

technology



Solutions: Managing Beyond Expectations

No matter how you want to slice your data, Web-based software is a benefit to resort management

by Nick Washburn

Why can't you have access to all of your data all of the time, from any location—and why can't you sort that data and sift through it all the ways you want to look at it? It is, after all, *your* data. You should be able to look at all of the available condo lock-off units in every resort for the upcoming holiday weekend. Compare that to the usage of the same holiday last year, and it should take you only three minutes or less to print a spreadsheet.

What you should be able to do, however, and what you are *actually* able to do can be two very different things. That is,

unless you have today's Web-based software.

Let's use an analogy of a warehouse. Imagine into the not so distant past a giant warehouse with 20-foot walls full of file cabinets (data). You would need a multi-tiered ladder system and a spry file clerk staff with good balance (and a good workers comp policy) to access any of the reports stored five or six feet above the ground. Remember that each report is written in a set format and is closed and disconnected to any other one (and if you needed a different format, you'd need to write a whole new report).

Let's say you need a report on last year's plumbing contractors (somewhere on level 2) to compare to mid-year numbers from this year's total repairs. First, you have to make the request and then wait for the report to be delivered. What if you need to compare just the data from column 7, but the column 7 data needs to be sorted by amount or company? With the old manual systems, you'd be in a bind. Today, however, the Web browser serves as your new ladder system and clerk staff, and the properly configured databases are warehouses full of data that is interconnected—all filterable, stackable, and reportable.



BENEFITS OF TODAY'S OPTIONS

A common problem in the older (first generation) software products is the inability of a non-software developer to call up and service an individual account because of strict search parameters and denied access. This then led to the possibility of having to create a new account any time you attempt to provide service because it is too complicated to manipulate a current account. You might have

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Then, another question arises. Just because the software business model has changed to something that gives you direct access to all of your data, how do you know that you are actually looking at truly Web-based software that has been

need to shop smart. What are some criteria you should use to make your new solution purchase?

Here are a few questions for you to consider, so you can make sure a solution aligns with your current programs and business goals and yet will also grow with the evolution of your company.

- Do I have access to all of the data from all of my properties?
- Is the product configurable to each property?
- Can I make changes in real time? Can I enter and track general information associated with my properties, including property manager, location, type, amenities, currencies, sales status, rental status, and occupancy?
- Do I have total control over the sales process?
- Can I specify purchase benefits and sales commissions with total control?

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five accounts which are all really versions of the same account because the owner has changed their address five times. These incomplete records should all be one cohesive data "chunk."

Just using a Web browser does not solve this outdated data accessibility prob-

lem. Many companies just slap a Web face on an old product that has deep flaws, but the old way needs to be converted to the new for you to have complete control of the data.

What's Out There?

Developing a Web-based application is no easy task; there are numerous choices of packages for resort management. You

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- Can I define price change to trigger upon rules, such as a certain date or sales quantity?
- How is the point of sale handled?
- How will the software integrate with my existing corporate resort and inventory systems, as well as with any existing corporate contracting and customer lead systems?
- Can the software monitor the status and progress of legal registration for all of my properties?
- When will I know registration is final and when sales can begin with full compliance with the law?
- Does your software require any third-party licenses? (Third-party means there is a separate software company with a separate product that is required for you to purchase in order for you to use a function.)
- Does your software require any installation on each PC?
- Describe your process of legacy data conversion. What are some risks or problems you encountered in past data conversions of legacy systems? One of the largest risk factors when upgrading a system to use a new database involves the actual “cut-over” to the use of the new software application. When this change happens, the risk of data loss is highest.
In many cases, real time synchronization processes are placed into the interim software builds to ensure both systems are fully functional during what becomes a lower risk extended cut-over periods instead of a high risk single-event cut-over. Involve your IT staff and/or software subject matter expert when looking at prospective software from this angle.
- Explain and identify the process your company uses to develop software.
- What type of service do you provide with the product?
- What type of service do you provide during installation?

JUMPING IN

Whatever you do, make any software purchase decision by surrounding yourself with good counsel, getting the buy-in of your business’ IT professionals, and gathering independent software analyses of products. **D**

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