

By Bill Boothe

Sharing Technical Support Personnel

Ever feel like your club's computer systems are starting to run your life, rather than the other way around?

Club computer technology has not only become more powerful and complex, but it has spread to most every department of the club. Who at your club has the time—and expertise—to take care of all of the PC's, POS terminals, printers, servers, switches, cabling and software—not to mention the constant barrage of operations questions from the club's personnel?

For most clubs, those chores fall to the controller or financial executive. Years ago that may have been okay, since computers were pretty much relegated to the accounting department. Today though, technology is everywhere. And it's complicated. And it requires specific expertise to understand and maintain. And when it doesn't work, the club can be in real trouble. Enter the personnel-sharing concept.

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Imagine that two nearby clubs with identical core application software, decide to hire and share a single technical support individual—a true professional dedicated to just those two clubs and their computer users.

Imagine this person working a half-day at each club handling network and equipment issues, answering user questions, communicating with outside vendors to resolve problems, handling special projects as they arise. Imagine this person being immediately available to handle any emergency encountered by either club. Here's how it can work:

- Two clubs get together and decide to make it happen.
- Both clubs should have the same core application software and network operating system. That makes software and network support consistent between the two clubs.
- The clubs jointly decide on the job duties and compensation to be offered for the new position.
- The clubs jointly recruit a suitable candidate.

The clubs contact a local staffing company to act as the employer of record for the selected candidate. The staffing company hires the candidate as a contract employee, and pays the individual's salary, benefits, taxes and insurance.

The clubs contract the individual on a fee basis, making the individual an employee of the staffing company. Since the staffing company has not been engaged to recruit the individual, they should be agreeable to a reduced staffing fee (15 to 20 percent, down from 40 to 50 percent).

Management from both clubs works out a suitable schedule for the individual—a set schedule that changes only in the event of an emergency.

The individual tracks the amount of time spent at each club and the clubs settle up quarterly on the staffing fee as needed. Management from both clubs conduct performance evaluations and decide on any changes to compensation.

This process allows the individual to be employed full time and gain the desired insurance benefits, while their workload is split between the two clubs. The clubs pay a small premium for this arrangement, but much less than for a full-time individual (when they really only need a part-timer). Bottom line – it's an opportunity to acquire valuable and much-needed expertise at a reduced cost.

While contracting can initially be an exciting venture, for many it becomes a very lonely existence—moving from project to project, never really gaining a feeling of accomplishment. A great percentage of contractors we have spoken with are tired of the routine and are “just looking for a real job.”

From a technology standpoint, private clubs offer plenty of challenge. The combination of sophisticated software applications, POS devices, operations nuances and, in this case, two separate but nearby sites, virtually guarantees an attractive intellectual challenge that most technology professionals will appreciate.

If your club has more than a dozen PC's (including POS stations) and does not have access to at least a part-time technology specialist, we recommend that you consider this approach and discuss it with neighboring clubs. You'll most likely find that they are in the same boat as you, and may be open to putting together a personnel-sharing plan that will meet both clubs technology needs—at a much-reduced cost! **BR**

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