

A Technology Primer

Editions Clé (www.editionsclé.com) in Lyon, France, was the first French evangelical Christian publishing house to publish Bible software, and has since created other electronic products for Bible study, evangelism, youth, and children. Greg Burgess shares how publishers can harness technology to better serve the Church.

Bekele Bibi Paulin, an African pastor from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, recently wrote, “The 21st century pastor needs to keep in step with the technology of the times. Every day I do my devotions using your software and I prepare all of my sermons with it. Thanks to the variety of documents you have included I have a Bible reference library that is easy to use—and this is in place of a multitude of Bibles and commentaries on my desk.”

A top-level menu of authors

Pastor Bekele has been using French Bible software for more than 10 years. When the software he uses first came out, it was furnished on floppy disks. I know, because I spent much time copying these disks in order to get the first edition of our Bible software to those who needed it. That was 1990. Today our publishing house is in its 10th edition of that same software.

Those statements from Pastor Bekele, who lives in a place that many would be hard pressed to locate on a map, might sound trite in the mouth of a Western Christian. Hearing that a pastor in Kinshasa uses our software every day to study and prepare his work is like cold water to a thirsty soul. Pastor Bekele is

one of the reasons I get up in the morning. Knowing that there are millions of Christians across the globe who can benefit from our electronic publishing motivates me. Perhaps you are of the same heart.

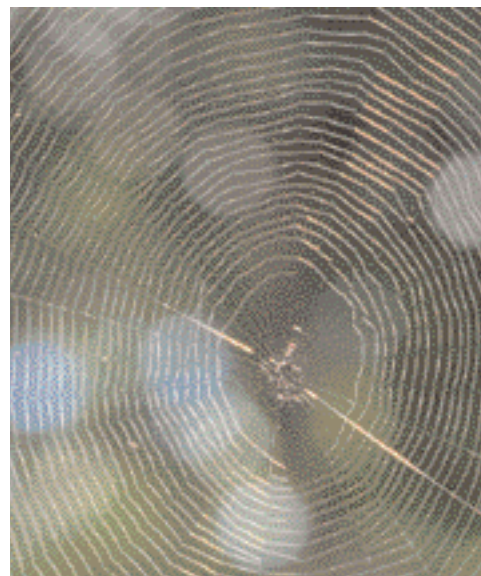
First things first

Christian endeavor should begin on one's knees. All plans and pursuits, if self-seeking, are just exercises in vanity. A Christian electronic publishing program should begin with Christ. As far as you are able, discern what is best for God's Kingdom where you live.

Need for good relationships

Publishing electronic Bible products involves relationships, even more than book publishing. To create Bible software, you must work with one or more programmers. You may have content from your own publishing house, from other publishing houses, from individual authors and from the public domain. Much of the content may already be contracted for print. Other electronic publishers may wish to use some of the same content in their software products. Distribution can go through a number of competing channels. Relationships are rarely exclusive.

The creation of Bible software is like the weaving of a tangled web, and potential pitfalls are omnipresent. Be sure that the relationships you make—and the manner in which you make them—are God-honoring, full of integrity and goodwill. Use contracts to clarify mutual responsibilities.



Your product development team

You do not have to be a computer engineer to publish a Bible software program for your market, but you need to work with one. There are independent

Christian programmers, Christian-run companies with staffs of 50 or more individuals, and computer engineering companies you can hire to create a Bible software engine for you. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

1. *The one-man band.* Independent Christian programmers create and own the technology and develop it as they see fit. The type or speed of development may or may not match your need. If the programmer dies, the code can no longer be written. However, if you are of like mind (and they are in good health), your unity of perspective may lead to a long-term relationship. Such programmers are often more concerned with serving the Christian community than with profit.

2. *The symphony orchestra.* Christian-run companies might offer you stability for the long run for an enduring Bible software engine. Some of these companies have brilliant programmers doing innovative and important work in the creation of Bible study tools. However, the company's agenda and deadlines may not be the same as yours. Your

important deadline may not be theirs, but the product you build together might be worth the wait. It takes money to run large companies.

expect more of an emphasis on things financial when going this route.

3. *The hired gun.* For a price, a computer engineering company will do the job, perhaps well, perhaps not. Research and choose your developer carefully. This option might be good for a specific aspect of development, but can turn into a financial black hole in the long-term.

There are people who have been developing Bible software engines for

close to two decades. They eat algorithms for breakfast. Their engines are constantly being upgraded. If you have the occasion to work with them, do so. Avoid reinventing the wheel.

At the same time, recognize that if you are working in a language other than English, you will surely encounter programming questions specific to that language. You will most likely need someone who is computer literate in your language. Help him or her to work through the programming specifics with those developing the engine. Encourage teamwork to build lasting relationships.

Appropriate technology

Another important consideration is the choice of technology. It is important that the programs and physical platforms (CD, DVD, etc.) be adapted to your market. In 1999, we released a game on DVD-ROM. At that time, DVD drives were just starting to be included as standard equipment on PCs in Europe. We were ahead of the game, but we weren't swimming in the mainstream. This hurt our sales. Today, some English-language software demands a large amount of space on the hard disk and a powerful processor to run the program. This technology might be inappropriate for certain markets in Africa where the computers are not frequently upgraded.

Do not lose the riches found in a book. How you input data from a work already in print can vary depending on the technology you use. Proprietary file formats (those specific to a particular software program) may not include all types of text formatting found in a book. For example, text may appear underlined in print, but the technology you use may not allow for underlining. One of the qualities of the print version will be lost.

To avoid this, consider preparing your files in a format other than the proprietary file format. Many electronic publishers use XML. With a good Document Type Definition (DDT), you can retain all the text-formatting found in a book even though it will not be used in your technology. Using XML offers ease

and flexibility in transferring your data to other formats, such as HTML.

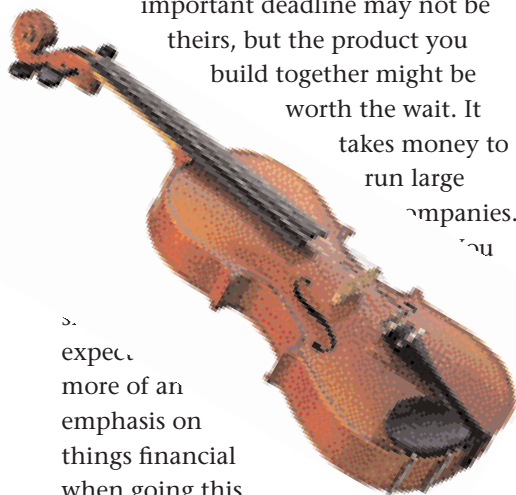
Sources for content

For basic Bible study software one needs Bibles, commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, cross-references, and more. Sources for content include your own publications; unpublished works by independent authors or professors; books from other publishing houses, Bible societies and seminaries; and works in public domain.

1. *Your company's published and forthcoming works.* With your own already-published books, all you have to do is code and compile the electronic files as needed for the Bible software (provided your contract with the authors grants you these rights).

Acquire more content by establishing good relationships with those teaching in seminaries and Bible schools. There are many dedicated and erudite men and women who have studied, taught and written on their area of Bible expertise and who would welcome the opportunity to publish their work.

2. *Licensing, heel-dragging and hand-wringing.* The bestseller of all time, the Bible, is the key ingredient of any program. Seek a balance among original, classic and modern translations to allow for the greatest depth of comparison for your audience. Most Bible societies and publishers are willing partners in the use of their texts.



Publishers of reference materials—like commentaries and dictionaries—may not be as willing to see their works enter into a new media format. The



common fear is that the sale of a Bible software program including their work will hurt print sales. Many delay granting electronic rights for six months or even a year. They want to give the print product a headstart. However, Bible software does not appear to have hindered print sales of reference works. Some would say it has actually increased print sales by giving revitalized exposure to many forgotten books. Others argue consumers prefer to get the best value for their money. Why buy \$7000 worth of books when you can have them all in electronic format for \$600?

Publishers should welcome the opportunity for new revenue streams by licensing their print publications to electronic publishers. Financially, it is to their benefit to license their works to as many electronic publishers as possible. Those publishing Bible software can, in turn, showcase these works in a context that gives them added value.

3. *Use of public domain works.* At first glance, this may seem a simple way to add time-tested and respected content to your software. You will, indeed, need time to find and create files of classic works in your language. To locate such works, you may find yourself gravitating to rare and used books shops, scouring the shelves for hours until your family presumes you dead and buried in one of those book crypts. To produce them in electronic form, you may have to cut these precious volumes apart, page by page, to scan them with an OCR program. Or, you may choose to send the books off to the most remote corners of Asia to be inputted by the lowest bidder.

The hazards of publishing public domain works continue once the electronic files are in good form. You may find the work you've done suddenly appears on the Internet or in a product from another publisher halfway around the world. Some Web administrators argue that the Gospel is free, so everything produced to advance the Gospel should be free too. Some people naively assume that any public domain work

now in electronic format is free game for all private and commercial use. Others need to reread and reconsider the meaning of Exodus 20:15. If you opt for using public domain works in your Bible software, refresh yourself on copyright and intellectual property law or talk to an intellectual property lawyer.

Unique content

A key to the success of our French Bible software has been its unique content. Perhaps there are some valuable missing ingredients in the reference works that have been published in your market's language. For us it was Strong's



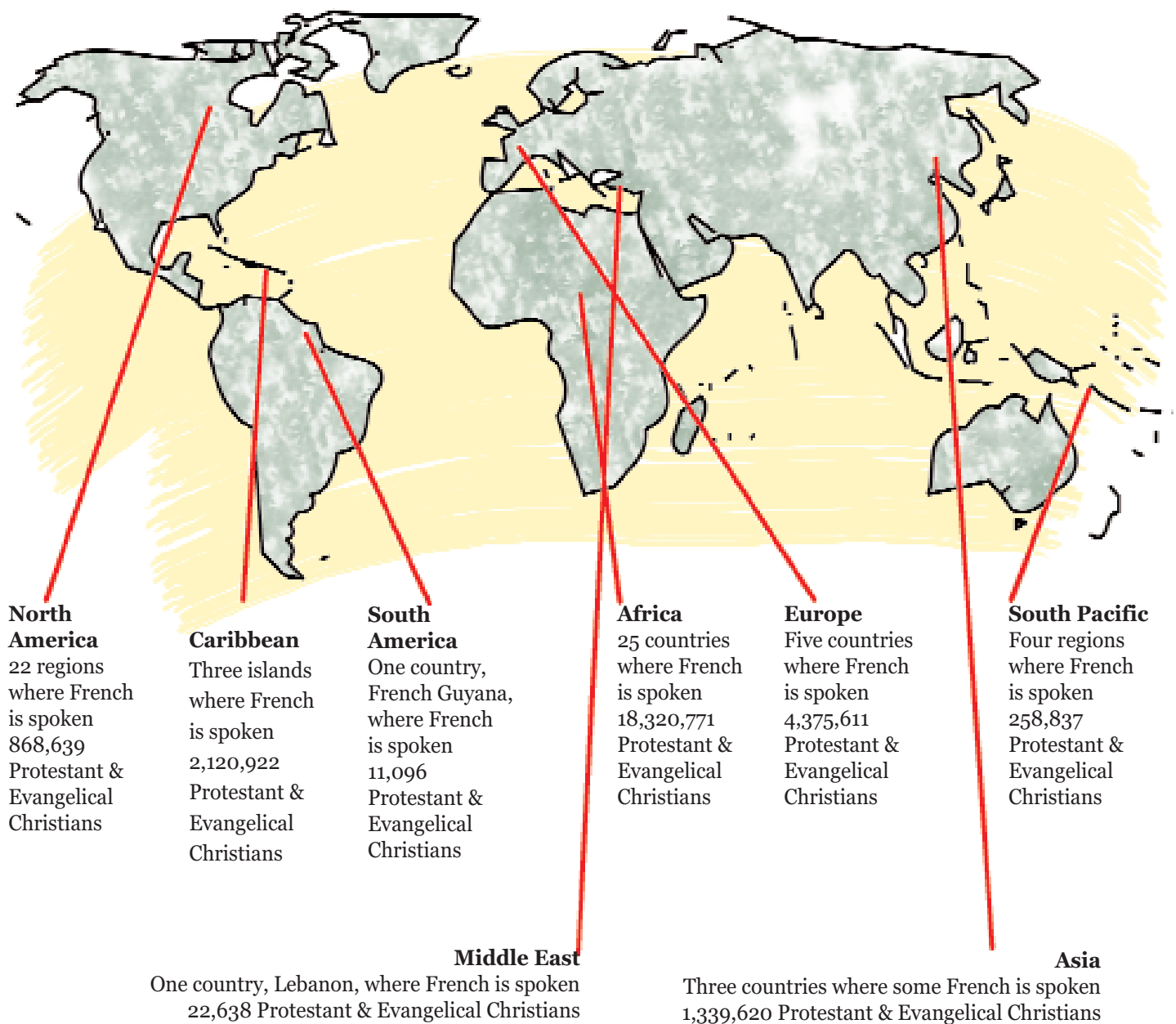
Greek and Hebrew lexicons and the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, a great collection of Bible cross-references. Our

Did you know that there are over 200 million French speakers in 44 countries across the globe? And 27 million French-speaking Protestant Christians? The French language is third on the United Nations list for educational languages, but unfortunately, there are few Bible software resources in French.

For 2003, the Association of American Publishers reports sales of over \$338 million of religious books in the United States, but you can count on one hand the number of books suitable for Bible study software published in a given year by French evangelicals. The gap between English and French resources is phenomenal and need of French-speaking Christians is overwhelming. The largest French-speaking evangelical Christian population, 18 million strong, is in Africa, where deprivation is often the norm. The church suffers when needed resources, both spiritual and material, are withheld.

Our dream is to create and distribute a comprehensive French Bible study library with over 50 key reference books in electronic format for use within Bible research software. The result would be a complete Bible study and ministry toolbox for students, pastors, professors, missionaries, and committed Christians in the French-speaking world. We are calling this initiative FEEL, the French Evangelical Electronic Library (see www.feel-project.com). We want to bring essential theological resources to the present and future leaders of the French-speaking Church today.

—Greg Burgess, *Editions Clé, Lyons, France*



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Publishers should welcome the opportunity for new revenue streams by licensing their print publications to electronic publishers.

publishing house translated these works, especially useful in Bible software, into French for the first time. We have only published them in electronic format. Recognizing and creating that unique content may be a challenging process, but one that could play an integral part in establishing your software's place in your market.

Service

Some companies believe it is sufficient to support their Bible software through the Internet, help files, and manuals, but much can be learned from talking to customers who call. If your structure allows for someone to respond

it. They did not know what it was, or how to sell it. Word of mouth was our most effective marketing tool.

Now, our marketing and distribution go through many different channels: direct mail, e-mail, catalogs, Internet, book distributors, software distributors and more. Starting from a base of evangelical Christians, our distribution has now spread to the Catholic and general markets.

Intelligent design meets intelligent minds

Bible reference works are comparable to other specialized information sources, such as LexisNexis, a legal database, and numerous online medical libraries. Reference works, sometimes cumbersome and heavy in their printed incarnation, are transformed when placed in a good software engine. The ability to access needed information in a short amount of time increases the value of these works.

Michel Philippe, a French computer engineer, noted, "For the last 17 years, computers and the Internet have changed the way we research, archive and transmit information. Thanks to fast and precise research functions contained within software, which manages large libraries of specialized documents, Bible software and the CD-ROM have revolutionized Bible study tools."

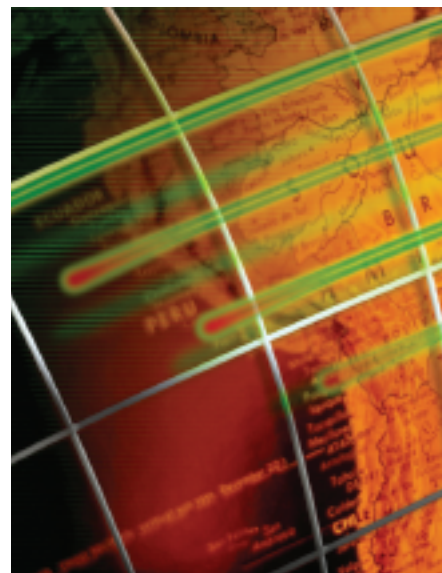
Portability

A sleek silver CD-ROM often goes through customs more easily than a book. A customs agent will open a potentially 'subversive' book to read the content, but will not take the time load a disc onto a computer to see what it is. Some speculate that Bible reference works will disappear from print and will

eventually only be published in electronic formats.

An electronic future

Bob Pritchett of Logos Bible Software is right when he says, "Bible software should be the finest in the world." It is up to us to create and bring the best resources possible to this generation of Christians in the formats that they can use. The Church will be stronger for it.❖



to technical support calls, provide this service. An indispensable factor in cementing our Bible software's presence in our market has been our ability to provide technical support by telephone.

Power to the people

When we released our electronic product in 1990, few stores would touch