DESKTOP VS. WEB APPLICATIONS

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WHEN PURCHASING CLUB-MANAGEMENT SOFT-WARE, deciding between a Desktop or a Web-hosted application can be vital to your business. Both Desktop applications (software that resides on your server) and Web applications (where the software provider hosts your data) have their advantages and disadvantages. Be aware of those differences to find the best fit for your center.

PROS OF DESKTOP APPLICATIONS

Speed. Desktop applications run quicker. The information is not transmitted over the Internet and back providing less delays and freezes. Everything is in real time, making scanning in members, doing a point-of-sale transaction and running reports a lot faster. **Reliability.** If the Internet goes down, you still have full access to your software. There will be no issues of writing down usage, transactions, performing your billing. Depending on your area and the Internet service you have, this can be a major plus. **Safety & Security.** You perform your own data back-ups ensuring you do not lose anything if a provider has issues with their data storage. Additionally, if you decide to switch software (for more functionality, better cost, etc.), you are in control. It is your data!

PROS OF WEB SOFTWARE

Access. Easy access from any computer. If you are on vacation or your club is far from your residence, it's very convenient to access your data off-site. **Easier upgrades.** Upgrades are easier and automatic. There is no need to have a disc shipped and have your computers down for the upgrade. **Easier back-ups.** Your provider can back up all of your data so you don't have to.

PROS OF HYBRID SOFTWARE

A Hybrid software is a best-of-both-worlds combination —a Desktop application with Web functionality. You get the benefits of both types of software in one product: **Speed.** The data resides on your computer, so processes are fast. **Reliability.** It doesn't matter if the Internet goes down, again, because the data resides on your computer. **Security.** You save your own data so switching providers is easy. **Accessible.** If some or all of your data is saved on the provider's servers, you may have the option of managing it via the Internet, providing you with 24/7 access from anywhere. **Easy Upgrades:** If the provider has an Internet connection with your database, upgrades can be done automatically, giving you the latest functionality.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A SOFTWARE PRODUCT

When comparing providers, ask each for information about the following: *Integrated billing and collection services.* There are numerous advantages to this in terms of efficiency and cost (another article!). *True cost of the software/billing.* Different companies charge differently. It is important to understand and compare the EFT merchant rates and costs for technical support, training, different modules, storage fees, exit fees, hardware, etc. *Length of time in business and references from clubs like yours.* Check with current clients of the company to see how they feel about the customer service and actual functionality of the product, and to check references to assess the stability of the company and their products. *Compliance with the Visa USA Cardholder Information Security Program (CISP).* To date, only four companies in the fitness software/billing industry have attained CISP compliance (go to www.VISA.com/CISP to see the current list of compliant service providers). CISP aims to secure Visa cardholder data wherever it resides, requiring that members, merchants, and service providers maintain the highest information security standards. CISP compliance is required of all entities that store, process, or transmit Visa cardholder data. *Ratio of customer service employees to the number of clients.* Most clubs will run into some issues when starting to use new software. Your provider should employ at least one computer technician for every 100 clients so you can get help quickly. *List of all functionality and type of software — Desktop, Web, Hybrid.* Be sure the software provides everything you need to run your center efficiently. *What happens if you want to switch?* Get the facts on what fees are charged if you want to leave, how quickly you will receive your data file and if that file is easily converted to other softwares.

The decision to choose a Desktop, Web or Hybrid software application will affect how your business is run. Understanding the pros and cons, and getting detailed information about the company and their products, will help ensure that your choice will be the best fit for your center's needs.

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