Newsletter #2 (May 26, 2005)

Contents

What's New

One More Beta...

We plan to release one more 3.1.x beta version before wrapping it up for the official release. No more changes will be done before release unless there are problems to be fixed -- so if you're using the beta be sure to let us know quickly if you find any problems!

By the way, the official release will be labelled as version 3.5 because it's a significant update from 3.1, having the online reservation support and several other significant additions. It's considered a "half" release -- not quite large enough for a full version number change. Then we'll be working toward the next major version, 4.0, which will include major changes to allow customizable forms and reports, and in general much more flexibility.

Friend Communications support

Some of you have already noticed that in the 3.1.x beta version documentation there's a passing mention of handling the online reservation confirmation E-mails from the Friend Communications service. Since the E-mail data extraction function is very flexible, this is certainly possible already -- but with the normal HTML-formatted E-mails that they send to the campground it's difficult to set up.

However, there's a better solution available. They have an alternate E-mail format that's much more easily interpreted, so we're working with them now to get the details worked out. You could set that up now using the E-mail request parsing, but the next beta version of Campground Master will have a separate Online Reservations setup just for Friend, along with built-in parsing rules so you don't even have to set it up yourself. It will also use a separate Site ID field so you can configure your sites to match your Friend setup, and separate POP3 mailbox settings in case you also want to use the other E-mail parsing e.g. from your

own web site.

If you already use Friend, this is great news -- no more retyping all of the customer's information. If you don't use Friend yet, it gives you another option to consider for online reservation support.

Please let us know if you're already using or you're getting set up with Friend Communications, even if you don't plan to integrate Campground Master with them right away. We would like to get an idea of how many customers we have in common with them.

Integrating the Vacancy Grid with your reservation form

If you're using the "Export to Web Vacancy grid" function and you also have your own reservation form on your web site, you may have been wishing you could automatically insert the site and date selected into the form when your customer clicks on one of the "V" links in your vacancy grid. The old example just has the "V" links opening an E-mail, where it can show the site and date in the E-mail's subject, but that's no use if you want them to fill out a form -- and of course to use the new Online Reservation functions you'll want to use a form, not just an E-mail.

Now we've discovered a way to do it, and it doesn't require CGI, PHP, or any other special web server programming. It can be done in Javascript, which for the most part you can simply plug into your existing HTML page for your web form. (This does require a bit of HTML coding knowledge, but should be just a 10 minute job for any web page designer.) We've created the code necessary to do it, as an example you can plug into your web form.

Here's a direct link to the example on our web site:
http://www.campground-master.com/help/newsletters/index.html?samplejavascripttoinsert_2.html

If you're reading this newsletter online or as an e-Book, click here: Javascript Example

If this is the PDF version of the newsletter, the example is already included at the end.

Feedback

Q & A

Here are some interesting support questions we've encountered this week. Have a question? Let us know!

Q: Why don't some of my inventory items show up when I try to do a POS sale?

(Applies to the Point of Sale option only)

Chances are that the inventory lookup filter has been altered, probably by accident when setting things up. Go to Maintenance / POS Inventory setup / Filter inventory sales lookup for this workstation. Click the "Reset All" button, and "OK". Now everything should show up.

Q. Why do my holiday Rates get used for all reservations, even though I put the holidays in the "Special Dates Applicable" field?

The Special Dates field is often misunderstood. This is used only as an exception to the Season dates -- e.g. if there are certain dates NOT in your normal season that this rate also applies. However if your Season Dates field is blank, the rate is available for all dates anyway -- the Special Dates have no effect. Therefore you need to put your holiday dates in as Season dates, not Special dates. That way the rate will ONLY apply to the holidays.

Of course the other key is that the holiday rate appear before your normal rate, so it gets checked first. Otherwise your holiday rate may not get used at all.

Q: Can I change my set up so that it says "Room" instead of "Site" since I run a hotel and not a campground?

No, the word "Site" can't be changed yet. It appears so many places in the program that it would be a major task to change it everywhere (not to mention the confusion with documentation), but when customizable reports and forms are available later this year you'll be able to customize things to the point it shouldn't be a problem.

Q: When we print our Ticket Form receipt, the "guest signature" is always cut off. Is this something we can fix?

This is probably because you've put too much text in the "Notice message for Ticket Form" (see Maintenance / Park Setup). The ticket form's box for that area is a fixed size, so you have to limit the amount of text you use or else it will push the signature "out" of the box. So just try removing some of the notice text, perhaps by abbreviating or simplifying it. Again, the upcoming customizable forms functionality will alleviate this problem.

Reader Comments

Here are some comments from our readers since the last newsletter. (You know who you are, but since you didn't specifically give permission to mention your names we left the comments anonymous.)

Tip for setting up a POS inventory item (or Rates) where only a variable dollar amount is to be used:

Another tip you might want to consider adding is for fuel I created an Item called "pump1" which has a price of $1 -- so when you enter a sale for gas you enter Qty 12.22 and you get $12.22. But what might be a consideration is that when printing a report the real quantity is not known. You would need to convert the $ amount to Gallons by dividing it by price per gallon.

-- Anonymous

A couple good reasons to use an online reservation form -- for phone reservations:

Even when someone calls about a reservation, I point them to the reservation page and ask them to fill it out. Talk about lazy on my part, but it is better for 2 reasons: 1 -- I may not hear the correct spelling of a name, street or whatever. 2 -- I can import it faster than keying in the data and go on to more important things, like making sure the current guests are being taken care of and there is pop in the pop machine.

-- Anonymous

OK, now let's hear *your* comments!

Bug Hunt Results

Last newsletter we requested some feedback on a couple reported issues -- dates not working on the Rack and the POS not allowing multiple users. So far nobody else seems to be having these problems, but only a few have responded.

If you get a chance to try these issues, please let us know!

Links to the previous information (if reading this is online or in the e-Book):
    Dates on the Rack
    POS with multiple users

<u>Tips & Techniques</u>

Showing underlines for hot-keys in XP

In the documentation we mention that Alt- hot keys are underlined in menus and on dialogs. For instance the "**F**" is underlined for the File menu item, indicating that you can press **Alt-F** to go to that menu. However you may not be able to see these in Windows XP, at least not until you press the **Alt** key in the first place.

This is a new option in XP to hide the underlines until you press the Alt-key, and in Microsoft's wisdom they seem to have enabled that option by default in some cases (why confuse the user with all those underlines, right?). So if you don't see any letters underlined in the menu or dialogs then just press the Alt key and the underlines should show up. You can also disable this option in XP by going into Desktop Properties (right-

click on an empty desktop area), click the "Appearance" tab, click the "Effects" button, and uncheck the "Hide underlined letters" option.

How to handle key deposits

Key deposits and other "security" deposits need to be handled differently than the "advance" deposits. When you use the "Deposit" transaction, that's assumed to be an advance deposit that will be applied to the rent. However for security deposits you don't want this -- and you probably want the balance to show $0 even though they've paid the deposit, and be able to refund that deposit when they leave.

Here's what we recommend for this:

Set up a Transaction Category of "Security Deposit" (anything besides "Deposit", which is reserved for advance-deposit transactions).

At the beginning of their stay (or whenever you need to enter this type of deposit):
--- Enter a Charge transaction for the security deposit, using this category.
--- Enter the payment for the deposit as a normal Payment transaction (or as just part of their check-in payment).

This will show the deposit as income now, but you'll have a record of the security deposit because of the Charge transaction, and the separate category allows you to separate it if needed. It will also zero-out the customer's "balance due" so you don't get misleading balance reports.

Now when they leave:
--- Enter another Charge transaction of "Security Deposit" category, but use a negative amount (or -1 quantity) to show that the security deposit is being removed. This will give them a credit balance.
--- Enter a Refund if there's still a credit left after any final charges.

Of course you can also set up Rate definitions to simplify this, or even have it add the security deposit automatically as an add-on (assuming you use auto-rates). When the leave, go to Select Rates, add the security deposit, and check the box at the bottom to "Invert Amounts" so it's added as a negative charge.

What to do if Campground Master won't start

We suspect that anyone who has experienced this type of problem has already called support by now. However we're posting this information in hopes that if you do encounter this problem you'll remember that it was mentioned here. We don't expect you remember the details of course, but perhaps you'll remember this article and be able to look it up in the newsletter archives (use the Index to search for "Won't Start").

There are some files and a registry setting that Campground Master reads when it starts up. If these become corrupted, possibly due to a computer crash, it may cause Campground Master to get an error on startup or simply not appear on the screen. Of course the program file itself might be corrupted, but it's not likely. If this is suspected, you can simply re-install the same version of Campground Master to overwrite the program files.

Note: This information only applies if the program doesn't appear, crashes or shuts down before you get any kind of prompt. If you get an error message showing that the database is corrupt, can't be found, etc., then that's a different issue and you should simply restore form a backup or otherwise follow the suggestions in the message.

Try these one at a time (testing after each one) to solve a problem starting up:

Clear the last window placement registry setting:

1.   Go to Start / Run (in Windows)
2.   Type "regedit", and Enter
3.   Open the HKEY_CURRENT_USER folder
4.   Open the Software folder
5.   Open the Cottonwood Software folder
6.   Open the Resortmaster folder
7.   Open the Settings folder
8. Right-click on the "Window Placement" item and select "Delete"

Rename the latest log file to keep it from being checked:

You need to know where your database is being saved to in order to locate the log files. This is usually C:\Program Files\Campground Master\, but you may have saved it elsewhere.

1.   Using My Computer or Windows Explorer, navigate to the folder where your database is located. There should be a number of log files there that all start with the database name and include a date and a workstation number after the date, and will have a "prklog" extension or type. For instance, "My Database_2005-05-23_0.prklog".
2.   Locate the log file with the latest date, which should be today or yesterday.
3.   Right-click on it and select "Rename".
4.   Press the Home key to move the cursor to the front (make sure the name is no longer highlighted), and type an "X" just to give it a different name.
5.   Click on something else to finish editing so it saves the new name.

Note: If this does not solve the problem, you should go back and rename it again, removing the X.

Rename the Campground Master.ini file:

This file contains Printer Setup information, Network settings, and information about the last database and backup locations, so this should only be done as a last resort. You would need to re-do those settings if this solves the problem.

1.   Using My Computer or Windows Explorer, navigate to the Windows folder (usually "C:\Windows\" or "C:\WinXP").
2.   Locate the file "Campground Master.ini". The letters may all be lower case. If you don't see the ".ini" extension, the file type should be "Configuration Settings".
3.   Right-click on it and select "Rename".
4.   Press the Home key to move the cursor to the front (make sure the name is no longer highlighted), and type an "X" just to give it a different name.
5.   Click on something else to finish editing so it saves the new name.

Note: If this does not solve the problem, you should go back and rename it again, removing the X.

Miscellaneous

Contacting Us

To respond to this newsletter, just send us an E-mail. If you're reading this in your E-mail program, just reply to this E-mail.

Otherwise, see our web site for complete contact information and an E-mail link:
http://www.Campground-Master.com/contact.html

How to unsubscribe or change your subscription

To unsubscribe an E-mail address, go to this link:
> http://campgroundmaster.com/unsubscribe.html

To subscribe with an additional address:
> http://campgroundmaster.com/subscribe.html

To change the address this newsletter goes to, use both links above to unsubscribe from the old address and subscribe with the new address.

Attachments

Sample Javascript to insert form values (copy)

You can use the code bits below to extract the <site> and <date> parameters from vacancy grid links as default values in your form. This assumes that the "Link Format" in your Export to Web Vacancy Grid setup is in this format:

```
http://www.mywebsite.com/reservationform.html?<site>&<date>
```

Basically there's a big block of script to extract the variables, then one line of script for each form input field. The latter script writes out the HTML code for the form input field with the value inserted as the default. There's also a <NOSCRIPT> section to write it without the variable if the user doesn't have Javascript enabled in their browser, which should be the simple <input> field for your form.

Note: Make sure that your site names don't have the "&" character in them, or else they will confuse the code.

Insert this code before the form to extract the variables:

```
<SCRIPT TYPE="text/javascript">
//
//  This block of code extracts the <site> and <date> variables
//

var var1 = location.search.substring(1, location.search.length)

// replace %20's with spaces so they're readable
while (var1.indexOf("%20") != -1)
{
```

```
  var index = var1.indexOf("%20")
  var first = var1.substring(0,index)
  var last = var1.substring(index+3,var1.length)
  var1 = first + " " + last
}

// replace %26 with the & so we can find it
while (var1.indexOf("%26") != -1)
{
  var index = var1.indexOf("%26")
  var first = var1.substring(0,index)
  var last = var1.substring(index+3,var1.length)
  var1 = first + "&" + last
}

// extract the two parameters
myparams = var1.split("&")
var param1 = ""
var param2 = ""
if (myparams.length > 0) { var param1 = myparams[0] }
if (myparams.length > 1) { var param2 = myparams[1] }

// see if it's in "May 23, 2005" format

dateparts2 = param2.split(",")
if (dateparts2.length == 2)
{
  dateparts3 = dateparts2[0].split(" ")
  if (dateparts2.length == 2 && dateparts3.length == 2)
  {
    mon = dateparts3[0]
    day = dateparts3[1]
    year = dateparts2[1]
    if (year.length == 3 || year.length == 5)
      { year = year.substring (1, year.length) }
    if (year.length == 4 && year.substring(0,2) == "20")
      { year = year.substring(2,4) }

    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Jan") { mon = "1"}
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Feb") { mon = "2"}
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Mar") { mon = "3" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Apr") { mon = "4" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "May") { mon = "5" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Jun") { mon = "6" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Jul") { mon = "7" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Aug") { mon = "8" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Sep") { mon = "9" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Oct") { mon = "10" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Nov") { mon = "11" }
    if (mon.substring(0,3) == "Dec") { mon = "12" }

    param2 = mon + "/" + day + "/" + year
  }
}

</SCRIPT>
```

Insert this code in your form to insert the default value for the site requested (<site> parameter).
(You may need to modify the actual <input...> code to match your form's requirements.)

```
Site Requested:
<SCRIPT>
document.write('<input type="text" name="Site_Name" value ="' + param1 + '">')
</SCRIPT>
<NOSCRIPT>
<input type="text" name="Site_Name">
</NOSCRIPT>
```

Insert this code in your form to insert the default value for the arrival date (<date> parameter). (You
may need to modify the actual <input...> code to match your form's requirements.)

```
Arrival Date:
<SCRIPT TYPE="text/javascript">
document.write('<input type="text" name="First_Night" value ="' + param2 + '">')
</SCRIPT>
<NOSCRIPT>
<input type="text" name="First_Night">
</NOSCRIPT>
(MM/DD/YYYY)
```