

Key Functionality

Below are key features to consider when evaluating member management technology solutions.

Online Sign-Up and Payments

New member sign-up should be simple and configurable to satisfy your needs. Online credit card payment processing is necessary.

Real-Time Member Profiles

A common problem is keeping member's personal data updated. Any technology solution should be able to demonstrate how member data is kept fresh throughout the lifetime of a member.

Configurable Database

Be sure you can easily add data fields to meet the changing needs of unique needs of your organization.

Member Communications

The system should foster member communications through easy to use Email tools using automated and scheduled messages.

Surveys & Elections

Polling your members is key to keeping you in touch with the pulse of your membership. If you have a geographically disperse group, conducting online elections is also critical when in-person elections are not feasible.

Event Registration

Most member organizations also manage member events. Be sure there is integrated event registration capabilities.

Technology Landscape

There's an overwhelming array of software options available today for member-based organizations in need of streamlining management of daily operations. These range from simple desktop applications to custom built software requiring robust infrastructures and database back-ends. Luckily for most organizations, the solution lies somewhere in the middle. Below are five things to keep in mind during your technology evaluation.

1 Ease of Use

If you need a team of techies to help you manage the software that's supposed to be making your organization more efficient, then it's a step in the wrong direction. After your initial setup, there should be very little need for technical support. Some questions you should ask yourself during the evaluation are as follows; Is it easy to navigate the software? When I look at a screen, do I know what to do next? During your evaluation, it's a good idea to have more than one key user test drive the software.

2 Don't be Distracted with "Bells & Whistles"

Many times, bells & whistles included in software could adversely effect the purchase decision. Don't let the "cool" features deter you from your primary goal – finding a solution that can meet 80-90% of your membership management software needs out of the box. When evaluating software, complete the attached priority worksheet. This will give you a number rating for each evaluation in which the "must have" functionality is weighed more heavily then less important features.

3 Total Cost of Ownership

There's an ongoing trend in the software industry to migrate to a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model. The SaaS model essentially eliminates any internal infrastructure costs, hardware costs and upgrade costs. Additionally, most SaaS solutions are turnkey, This means that after a simple setup process and some configuration, you're ready to go. A hosted software solution eliminates installation costs, and unnecessary in-house technical assistance. When evaluating SaaS solutions, be sure to inquire about any hidden costs, training costs, setup costs, and ongoing maintenance costs.

4 Security

Your members entrust you with their personal data. Small homegrown solutions typically do not meet the stringent requirements necessary for enterprise software. On the other hand, a custom built solution with proper security will often come with a heavy price tag. Be sure to examine the security procedures and policies, both electronic and physical, for all the software solutions you are evaluating.

5 Training & Support

The software solution driving your membership should provide a way for you to answer questions yourself through readily available self-help resources such as forums, blogs, instructional videos, user newsletters, etc. Inquire about each of these and be leery of primary support handled through 1-800 numbers. A heavy emphasis on community driven help resources is a good sign. If it seems difficult to find support on the website, then it should be a red flag. Software training should be brief and free. If training takes more than 30-60 minutes to learn how to perform key interactions with your new membership software solution, it should also be a red flag.

Conclusion

Finding a solution that is simple, easy to "turn-on" and can meet 80-90% of your immediate needs is paramount for success. Every organization has unique needs, so use this as a starting point to narrow down your selection. Additional points to consider are as follows; viability of the company, international support, migrating your existing member data and product scalability. For a free evaluation of your membership needs please contact us.



Technology Evaluation Worksheet

Step 1: First rate each features on a scale of 1-5 for importance. A “5” represents a very important feature for your organization whereas a “1” represents a feature that is unimportant. These numbers should remain constant with each software solution you review.

Step 2: Review the software and give each feature your own rating on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the best.

Step 3: Multiply the importance number by your review rating for each feature and place this in the “Score” column.

Step 4: Total the “Score” column to achieve a numerical grade for the review. Repeat the process for each

Important: Once you rate the features in terms of importance for your organization, they should remain the same for each software you review.

Feature/Needs (Importance Scale 1-5)		Compete-At Membership Manager (Your Rating 1-10)	Score	Notes
<i>Example Feature Here</i>	5	9	45	
Ease of Use/Overall Usability				
Data Migration Process				
Flexibility/Customization of Member Database				
Configurable and Flexible member levels				
Customize Member Fees				
Credit Card (Processing and gateway Included)				
Online Member Application				
Online Renewal Process				
Email Notification Tool				
Online Surveys & Elections				
Member Profiles				
Integrated Event Registration				
Public Website Management				
Private Member Directory				
Public Member Directory				
<i>Insert your feature here</i>				
<i>Insert your feature here</i>				
TOTAL SCORE				

About Compete-At

Compete-At provides online registration, event planning and member management solutions to meet the unique needs of member-based organizations, race directors and event planners. Clubs, associations and national governing bodies rely on and entrust Compete-At to provide affordable, world-class technology solutions. For more information on our solutions visit www.Compete-At.com