



BILL BOOTHE

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# Club Software Reliability and Customer Support

## What Are Your Expectations?

During this year's CMAA World Conference, and at several recent HFTP conferences, I spoke with a number of club managers and financial executives about their satisfaction with their management software (POS, accounting, reservations, website, etc.).

While I was expecting their comments to focus on software features and capabilities, I was surprised to find their interests to be more about the reliability of the software and the customer support they receive from their software vendors.

In a word, they are disappointed. Some are quite angry. Virtually all those I spoke with said the vendors are not performing at an acceptable level. However, defining what is "acceptable" can be a bit tricky. Let's start by reviewing the feedback gathered from the managers and financial executives.

**Software reliability:** Complaints here were wide-ranging and included the following:

1. Ongoing unresolved performance issues, such as frequent software freezes and lockups, performance sluggishness, kitchen printer failures, and a variety of other issues that slow down or interrupt the use of the software
2. Ongoing transactions errors, such as duplicate charges, incorrect charge amounts, and missing charges or payments
3. Software updates that create performance problems, such as existing features that stop working, new features that do not work as promised, and reporting anomalies and errors.

Interestingly, the major frustration voiced was not that these errors occur, but that "they never seem to be resolved." Comments such as "We have the same problems over and over again" and "They don't seem to know how to permanently fix problems" were common.

**Customer support:** Complaints here were primarily focused on response times and follow-up and included:

1. Long delays (often several days or even weeks) in responding to support requests
2. Lack of follow-up on how/when issues will be resolved
3. Confusion as to which vendor staff person is responsible for handling each support request.

This is the area that produced most of the anger. Mention customer support and tempers start to flare.

**Industry norms:** Unfortunately, this type of poor vendor performance is not unusual within small vertical markets with just a few sources available to provide specialized software and support.

With just a few thousand customers and only three vendors supplying more than 90 percent of the core management software, the club management industry is without much leverage when it comes to resolving dissatisfaction.

Vendors know that changing club management systems is a major endeavor, from a business interruption and cost perspective. As a result, vendors are not particularly worried about losing customers due to poor reliability or support. So, what can be done to improve this situation?

**The squeaky wheel approach:** During our decades of assisting clubs with their core management software challenges, we've learned an important lesson: The squeaky wheel gets the oil.

Since the vendors aren't held to any sort of performance or support standards, the only recourse a club has to improve its service is to move to the front of the line of complainers. Here are some proven methods for doing just that:

1. Keep a detailed list of reported issues and support requests. Date the issue was first reported, description of the issue, person(s) in support assigned to address the issue, current status. You may think the vendor is already doing this but don't count on it.
2. Stay on it. Send the issues list to the support supervisor every month and schedule a monthly call to review the status of open items.
3. Escalate to the director of support the items that remain open for a lengthy period.
4. Change your support and maintenance contract from an annual to a quarterly payment frequency. Withhold payment if significant issues are not resolved to your satisfaction. Money talks and you know what walks.

You may be thinking, "This doesn't really do anything to resolve my vendor's overall software performance or support responsiveness to their customer base. It just helps my club."

True if you're the only club that does this. But not so if many clubs join in. The more clubs that deploy this approach, the more the pressure is placed upon the vendors to improve their overall performance.

**The bottom line:** Small vertical markets tend to spawn specialized software solutions from a handful of small vendors. Those vendors generally have limited motivation to provide outstanding reliability and support.

The squeaky wheel approach is a proven way to increase your club's chances of receiving timely attention. If adopted

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from Green Committee - Straka | 62

For starters, don't be afraid to reserve your sod right now for 2024. Most sod farmers are small businessmen and they will prove eager to lock in business now, which may save your club some money. That said, most materials agreements include clauses on delivery and transportation. Gas prices are, of course, highly variable and very important to these costs.

Beware the clause that allows for adjustments at the time of delivery. Clubs will want to hardline that detail in any

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from HR Committee - Radcliff | 66

### **The power of synergy**

Each of our senses is powerful on its own. Now think about combining two or more senses – the stress relief is amplified. Here are some examples:

- Watch a film in your favorite genre in a dimly lit movie theater while holding hands with your loved one and eating popcorn or your favorite movie treats

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from HR Committee - Lacey | 68

### **4. Talent quality as a compelling operational issue**

**Past** — In the '50s and forward into the early '80s, talent quality tended not to be "front and center" from an operating perspective. There was an informal belief that a club could access the talent it needed and that these professionals were prepared to do the job when they joined the club.

**Present** — Talent quality is a sustained operational focus at all prestigious clubs and requires ideas and action from club leaders. The rhetoric about talent quality is enhanced by many actions to develop and retain a club's professional staff.

There is far more attention to employee training and development, competitive pay practices and flexible benefit programs matching employee needs. All three HR subjects are a major focus of HR and club leadership. Talent quality has moved from "an interesting idea" to a "compelling business proposition" at successful clubs.

by many clubs, this approach can also pressure vendors to improve their overall performance.

Of course, adding new vendors to a small vertical market can create badly needed competition for customers, especially if the newcomers enter the fray with top-notch software performance and customer support.

We visited with several new companies that seemed promising at this year's CMAA World Conference. If you're considering a change in systems, it might be a good idea to include these new players in your evaluation process. Never hurts to learn what "the new kid on the block" is offering. **BR**

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agreement, in advance. And do lean on your ASGCA-member architect — and your golf course contractor, if you've got one in the fold — for help in this regard. Either or both will prove useful advisors in effectively structuring/wording such clauses.

Finally, waiting two full years to break ground on a renovation does more than allow for more meticulous planning and procurement strategies. It will yield more accurate cost estimates. And last but not never least, it will give clubs two more years to build up their course-renovation war chests. **BR**

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- Go to your favorite cozy restaurant for the visual and acoustic ambiance, and the sight, smell and taste of your favorite dish
  - Have cocktails on the beach at sunset with a loved one.

Now it's your turn. Send me an email with your favorite de-stressing combinations of senses at [pradcliff@hideaway-beachclub.org](mailto:pradcliff@hideaway-beachclub.org). **BR**

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### **5. HR moving from a "nice to do" to a "must do"**

**Past** — Thinking about your human resources was considered to be worth doing, and it was. But specific actions often lagged behind the thinking from the '50s through the early '80s.

**Present** — Effective HR policies and practices have become a "must do" because talent quality drives favorable results, partially captured in the overall member experience. Today they are a "must do" because selecting quality people, designing/implementing competitive compensation and benefit programs, developing your personnel and retaining your key people are priorities at the core of a successful club operation. There is no doubt about that fact.

These five themes underscore the importance of HR and its impact on a club's operating priorities. It has been my pleasure to witness these themes and to be a constructive HR professional for managing them. I have been a positive "force" in HR's present and I look forward to watching its future unfold. **BR**