

Calendaring in the Church

© 2006 by Nick B. Nicolaou, all rights reserved

President, Ministry Business Services, Inc.

Reprinted from *Leadership Handbooks of Practical Theology*

Churches have three types of calendaring needs: resource calendaring (rooms and equipment), publication calendaring (printed flyers), and personal / team calendaring. Surprisingly, each of these needs is so different that they require separate programs!

What's the Difference?

Many churches try to make one or two programs fill all three needs. No one program meets all three needs well, nor does any even meet two of the needs well!

Resource calendaring is for scheduling rooms (or groups of rooms) and equipment. This software needs to ensure there aren't any conflicts and enforce whatever event approval process a church has established. It also tracks room setups, blocks time for setup and teardown, and may include a billing module for use when outside groups rent your facilities. Some of the more sophisticated programs written for this need include the ability to:

- Search for room "type" availability and make recommendations, and
- Identify events as internal-only (like staff meetings) or public; those that are public then automatically feed website calendars.

About twenty church management software systems offer this as a module option.

Publication calendaring is really done best in graphics programs. These are the calendars that are usually department-specific, like a youth or childrens ministry calendar, and are printed in full-month formats. Those who use them often like to add graphics into the boxes like a Christmas tree on Christmas Day, a tent on a summer camp day, and so on. Some of the most common programs used to do these well are desktop publishers and graphics programs like Quark or Publisher.

Personal / team calendaring tracks appointments and commitments on a person's calendar. These are the programs most used when calendaring on a computer, but they never meet the other two needs well. The most prevalent of these programs is Microsoft Outlook.

Focus on Personal / Team Calendaring

Putting one's calendar on the computer is a great way to 1) make it more portable, 2) increase team collaboration, and 3) ensure it's never lost or destroyed (because it gets backed up with the rest of the computer's data).

- *Portability.* Computerized calendars can be on a computer, available via the Internet in a web browser, and on your PDA or smartphone all at once! Depending on the software you use and how it's configured, all of these can be accomplished by entering the information only once! And making a change in any one of these automatically synchronizes with the others!

This has the potential of making your calendar very easy to have with you at all times... especially if you use a PDA or smartphone. And there are even more advantages to using this technology, like having your address book— or contact list— on that same device at all times! Some church management systems can send the church database to your address book so that it can synchronize with your PDA or smartphone. Imagine having your church database with you anytime you'd like it!

- *Collaboration.* If you use the network version of Outlook, called *Exchange*, or a number of other programs, you can give others access to your calendar as well. This aids in the process of setting up meetings and letting other team members know your availability. Teams that take advantage of this option find their time is more efficiently focused.

- *Backup.* The importance of backing up system data cannot be overstated. Making sure you have a good backup strategy also means your calendar will never be lost or destroyed— even if you drop your smartphone in a lake! (One of our clients actually had this happen! He said he was so glad he'd given up his handwritten calendar because it would have been destroyed.)

I find there are other advantages to using this kind of system too. I use it to track those things I need to do throughout the year. When I think of something I need to do (like follow up with someone at church about a prayer request), I add it as a task to my calendar and schedule it for the day I'd like to do it. In addition to keeping things from falling through the cracks, it frees me from trying to remember those future things I need to get done, which means less stress.

A tip I learned early on was to create a task that lists each calendar item I want to schedule for the next year, and scheduling myself to add them to next year's calendar in the Fall of this year. I include regularly scheduled appointments and reminders (like staff meetings, birthdays, my anniversary, etc), and tasks.

Computer calendars help us, and using the right software to meet each need enhances our ability to accomplish ministry and to do so more efficiently.