Do You Know What Your Club Management System Can Do?

Club management systems have come a long way since their inception as point of sale, accounting, and financial reporting tools. Over the years various upgrades have added timekeeping, payroll, and tee time systems; member relationship management tools; custom reporting formats; dashboards for key metrics; the ability to drill down to data entry detail; member websites and online activities sign ups; and even more powerful analysis of member spending habits. Such improvements have gone a long way toward providing club boards and management teams with timely, accurate, and actionable intelligence about their club's operations and performance.

My own fantasy is that someday a club management system will include everything a manager could possibly need to efficiently operate the club in one convenient, easy-to-access location. Items that I would want to see include: budgeting tools and templates; work planning and performance review modules; human resource information systems; detailed benchmarking by department; a server-based customizable operations plan with departmental standards, policies, and procedures (SPPs); training and professional development material for employees and managers; and training administration software.

Several years ago while attending a Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals chapter meeting as a guest speaker, I mentioned my fantasy to a sales representative for a club management system provider and was somewhat surprised by his response that in today's feature-rich software, the great majority of features went unused by club operators. In reflecting upon his statement I've come up with four possible reasons this might be so:

1. The club's leadership and decision makers – those key people who set the club's agenda and drive operational expectations, such as the general manager, boards and finance committee members, and controller – don't fully understand the capabilities of their club management system.

2. While they may have reviewed the system's features at one time and have a vague notion of its capabilities, they have neither the time nor the focus to implement routine use of key features.

3. Ongoing turnover of key people can cause a lack of the awareness of software features.

4. Without written accounting standards, policies, and procedures there is a lack of continuity in key accounting and financial reporting practices. When the club's operational practices are based on oral history instead of clearly delineated SPPs, things get lost over time.

To confirm my suspicions I recently spoke with Vache Hagopian, Director of Marketing for Jonas Software, the largest supplier of club management systems. He agreed with my basic assessments and quoted Bill Gates who said, "Most software upgrades/purchases are made to acquire features which were already available in their current software." This certainly doesn't speak well for a management team's knowledge and understanding of their software's capabilities.

I then asked how a software company addresses this lack of understanding. Mr. Hagopian indicated it was an ongoing challenge – one which Jonas works hard to overcome. "First," he said, "we offer a variety of training options to ensure client clubs are well-trained and understand all the features of their system." These include:

➢ On-site personal training provided by accredited trainers,

➢ One-on-one e-training with club employees which is a cost-effective method of training, and

➢ Group e-training with monthly course updates. This is the most cost-effective way to train in that clubs can have as many staff members participate as they like.

Mr. Hagopian said that his company offers the Jonas Utilization Review process, which is conducted over the phone by one of their system specialists, providing a complete overview of a club's software and education needs. The result offers an in depth report of the club's software utilization and includes recommendations for software configuration, optimal usage and reporting, and proactive services needed for skill development. The specialist then assesses training and support needs, while developing a plan to meet the club's specific objectives. Finally, the specialist outlines targeted training courses and appropriate resources to help equip the club's staff with the skills and product knowledge to successfully carry out their daily work.

As much as some club managers may wish for a completely integrated club management system with everything they need to efficiently operate their clubs in one place, it seems probable that, as Bill Gates said, many of the features we want, we already have.

Bottom Line: Conscientious club leaders and controllers should do annual reviews of their club management systems to determine if they are getting the most and best information out of their software package.

Ed Rehkopf, Hospitality Resources International