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Technology and The Private Club

What's Good Tech and Bad Tech?

Many private clubs continue to struggle with technology issues. The challenge lies in drawing lines between "good tech" and "bad tech."

This lack of clarity results in confusion on the part of members and a failure to employ tools that could make the club more efficient. Rules for when and where the use of electronic devices is acceptable are often unclear or, if known, widely violated. Clubs also continue to underfund their technology budgets, if there is one at all, resulting in missed opportunities.

As always, planning for success starts at the top. To move a club into the future, the board must first spend time establishing clear policies for member and staff use of technology. Once established, it is important to enforce the adopted rules and dedicate resources to implementation. Without this roadmap, or should we say global positioning system, you'll never know where you'll end up.

From accounting, to human resources to communication, there are myriad ways a club can be more effective in serving their members and keeping them informed of what's happening.

Ultimately, broader trends are going to drive big changes in the level of technology deployed on the service side of the business. For example, the State of California is in the process of increasing the minimum hourly wage by \$1 per hour, per year, until it reaches \$15 an hour in 2021. That's a 36 percent increase in four years.

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As to policies, there's a difference between things that propel your mission and those that undercut it. A club wouldn't be very social if everyone was sitting around the bar and dining room with their nose stuck in their electronic device. On the other hand, it'll be viewed as a band of Luddites by NexGen members if it doesn't have realistic policies for devices or make use of the latest tools to promote community and engagement, say through better communication or event registrations.

Management should jump start the planning process by introducing the board to policies that are working at other clubs. This should also include insights on the tech tools that are available and recommendations for how the club should go about incorporating the ones that suit the club's culture.

On the policy front, there is universal agreement that no one wants to hear anyone having a phone conversation in the middle of a dining room. On the other hand, it is also untenable to eliminate all the phone booths in the clubhouse and then tell people they can't make a call. Develop designated areas for communicating and then strongly enforce violations.

On the operational side, while many people expect big changes will come in the form of member-facing technology, the real action is currently in back-of-the-house systems. This makes sense since the staff will gladly use tools that make their job easier and more effective and this approach lacks the politics to be found on the member side of the discussion.

Inflation is on the rise, but not at that rate. This should ultimately lead to tech playing a role in the member interface, like iPads on tables and kiosk ordering. We're not there yet, however, so it is best to make progress on the easy stuff now.

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How slow or fast that happens is up to each club. Thoughtful discussions and planning are the place to start your journey to the future. **BR**