

TEN WAYS TO GUARANTEE A COMPUTERIZED DISASTER!

by Chuck Havlicek

1. Don't get any input from your registration staff. After all, what could they possibly know about how to work with registrations?
2. Don't get input from programming staff (eg, program coordinators). Again, just because their success depends upon the accuracy and timeliness of the reports (given by any registration system) why would you want to be bothered by asking them what kind of reports they really need?
3. In fact, to guarantee an underwhelming success, don't take the time to do any kind of organizational needs assessment whatsoever!
4. Don't bother with taking time to prioritize your needs! Why should you try to find out which elements of the registration process are the ones which make the difference between success and failure?
5. Don't worry about making sure the program can be customized or is flexible enough to meet your unique needs? ... surely your program is just like every other one in the country?!?!?
6. Don't get a clear handle on user support and service from the vendor. Surely your fiscal officer won't scream too loud if, after paying your bill for the software package, he finds out that there is an annual "user support" fee of \$500.
7. Don't visit with other administrative units (accounting, registrar, payroll, etc) to let them know you are planning to modify your registration procedure. So what if Hilda Hardcase in accounting is as flexible as a steel I-beam about new procedures, surely she will go along with some new forms (even though there has been no recorded instance of that in the last 39 years).
8. Don't budget the time and money to provide user training for your registration staff. Also expect them to master the whole program in a day or two and. . .
9. Immediately convert all registrations from your system to the new one on the day the computer comes in. After all the "sink or swim" approach guarantees that your staff will learn the system fast!
10. Finally, don't develop a plan for making a back up of data files before the system is installed. So what if you lose a few week's work if you accidentally crash the system or incorrectly back up your data. After all, re-entering those 3,298 names will just give the crew in registration some extra practice on the system and really give them a reason to think that this is a great big improvement over the old system.

This tongue-in-cheek check list was developed by ACEware Systems with hopes that it may help you in your efforts to select the appropriate registration system for you! Chuck, the owner of ACEware Systems is one of the students I worked with at the University of Nebraska many years ago. His company has a very successful track record with conferencing software: <http://www.aceware.com/>.

CHECKLIST

FOR CHOOSING A REGISTRATION SOFTWARE PACKAGE

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I. WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT SITUATION?

A. Do you know why you are considering "going computer?"

- Dissatisfied with existing system?
- Too slow
- Takes too much time
- Want to be able to do more and use existing staff more effectively
- Want to do things that aren't possible (with your current system)
 - Transcripts
 - Income reports
 - Marketing analyses
 - Target marketing efforts
 - Build a current student database
 - Maintain an in-house mailing list

B. Available Resources? What will help you out?

1. Hardware? What is your current computer inventory? What is their level of use? Do you have \$\$\$ to buy new hardware?
2. Software? What software programs are spoken here? Do you have current data (students/enrollments) stored on "disk"? Do you have a base of familiarity with specified software?
3. Headware? What are attitudes of personnel towards computerization (especially registration staff)? Are they excited? Nervous? Scared? Dead set against it?
4. Leadership? Who in the office will take the lead in analyzing the need for, evaluating packages, and installing and integrating a computerized registration system?

II. IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING NEEDS (Remember the Pareto Rule*)

A. What do you need the system to do for you? (How important is it? How much is it worth to you?)

B. Do you want or need the following:

1. Enrollment management

- Receipts and confirmation forms
- Registration counts
- Payment information/tracking
- Multiple fee tracking
- Class/group enrollment reports

2. Class/Program management

- Lists of upcoming classes
- Course income reports Q Course Rosters
- Are different formats required?
- Nametags
- Attendance Certificates
- Invoicing / Accounts receivable

3. Marketing and overall management

- Mailing Labels (by demographic criteria)
- Ability to build a participant database
- Participant transcripts
- Ability to interface with other software

4. System consideration

- Overall "fit" with existing systems
- Does volume require multiple data entry points? (multi-user or network system?)
- What hardware (eg, computers. . PC/Mac/Mainframe) are available for your use?

*Pareto's Rule: An Italian economist, Pareto observed that 80 % of the wealth was generated (and controlled) by 20% of the population. In an organization, the goal is to identify the 20% of the activities that produce 80% of your results.

III. REVIEWING SOFTWARE PACKAGES (AND VENDORS)

*!!! THE **BIG** QUESTION? Will it fit our budget?*

- A. Will it fit our computers (or a new computer that will fit into our long range plans?) (Will additional boards/chips/peripherals need to be purchased?)
- B. Will existing data (if any) be automatically transferred to the new program (without retyping)?
- C. Does the "basic" package take care of most of our "high priority" needs?
- D. How easy is it to use? (by the registration staff?)
- E. How steep and long is the learning curve? How quickly can users get "up to speed"?
- F. Can it be customized? By you? By the vendor? How expensive are modifications and how fast can they be done?
- G. In what language is it written? Does this fit with any existing database, user knowledge?
- H. Can the data be moved or uploaded to a new system if so desired?
- I. Is source code available? J. What printer(s) will the software support?
- K. What do current users of the software have to say about it?
- L. What about user support? (how willing and able if the vendor to provide user support? How much does user support cost?

IV. INSTALLATION ISSUES

- A. Will you need to run a parallel system? For how long?
- B. How easy is it to install?
- C. Can it be installed by the user?

V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Do involve your registration staff. They are the ones who must make the system work!!!
- B. Do develop a systematic data back-up procedure before you type in one single name!!!!
- C. Be prepared to run a parallel system for a while
- D. Be patient! It will take some time to achieve proficiency.
- E. No matter what you do, (if you are not now computerized) it will probably be better than you are doing now!

ACEware Systems develops and markets registration software to meet the unique needs of organizations that market and administer conferences, workshops, seminars, noncredit courses, and/or professional development programs. For more information about the full line of registration and registration support software, contact ACEware Systems:
<http://www.aceware.com/>.