had access to the **written** Word of God. For them, their knowledge of the Word came from hearing—from listening to it read aloud in small group settings.

> THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORD CAME FROM HEARING—FROM LISTENING TO IT READ ALOUD IN SMALL GROUP SETTINGS.

In the Old Testament, we read about the book of the law read to King Josiah and his court in 2 Kings 22, and of Ezra who:

. . . read from [the book of the Law] facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law (Ezra 8:3).

Centuries later, the words of God were still being shared—and read aloud:

In Col. 4:16 Paul says, "And when this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read before the church at Laodicea."

Continuing through centuries of church history, people did not have personal Bibles but heard it read through the liturgy of the church as they gathered week in and week out.

Reading is wonderful, but this year, try something new

My primary spiritual discipline is to read through the Bible every year, in chronological order. This year as I prepare to teach the scripture, I'm encouraging the people in my church to LISTEN to the Bible. If you haven't gone through the Bible in this way, I strongly encourage you to try it. You'll literally hear new things and understand it in a way you haven't before.

And here's the best news: Technology makes it very easy to do. The following are two ways (just go to these sites and download their app or listen online):

www.biblegateway.com
www.youversion.com

Both have apps that you can use to listen on your desktop computer as well as on your mobile phone. You Version even has one for your Amazon Alexa or Echo and Google Assistant.

You may need to demonstrate this to your church

Regular readers of MinistryTech know what I mean when I talk about going to sites and downloading apps, but many of the people in your church might greatly benefit from your help. Simply taking the time to help people download an app or bookmark a website may be the greatest "tech support" you can provide! Whether one on one, or in a group setting, or online video, you can show your people how to access the tools for the experience of *hearing* God's Word.

If you'd like to follow my through-the-Bible teaching this coming year, or use downloadable schedules, or discover additional introductory and encouraging materials on this, go to www.bible805.com.

Yvon Prehn*'s ministry to church communicators has two parts:* effectivechurchcom.com, *a site of FREE templates, strategy and resources, and* churchcomtraining.com, *a Church Communicators Online Training School.*
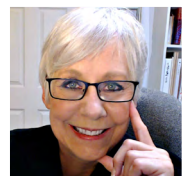
5 LOW COST AND EFFECTIVE WAYS TO
SECURE A NETWORK

Christmas has come and gone. Are you content?

The highly requested and briefly treasured gifts that were unwrapped on the 25th are already collecting dust on the shelves. Your family (like mine) possibly missed the important lesson of contentment. Contentment is defined as a state of happiness and satisfaction.

Do you have "happiness and satisfaction" with the gifts you received? Do your children? It seems a naturally learned tendency for kids to observe the sizes, quantity and perceived value of the presents they have received, but then to also compete and compare with the presents given or talked about by siblings, friends and classmates. The truth is, sometimes-basic things fulfill all of our needs, and the bells and whistles just clutter the experience. For a true life of satisfaction, preaching contentment to our little loved ones is essential. And it's not just about our children: This is true for us, too.

Contentment of course goes way beyond gifts at Christmas. With the fallen world constantly bombarding us with false subliminal and not-so-subliminal messages on what "success" looks like or how our bodies should be shaped, I believe I speak for the majority of us when I say that I need to constantly pray for contentment. 1 Timothy 6:6 reads: "But godliness with contentment is great gain." And yet, I've seen firsthand how struggles with contentment can also seep into our IT Ministries at churches.

Churches across the U.S. come in all sizes (thank God!), and so it makes sense that IT budgets would therefore also vary in size. If you are an IT Director of a smaller church, at times, one can quickly get disheartened at seeing the technical advancements: lighting, sound and IT infrastructure on glaring display at a "big" church.

While maximizing your IT Security should be a critical priority in securing your network, it doesn't have to be an expensive endeavor. In my 20+ years of experience I've seen many organizations overpay for the latest, trending hardware, appliances and software that they don't need or that they purchase and then leverage less than 10 percent of the included fancy modules and features they paid for.

Here are a couple of inexpensive, critical ways to protect your church and its staff securely without having to take up a special 'love offering' to meet your IT needs.

1. **Install strong client-based anti-virus and firewall software.** Thirtyseven4 Endpoint Security incorporates both + much more and is priced fairly and honestly.
2. **Manage regular backups.** With hundreds of Cloud-based backup solutions competing for your business, backing your data to the Cloud is easy and inexpensive.
3. **Keep all OS and software applications up-to-date.** Software updates are free and essential to keeping your devices from threats.
4. **Invest in your staff.** Security is as much knowing where the issue may come from as it is fixing any potential holes. Educate your staff on (simple) safety tips, and the real dangers of not being vigilant (and clicking on things we should not).

It is easy to look at what we don't have as opposed to what we do. As I peruse our living room and basement and see forgotten items that were "must have" expensive Christmas gifts just a few weeks ago, I see the parallel into our Technology whims. Seek contentment. Whether you manage a large or small network environment, there are inexpensive and logical ways to adequately secure your network.

Wishing you a happy and satisfied 2019!

Steven Sundermeier *is the owner of* [*Thirtyseven4, LLC,*](Thirtyseven4, LLC) *a leading provider of antivirus/security software. With 17 years of experience in the cybersecurity field, he is one of the nation's leading experts in virus, malware and other threats. Before founding Thirtyseven4 in 2009, Steven worked in a number of roles in the antivirus industry dating back to 1999.*

One Call Now
AN ONSOLVE COMPANY

HOW EVERY CHURCH CAN—AND MUST—
IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS
Group Messaging Technology Is Part of the Answer

Despite heroic efforts and substantial talent, faith communities across the country struggle with communicating effectively to members and visitors. The many initiatives planned by staff and volunteers are exciting and vital to the health of a faith community. However, if they lack one key ingredient—great communication—they will ultimately fail to achieve their full potential. Consider these factors relating to challenges unique to the faith community environment.

> FAITH COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE TURNING TO GROUP MESSAGING SERVICES TO **BOOST THEIR COMMUNICATIONS.**

A Multigenerational Audience

Your members' ages likely span from cradle to grave. As such, all members do not share the same perspectives or worldviews. They don't necessarily speak the same language, and they have vastly different time commitments and priorities. Sometimes communication fails because faith community leaders have not tailored information, language cues and motivational points according to differences in generational groups.

Communicating Through Many Devices

With this wide range of age groups also comes a spectrum of communication device preferences. Want to alert the teens in your youth group to a schedule change? Forget about using email—you'll need to send a text message or post your announcement to a social media account instead. Want to reach the older adults? A voice call through a landline telephone might be the preferred method. Communication

falls short when faith communities fail to recognize (and appropriately leverage) the multitude of available communication channels and devices.

Dealing With Information Overload

We are bombarded daily with thousands of print advertisements, billboards, commercials, signs, as well as personal communications such as text and phone calls. Even within faith communities there can be a multitude of activities, requests and announcements that compete for mind share. Our brains were created to filter and discard the vast majority of these stimuli, simply as a protection mechanism. Communication can miss the mark when faith community leaders fail to adequately capture people's attention and rise above the noise and filters of daily routines.

Dealing With Urgent Needs

Another challenge in effective communication is the fact that urgent needs arise routinely. Volunteers for services become unavailable and need to be replaced; members face difficult times and need prayer and support. The response to these things either contributes to or detracts from the creation of a feeling of community. Yet, efforts here are often slow, manual or rely on poor processes, such as "call trees." When people are not informed quickly and precisely when urgent needs arise, our communication process has failed the community.

A Call to Sacrifice

In a faith community environment most of our communications contain an appeal for personal sacrifice. Whether asking for commitments of time, money or talent, our messaging often involves at least some degree of pain from the audience. When there is a gap in communications the blame may not lie with a failure in creating awareness or outlining the cold, hard facts. It may have been that an *emotional connection* was missing.

Can Group Messaging Technology Close the Communication Gap?

Trying to address each of these challenges in a manual way is time consuming, costly and inefficient. Is there anything that can be done to make communications more streamlined and effective? For many, the answer is "yes." Faith communities across the country are turning to group messaging services to boost their communications. Also known as "mass notification systems," group-messaging applications are online software packages designed to help people easily manage contacts and send all types of messages through virtually any device. These systems can deliver thousands of voice, text and email messages in minutes. Here are a few ways faith communities commonly use group messaging.

- URGENT PRAYER REQUESTS - When unexpected needs arise, group-messaging software can be used to quickly inform people and request prayers. In addition, some faith communities utilize the service for weekly prayer reminders.

- SERVICE OR EVENT CANCELLATIONS - Faith communities are not immune to severe weather or other unforeseen circumstances. Group messaging technology can be used to alert the whole congregation to a service cancellation or change within minutes, keeping people from being exposed to dangerous situations attempting to attend a cancelled service.

- VOLUNTEER COORDINATION - Most faith communities rely heavily on volunteers, and these volunteers must be coordinated to ensure people are aware of their duties or find replacements. Group messaging software can be used to notify people of their service responsibilities and confirm participation. Or notices can be sent to groups of volunteers when someone who was previously scheduled cancels. Two-way feedback can be used to fill gaps in an automated way.

- VISITOR WELCOME - Immediate feedback from the faith community helps reinforce a visitor's experience and make them feel truly welcome. Computers at the visitor help desk can feature a self-registration portal in which

visitors can enter their information. Messages can be sent via SMS or a recorded voice call sent from the pastor. While not a substitute for true hospitality, technology can help "systemize" the visitor welcome process.

- CONTACT MANAGEMENT - Group messaging solutions allow users to manage their database of contacts and personal information. Contact information can be manually entered, imported from a spreadsheet or, in more robust systems, integrated with other software packages (such as a church information system). Some also provide the ability to set up a self-registration portal, through which members and guests can create and update their own contact information.

- DYNAMIC SUBGROUP SELECTION - While it's easy enough to send messages to everyone in the congregation, most faith communities also utilize the software's dynamic grouping capabilities for selecting targeted subgroups. Information such as: service preferences, volunteer teams, youth or other group memberships, special needs, etc. can all be queried to create subgroups for messaging on-the-fly or saved for future messages.

- MESSAGING THROUGH VIRTUALLY ANY DEVICE - Group messaging solutions also solve the problem associated with communicating through today's plethora of devices and preferred channels. Voice messages can either be recorded, or typed and read by the computer (known as text-to-speech technology), then delivered to land or mobile phones. SMS text messages or emails can be sent to large groups of people at once. And, some solutions will even post a message to your faith community's social media account automatically. The selection of the devices used is completely up to the message sender.

- TWO-WAY COMMUNICATIONS & ONLINE REPORTING - With group messaging, questions and responses can be incorporated into the message. When recipients receive the message, they can

indicate their preferred response (e.g., press 1 for "yes" 2 for "no"). Some systems will allow for responses through any device.

While technology can't replace a smiling face and a friendly handshake, thousands of faith communities across the nation have turned to group messaging services like *One Call Now* to improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of their communications. Whether for urgent situations or routine tasks, *One Call Now* can help members feel connected and motivated instead of feeling disengaged and uninformed. **MT**
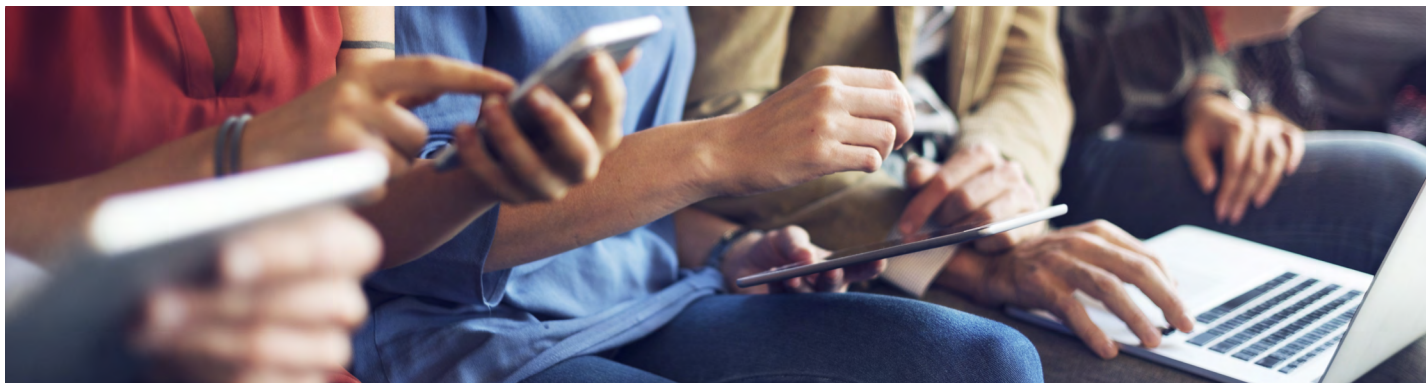
5 REASONS IT'S NOT YOUR
SOUND PERSON'S FAULT

Let's Look Underneath the Stereotypes

by Caleb Neff

Recently I was talking to a frustrated worship leader at a church I was helping with their live sound issues, and he was talking about his (volunteer) sound guy:

"Dude, it's not like it's my job to keep running back there and showing them how to do stuff."

I (maybe not very politely) responded, "Actually Fred *(name changed to protect the guilty)* it is. Let me explain the difference between paid staff and volunteers, and then hopefully you'll understand that you're lucky to have any because if I came to church here I'm not sure I'd work for you."

Too harsh? In both my travels as a sound consultant, and my lifelong experience as a church brat, band member, worship leader and pastor, I discover over and over that the stereotypes about sound guys exist for a reason. Yeah, a lot of them are grumpy, and many of them lack some needed skills, but if you're willing to zoom out a little bit, it's not hard to see why. So, in the spirit of an apology, and sort of explanation to my rudeness to Fred, here are five reasons it's not the sound guy's fault.

> LET ME EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PAID STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS: THEN YOU'LL UNDERSTAND FIVE REASONS **LIVE SOUND ISSUES ARE NOT YOUR SOUND PERSON'S FAULT.**

1. You didn't train them. So many good-natured, servant-hearted people are totally set up to fail in this role from day one. Some mechanic who once installed his own stereo system at home gets prodded by his wife during a call for volunteers, and the next thing you know he's been locked in that booth for five years, with the current plan for him being to have a week off when Jesus comes back. His "training" consisted of a five-minute run-through on a Sunday morning right before he ran his first service.

Now he runs the main complaint station for every grumpy member of your congregation and mainly gets attention whenever something goes wrong. Seriously, you should only do this to people you hate. Is it any wonder he bites now? This is why often in my training events I offer time for repentance, and whenever speaking to groups of sound people I offer apologies on behalf of their church staff that "know not what they're doing."

2. They don't have the proper equipment to do their jobs. Many churches are running like the Millennium Falcon week to week. Turn stuff on, bang on it and cross your fingers hoping you make it through the service. Having the right tools matters. Pastors, can you imagine having to prepare a sermon using only your least favorite Bible translation? Worship leaders: Imagine replacing your carefully curated pedal board with a bunch of random stuff from the guitar center closeout shelf. This is what many sound techs are facing week after week. When the microphone cuts out, everyone shoots a frustrated look at the sound booth. The sound person has been telling the staff that it needs to be looked at for months, but nothing gets done, and people assume the sound person sucks.

3. No "win" has been clarified, therefore all anyone can do is lose. Sound techs intuitively assume that their job is to offend no one since it's church and we're supposed to be nice. When they receive complaints (from people that generally just don't like rock music

and are going to be unhappy no matter what), they feel personally responsible and begin to mix out of fear, trying their hardest to do what every pastor knows is impossible: please everyone in the church. Volume and mix preferences are wildly subjective, and no two people (including professional mix engineers) totally agree on what good is.

4. They're volunteers. In most churches (like Fred's) these wonderful people are there only out of the kindness of their heart. They are among the first to arrive and last to leave on a day that for many people is their only day to sleep in. In most churches I've seen, they serve more frequently ([fewer] Sundays off) than any other area in the church. And they carry a tremendous weight of responsibility. Is there any other volunteer position in the church where the pressure of the entire service is on someone, they're not paid, and they're there as long or longer than the staff?

matrox
Digital Video Solutions

And last but not least:

5. You forgot to turn the mic on, bro!
The most common answer to "what's wrong?" is "someone on stage did the wrong thing." Not that that's going to stop anyone from blaming the sound person.

Now that you and I and Fred are on the journey of repentance together, maybe consider if that Starbucks gift card is really adequate to express your appreciation for the team. **MT**

YOUR GUIDE TO MUST-HAVE
KIDMIN TECH TOOLS

The Days of "a Snack and a Story" Are Long Gone!

by LaBreeska Ingles

When I began my career in children's ministry, "ministry management" boiled down to a bulletin board and pushpins. I would type up monthly schedules and post them on a corkboard in the children's resource room at church. I had to talk to every volunteer and parent on Sunday morning to verbally remind parents of any upcoming events. I made phone calls every Saturday night to remind volunteers of their Sunday responsibilities, and the good ol' copy machine was the most overworked machine in the building.

Today, I'm a Family Ministry Pastor at a mid-size rural church in Kentucky. I threw out the corkboard years ago and entered the new tech era. Here are the four children's ministry areas that I feel most benefit from the use of technology.

> ALTHOUGH GOD IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER, **TIMES ARE ALWAYS CHANGING AND TECH IS ALWAYS CHANGING.**

1. Organizing.

The average church attender may not realize the amount of work that goes into running a children's ministry. Children's pastors only work on Sundays and Wednesdays, right? Wrong. We organize curricula for multiple classes, recruit and train volunteers for each class, manage systems put in place for safety and functionality, pastor families in the church through births, deaths and divorces, as well as plan events that inspire community within our church family.

Thankfully, organizing ministry has been simplified with services like Planning Center. On our children's leadership team, we use Planning Center for creating our weekly volunteer schedules for 10 different areas of children's ministry each Sunday. This software provides intercommunication between each of the areas of ministry within the church so that we do

not triple book a volunteer on any given Sunday.

Planning Center offers an option to post lesson plans for each class so that all of your weekly information can be found in one location. Planning Center also accommodates group registration for events, as well as a tracking system to keep up with each individual child's birthday and family information.

Other children's pastors advocate services such as Church Teams and Church Community Builder as their favorite church management software.

2. Communication.

While Planning Center is where I handle my weekly *volunteer* schedules, I still need to communicate with parents, teens and other staff members about each upcoming event. Remind and FlockNote provide connections with everyone who needs to know about weekly events and announcements—even if they are not participating in that event.

Social media blasts are vital to advertise church events, but it seems that no one outlet is efficient at reaching everyone in the church. Every family, each person, has his or her own favorite social media hangout. I poll the parents of my church regularly to

see which social media sites they are using most frequently. I have found that it takes multiple media to communicate one message. It's always useful to check the settings feature in a social media app to see how you can automatically post to other services (for example from Facebook to Instagram). We need to use them all, but we don't have to manually post to each one!

3. Safety

Check-In Software seems to be the number one concern for children's pastors these days. There are many articles written about it and several options for websites and software that protect our kids at church. At my small town church, we have 24-hour video surveillance, a security guard during services,

and a check-in system. We use a check-in system that my husband built from the ground up. So, if you did not plan your children's ministry by marrying a software engineer, like me, then you may need access to some other options, like KidCheck or KidMin App.

Our church attendance has doubled in the past decade, which means we no longer personally know all of our volunteers. We rely on background checks, as well as our discernment in interviews, to guide us in placing volunteers. This is a vital piece in our tech portfolio—*EVERY* church should vet their children's ministry volunteers! We use Shepherds Watch from Group Publishing for our background checks.

Another respected security resource is Protect My Ministry. They serve more than 25,000 clients in areas that go beyond background checks: child safety training as well as staff and volunteer training. One nice service they provide is free re-verification of previously-checked volunteers—it's always a good idea to do a background check for each volunteer annually.

4. Creativity

I was drawn to children's ministry because I had a strong desire to reach kids with the gospel through creative strategies. Many of us grew up with a Sunday school lesson that entailed a Bible story, coloring page and a snack. But in the last decade of children's ministry, the case for technology in the classroom has exploded, as kids are more interested in their personal devices

than anything else. The days of just a snack and a story are long gone.

Based on a recent poll I administered to a forum of children's ministry leaders, the second most used technology for children's ministry was online curriculum. Some of the favorites listed were [Hillsong curriculum and worship DVDs](#), [Think Orange](#) and [Deep Blue Kids](#). And if you need a *free option*, you can't beat Open Life Church lesson plans. We are currently using the [Bible App for Kids Curriculum](#) in our preschool and we love it! Technology-rich curricula are fun and engaging inroads to reach kids in the way that they prefer to digest information.

You might also check out [ShareFaith](#). One particular strength of their curriculum is that they also provide family devotionals, which go a step beyond in-church lessons and close the circle by including parents in the lessons their children learned earlier in the week.

Times are always changing. Technology is always changing. And although God is the same yesterday today and forever, I'm learning that I have to continue to grow in my knowledge of technology to keep up with the younger generations that God has called me to empower. I never thought of technology as a ministry, until I needed it to teach the Bible to the kids in my life. Now, I embrace many forms of ministry tech to enhance my influence on the community I love. **MT**

LaBreeska Ingles has been involved in children's ministry since, well, since she was a child! She is the founder of [KidsMinistryTeam.com](#), and her husband, Brian, is a software developer. Their family of wife, husband and four children are a children's ministry in microcosm. You can reach her at [contact@kidsministryteam.com](#).

Let's not forget three of the biggest names in children's ministry, like Group and Lifeway—or the surprising player in children's curriculum, Children's Ministry Deals.com.

[Children's Ministry Deals.com](#) is a one-stop website to compare and purchase. If you already know what you're looking for, this site will help you steward your church's money well!

[Group](#) presents a DIY approach to curriculum development: Build your own Sunday school experience via a unique mix-and-match method that allows you to customize the experience for your congregation.

[LifeWay offers "Zip for Kids,"](#) an event creation and management software. It's like having all the resources of the publisher at your fingertips when you need to create an uncommon event capable of lasting impact.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Don't forget Facebook! Facebook groups help you connect with regional friends, or across denominational lines. You don't have to go it alone—never before have children's ministries been so connected. Simply enter "children's ministry" into the Facebook search bar and you're in touch with ministries around the world and around the corner. One of the largest is the **[Children's Ministry Network](#)**, a gathering of 3,000 leaders and volunteers.

Start your own network:

Perhaps the most overlooked resource is right within your own church. Have you established any means of quick and easy communication among the volunteers in your children's ministry? Facebook (again) provides a free forum that can be limited to only the people within your church.

ShareFaith

HOW TO BRING **SUNDAY SCHOOL HOME**
QR Codes Help Deliver the Content

A successful Sunday School is more than a good curriculum, it's a bridge that connects classrooms and family rooms. That's why as a Kid's Ministry leader, getting parents involved is one of your top priorities. You know that parents, more than anyone else, can inspire their children to fall in love with Jesus.

But there's a problem. Parents often feel that they lack the time and resources to be spiritual leaders for their children. It's not that they don't want to, it's just that many have never been given resources that lead them through the process of family Bible study. Perhaps you've heard parents share some of the following sentiments:

- "I hardly know the Bible myself, how can I teach it to my children?"
- "With my schedule I don't have time to prepare a Bible study for my kids."
- "I've tried a family Bible study before, but my kids got bored and distracted."

> YOU CAN EMPOWER YOUR CHILDREN TO SAY, **"LET ME SHOW YOU!"**

While the hesitation parents feel is real, it doesn't change the fact that families must spend time in the Bible together. If they don't, spiritual growth is next to impossible, and your Kid's Ministry will have limited growth. Your ministry needs to partner with parents, otherwise they'll rely on a weekend service to teach their kids about the Bible, prayer and discipleship. When this happens, your ministry faces the biggest challenge of them all: a Sunday School that is *only* about Sunday.

So What Can You Do?

Well let's start with a typical Sunday service. You and your team work hard to prepare a compelling lesson that shares the Good News of Jesus with your kids in fun and creative ways. The service concludes and you give your

class some handouts, praying that somehow they make it into the car ride home. But all too often you find them left under chairs, turned into paper airplanes or crumpled up in the trash. It's frustrating.

Now, let's look at the typical Sunday service from the parents' point of view. Mom and dad have just sat through the adult service which, as always, ran 15 minutes long. They enter your classroom excited to pick up their kids. On the way down the hallway, you hear mom ask the big question: "So honey, what did you learn in class today?"

And then, the all-too-familiar reply, "I don't know . . . Jesus?"

Empowering Children

In the typical Sunday service scenario presented above, where did things go wrong? The kids—isn't it always the kids? But in all seriousness, kids _love_ to show their parents what they've learned and what they've accomplished. But too often we don't empower them to do it.

Imagine a Sunday post-service scenario that goes something like this:

Mom: "Hey honey, what did you learn in class today?"

Child: "Let me show you!"

And then the child puts a resource in their parents' hands that unlocks your lesson for all to see! I know, I know. It sounds too good to be true. You've tried this before and you keep running into the same issues: First off, if you put together a devotional for them to

take home, it looks boring to kids and they lose it before mom and dad show up. Even if it does make it home, odds are it's not going to capture the excitement and interaction of your lesson. Parents may give it a try one week, but pretty soon those devotional handouts just start stacking up and collecting dust on the counter.

But there is an answer: Empower your children to say, "Let me show you!"

## Sharefaith Kids Family Devotionals

At Sharefaith Kids, we understand the power of connecting families and classrooms. We also understand the challenges you face to make this happen. Throughout the years, we've helped thousands of churches with these three simple steps:

- **First:** Equip your volunteers to teach inspiring, Bible-centered Sunday School lessons.
- **Second:** Encourage your kids to take these lessons home with fun activities.
- **Third:** Empower your families to explore these lessons at home with family devotionals.

Let's break down each step so that you can envision it in your Kid's Ministry:

1. **An all-in-one lesson bundle:** Within each Sharefaith Kids downloadable lesson you'll find everything you need to teach an inspiring Bible-centered lesson that your kids will love! Our Sunday School library
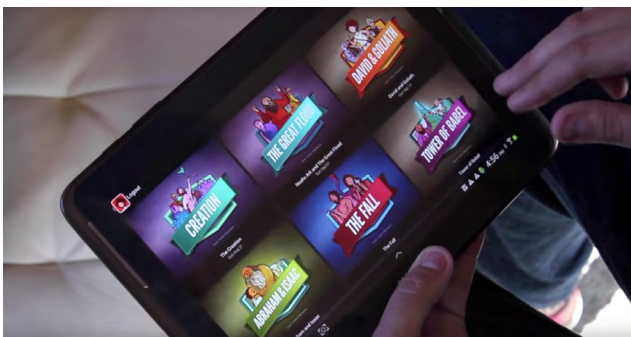
includes over two years' worth of lessons, each of which feature volunteer-friendly curriculum, an engaging kids Bible video, fun activities and an interactive teaching slideshow.

2. **Take Home Coloring Pages:** These activity sheets are the kids' favorites, and allow children to bring your Bible lesson to life. But that's just the start! With an innovative QR/Unlock code on every page, families can access online devotionals anywhere at anytime.

3. **Family Devotionals:** This amazing online resource allows families to explore any Sharefaith Kids lesson at home. Each devotional features the lesson video, a family Bible reading, discussion questions, a closing prayer and downloadable activities.

It's that simple: You give your class the fun coloring pages they want to take home, and your parents use those coloring pages to continue the lesson at home. BOOM! Your lesson just went beyond Sunday.

If you would like to try out a *free* Sharefaith Kids Family Devotional, visit us online at sharefaithkids.com. We look forward to hearing how this resource has blessed your children, your families and your ministry!

KEEP KIDS SAFE IN 2019
(And Protect Your Ministry, Too!)

by Dan Raley

You don't have to search hard to realize how dangerous our world can be at times. Go to your favorite news site, and you'll see headline after headline where a predator has gone undetected or slipped through the cracks, and as a result, another victim was added to the statistics. A quick Google search for "Church Predator Abuse" returns 8,600,000 results in 0.57 seconds! It's sick, and it's sad, but it's a reality.

> SOME CHURCHES HAVE FACED VERDICTS OF **UP TO $100 MILLION FOR CHILD ABUSE** COMMITTED BY THOSE WHOM THEY WERE CHARGED WITH SUPERVISING.

Consequences of abuse

Victims of child abuse often struggle with the emotional and spiritual effects of this sin for the rest of their lives. Sadly, child abuse victims are themselves at higher risk of inflicting the abuse on other children. Allegations of abuse can also tarnish, sometimes irretrievably, a church's ministry. Instead of being able to discuss the gospel, leadership must spend their time explaining to the media, to the courts and to visitors why they weren't able to prevent the abuse. Also, of course, the financial impact can be devastating as well. Some churches have faced verdicts of up to $100 million for child abuse committed by those whom they were charged with supervising. Any church or ministry that sends an individual to serve in ministry (even those that serve without pay) may be held responsible for the actions of that individual.

The pain and damage from this are far-reaching. The shame and guilt can be crushing. A world like this demands that you ensure your ministry is not seen as a soft-target to would-be predators. One of the strongest predictors of

future criminal behavior is a person's criminal history. Background checks are your window into the past and a vital element in a healthy church risk-management program.

What is a background check?

A background check is a "records" screening of an individual, which can be as little as a one-county check or as in-depth as a Security clearance investigation. Public and private records can be searched once applicant consent is given. The industry standard for turn-around time on a background check is 72 hours; however, some providers have same-day to 48-hour turn-around times.

Why do background checks?

A ministry that serves children and youth must exercise "due diligence" with regards to protecting its members, especially the children. By performing background checks on your volunteers, your ministry is putting up a safeguard at the "doorway" of the organization that will, in most cases, scare off sexual predators. You'll also offer better peace of mind to discerning parents when choosing a church, by knowing your ministry is being pro-active in trying to protect the children and that you do not tolerate or turn a blind eye to abuse.

What criteria should your ministry require for a background check?

Multiple databases are searched to provide background information; however, they are not equally maintained and accessed by each state. This makes universal criteria hard to enforce. For that reason, it's critical that you partner with a credible background screening company. At the very minimum, the background check should cover Social Security Number Verification, National Criminal Search, Sex Offender Registries Search and offer "re-verification" of records from the national criminal database and also do a "true" 50 state search on sexual offenders.

Choosing a trusted background check provider

Your background check provider should become an extension of your ministry and help to evaluate needs and implement and maintain a thorough background-screening program for employees and volunteers. Look for background check providers that offer different packages. Also, choose a provider that helps you with selecting the proper searches with recommendations based on the quality of data available in each state and industry best practices. Some simplify this process through an intuitive online consultation.

Before sending national background results to their clients, background check providers should verify the accuracy of the information by thoroughly reviewing every positive record "hit" returned from the national criminal & sex offender database. Then ensure those records are "frozen" for further investigation at the county courthouse before being returned and included in a final report. Doing this will prevent you from getting "false positives," which can happen when doing national database searches. From there further due diligence is required, filtering out un-reportable records (e.g., parking tickets). Clearing out un-reportable records before sending results is the best way to protect the applicant's rights and is required by the Fair Credit Report Act (FCRA). A complete final report should include the following:

- Case numbers
- File Dates
- Complete description of charges
- Sentencing information
- Disposition and dates
- Full explanation for cases with multiple charges.

There are many excellent background-screening companies around the country, but there are many who are either not in compliance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA, the federal law intended to protect individuals from lousy background checks) or are so cavalier with their quality that they routinely misreport negative information. This is bad for job seekers, volunteers, employers and the background screening industry. Be wary of any background check service offering you instant results, unless there is a proactive re-verification process as well.

Screening Policies

It is imperative to implement a screening policy that depends on more than just background checks to succeed in the goal of protecting your ministry, children and volunteers/staff from the risks and allegations of abuse.

There Are Three Key Elements to a Screening Policy:
1. BACKGROUND CHECK
2. REFERENCES
3. PERSONAL INTERVIEW

Each element helps to identify whether or not an individual has anything in his/her background that would pose any danger to children. Moreover, while no background screening is perfect, these three elements when combined will help your church and ministry demonstrate that you have used reasonable care and diligence in selecting those who serve. Also,

remember that background checks are not fool-proof and constant vigilance is imperative. All staff and volunteers should be required to review the basic principles of sound child protection and procedures, and complete child safety training as well. Child safety training is all about bringing awareness to those working with the most vulnerable. This helps them understand the methods that predators use when identifying and developing relationships with their victims.

Integrated Solutions

Technology is moving faster than ever before, and selecting a background check provider that can integrate with your existing ChMS software is a smart move that can save you time and money. Integrated background check solutions are designed to save time and money. When working on your church's budget, it's crucial to factor in every dollar, including how much time it's going to take to complete specific tasks. Let's face it—some of us enjoy using technology, and others would rather stick to pen and paper. However, even if you love technology, when it isn't tailored to your specific needs it makes it twice as hard to adopt in the church office. The best background check integrations are manageable at every skill level, and because the technology aligns with your church's vision and integrates with systems you already have in place, it's easier to focus on growth, engagement and protecting your ministry.

The world of background checks and church risk mitigation can be overwhelming at times. Being a church leader in 2019 requires that you become focused on spending your time where it makes the most significant impact: teaching, leading and making disciples. Selecting a background check company focused on ministry that understands the unique needs of a church will not only make this much more comfortable on you as a church leader, but it will also ensure you are protecting what matters most. MT

Daniel Raley is a Marketing Director for Ministry Brands, a software company dedicated to empowering faith-based organizations in a digital world. When he's not helping churches use technology to further their vision, you'll find him spending time with his wife and sons, fishing, enjoying the outdoors or actively volunteering in the student ministry at his church. He's thankful and excited to be a part of the Ministry Brands team and the work they do to help further God's Kingdom.

HOW DID HE BECOME THE MAN HE WAS?

"You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." (Acts 10:37-38)

The Apostle Peter provided a powerful one-sentence summary of Jesus' ministry—including the hope that we, too, can be like him because God is with us as well. The concept of the Holy Spirit's anointing is nearly lost in many quarters of the church. If Jesus needed this anointing, how much more do we?