



by Tom Schek

Facility and Event Management Software

Taking the church scheduling process from chaos to calm

Anyone who has been involved with coordinating space use at a church knows that the orderly flow of people into and out of events isn't something that just happens on its own. Behind the scenes are groups of dedicated, hardworking people who go to great lengths to ensure event organizers have the room they need, when they need it, set up the way they requested it. While this frequently hectic room reservation and preparation process can be coordinated using the labor-intensive pen and paper method, more and more churches are discovering it doesn't have to be.

What's in a Name?

There are nearly as many terms used to refer to "facility and event management" software as there are churches using it. "Room reservation," "resource scheduling" and "calendar" are just some of the common descriptors for this type of computer program, which is used to schedule the space needed for events taking place in a church or other facility.

These programs cross the spectrum from basic to complex – from simple calendar programs that are used to record event names and locations to feature-rich applications that not only book the room, but also print out calendars and reports, reserve the resources and services required for the event, provide reminders about scheduled tasks, allow church members to search for available space from the internet and more. Which type of system a church uses depends on many factors including facility size, reservation volume, event resource requirements and communication needs.

Nuts and Bolts

While each facility scheduling system will have its own unique set of features, certain functions will be common to most. The ability to submit a date or series of dates and have the system determine room availability is a key element of scheduling software. Ideally a system can even help you "piece together" a series reservation when there is no one room that is available for all of your dates. For example, it can tell you that the choir room is available for seven of a group's 10 requested dates and that the large conference room could accommodate the other three dates.

Once the system has found the room or rooms that will meet the requestor's needs, it must then be able to book the space and hold it exclusively for the group. A well-designed system will prevent double-bookings, as there is nothing more frustrating to event attendees and more stressful for event staff than having to scramble to find and prepare

extra space when two groups have been allowed to reserve the same room at the same time.

Reporting is another important feature of event management software. Information in the computer is only as useful as it is accessible. The ability to print confirmations for event organizers, set up reports for custodial staff, and event listings and calendars for the congregation is critical to ensuring everyone is well informed about events. In some systems, reports can be emailed to interested parties, making the distribution of information even easier.

Resource tracking, while not an issue for some churches, can be very important to others. Will a video projector and a wireless microphone be available next Saturday? The answer to that question might determine whether an event can be scheduled on that day. Many event management systems can be used to keep track of resource inventories and warn schedulers when their event requires more of a particular item than will be available.

Another key feature in facility scheduling software, especially for churches that make use of volunteers in booking events, is an easy-to-use interface. Amidst the flurry of activity in a busy scheduling office, the ideal system is one that a new user can grasp with little or no training.

Reaping the Benefits

Organizations that implement a facility scheduling system discover a wide range of benefits from doing so. The first is increased efficiency. "Using comprehen-

sive scheduling software is vital for us to facilitate the high volume of events we have," says Kellie Rogers, facilities coordinator at Mariners Church in Irvine, California. One of the many problems associated with scheduling events manually is that it often involves making multiple entries for the same event. For example, an event scheduler might review a wall calendar to see if there is space available and then handwrite the event onto the calendar. This alone can be a long, labor-intensive process for a series reservation.

Then they type the information into a word processing program in order to include it in a list of events in the church newsletter. After that, they might type it again, this time in a monthly calendar format for display on the Internet. Not only is this time-consuming, the manual and repetitive nature of the process makes it one in which errors are not only possible but likely. And when the event organizer decides to make a change to the reservation, the information must be found and corrected in multiple locations.

With an event management system, a scheduling process that might have taken thirty minutes or more for one event can often be completed in less than half the time. The information is typed only once and then is available in multiple formats with just a few clicks of the mouse. Changes, too, are made in just one place.

Another benefit of using facility management software is enhanced communication. The easy access to information on scheduled events or room availability

— through reports or network access to the reservations database — all but eliminates the need for phone tag and lengthy email dialogues. "We find it very helpful that our scheduling software allows us to communicate all of the details for an event to numerous people at one time," says Rogers.

For many churches, one of the primary benefits of using an event management system is the framework it provides, within which the church can develop a standardized process for the booking of space. Overworked staff members and volunteers who are just learning the ropes find that having a consistent, straightforward method for creating reservations is invaluable. Rogers agrees: "Our event management system provides a simple process for our event coordinators to follow when scheduling a room and the resources required for an event."

Still another benefit of using scheduling software is an overall improvement in the level of service to event organizers and attendees. Whether it is the speed with which schedulers can determine room availability, the ease of access to event information or the elimination of double-bookings and room set-up errors, congregation members and visitors recognize and appreciate a well-run event scheduling process.

The Price Tag

As the functionality of facility scheduling systems vary, so do the costs. Simple systems can be purchased for as little as a

few hundred dollars. While these systems have limited functionality and virtually no ability to expand as the needs of the congregation grow and change, they can be sufficient for smaller organizations. More comprehensive systems are generally priced from \$1,000 and up. Also, depending on the complexity of the system, there may be additional costs for training and implementation assistance.

Other costs that churches should keep in mind when considering an event management system are time, effort and emotion. Beginning with the software evaluation process, the review, selection and implementation of a system can require a significant commitment on the part of those involved. Emotions also play a part in any software transition – whether that transition is from a manual process to a computerized system or from one computerized system to another. Scheduling offices are sometimes very reluctant to give up that familiar old black book!

Learning More

One of the best places to learn more about facility scheduling systems is at the churches that are using them. Talking to someone involved in church scheduling can be very informative. Organizations like the National Association of Church Facility Managers can be a great source of advice. Other church-related groups and associations can also be a wealth of information when it comes to searching for a scheduling product.

What you are likely to hear, no matter where you turn for advice on scheduling systems, is that implementing such a system can have a very positive impact on your staff, your scheduling operations and your church as a whole. "We've concluded that event management software is well worth the cost as it allows us to do what we need to do, efficiently and effectively," says Rogers. Review carefully, choose wisely and then enjoy the peace of mind that comes from letting an event management system turn scheduling chaos into calm.

Tom Schek is the communications manager for Dean Evans & Associates, which develops, markets and supports the EMS line of software products for facility scheduling, event management and calendaring. He has been involved in client services, documentation, training and public relations.

QUICK - LINK

Dean Evans & Associates

PRODUCT: EMS Event Management Software
QUICK-LINK: (800) 440-3994 x863 or (303) 771-0110 x863
URL: www.dea.com

National Association of Church Facility Managers

URL: www.nacfm.org



Company: Dean Evans & Associates, Inc.

Phone: (800) 440-3994

URL: www.dea.com

Email: sales@dea.com
