

Tested Tips and Tricks for Implementing AccessACS

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For ongoing tips and tricks, check out the ACS Users Podcast at acsusers.net and my blog at matthewirvine.com.

There's Hope!

Let's face it, implementing AccessACS is a big task, but there's hope. I've been there. I've done it. My goal today is not to teach you how to *use* AccessACS, but how to maximize its effectiveness for your church. Let's look at five steps to beginning a successful implementation of AccessACS.



Plan ► Install ► Train ► Promote ► Launch

Plan

Planning is the most important step of your AccessACS implementation. Don't rush this step because you are anxious for your church to play with this new "toy." If you bomb out on the initial launch, you may never gain the momentum you desire with AccessACS.



- Form a small team of people to begin planning
- Schedule key dates for your implementation
- Decide which features of AccessACS your church will use
 - a. Serving / Volunteer Management?
 - b. Event Registration?
 - c. Small Groups?
 - d. Connections?
 - e. Online Donations / Payments?
- Choose a name that you will use for AccessACS in your church. Don't call it AccessACS since none of your members know what ACS is.
- Decide who you will upload to AccessACS. It's likely that the prices are too steep for you to upload every single person in your ACS database.
 - a. All church members
 - b. All church members and regular attenders
 - c. Everyone who has attended in this quarter or the last quarter
 - d. Everyone who has attended or given this quarter or last quarter

Install

Okay, so you've reached the step of getting your hands dirty and tinkering with the software. Don't rush this. It's new to you, and it's definitely not as intuitive as Excel or PowerPoint. You have to learn the lingo and the inner workings of the minds of the ACS Developers. Be patient, and don't bring anyone else into the software until you're sure that it can't be broken.

- Follow the steps and user guides from ACS to complete the initial set up of AccessACS.
- Set your default permissions for staff, administrators, lay leaders, and members. This is a real booger.
- Create a user account under each of the templates (member, lay leader, and administrator), and login as each of them to TEST, TEST, and TEST some more! Again, don't bring anyone else in until you're sure that it can't be broken!
- Create a unique look for your AccessACS implementation. Add graphics and change the colors to look closer to your church Web site.
- Define leadership positions.
- Upload records from ACS and create a scheduled task to do this automatically for you.
- If you're using Small Group functionality, get it set up.
- If you're using Serving functionality for volunteer management, get it set up.
- If you're using online giving and event registration, get it set up.



Train

- Your staff and group leaders need to be on board early on. Organize training sessions for these groups not only to show them how to use it but also to convince them that life is better when they employ the tools provided by AccessACS.
- Well trained group leaders will train their classes, and their classes will use the tools provided by AccessACS
- Let's face it. If you bomb out here, no one will use AccessACS, and you will have a very expensive, albeit very cool, ghost town on the Web.

Promote

- Collect email addresses from everyone. This is CRUCIAL. You can do this in conjunction with publicity or before. On all response cards, make the blank for email addresses really really long.
 - a. Set up a table in the worship center foyer and have the pastor send people to the table after the service.
 - b. Send a letter to everyone in your database that does not have an email address listed.
 - c. Stuff your contribution statements with a response card.
 - d. Include information in your church newsletter.
 - e. Visit small groups & Sunday School classes to request information.
- Publicize the launch
 - a. Create posters and place them in prominent places around your building. Your local print shop will likely produce full-color posters on 11x17 paper for very cheap. Ours charges us \$0.50 per copy since they are able to do it on a color copy machine.
 - b. Mail a letter from your pastor advertising the new service. Make sure to include a response card for people to provide their e-mail address.
 - c. Include a blurb in your church bulletin for at least four weeks leading up to the launch.
 - d. Use an announcement slide on your projector to announce the launch.
 - e. Create a video to explain the how to's and also to provide some "testimonials." Include this on your church Web site and show it every chance you get.
 - f. Provide resources to small group and Sunday School leaders to use AccessACS for their class.
 - g. Send out small batches of invitations **before the launch date** for people to get connected. This accomplishes a couple of goals:
 - i. It creates ownership. Word the invite in such a way that people feel special for being selected to connect on AccessACS before the launch. Start with your leaders. Doing so will allow them to learn the product and feel a sense of warmth for being pre-selected.
 - ii. It limits your number of requests for help. Let's be real. If you send everyone instructions to connect on launch date, you will be flat overwhelmed with people who are having difficulty creating an account or logging in. Spread it out, and I promise that you'll be a much happier person.



Launch

Way to go buckaroo! You're almost there. You've had several weeks of hard work leading up to the launch of AccessACS in your church. Now, let's get out there and launch this thing with fanfare and gusto. Let's create some lasting momentum to drive this thing into everlasting success!



- Link AccessACS prominently to your church Web site.
- Create some mechanism for tracking the number of times people click on the link. This will help you monitor success. I use a very simple, very cheesy, PHP script to accomplish this. You can download it from <http://www.phpjunkyard.com/php-click-counter.php>. Basically *fbcbelton.me* redirects to this counter script which redirects to AccessACS. The user doesn't notice this since it happens transparently, and now you've got a system that has basic tracking.
- Create a Frequently Asked Questions page to help people answer their... um... frequently asked question. I give you permission to completely plagiarize my FAQ or modify it in any way you seek fit. Interestingly, I've seen it on dozens of church sites already. ☺ You can find my Frequently Asked Questions here: <http://www.fcbelton.org/fcbelton-dot-me-faq/>
- Remind your church periodically about AccessACS. You can do this through mass e-mails, bulletin inserts, pulpit appeals, Sunday School announcements, etc. Make it a goal that every person in your church hears about what they can do on AccessACS at least one time every month.
- If you use a scheduled task to perform your uploads to AccessACS, you need to verify on a weekly basis that these are actually completing.

See Also

If you do not have the "Small Groups: Getting Started Resources" from ACS, you can obtain it for FREE by contacting your ACS sales representative. This little disc has great templates for publicity and a handy guide that provides a few more details than I have provided. It is a bit dated, but the templates are great starting points!



Sample Implementation Timeline

Note: this is not comprehensive. It simply illustrates the need to create a timeline and stick to it.

June 1	Hold initial meeting with implementation team
June 15	Deadline for initial set-up, testing and troubleshooting of AccessACS (by administrator)
July 1	Meet with implementation team to discuss progress and problems.
July 12	Do spiritual gifts survey in Sunday School to collect SHAPE data from congregation
July 13	Begin entering SHAPE data. Request that staff begin sending serving opportunities to you.
July 16	Hold training for staff. Make sure to cover Serving and Event Registration, if you will use those features. If your staff don't use them, they won't work.
July 16	Staff Launch Date
July 17	Deadline to complete AccessACS video
July 19	Four weeks until launch (bulletin announcement, PowerPoint slide, visit half of the Sunday School classes to discuss what AccessACS can do)
July 21	Hold training session for Sunday School and small group leadership
July 22	Staff debriefing – talk to staff about problems they have encountered with AccessACS. Fix those before inviting anyone else.
July 23	Deadline to have SHAPE data entered for congregation
July 24	Deadline to have serving opportunities listed in AccessACS
July 26	Three weeks until launch (bulletin announcement, PowerPoint slide, visit second half of Sunday School classes to discuss what AccessACS can do)
July 27	Send mass email to entire church discussing the launch of AccessACS, include link to video
August 2	Two weeks until launch (table in foyer, bulletin announcement, PowerPoint slide)
August 3	Begin sending 20-50 email invitations every day for people to get an exclusive sneak peak
August 9	One week until launch (table in foyer, bulletin announcement, PowerPoint slide)
August 15	Modify church Web site to include FAQ and
August 16	Launch Date
September 1	Analyze usage statistics. Send an email to anyone who has had zero logins. This means that they have created a user account but couldn't get logged in. Help them. Enlist a focus group of all those who have logged in more than a couple of times to discuss their experiences.
September 16	Send a reminder to congregation to get plugged in to AccessACS
October 1	Target date to begin using Event Registrations and Online Giving. Create new timeline after launch of main functionality to plan the implementation of this feature.
November 1	Target date to begin using Connections. Create new timeline after launch of event registrations to plan the implementation of this feature.

