Your Club's IT Strategic Plan
DOES IT GO FAR ENOUGH?

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Let's start with a reality check. The vast majority of private clubs don't have any kind of IT strategic plan at all. In fact, very few clubs have what could even be considered a comprehensive budget for IT.

However, we are now seeing the beginnings of a trend in the industry where clubs are developing formal IT strategic plans, which typically focus on budgeting for future technology expenses.

The idea is to look forward for the next five years or so, determine what will be needed to maintain or expand the current technology footprint and calculate a budget to cover those expenses. Budgeting generally includes the following items:

• Maintaining the club's network infrastructure and equipment inventory with replacements and needed upgrades

• Providing technology to support anticipated physical footprint changes (new spa or fitness center, clubhouse renovation adding new dining or activity areas), and

• Providing technology to support new operations (security cameras, access control systems, club management software, other specialty software).

This approach is a significant step forward in the private club industry. But it's not enough, because an effective club plan should address more than just the physical footprint of technology. It should also include strategies to increase member satisfaction.

A comprehensive plan should address the use of technology to enhance the *member experience* – while members are at the club and when they are away from the club – which adds value to the membership. Here are some specific examples of how technology can be used to enhance the member experience:

1. Robust member website – A fully mobilized site that is responsive to the device being used by the member (more than half of most club's members access the website using a smartphone or tablet); a variety of content that is well organized and easily accessible; opt-in interest groups that allow members to control what email promotions they will receive.

2. Comprehensive online reservations – Easy-to-use reservations modules for sports reservations (golf tee times, racquet sports court times, lessons, personal training, classes and activities) and club reservations (social and dining, hotel rooms).

3. Online member account management – Secure online access to monthly billing statements, POS detail and minimum spend balances, online bill pay, credit book and gift card balance and transaction history.

4. Expedited member service – Self-serve POS for F&B outlets geared to fast service, golf cart call-ahead ordering, dining online take-out ordering; self-serve check-in at fitness and spa areas.

5. Enhanced member connectivity to other members – Website includes enhanced member roster with interests, home states, player caliber, neighborhood, etc., and online social networking that is private to the club's membership.

6. Enhanced member connectivity to the outside world – High speed WiFi access to the Internet throughout the club facilities; business center with PCs, printers, etc. and sensible mobile device usage rules that separate data from voice usage.

In essence, your club's IT strategic plan should consider technology as a *member amenity*, and not just as an internal production tool. Astute clubs are quickly realizing that by focusing on technologies that enhance the *member experience*, the budget dollars needed to deploy those technologies become readily available.

And here's the icing on the cake: The infrastructure needed to support those member-facing technologies is the same as what is needed to support the production side of the business. Tie your club's IT budgeting to the member experience and the funding will be more easily available for the entire technology footprint. **BR**

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