



LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE SOFTWARE!

I am a big fan of software. Today, people are using more types of software than ever before. The software industry has infiltrated all layers of our lives and claims to have made our lives better by making us more productive. Companies like Apple and Microsoft are household names. Software is an unavoidable necessity in our modern world.

Yet choosing the right software for your community association is as challenging today as it has ever been. There is a myriad of software products targeted to property management professionals and community associations. These products can help with tasks as diverse as simple accounting to providing online access to common fees and assessments. How will you decide which products are right for your community?

Ever since the first association common fee was collected, associations have needed to keep accurate records. Although it may seem archaic today, hand written journals were the tool of choice for most associations. Unless you operate your association without the use of a computer, you have dozens of software programs designed specifically for the accounting task.

communicate with homeowners and each other. With these programs, documents are easy to print and can be shared electronically as well.

WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION DO I WANT TO COMMUNICATE?

If your goal is to communicate more than words, you may need some more software. The Microsoft Office suite of products is the most used in this area and includes Excel for handling spreadsheets. Pictures can be embedded into Word documents. Finally, a desktop publishing program such as Microsoft Publisher or Adobe PageMaker will allow you to incorporate extra design features into your communications, which can be particularly useful if you are producing newsletters.

DO I NEED AN ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTION NETWORK?

Since more people have access to the Internet today than ever before, this is a question that most associations who are not yet online are facing right now. The software products for these tasks make it easier than ever to get your community online. Microsoft

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Accounting software is nothing new. Communication software has really just come of age in the last few years, as the popularity of the World Wide Web has increased. Are you using the power of software to help automate the communication process for your associations?

Deciding which software tool you will choose depends on your communication needs. You should begin by asking the right questions to guide you to the right software for you. Here's a checklist to help you make the right decision:

WHAT ARE MY COMMUNICATION GOALS?

A simple word processor will suffice if your goal is to allow the board and association manager to easily

Outlook and Outlook Express are the most common e-mail programs used by businesses and America Online (AOL) is still the most common e-mail and Internet service provider for homeowners.

DO I NEED A WEBSITE?

The "always available" aspect of a website makes it very attractive for many associations. It can be an invaluable source of readily available information for homeowners, managers, vendors, prospective community members and more. The only caveat I offer to prospective community website owners is to do your homework. An ideal solution is to find a vendor who can provide the services you need and will update

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 >>>

or maintain your website with you or for you. There are a host of simple issues that should be addressed before a community goes online and I advise you to seek out professional expertise before you sign a contract and start paying for a service you do not fully understand. For do-it-yourselfers, Microsoft Publisher can double as a simple web-authoring tool and is an excellent and affordable software product to get you up and running.

The bottom line is that software goes with community associations like daylight goes with the sun. It permeates the operation of the association. Choosing the right software for your needs can be the difference between feeling left behind by technology and wanting to sing its praises. I say, let's hear it for the software!

Bob Gourley is one of the founders of MyEZCondo. He also serves as board president of Captain's Walk.

technology." What is the most frustrating thing? "People's lack of willingness to compromise. My whole life is a compromise. I have always tried to find the middle ground," says CJ.

CJ has advice for those just starting out. "Usually, everyone has drifted into this field from something else. You have to remain flexible. When dealing with people, you have to learn to take a lot of criticism. I take my job seriously – not myself. Rarely do you get accolades. You always hear from people who have complaints and you don't get many positive strokes. However, it is a great field that is growing very fast."

In the end, what makes CJ Klug a good manager is his flexibility, reasonableness, honesty and his industriousness. And this is something we could use more of in today's world.

with somebody. But, do so because you have a sense of community. This must be the overriding factor," he said.

Serving on a board can be a demanding, stressful experience for some. However, although this may be true, to Bob, there are rewards. "There is some benefit to giving back to the community. I enjoy the people I work with and there is a great deal of satisfaction in making positive contributions to the community," says Bob. If everyone took this positive, selfless approach to serving on the board, the community would certainly be a better place for it. And although problems arise from time to time, they do not seem to be as overwhelming when you have such an optimistic attitude. There's an old saying that says its 90 percent attitude and 10 percent circumstance. Bob Varo seems to have mastered this approach and the people that he serves are the better for it.

