



BY RONALD E. KEENER

# Working the IT role from megachurch to 'mega-company'

Churches should be upgrading their Internet connection to further ministry, says the technology director of Shelby Systems.

After 14 years in IT work with a megachurch, Mike Gold decided to put his practical, hands-on experience to work for a leading corporate firm where he can work with dozens of megachurches.

Mike Gold served in technology roles at Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, IL, since 1996, more recently as CIO where he led all aspects of computer and telecommunications technology. There he had a staff of 20 members and 70 volunteers, and the department was responsible for creating long-term strategy for technology innovation, technical support, infrastructure and software development.

Today Gold is with Shelby Systems as director of Technology Development. Fresh off the megachurch field, *Church Executive* asked Gold what he would advise congregations today.

"If I had one piece of advice I would give to churches it would be to upgrade their Internet connection. There are countless systems out there to help ministry efforts, many of them hosted solutions.

"The old 768k DSL line just isn't enough," Gold says. "It surprises me how many churches still have these old connections."

**What do you feel is the biggest improvement that membership systems need to take to get us to the next level?**

First, the overall philosophy of systems needs to change. This is a much broader topic than membership systems. Thirty years ago technology was relegated to support corporate operational processes alone, 15 years ago promotional Web initiatives were added to computer technology ranks, and less than 10 years ago it started to become normal social/collaborative interactions to be facilitated by computer technology.

In short, today, technology supports and/or facilitates the whole gambit of organizational and personal functionality along with many personal and organizational processes and interactions we work through on a day-to-day basis.

I see the best of these concepts coming together around personalized user experiences. I would like to see the best risk management practices of IT, the open innovation of social technology and the creativity of promotional marketing technology all come together for the sake of offering better overall solutions for users.

## WHEN HIRING FOR THE IT POSITION

First, I consider a church IT director/manager to be a pastor. He or she must follow the biblical guidelines for church leaders as outlined in 1 Timothy 3. A wise friend taught me that one should never be elevated to a level of responsibility that is beyond their level of character. I consider the responsibility of stewarding the information and technology of a church to require the utmost integrity and character.

Second, they must be a 360 degree leader. Today's technology managers have to influence decisions in all directions — staff, volunteers, leadership, etc.

Third, they must be a skilled manager. Leaders don't always make great managers. In this day and age the technology director/manager has to be both. I recommend Ken Blanchard situational leadership or some other formal and rigorous management training.

Fourth, and just as important, the technology manager must have sharp technical skills. They may not be an expert in all aspects of the technology they lead, but I believe that today's technology leaders need to be at least versed in all they manage.

Fifth, today's technology leaders have to be good communicators at all levels. They have to know when and when not to go into too many details and when and when not to communicate high level vision.

— Mike Gold

## INNOVATORS IN CHURCH TECHNOLOGY

There are so many people doing some very cool things with technology to facilitate ministry. The hardest part for me in sharing these initiatives is knowing that I am going to miss a few people.

- Clif Guy from Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, KS is doing some really cool things leveraging Amazon's EC2 technology for live streaming.
- I love what Terry Storch from LifeChurch.tv is doing with YouVersion.
- Pastor Arturo Paniaqua of Templo La Hermosa Church in San Sebastian, Costa Rica, just launched a brand new ncomputing virtual desktop computer learning center in his church complete with almost 30 brand new work stations. He plans to offer job skill classes to his community.
- Gateway Church in the Dallas-Fort Worth area is doing some really cool things to support spiritual growth.
- I am inspired by Jason Reynolds of Christ Fellowship and Mark Newton and Ben Jordon of Big Bad Collab for their innovations with open source technology.
- Finally, I am excited to see what the new technology leaders at Willow Creek, Beth Hayes and Ted Allen Miller, are coming up with. Beth now manages all IT support, infrastructure and telecommunications. Ted now oversees all software development and the Web. It will be fun for me to partner with them from a different perspective.



— Mike Gold

Secondly, platforms need to change. Organizations need the best of both worlds. They need the flexibility and in some cases the off-line security management of locally installed systems along the scalability and online accessibility of hosted, SaaS systems. There is no longer one platform that meets all needs. Organizations need systems that can talk to each other without writing complex batch and real-time interfaces.

Technology has become way too personalized, way too consumer focused to constrain technology to one or two platforms per organization. Standardization is still important. It is just that the focus of standardization must be across platforms. Furthermore, while old concepts like security, functionality and content relevance are still important, how users access functionality and content are most critical, and platforms need to allow for radical changes to user experiences while requiring little to no changes to business functionality.

Finally, processes need to change. Too much time is spent on figuring out software features that are seldom used. While long-term road map, strategic planning and project management philosophies need to be in place for organizations to use technology effectively, I still believe that more creative processes need to be added to good solid software development life cycle rigors.

I believe if more organizations adopted methodologies like Agile SCRUM they would get more out of their technology solutions. Most organizations are simply changing too quickly to take on multi-year software development projects.

**Willow has the Arena product that Shelby produces for large churches. How do you describe your depth of experience gained at Willow Creek?**

At all levels Willow Creek places a strong value on innovation and change. This entrepreneurial spirit, coupled with a deep conviction Jesus really can make a difference in our world through his church, made for an amazing if not constant growth experience. It would be easy for me to say that through the size and scope of Willow Creek's infrastructure, staff, volunteer base and overall community, that I have had more than my share of experience working with countless technologies and systems in my time there.

**Where do you see the future of church management software heading?**

I envision open frameworks with individualized accessibility on the mobile level, where content delivery and interactivity are all personalized. I also see the value of face-to-face, human-to-human relational interaction rising to new levels, while the use of technology to facilitate connecting with people will also continue to rise. CE