



May 2008



**A WORD
FROM
THE
PRES...**

Developments!

The Eagle Eye has been silent for too long. For that, I apologize. This "special edition" is intended to get it back on its sometimes-monthly schedule. Future editions will include a return to our previous format with articles from each member of our team. I will use this entire edition to fill you in on what we've been doing these past several months with development on MissionBase and UMCDData.com software, as well as on the addressing upgrade project that we began last spring.

First let me tell you about our exploration of new technologies for our software...

Last August we held a customer conference in Kansas City, and spent some time discussing with several of our customers various ideas, customer needs, and future technologies that we had been exploring. Six conferences were represented there by one or more persons. Bill, Lori, Jacob and I tried to spend at least as much time listening as we did talking. We did take time to outline what we were thinking should be a major retooling and upgrade of our software into a "web based" product. The technology behind MissionBase is over 10 years old, and is highly dependent upon the aging Microsoft Windows operating system. It is questionable whether the next major upgrade of the Windows operating system will support MissionBase in our original programming language.

We took a hard look at alternatives. As we did so, we began to consider a possible change in the underlying technology of our software to the Adobe Flex, ColdFusion, and AIR products. In October, the four of us immersed ourselves in the Adobe MAX conference. At this annual event, Adobe showcases all of its many products and technologies, and gives developers and designers the opportunity to interact with their engineers and product managers in a variety of ways over three grueling long days.

Following that, we have each stolen chunks of time whenever we could to explore these new tools; downloading trial versions, following tutorials, installing a separate server for development, and finding out all we can about these technologies prior to launching into a rewrite of our substantial program code base. We want to be certain that we choose a platform that will provide the foundation for the many different modules and functions that are currently included in MissionBase.

The result of all this is that we are convinced that the Adobe platform of Flex/ColdFusion/AIR technologies will handle the functions that are currently being done in MissionBase and UMCDData.com. Not only will they handle them, but they offer some significant advantages, not the least of which is the ability to provide our software on the three major operating systems in use today – Microsoft Windows, Apple Macintosh (OS/X), and Linux. The key is that the software is delivered via the web browser, using Adobe's Flash Player plug-in. Thus a reasonably current version of a web browser with the free Flash player installed (Flash is downloadable) is all you need. Adobe estimates that 97% of all PCs already have Flash installed, so chances are you already have it on your computer right now. I will cover other advantages of this technology in a future article.

As we now begin to make plans for the redevelopment of MissionBase and UMCDData.com, I want to outline some principals that we will try to follow.

- We will continue to support and maintain our current products as long as they are in use. However, any new major development requests for MissionBase other than the addressing project discussed below will have to be carefully evaluated, as we will need to keep our focus on the evolution of MissionBase to these new technologies.
- We will retain as many of our good design concepts as possible. Things like our tree structures, which offer a hierarchical view of data will be retained. At the same time, design concepts that have been troublesome to our customers will be evaluated and likely changed.
- We will refer to our accumulation of comments, suggestions, and requests at regular intervals to assure that we include as much customer feedback from recent years as possible. We will also set up some type of interactive website to allow additional customer input to our design.
- We will create a few demo "concept applications" that will allow you to see what we have in mind. The first of these is available now. By going to: <http://65.86.191.58/FruitDemo/bin-release/main.html>, you can view our first live application using Flex and ColdFusion, which is already in use by the district offices of the Missouri Conference.
- I will do my best to keep you informed of progress through regular articles in The Eagle Eye and the interactive website mentioned above.

If you have questions or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact me at any time. Email is usually the best way to get in touch with me. Watch for more on this project in the next Eagle Eye, coming soon.

Next, an update on our addressing project...

Most of you are aware that we have been upgrading our address/phone/email sub-system in MissionBase for several months. We have been doing this in phases, because of the significant size of this project and the need to keep MissionBase functional as we go.

You have seen the rollout of the email and phone updates already, and have probably noticed some design changes on the Contact Information form. However, the major portion of the address upgrade is yet to come. During the next few months you will see several changes. Very soon you will see some additional changes on the Contact Information form. At this point the program is still using what we have come to call the "legacy address tables" within the internal database. This next change will continue to use the legacy database table, but will stage the addressing system for the next big change, which will replace the use of the legacy tables with a new internal database structure for addresses.

The major change is projected to take place during early to mid summer. We will need to contact each of our customers, and stage a 1-2 day period when we will need to coordinate a brief stoppage of data entry. We will not need to come on-site in order to accomplish this. We will simply need to follow a process where all remote users synchronize their data, followed by a conversion process to be run on our end. This process will be similar to what we did with the email addresses and phone numbers. Some enhancements that will be present with this upgrade include:

- Multiple addresses for churches and institutions
- Flexibility in address types (not limited to home/office/other)
- Address notes for user reference

Simultaneously with the new addressing rollout, we will be working on implementing the Satori address standardization software which uses USPS addressing suggestions and requirements, and the mailroom CASS certification module (which will be optional).

Following that, our aging "Labels & Lists" function in MissionBase will receive a complete overhaul to take advantage of our new addressing features while adding new functions, such as email broadcasts.

While it is still very difficult to predict when these final pieces will become available, we are hoping to have the Satori piece in place by late summer or early fall, with the rewrite of Labels & Lists to follow.

In summary...

We have been busy these past few months, even though you have not seen a lot of changes in our current products. We have been laying the groundwork for a major evolution of our MissionBase and UMCDData.com software. We believe this will be worth the time invested for our customers, by repositioning our software for the current and future needs of our customers as well as bringing it up to date with the current state of computer technology. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.

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