

It was 11 p.m., with online registration due to open at midnight. Wendy Eberhardt of Indian Creek Camp (Liberty, Tenn.) had just discovered a glitch in her programming—a glitch that would charge registrants incorrectly, leading to what Eberhardt saw as a “financial nightmare.” She called her software provider, who walked her through correcting the problem over the phone. Soon she had things running smoothly—just in time for the campers who began registering right after midnight.

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Camp management software may not seem to be a dramatic part of camping ministry, but the strengths or weaknesses of it can cause endless help or headaches. And with initial setup costs ranging from \$200–\$40,000, camps and conference centers don’t want to choose management software without solid research.

As business manager for Joy El Ministries (Greencastle, Penn.), Mike Smith is currently searching for management software. He summarizes the concerns of camps and conference centers by stating, “The needs are: 1) Software that meets the ministry’s needs and fits its budget; 2) Software that is being used successfully by other, similar

camps; and 3) A vendor who can be relied upon for support.”

With the help of Smith, Eberhardt, Eugene Barnes of Warm Beach Christian Camps and Conference Center (Stanwood, Wash.), Andrew Vincent of Twin Lakes Camp and Conference Center (Florence, Miss.) and the management software providers listed in the sidebar “Preferred Providers” (see page 36), here is some help in the search for the right software for your camp or conference center.

Cost

It’s important for camps to understand how many variables factor into setup cost estimates. The \$200 cost mentioned above is what Barnes pays to put his management software



on one computer. However, he uses the program on 15 or 16 computers, which brings his total to at least \$3,000. Fortunately for Warm Beach's budget, Barnes' program doesn't include the annual or maintenance fees often associated with management software.

When determining the bottom line on cost, you'll want to know:

- What is the one-time setup fee?
- What is the annual fee?
- Are there additional costs for enhancements along the way?
- Are there additional costs for support? Is there a monthly limit after which costs increase per hour?
- Is online registration software included?
- Is there a per-transaction fee? (A charge "per head," with examples ranging from \$3-\$6 per transaction.)
- How many users are covered by this fee?

CCCA's preferred providers offer a wide variety of cost models. One company's most popular package involves a one-time fee of \$6,950. Another offers extensive property management software for an initial startup of \$8,000-\$30,000 (generally depending on the size of the property) and an annual fee of 15 percent of the initial software cost. A third is a SaaS (Software-as-a-Service) provider that charges \$6 per head.

In determining how much to invest, consider:

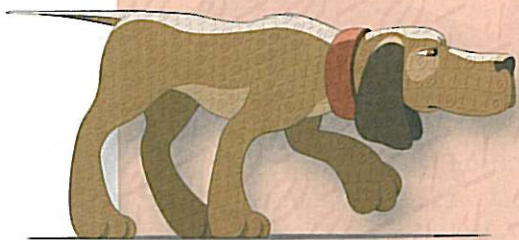
- What money are we saving through the software we choose (e.g., labor costs, paper and mailing expenses, etc.)?
- Will this software generate revenue (e.g., improved and growing guest services, photo and camp store sales, etc.)?
- Will we outgrow this software in the near future, or will it last us for the long haul?
- Particularly when examining the different fee models, consider what your cost will be over the next five years.

by Stephanie Ziebarth



THE SOFTWARE SEARCH

Questions to ask when choosing camp management software



PREFERRED PROVIDERS

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These CCCA business members can help with your management software and online registration needs.

Camp Register (Specializes in a Web-based online registration program)

www.campregister.com
(877) 996-2267, ext. 3
10182 Telesis Court, Ste. 100
San Diego, CA 92121

CampBrain (Offers both management and online registration software. A free trial may be downloaded through their Web site.)

www.campbrain.com
(866) 485-8885
c/o BrainRunner Inc.
366 Adelaide St. E., Ste. 411
Toronto, Ontario
CANADA
M5A 3X9

CAMPWISE by RecSoft (Provides customizable software in either a basic or advanced package)

www.campwise.com
(866) 297-7111
39 Southgate Court, Ste. 201
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Circuitree Solutions (A not-for-profit organization that offers all-encompassing camp management software)

www.circuitreesolutions.com
(877) 800-3390
1353 Lake Shore Drive
Branson, MO 65616

EZCamp2 by Softwera

(Provides camp management, donor management and online registration software, available for one-time purchase or as a hosted subscription)

www.ezcamp2.com
(800) 220-4111
132 Welsh Road, Ste. 140
Horsham, PA 19044

Megasys Hospitality Systems

(Offers full property management services, including BackPack, which was designed specifically for camps and conference centers)

www.megasyshms.com
(800) 492-5001
5800 East Skelly Drive, Ste. 600
Tulsa, OK 74135

Ultra Camp (Provides a Web-based registration engine, along with other management tools)

www.ultracamp.com
(888) 791-2080
21738 Academy Terrace
Hagerstown, MD 21740

Business Member



Christian Camp and Conference Association

Content

A statement that often comes up in software discussions is: "You get what you pay for." So you need to determine ahead of time what you really want.

Some key questions include:

- What software would best fit our entire ministry? Work with all department leaders to determine ahead of time exactly what features you need.
- Is it easy to use?
- Is this product compatible with other software we need to keep?
- Will this maintain our branding by reflecting quality in our registration process?
- Is this product Web-based? If so, consider related implications (e.g., access, data ownership, etc.).
- Is it a package, or can we buy needed modules?
- Is it customizable? Will it be able to grow with us? (You may find an affordable fit for this year, but this isn't a long-term savings if you need to buy a much more complex system soon after.)
- Is it an open or closed system? An open system allows you to make your own changes, but you need a staffer or volunteer who is able to do this.
- What features can I legitimately tie to generating revenue?
- Does the new software package resolve things we do not like with our current system?
- Does the software have the reporting features we need?

Customer service

As evidenced by Eberhardt's urgent need for pre-midnight technical support, customer service is important when it comes to management and online registration software.

- As you search, be sure to take advantage of videos and demos available on company Web sites.
- Be attentive during demos to see if the software actually does what it claims to do.
- See if you can “test drive” software with your own data.
- Find out what support is like for the long haul. Is it available 24/7 during key seasons for your ministry? Is there an extra fee? May you interview references?
- Determine whether the company will build into the application what you need.
- Discern whether this is a partnership or a one-time purchase.
- Look at the history of the company. You don’t want to invest money in a setup fee, only to have the company fold within the year.

Online registration

One of the biggest factors for many camps and conference centers is whether their potential software includes online registration. All four camps interviewed for this article offer online registration, with two using this almost exclusively and two at about 40 to 50 percent of the time.

Eberhardt was a bit surprised by how smoothly Indian Creek transitioned to exclusively online registration, particularly because her camp primarily serves rural parts of Kentucky and Tennessee. Of the 700–1,000 summer campers she has annually, only 10–15 do not have access to a computer. (She takes their registrations over the phone.)

Vincent thinks online registration is almost essential in a culture of immediate gratification. “Having an online registration system gives an organized and professional appearance to families interested in your camp’s program,” he adds.

Questions to ask about online registration include:

- Will the online registration program interface with your current software?
- Will the system generate enough revenue to pay for itself, and/or will it do this through saved expenses?
- Will the benefit to customers make it worthwhile?
- Is there a separate cost for this feature (e.g., a per-transaction fee, a special cost to make it compatible with other software, etc.)?
- Is the registration processed in real time? (This helps handle waiting lists, etc.)
- Is the money transacted in real time?
- Will parents be able to log in to make updates?
- Will you be able to generate e-mail receipts?
- Will you be able to provide health forms, parental releases, etc.?
- Is the data entered immediately into the database, or will you have to re-enter it?

Keep in mind that some of CCCA’s preferred providers offer separate online registration software.

As one service provider said about the software search, “Depending on which salesperson you talk to, you may get 20 different answers. There will be a lot of bells and whistles to consider along the way. Your big question will be, ‘What will allow me to be the best steward of the ministry God has given me?’” *

Stephanie Ziebarth serves with her husband, Aaron, at Camp Joy El (Greencastle, Pa.), where they evangelize, encourage and equip



individuals for active ministry. She also enjoys life as a mother, homemaker and writer.

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