

Zowzer White Paper
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Introduction

As every organization grows from the passion project of one individual into a thriving nonprofit or corporation, the need for efficient computer support becomes increasingly more urgent and unavoidable. In our modern world, it would be extremely unlikely that any organization could expand significantly without effectively utilizing computers. Even an effort involving only one or two individuals cannot function efficiently without leveraging computers to assist.

Large organizations can afford to buy equipment, software, and expertise to help them develop solutions to meet their computerization needs. However, new and emerging organizations typically have extremely limited computer expertise and resources. The challenge for them is to find inexpensive and uncomplicated ways to computerize. Only by doing so can they grow and transition into an organization that can afford to budget for its own computer systems and support.

While the ways in which computers offer assistance are seemingly limitless, there are really just **three main categories**.

The first is in providing a **web presence** for the organization so that interested parties can discover and learn about it. For new organizations, there are now many free or inexpensive tools to help create a web site and there are a relatively large number of web developers available to offer expert creative and technical assistance.

The second set of systems fall into the general category of **content management**. These help organizations to store, organize, and share documents and images. Again, there are a relatively large number of free or inexpensive tools available to help meet these needs.

The third general type of computer support falls under the umbrella of **data management** systems. These systems help users to store, organize, and share the nitty-gritty data and information that it needs to track and work with daily. Contact Management and Accounting systems are just two examples of a specialized data management systems, but organizations need to be able to efficiently work with large amounts of data including contacts, sales, events, vendors, inventory, purchases, and products just to name a few.

While there are specialized software solutions to assist with say, Contact Management and Accounting needs, there are few very inexpensive tools to help emerging organizations to manage the more specialized kinds of information that is unique to their particular model. Larger organizations typically hire technical experts to develop custom **database application** to meet their specific needs, but such resources are extremely scarce for nonprofits and emerging organizations to engage. In fact, their needs have probably not materialized as yet to a point at which it would make sense to engage in such an effort.

This leaves most emerging organizations without a very good way to manage their emerging and rapidly growing data management needs. They typically start out using crude tools like spreadsheets and text documents, but these begin to fail them very quickly. Further, they offer no efficient and robust way to

share data and to distribute the workload of maintaining it. And finally, as files and spreadsheets quickly fall apart under their own weight, they become ever more difficult to transition into a more efficient and scalable database system. Small personal database applications, such as those created with Microsoft Access™, really do not address the key challenges of sharing across the team and do not transition well.

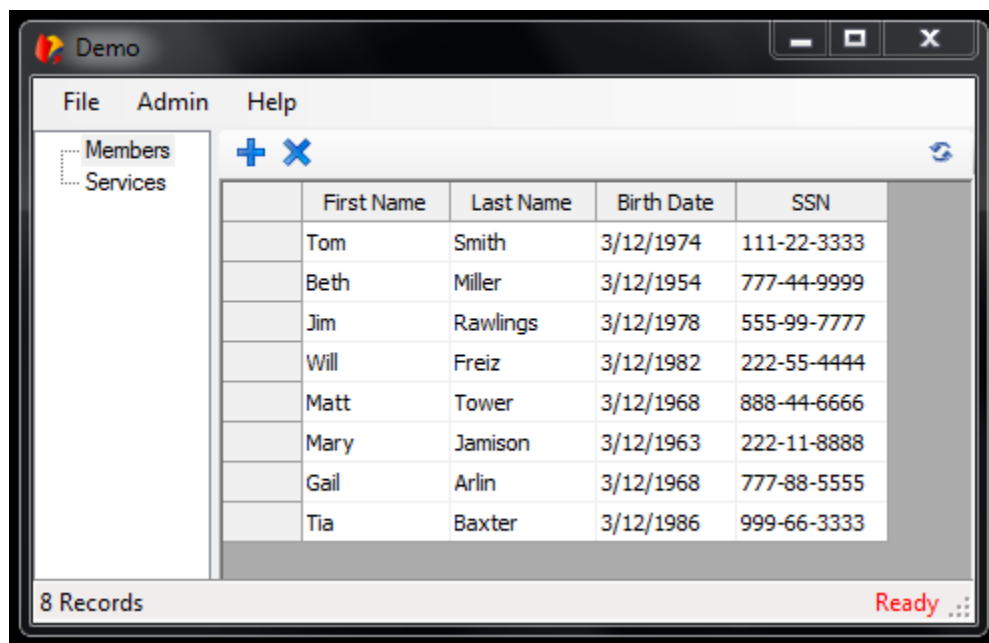
Thus, data management soon becomes one of the most difficult challenges for emerging organizations and jeopardizes their continued growth.

The Zowzer Solution

While the variety of specialized data that different organizations need seems endless, the basic needs are fairly standard. They need to create tables of data with customized field types and names, and then share that data with others outside of and within the organization. Team members at different locations need to be able to enter and maintain the data and share those changes immediately with the rest of the team.

The best way to accomplish this is to store the data in a database, such as MySQL™ or Microsoft SQL Server™. However it requires specialized expertise to create such a database. And then, to access that data, a **database application** is required. Typically these are either specialized applications, say a Contact Manager, or they are custom applications written by software developers.

Zowzer provides a generic database application that connects to a MySQL or SQL Server database across the Internet. It allows users to configure their data tables and to import or enter data. All data is stored in their own database and their users can access it in real time from wherever they are located. No special computer expertise is required since Zowzer takes care of creating and managing the database for you.



The screenshot shows a window titled "Demo" with a menu bar containing "File", "Admin", and "Help". On the left, there is a tree view with "Members" selected and "Services" below it. The main area displays a table with the following data:

	First Name	Last Name	Birth Date	SSN
	Tom	Smith	3/12/1974	111-22-3333
	Beth	Miller	3/12/1954	777-44-9999
	Jim	Rawlings	3/12/1978	555-99-7777
	Will	Freiz	3/12/1982	222-55-4444
	Matt	Tower	3/12/1968	888-44-6666
	Mary	Jamison	3/12/1963	222-11-8888
	Gail	Arlin	3/12/1968	777-88-5555
	Tia	Baxter	3/12/1986	999-66-3333

At the bottom left, it says "8 Records" and at the bottom right, it says "Ready" with a status icon.

The screenshot above illustrates an example of a simple **Zowzer Application**. Users can create any number of different Zowzer applications on their database. The area on the left provides an outline of the different tables of data that their application maintains. Users anywhere can be given permission to view and optionally edit application data.

Benefits of using Zowzer

Low Cost

The Zowzer application is free and is only supported by voluntary donations. A SQL Server or MySQL database may already be available on your current web hosting service or can be added for very little cost.

Easy to Configure

No computer expertise is required. Simply download the application, run it, and configure your application with a few simple menu options. Import existing data, share your application information with your team and you're in business. Once familiar with it, it can take you literally minutes to create a new Zowzer application.

Easy to Use

Usage is very intuitive. Just click on the table to display in your outline, browse the records, and edit them in place. If users have access to multiple Zowzer applications, they all work exactly the same way.

Flexible

Zowzer supports a wide range of data presentation and entry styles but imposes no restrictions or limitations on what information you store and do more specialized data management systems.

Fast

While performance is limited by your internet connection speed and the response time of your database server provider, Zowzer offers high performance to manage relatively large amounts of data.

Powerful

Zowzer has many advanced capabilities including; display styles, input filtering, security, finding, filtering, sorting, exporting, and printing.

Simple Installation

The Zowzer application is very small and installs quickly and easily.

Scalable

Since your data is stored in a true database, when you are ready to develop more customized solutions to meet your needs your data will already be stored in a system to make that transition easy.

Accessible Data

Your data isn't hidden away from you. While you can always access it through Zowzer, you can also export it to files whenever you wish. In addition, you can develop other system to access your database directly when you are ready to do so.

Limitations of Using Zowzer

Transitional

Zowzer is intended to be a transitional solution. It is designed with zero-entry cost to move new organizations quickly into a true database application. But at some point it is understood that you will become large enough to commission more customized solutions to meet your needs. However, Zowzer can take you much farther than other options and make that eventual transition much smoother.

Single Tables

Zowzer can only manage single tables of information and always returns all records for every table. It therefore does not provide some of the most important benefits of a true database application in being able to return only a subset of records nor does it allow relationships between records in different tables. These are the limitations that will cause you to eventually outgrow Zowzer.

Limited Records

Since Zowzer must always return all records for each table, you will be effectively limited to several thousand records per table. If you know ahead of time that you will have more records, you might want to split them into multiple tables from the start. For example, you could have a Contacts category with separate tables for A-D, E-G, etc. This is not the most desirable solution, but is the only way to manage very large record sets through Zowzer.

Windows Only

While other platforms are planned, there is currently only a Microsoft Windows version of the Zowzer application.

Zowzer Pro

It is possible to overcome all the limitations of Zowzer basic by upgrading to Zowzer Pro. Zowzer Pro can be extensively customized to perform true relational database operations and meet almost any needs. However, this requires more extensive configuration and the development of custom **Web Services** to talk to the database.

Interested parties should contact Surgical Grade Software consulting services.

Conclusion

While Zowzer cannot grow with you forever, it does offer a very simple but powerful tool to grow your organization and help you transition into custom database applications. By implementing Zowzer early and extensively, you gain a significant technical advantage and position yourself well for eventual migration to custom systems.