

# ENTERPRISE CLUB MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE:

## REACTIVE COMMODITY VS. PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT TOOL

Let's be frank. Most of the club management software on the market today, particularly those that have been around for more than a few years (dare I say legacy systems even though they are mostly Windows-based), were built to be reactive and for one primary purpose: billing the member. Think about the body of evidence. Most of those systems use their respective accounts receivable module to double as their membership module. The primary focus of each of those legacy systems is billing and payment, with most other modules geared to collecting or disseminating such data. In most such systems there is very little functionality to improve productivity or efficiency, or that results in improving either the performance of the club or member satisfaction; and, most of these systems are reactive in nature, providing assistance only on demand.

This is not to say that club systems shouldn't provide the above functionality, with charging and billing obviously a necessary and critical function. And, it is not surprising that systems have grown up this way since accounting departments created the original demand and since each of the functions above is very task-oriented, lending itself to computerization. However, the above functionality has become a commodity, something that "everyone" has, and pretty much works the same way across varying systems.

What, then, is the true value of technology if we are simply completing mundane, routine, scheduled tasks? Certainly there is value in doing these things faster and with a higher degree of control and accuracy than if done manually.

However, the technology is clearly not being maximized in these older but very popular systems.

On the contrary, and consistent with development being done in other vertical markets, systems that have come on the scene in the past few years are bridging the gap between the billing and control-oriented systems, to ones that also provide tools for proactively managing the club enterprise. These tools encompass functionality designed to help increase non-recurring revenues, provide marketing information to drive club usage, provide reporting capabilities for decision support, help increase member satisfaction, as well as generally improve productivity and efficiency. All of these things are core to the mission of a private club, and yet sorely missed in most of the older systems.

Let's take a look at the possibilities, much of which is currently available in next generation systems:

- >> Functionality that memorizes what members like and dislike, what they've ordered in the past in the restaurant, and what their interests are, and then uses it rather than reporting it. In other words, the system will use that information to help you proactively communicate with the members in a targeted manner, increasing non-recurring revenues through up-sell opportunities, as well as serving every member uniquely. Or, the system will use such information to help reduce the amount of time food servers spend at a POS terminal, thus increasing productivity and member satisfaction (servers are with the members rather than stuck at the terminal);
- >> Functionality that allows for generating merged communications based upon prior club usage or predefined interests, activities and involvement. Such merged and targeted e-mails and letters allow for increasing both club use and member satisfaction;
- >> Customizable user dashboards that allow cross-module tasks and information on a single screen, and eliminates jumping around from module to module, clearly a productivity enhancer;
- >> Real-time member portals, allowing for members to review activities and charges, modify profiles and communicate with other members, all without a formal club Web site;
- >> Full, seamless and real-time interaction with Mi-

crosoft Office tools, increasing the efficiency of numerous types of tasks;

>> Wizard-driven report writers, providing data access and custom reporting, even for the average user rather than just for the super user, a benefit rarely seen in the first-generation Windows applications.

Match up the functionality of the older systems with the list above, and note the significant differences: Although incorporating the need to bill the member, the next-generation systems are all about member satisfaction, target marketing for the purpose of generating non-recurring revenue, productivity enhancement, decision support and most importantly, they tend to be proactive rather than reactive.

These are the signs of newer, next generation applications that have come on the scene in the past few years, and exactly what savvy clubs are seeking. The decision point is really whether some of this newer functionality will prove valuable to your club, or whether you are just interested in the so-called commodity functionality. Certainly any club management software system needs to be strong in accounting, billing, payables and controls, but in the current business environment with high labor costs and precious few member waiting lists, the need for productivity, proactive decision making, target marketing and member satisfaction are all paramount.

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