

## Do I Need a Desktop Genealogy Program or is FS - Family Tree Enough?

Following are answers to the above question asked by Gordon Clarke, FamilySearch API Program Manager to panelists: Bruce Buzbee ([RootsMagic](#)), Luc Comeau ([Legacy Family Tree](#)), Gaylon Findlay ([Ancestral Quest-PAF](#)), and Dovy Pukstys ([RealTime Collaboration/AncestorSync](#)) during a RootsTech session.

Their answers combined with thoughts written in **Renee's Genealogy Blog**, and Logan Allred, an employee of FamilySearch.org, have all been organized into this opinion paper by Terrence Mason.

Family history "genealogy" programs are tools used to organizing data. The main purpose for the Family Search – Family Tree software program provided by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to provide ordinances for the salvation of deceased family ancestors.

1. Information about living people must be kept private, especially if it can be embarrassing or hurtful. That private information may be vital to your research conclusions. A public forum like Family Search - Family Tree is not a place to record information about living individuals. Having both living and dead family members in a database eliminate this security concern when you have a database which you control.
2. The power to find, analyze, filter, and sort data in online programs does not compare to the power available on personal computer software. Personal desktop programs allow you to organize and analyze your data in a particular way such as selective searching, filtering, listing possible errors, flagging duplicates, match/merging, search & replace or listing report with place names. For example: you can focus on a specific geographic region to view all of the individuals in the database who were born, married or died there during a certain time period. Such a report together with your "To Do" list notes can really help you focus your research efforts as you plan and look in a certain courthouse, cemetery or parish.
3. Desktop programs can be customized to be simple or complex as desired. Web programs treat everyone the same. A desktop program allows you to choose colors, fonts, and customized templates for entering names, dates and places. You can set up your database to show in the way that will best assist your needs. An online application does not have that ability.
4. In a desktop program you can have separate databases, some with well researched and documented data and some with personal notes containing theories requiring more research. "To Do" lists and personal logs of what you did not find can be recorded in your personal database. It is important to have your information accurate and well organized before you add it to FS - Family Tree. Although Family Tree does allow putting a "Watch" on individual records so that you can be notified weekly when others change your online data, monitoring the actions of others might take time which you would prefer to spend in more productive research. Conclusions that are well documented are less likely to be changed by others
5. Although the conclusions found in Family Search - Family Tree might attract people to genealogy and get them interested in collaboration and sharing their information with others, the research process might be better organized using a desktop program.
6. Because of confidentiality some information can not be placed on a public accessed web site. Yet a need exists to put enough of your family history online in a way that other can find you so that you can share information in other ways. You can create a personal web site showing your contact information and in personal correspondence provide reports with limited information asking others to help fill in the blanks. A personal computer program provides many means to share with a restricted group as well as an ideal means for storing and organizing digital images of documents and photos. Some but not all should be put onto a public site like Family Search - Family Tree. A family's Book of Remembrance belongs in the family while data in the LDS site is for processing temple ordinances and collaborating efforts with others. Personal computer programs can create a book for your family.

7. You control the data in your database. Website managers can change things about which you have no control, to adjust to their requirements. You can stay with your older version of your program if desired and not be forced to change, while programmers may innovate in ways that may not promote better quality research.

8. Life gets busy; people tend to work on their family history in little pockets of time. Desktop programs have “To-Do” Lists and Research Logs that help you manage and track your research efforts. These help you organize records reflecting your thought process. A Research Log is a method of recording, as the impressions come to you, where you want to look in the future as well as track what you have already searched. “To Do” lists help us remember where we left off each time we get back to our family history. Such lists make a person much more productive with the time they do have to devote on their family records. Besides the “To Do” lists, an obscure note to ourselves can easily be searched for and found on a personal computer. These lists, notes and logs help us to focus our efforts as our time allows.

9. If you have your data in a desktop program and something happens to you, hopefully someone will have a copy of it. A personal computer program requires that you backup your personal data often and store it in on different devices. Family Search – Family Tree has assured users that they will preserve our data, but the transfer of information from new.FamilySearch and from Ancestral File into FS-Family Tree has proven otherwise. Your data is actually safer in your possession if you can make sure you've got backups.

Family Search – Family Tree is an open edit database. Anyone can modify the information. Hopefully when data is well documented others will tend to not modify it. But sadly, often users change the data therein and introduce folklore which corrupts database quality. When family members have copies of personal databases they have a means to compare information in Family Tree with personal documentation and sources. This will enable corrections to be made to corrupted data.

10. Maintaining your family history only on Family Search - Family Tree limits finding potential researchers working on your lines. The more places you share your research on the web the greater the potential you have of finding other family members. Desktop programs allow you to create GEDCOMs to share your data with other or a means to place your data on other websites. You can upload your database to Ancestry.com, WorldConnect, Geni, and MyHeritage, to name a few. You can also create your own websites with desktop programs and host them yourself. These in turn can be searchable by web crawlers like Google where other researchers can find you.

11. Desktop programs provide a variety of features for tracking your submissions for temple ordinances. Such a feature helps determine who still needs their ordinances done, which have been completed and a means to track which family members have cards that you have shared with them.

12. Desktop programs can help keep you in touch with living family members that are not interested right now in family history. It can be a great tool in planning family reunions. You can easily determine all the living descendants of a common ancestor. Most programs include a way to record contact information. You can also generate calendars showing family member’s birthdays and other special events.

Family Tree and the desktop programs actually fulfill different needs. Family Tree helps by getting new people interested in working on their family history. The desktop programs serve users when they need more features to help them manage their research efforts. Carefully done research helps users accurately identify and document their family members. The challenge for this generation is to create a legacy for our family that will endure. Stories of the lives of our family member’s lives will provide a connection to our roots that will give purpose to our family’s future.