

2013 No Surprises Series

# QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK EVERY ChMS PROVIDER

Provided by **ACTIVE Faith**

Committed to Resourcing the Church with Excellence

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2013 *No Surprises* Series

**QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK EVERY ChMS PROVIDER**

# INTRODUCTION

**Imagine making a complex technology decision and receiving only good surprises after you buy because you knew what questions to ask.**

It's not easy to shop for new software. Software solutions vary so much that it's hard to compare apples to apples. Terminology can be confusing and misleading, and some companies seem bent on throwing fear, uncertainty, and doubt into the mix about other solutions.

Our *No Surprises* Digital Guide provides the questions you need to ask in 4 categories, in order to make the best software decision for your church's unique needs. These questions help level the playing field of confusing technology terms or complex software features.

We hope you'll consider ACTIVE Faith when you're in the market for a church management software solution, but the last thing we want is for you to end up with a product that isn't right for you. We believe asking the right questions will prevent unpleasant surprises after you sign on the dotted line and ensure that if you choose ACTIVE Faith's Fellowship One and ServiceU, you get what you were looking for.

4 Topics Included in this guide:

**+ DATA TRANSITIONING**

**+ DATA SECURITY**

**+ REPORTING**

**+ FEATURES**



2013 *No Surprises* Series  
QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK EVERY ChMS PROVIDER

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## DATA TRANSITIONING

The process of moving your data from one system to another (known as data transitioning, conversion, or implementation) involves a series of steps that are often misunderstood on the front end. This is true no matter which system you are transitioning to or from.

During this process, you want to make sure your vendor does the heavy lifting without adding any surprises. Here are some questions you can ask as you evaluate the various church management software (ChMS) offerings.

# DATA TRANSITIONING

## Does the vendor require that your previous tracking system or database be cleaned up and in perfect working order before transitioning begins?

Some vendors suggest that your success with their product is dependent on your data being cleaned up first. The problem is that if you knew how to do this, you'd probably already be having success with your current system. Data experts should implement your data transitioning.

## Does the vendor have various methods of transfer that are specific to your old system, or does it offer a one-size-fits all transitioning method?

If the only method the vendor has is that you manually input all your data into a spreadsheet, there's a problem.

There should be a unique solution for whichever type of system you are transitioning to and from.

## Will the vendor assign you an expert guide who will work with you from start to Go-Live?

Your guide should have expertise in both technology and ministry processes in order to advocate for your unique needs without handing you off to someone else for different phases of data transitioning.

## Does the vendor have a formal data conversion process document and timeline, or are estimates vague and simply verbal?

A good transitioning plan allows enough time for change while keeping the momentum moving toward the big day. See **chart below** for an example of a 70-day plan document.

## How many implementations has the vendor successfully processed?

Experience makes a big difference in the success of your data transitioning. A vendor with expertise from working with successful churches can give you a broader range of choices for configuring your data and processes.

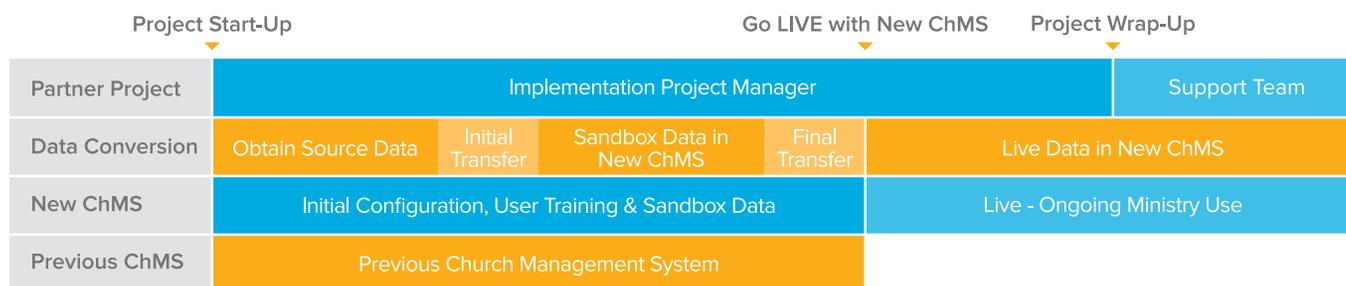
## Does the vendor have a detailed To-Do list for both itself and the church, so that expectations are set in advance, progress is easy to track, and everything can be found in one place?

Implementation is a collaborative process that requires organization, communication, and accountability on the part of both parties. The forethought and intentionality given to this process will reflect the type of relationship you can anticipate with

the vendor later. A central reference file for assignments, due dates, and communication history helps eliminate surprises later on down the road. Ask to see one.

## How does the vendor structure its pricing for data transitioning?

Ministry-Module-based pricing allows you to know up front exactly what you're getting and what you'll be paying for it. With or without modules, the transition period should be solution-priced, not hourly-priced. If you aren't up and running by the expected date, you should not be charged or abandoned. A **total solution commitment** means you get help as long as you need it, which could save you a lot of money!



# DATA TRANSITIONING

## What is the scope of the vendor's goals for you?

The goal of data transitioning should not be just the transfer of data, but also the transfer of expertise to each ministry so that it can truly own its own data. A good data transitioning should include education on creating and maintaining data integrity in three areas:

- + **Processes:** best practices for data collection, labeling, entry, rights-management, security and reporting
- + **People:** role-based recommendations and instruction
- + **Technology:** system training and built-in configuration that eliminates many process-based issues.

## Does the vendor have a sandbox environment for you to play in before Go-Live?

It can be intimidating to start working in your new database. A two-pass system will allow your data to be transferred into a staging area where

you can build structures with the help of your expert guide, view the results, and practice without fear of making mistakes that affect operations. Find out how much of your "practice" will transfer in the second pass.

## How can the vendor ensure there are NO SURPRISES?

There should be no surprises.

A Service Level Agreement (SLR) should specify policies, but please verify details about these areas and scope of access to them, to avoid frustration:

- + **Educational Materials:** Vendors should disclose whether the initial price of their product includes unlimited, ongoing access to educational materials. Knowing this up front can help you compare their purchase price more accurately with other vendors and prevent surprise charges after Year 1. Find out what form the materials are in, as well as the quality and quantity, access limits, and costs (now or later). Ask for a preview.

- + **Dedicated Expert Guides:** Understand the vendor's policy for who will be working with you, for how long, and toward what end, both before and after Go-Live:

- + **Implementation:** Guidance through the entire commitment of the data transitioning process

- + **Account Manager:** Guidance through the vendor's individual customer growth track, as well as personal account assistance when needed

- + **Support:** Ask about free, live support, online help, regular, live Q&A webinars or other ways of getting the information you need. You should be able to get the help you need from a variety of resources. Ask to see everything.
- + **Exit costs and procedures:** It's very important to know what will happen to your data if you decide to leave. The vendor should not hold your data hostage, put a limit on how long you have to extract it,

or charge you to extract it, unless they have made their policies clear upfront. Should you decide to leave, it is best to confirm data transition timeframes with your new vendor before you tell your old one you're leaving, to avoid missing cut-off dates and losing your data.



## DATA SECURITY

Cybercrime is increasing. With many churches now offering online giving and registration payment, the responsibility to protect members' confidential information makes data security a rising concern for church leaders.

If you're comparing church management software (ChMS) solutions, access to security standards can be non-existent, confusing, or, at best, meaningless unless you know the data security industry.

In this document, we will look at two aspects of data security — [the Cloud](#) and [datacenter security](#) — and provide you with questions you can ask as you compare the various ChMS solutions from a data security perspective.

# DATA SECURITY

## Is the vendor's product truly Cloud-based?

True Cloud computing means that all data exists remotely and can be accessed remotely from any device, not just from your computer. The type of software that operates strictly in the Cloud is known as SaaS—Software as a Service. But not everything that accesses the Cloud, or calls itself Cloud-based, is Cloud-based or SaaS. If the vendor indicates either of the following, then its solution is not 100% Cloud-based and will not give you all the security you need:

- + A unique server must be maintained “on premise” somewhere—either your facilities or theirs
- + Software must be purchased, installed, licensed, and upgraded

## If the product is not truly Cloud-based, how does the vendor propose to protect your data?

If the vendor is Cloud-like, or not 100% web-based, security is an issue:

- + “Cloud-like” capabilities mean “on-premise” storage somewhere, which is indisputably less secure.
- + “Cloud-like” technology may also lack the internal controls needed to prevent fraud that

a 100% web-based technology has. (This is especially true if you're dealing with a ChMS that includes an accounting function. The multiple-user access required to maximize member data effectively is the opposite strategy needed for general ledger data, which should have tight access restrictions.)

Beware of a promise of “the best of both worlds.” In reality, you miss out on the best of the Cloud and retain all the risks of self-hosted when your data is stored both in the Cloud and on-premise somewhere. Ultimately, such a product is going to create additional issues with redundancy, synchronization and security as well as extra costs associated with double storage, IT expenses, and possible loss of data.

## Is ANY church management software (ChMS) really 100% Cloud-based?

A vendor who is honest will explain that the answer is, technically, no. Browsers don't communicate well with some devices and hardware, so an app or driver may be required for communication between the information stored in the Cloud and, for example, a scanner. These apps are

referred to as “thin-client” applications, meaning that very little is required of the computer that hosts the app. There is nothing to maintain, purchase or upgrade and such a product is still considered a SaaS, or Cloud-based, because data is stored, managed, shared and accessible via the Internet. See #1 for the two important differentiators.

## What is the vendor's position on the dependability of Cloud security?

Nothing is failsafe, so be wary of absolute guarantees of security. Also be assured that anyone who tells you self-hosted is safer is selling a self-hosted software.

If you compare the risks of Cloud-based versus self-hosted, it becomes clear that Cloud-based storage is far more secure. For one, Cloud companies invest much more on security than most churches could afford on their own—their businesses depend on it. Their security measures must meet and/or exceed all regulatory standards, which most churches cannot do. Yes, Cloud companies can go bankrupt or have unscrupulous employees or a security breach, but so can churches. And the risks to “on-premise” data are far more likely with self-hosted: physical damage, system failure, and insufficient backup.

## Is security really worth the price of the Cloud?

When churches compare self-hosting to the Cloud, they often conclude that the Cloud is too expensive. To do a realistic comparison, they must consider the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), which includes all of the costs related to extra personnel, hardware, backups, security, redundancy, maintenance, upgrades, connectivity, energy, and more. For churches with a small amount of data and no web presence, Cloud-based systems are definitely more expensive on the surface than traditional onsite options. All other churches must consider that the costs of operating inefficiently and insecurely exist, whether they are tallied or not.

It is impossible to fully know the cost of self-hosting upfront, because there are always unexpected obstacles. With a Cloud-based system, everything—including vastly superior security—is built into the access fees and provided at a far lower cost in comparison to providing that same level of security in a self-hosted environment. You know the cost upfront and can include it incrementally in your budget, so that it becomes a fixed operating expense rather than an unknown and varied budget drain.

# DATA SECURITY

And while Cloud security is definitely more expensive than doing it yourself at a lower security standard, you must factor in the incalculable costs of:

- + Operating inefficiently or losing ministry opportunities
- + Disruption due to outages resulting in lost data
- + Data recovery
- + Impact to your reputation

## Are all Cloud-based or Cloud-like products created equally regarding security?

The better a vendor's security, the more adamantly they will say no, they're not. They will be eager to share the extent to which they have gone to make sure your data is "always on," safe, and secure. Knowledge of these layers can help you make informed decisions about whom to trust with your data. Ask about and compare with other vendors:

- + Internal controls in the software
- + PCI compliance level for credit card usage
- + Datacenter redundancy and availability

## Where exactly does the vendor store the data?

All Cloud companies store their clients' information in some kind of datacenter. They should be able to tell you exactly where theirs is located. Note that not all datacenters are created equal either.

## Some datacenters claim to be a "state-of-the-art datacenter and application infrastructure." What does that mean?

"State-of-the-art" refers to the highest level of general development achieved at a particular time. Not all data centers are created equal and even claims of being "state-of-the-art" can mean different things. We recommend the following two third-party articles for evaluating data center providers: [Processor Magazine](#) and [Compass Datacenters](#).

## How many levels of security are in place and to what degree?

There are five categories of security. Make sure the vendor describes the details of each:

- + Physical security
- + Network security
- + Data security
- + Testing
- + PCI compliance level

## What can the vendor tell you about the datacenter's security operations in the areas of:

- + Monitoring and response
- + Data back-ups and redundancy (how many separate locations are used?)
- + Disaster recovery
- + Number of days the datacenter can function in a regional blackout

## What are the datacenter's scheduled maintenance windows, uptime objective, and actual uptime?

Find out when and for how long scheduled downtimes occur. A reasonable uptime objective from today's Cloud computing systems is 99.95%. That means 4.37 hours of unplanned downtime per year. Ask for actual rates and compare the percentage against other vendors to know what is to be expected from any particular company.

## How can the vendor ensure there are NO SURPRISES when it comes to security?

With security, a surprise would indicate a loss you thought could never happen. This would either be a disaster of epic proportions or a failure to understand

your vendor's reasonable limits of liability. We recommend external research and requesting the following minimum documentation:

- + The mandatory **Service Level Agreement (SLA)** should specify policies, but please verify details and clarify expectations.
- + **PCI-Compliance** is mandatory for all vendors who offer credit-card transactions. "Levels" reached indicate the amount of independent auditing vendors have procured in order to validate their compliance. Please see the [PCI Compliance Guide](#) for further information about claimed certification. Not all provide the proper level of security.
- + Reasonable documentation of intent to comply with standard auditing practices.
- + The vendor's datacenter security standards certification.
- + Explanation of superior database internal controls and protocols.



## REPORTING

A robust reporting system may be one of the most important features of a Church Management Software (ChMS) system for those ministry leaders who understand that their data is the most valuable ministry resource they have.

Reporting analytics allow you to track specific numbers over time to see trends you might not be able to see in person. Not only can you get attendance, giving and volunteer records, but also you can discover deeper data, such as where people drop off of spiritual growth tracks, what times of the year typically show offering declines or increases, or how your front door rate compares to your back door rate. This information—and much more—can enable you to make informed planning decisions and to challenge assumptions about the effectiveness of various processes already in place.

# REPORTING

Here are some questions you can ask as you evaluate the various church management software offerings:

## What is “robust” reporting?

Robustness refers to a system that holds up well under exceptional circumstances or a system that comes with a wide range of capabilities. It is the ability of a system to cope with errors in input and still produce the desired outcomes. In reporting, robustness can be described by the word “FLEXIBLE.”

## How does robustness affect ease of use?

Every ChMS vendor faces the same challenge: If the software is robust or flexible enough to truly mine your church’s data, it necessarily makes the software more complicated for users. **Easy-to-use reporting solutions**, however, are not flexible or comprehensive. They are easy because your choices are limited. Whichever quality a vendor promotes, the flipside remains true.

Be aware that some churches never use their reporting features to the fullest potential because of the learning curve, while other churches opt for easy-to-use, only to be disappointed at the limitations they encounter when they are ready to dig deeper into their data. Understanding that spectrum will help you realistically evaluate the level of user-simplicity and high-level reporting capabilities the vendor offers.

## Are there easy-to-find guides within the reporting query process?

Ask to see an actual report query Does the vendor embed tutorial and workflow documents right in the report? Are they easy to find and illustrated to walk you through the process?

## Can I save and share reports?

This might be two of the most important set-up features you want; make sure they’re available. Being able to save and share reports, and rerun them at any time, saves time!

Many administrators return again and again to their favorite reports to quickly get the information they need without having to recreate the report. Whether it can be done at the click of a button, or simply by saving the URL of the report and emailing it to someone, who can then save it to their computer, report sharing is a handy feature.

## Is the system written on a SQL Server?

SQL (pronounced SEQUEL), is an Enterprise-level technology designed for large numbers of records or users. It is the technology on which reports are built. Some vendors use bolted-on, file-based solutions, which require all reporting to be done on specific devices on premise, rather than through the Cloud. In a file-based system, when too many files are accessed at a time, corruption occurs and the file must be sent to the vendor for repair.

A vendor that uses SQL shows you the depth of its system. A large or complex report, such as a picture directory, will not crash the system.

## Will you be able to report against households, not just individuals?

This is an important database design concept, because *whatever the database supports, reporting supports*.

A simplistic solution (easy to use, but inflexible) may simply record people as individuals. Family members may share an ID number, but not a Household Name. This may work for awhile, but eventually, you may want to know about the families in your database—not just individuals or heads of households.

A database that stores information for individuals AND for households (such as address) will help on the data entry level first. For example, to change an address for a household requires only one record change to be made for all the individuals in the household. Then, on the reporting level, information can be pulled for either level.

In an individual record-based system, you would not be able to find out about families. In that case, extensive manual compilation would be required to get the data into meaningful formats.

# REPORTING

## How does summary data display?

It's time for show-and-tell. Summarization formatting is more important than you may realize, so ask to see the various formats in which summary data displays. The more options the vendor offers, the more flexibility you will have in reporting:

- + **Raw Data (CSV format)**  
Are the displays simply rows upon rows of raw data—everything there is to know about giving, for example, with no ability to compare monthly giving, or traditional giving versus online giving? **Raw data** has to be interpreted; it requires manual manipulation to find meaning.
- + **Singular summarization (PDF format)**  
Does the data report on only one level with limited criteria options? These types of reports are easy to run, and sometimes all you need. However, they have no flexibility and are non-editable. You cannot see different views of the same data, making them inadequate for deep data mining.

- + **Dynamic summarization (Excel format)**

Can the data be rolled up from one angle—such as giving by month or fund—and then, with the touch of a button, rolled up through other filters—such as by zip code, to enable you to see which locations produce the greatest financial contribution? A **dynamic summarization** view lets you build the view you want to see.

- + **Other (Miscellaneous formats)**

Can the data be exported directly into **mailing label templates, rosters, mail merge,** or into a **temporary groups file** for further categorizing?

## How does the vendor enable you to find and choose reports?

There are so many areas that can be data-mined that the resulting collection of reports can be overwhelming. Does the vendor have a collection of the most popular reports that are easy to sort through, customize and learn? Is there a simple naming convention that helps you identify reports? Ask to see the arrangement of reports in the system and a demonstration of a report search.

## Does the vendor's report library show evidence of improvement and response to customer feedback?

As the ChMS industry evolves, a vendor should be able to document a regular history of updates and improvements. To get an idea of the value placed on user's requests and software improvements, ask to see how the reporting system has progressed over the past year.

## Ask the vendor to distinguish between Custom Reports, Customized Reports and Customizable Reports.

There's a great deal of ambiguity in these terms and it's a good idea to make sure you and the vendor are comparing apples to apples. Find out what is meant by phrases containing the word "custom," and the ramifications of each one. No matter how **flexibility** is defined, be aware of these possibilities:

- + **Custom-built:** Does the vendor promise to build your reports whenever you need them? That may sound like a good idea at first, but the reality is that no company

could sustain that level of service for long. You would have to wait in turn with all the other churches to get your custom reports built.

- + **Flexible Summarization:** Do the vendor's reports have the flexibility to give you the data you need in the way you need it?
- + **Unlimited Filters:** "What does customizable" imply? To some, "customizable" indicates infinite choices in report criteria. This is not possible. To put it simply, the level of customization depends on filter options. You will be limited to the filters the software has included. You will not be able to make up your own.

For maximum effectiveness of your valuable ChMS, the vendor should abide by the old maxim "*Give a man a fish and you feed him for day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*" Empowering you puts the information you need at your fingertips, which is the promise of all Cloud systems. That is the ultimate in flexibility.

# REPORTING

**Does the vendor have educational materials on the topic of deep data mining to help you learn not only how to run reports, but also what criteria and queries make valuable reports?**

Many churches start out wanting simple reporting: attendance, giving levels trends or spiritual formation tracking. As leaders solve their initial problem and mature in their understanding of the power of data, they become interested in hidden details, such as “Who attended Parenting 101 but whose baby is not in the nursery class one year later?” They know that who was not there is a more important factor for identifying ministry needs than who was there.

This desire to dig deeper often coincides with the discovery that their easy-to-use reporting system isn’t capable of providing those kinds of answers. If they have opted for a more robust system, does the vendor provide support and training in not only the system itself, but also the basics of quality analytics?

**How can the vendor ensure there are no surprises?**

+ **Manage Expectations**

- **Terminology:** Make sure you and the vendor are in agreement about even common terms being used to describe the software or the contract.
- **Usability:** Understanding the balancing act of robustness and ease of use will enable you to set learning curve and usability expectations up front and decipher product marketing information.
- **Price:** Discuss fees per report, if any.
- **Security:** Check the availability of rights-given options that specify viewing and reporting limitations for every individual in order to protect sensitive data.

+ **Training and Support**

Ask about free, live support, online help, regular, live Q&A webinars or other ways of getting information. Ask to see everything. The vendor should allow you to review their educational materials and thoroughly explain their training processes.

+ **Dedicated Expert Guides:**

Understand the vendor’s policy for who will be working with you, for how long, and toward what end, both before and after Go-Live:

– **Implementation:**

Is there guidance through the software implementation period to help you assess your reporting needs and build reports that you can not only play with before Go-Live,

but also carry over with you into your launch? Make sure the implementation process includes a total solution commitment to having you 100% confident about your reporting readiness before you are on your own.

– **Account Manager:**

Is there guidance to personalized care along the way, if needed?



## FEATURES

In the field of technology, comparison shopping sometimes boils down to the features available on the products being considered. Oftentimes, software users crave certain features so strongly that they're willing to overlook more important but less "shiny" functionality that may be missing. Ultimately, this leads to major unforeseen limits on other aspects of the software.

Features are a valid concern, but the discussion of features must be balanced with attention to the following categories that can, ultimately, play a bigger role in long-term utilization and success:

- + **Scalability**  
Does the product grow with you?
- + **Ministry needs**  
Does the product serve the unique needs of your church?
- + **Product scope**  
What is the product's stated purpose and how well does it provide that functionality?
- + **Price**  
What value does the product offer relative to your budget, current needs, and vision?
- + **New Functionality**  
How does the vendor propose to expand feature options?

This checklist will cover some areas where vendors can be less than transparent. Ask these questions to get as many of your software needs met as possible and avoid frustrating surprises when promised "features" turn out not to solve a ministry problem.

# FEATURES

## If the vendor doesn't offer a feature you want, is there a specific reason it doesn't?

Sometimes, it's better NOT to offer certain features. A great example is the commonly desired feature of an accounting component in a ChMS. On the surface, this seems like a feature that would simplify things for staff, but it carries with it risk many have not considered:

To maximize the value of a ChMS, multiple people need to be able to access the data it contains. However, for security of financial information, a higher degree of internal control is called for, which necessitates limiting the number of people who have access. By having this functionality separate, but able to be accessed by your database, churches provide an additional layer of security to their financial data without sacrificing needed functionality to staff.

Another reason the vendor may not offer every feature is because the resources needed to expand the product can dilute the quality of the

vendor's core competency. (Think: Jack of All Trades, Master of None.) If superior products already exist around optional features, such as social media or background investigation, vendors have to determine if their time and efforts are better suited by:

- + Maintaining, expanding and improving what they already offer by prioritizing their core mission and field of expertise and opting to integrate with other solutions to offer additional functionality
- + Hastily bolting on a potentially inferior version of the feature solution by attempting to "recreate the wheel"

## If the vendor chooses to focus on its core competency, what alternatives does it offer as a replacement or workaround for the needed solution?

In most cases, the vendor is aware of the need or value of additional features and may enlist one or more of the following solutions to expand the functionality of its core solution:

## Recommendations and Partnerships

### + Who does the vendor have relationships with?

Vendors have partnerships and make particular recommendations because the products are known to integrate or complement one another with a minimal amount of conflict between systems.

## API

### + Does the vendor have an API for integrated feature connections, and, if so, how many other vendors have built on the API to bridge their product to the ChMS?

**An API is huge.** An API is a platform built to allow the original system to connect with other products, creating an ecosystem that allows disparate systems to "play nice" with each other and with your database. If a ChMS provider is reputable enough and its product sound enough, other companies will build on its API so that their feature software integrates with it and its customer's databases. This significantly expands the functionality of the ChMs, since each additional feature is being produced by a vendor concentrating on its respective core competency.

## White-labeled, third-party products

### + Is the vendor reselling white-labeled products?

The practice of using *white-labeled products* produced by one company for the purpose of resale by other companies is not uncommon or unethical. It is a viable way to expand the offerings of an initial product and, in most cases, delivers value to the user. An example of a white-labeled product commonly used by some ChMS providers is a bulk mail add-on by Satori.

### + Does the vendor disclose the use of a third-party product and any profit margins it earns?

Some vendors secretly rebrand white-labeled products as a feature of their software and profit by passing inflated costs on to customers even though a free or integrated solution may also be available.

### + Can you choose a different third-party product for that feature and pocket the savings by bypassing the middle man or choosing a less expensive product?

Vendors who are transparent about their features not only expand the choices you have but also ensure apples-to-apples comparisons of ChMS systems.

# FEATURES

## Are any of the vendor's product features merely workarounds?

Workarounds can be better than nothing, but ask the vendor if they have any solutions that are not true solutions. An example is text messaging and email to text, which is currently a one-way communications tool for all ChMS systems that offer it, not true text messaging. Ask for full disclosure about the downside of any workarounds. Again, this will help your apples-to-apples comparison if you encounter another ChMS that doesn't seem to offer that feature.

## Is there a way to increase features without increasing cost?

Unfortunately, no. While it will cost extra to use ancillary products in addition to a ChMS solution, it must be noted that the ChMS would also have to cost more if the provider devoted time and resources to create these add-ons. Each feature represents a significant investment in software development expenses.

## How can the vendor ensure there are no surprises in the area of features?

Do your research and insist on transparency in:

- + **Terminology:** Make sure you and the vendor are in agreement about even common terms being used to describe the features. For example, what is meant by "text messaging"?
- + **Features:** Make sure software components don't just sound good in the sales pitch, but actually meet your ministry need.
- + **Comparison:** Shopping around will increase your understanding of the realities of software features. Don't by-pass the actual product you need because of secrecy about a third-party feature you could have with any system you chose.
- + **Integrity:** When it comes to the feature wars, the provider's integrity is the real issue.

# CONCLUSION

A move to a church management software system can represent a significant investment in time and resources. Even with a tool belt full of probing questions, at the end of the day, shopping for new technology can still be a challenge. We hope the questions and answers we've provided will provide a little more piece of mind during the discovery process.

Although we understand the pain of the decision, we also know the cost of lost opportunities, data, and efficiency. Even if you're not in the market for a ChMS system yet, we invite you to start asking questions, including of ACTIVE Faith.

