

# UNRAVELLING TECHNOLOGY

GEARING UP FOR  
2010



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I SOMETIMES ASSIST CLIENTS WHO HAVEN'T grown up with the computer technology that most of us now take for granted. Many do things the old-fashioned way – entering bookings in a bookings book and handwriting invoices. But to be effective in today's workplace you have to use today's tools. The first step is to understand computers so you know what equipment (hardware) and programs (software) you need to buy.

## HARDWARE

This refers to the physical components of a computer, such as the

- Central Processing Unit (CPU) – device that processes the information and determines the speed at which everything occurs. The heavier the demand, the higher the speed you'll need.
- Random Access Memory (RAM) – area where the computer stores the information it is currently working on. The more RAM you have, the faster you can work and the more programs you can have open at the same time.
- Hard Drive (HDD) – device on which your saved work and programs are stored. The basic rule is to buy the biggest you can afford.
- CD-Rom or DVD drives – devices that allow you to copy information to or from CDs or DVDs (portable storage discs).

- Keyboard and Mouse – input and navigation devices that must be chosen with ease of use and comfort in mind.

## SOFTWARE

This refers to the programs that are loaded onto your computer and with which you keep track of bookings, write letters, compile invoices, do your bookkeeping and so on.

The next step will be to determine what your business requirements are as this will dictate what hardware you'll need. That's because different software requires different operating speeds and storage capacities.

For instance, will you need a network where staff can access information from different computers? And will you need to be able to access information while you're away from the office?

A basic drawing showing where you want to place computers, be it in reception, your office, dining room or bar, will help determine your hardware needs. If you are not sure how to go about this, get assistance. Elfasco HMS offers expert advice and will help you compile a schematic layout at reasonable rates.

Now for the software. A typical B&B needs programs for keeping track of reservations, doing the bookkeeping, managing stock, attending to administration, managing client relationships, printing invoices or statements and processing receipts. Having Internet access for sending and receiving emails, doing Internet banking and maintaining a website is also necessary.

Make sure you do your homework well as the hardware and software you buy must last you for at least three years.

I dedicate this article to all those out there who are 'technologically challenged'. Don't be afraid to embrace computer technology. It has been developed to make our lives easier. It also makes us professional. And it enables us to reach people and markets that were inaccessible only a few decades ago. □

Computers are a great help,  
so learn about them . . .

- USB Ports – points that allow you to attach hardware such as mice and printers to your computer quickly and easily. Make sure you have enough to meet your needs.
- Monitors (screens) – there are many monitors to choose from on the market. Select ones that suit your needs and pocket.

# THE ALL-IMPORTANT CLIENT DATABASE

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LAST MONTH WE UNRAVELLED SOME OF the mysteries surrounding computers and the computer programs that can help B&B owners manage their businesses more efficiently and professionally. This month I want to focus on one of the most important ways you can use computer technology, and that is in building up a database of your clients.

We know there are different dynamics at work in running a bed and breakfast. Not only do we take clients' reservations, but we also have to communicate with them about our offerings, meet their expectations, invoice them and process their payments. We need to keep abreast of what our suppliers are doing and have full control over our stock, income and expenditure. But we also need to keep records of our guests, and this begins with the reservation process.

I cannot stress enough how important this process is, or the role staff play in it. By capturing all of a client or prospective client's details they can make it easier for you to communicate with the client and meet their individual needs in a professional way.

We are often so focused on conquering new frontiers that we forget what we've already

in a database on your computer, because a computer database allows you to manipulate and use the information in all sorts of profitable ways.

Databases can be used for marketing purposes and for maintaining customer relations. They enable you to establish close relationships with individual clients because of the information you have on them which enables you to customise your service to them. Databases can also be used to distribute electronic newsletters and promote special packages or offers to former and prospective clients.

However, a database should be just part of an integrated, client-centric management system. There are many such systems on the market, varying in degree of functionality and pricing. The secret of choosing the right one is, firstly, to determine what your business needs are, then to research what is available.

Analyse and compare their features. Pay special attention to how up-to-date each package is and what its capabilities are. If your business is going to grow or expand in the future, will the system be able to cope with this? In my experience one of the most important aspects is not just the software supplied, but the degree of staff training and backup support offered with it.

As frontline deliverers of service we should make use of the tools and technologies that can help us deliver service excellence by meeting, and even exceeding, guests' expectations. We need to make the transition from focusing on product or destination to focusing on providing guests with personalised end-to-end experiences.

In the current economic climate, and with the growing competition in the industry, it's really important to implement a hospitality management system that will help you become not only more profitable, but more focused on service delivery at the same time. □

Recording as much detail  
as you can about a client is vital

achieved. This is especially true when we don't record clients' details. We spend a lot of time and money on attracting them, then when they arrive, fail to find out anything about them, what interests them, how they heard about us, why they chose to stay with us, or even how we can contact them.

This information is just too valuable not to capture. And the place to capture it is