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What's New

Friend Communications Enhancements On The Way

Many of you may have read the recent press release announcing a strategic alliance with Friend Communications. We are very excited about this alliance and what it means for Campground Master customers, and we're anxious to tell you all about it.

"Real time" online reservations

The new strategic alliance with Friend Communications will enable Campground Master to provide online reservations support with a 2-way "real time" interface, rather than the 1-way manually-updated interface currently employed. This means that you can make your complete site inventory available online all of the time, rather than just part of it, part of the time. The availability shown to customers booking through your web site (via the Friend Communications gateway) will always match the availability in Campground Master, eliminating the possibility of double-booking. Likewise, reservations made through Friend will immediately and automatically be reflected in Campground Master (optionally tagged as "pending approval" until you review them), abolishing the need to manually retrieve them periodically. You will still have the ability to change or reject online-submitted reservations if necessary, so you don't give up any control of your inventory.

This new online integration functionality is already in the works, and you'll receive more information as it progresses. We expect it to be fully released by the end of this year, and will have it ready for testing much sooner. Current customers will be notified when the product is available in beta and will be offered the opportunity to participate in beta-testing.   Whether you already use Friend or you're just thinking about online reservations, we welcome and encourage your comments, suggestions or concerns so that they can be suitably addressed and incorporated in the final design.

What follows are some excerpts of a press release.

"After years of working together, we are taking the relationship to the next level by creating this strategic alliance," said Gary Pace, Friend president and CEO. "This enhanced relationship will enable us to build a tighter integration with Campground Master."

Campground Master customers will not notice any change in the software or support, other than the ability to participate in the enhanced benefits of the Friend online booking engine and increased exposure on Camping.com and the Friend network. Rest assured that this is not a merger or buy-out -- Cottonwood Software, LLC, the producers of Campground Master, remains an independent company with the same leadership, goals, and business practices as before.

"We are excited about this alliance. After working together for several years, this is just a natural progression in our relationship and we are pleased with what it can offer our customers," said Stan Spielbusch, president and CEO of Cottonwood Software. "Being able to integrate with Friend's online booking engine is a valuable asset to any park or campground. This enhanced partnership will ensure that the integration remains strong and continues to progress technologically, as well as strengthening our position in the industry through cooperative opportunities."

Friend Communications Inc., a subsidiary of Leisure Holding Inc., provides an integrated portfolio of services, including online reservation technology, advertising infrastructure and marketing services to the outdoor recreation industry. Friend is committed to delivering best-of-breed products and marketing support to unite the businesses that make up this vertical and allow the industry to compete effectively for the general travel dollar. Through industry partnerships and its own brands, including Camping.com, Friend enhances the consumer's online experience by providing outdoor recreation-centric information, resources and an extensive online reservation network for locating RV parks and campgrounds. More information is available on the Web at www.friendcommunications.com.

User's Forums Update

We're getting some nice activity in our new Campground Master User's Forums, but we sure would like to see more. There have already been some great discussions started and lots of good suggestions for improvements, a total of 50 different threads/topics. You can find out how to change the vehicle field labels like color, model and license, find out how to use Campground Master on a hand-held mobile computer, and copy your data to another computer. Also join the discussions about RV age limits, charging for extra guests and non-campers, handling homeless "residents" who want to camp, using yield management, and more.

So why not stop in to say "Hi!" and see what's going on? You may find that help with your computer that you need, or locate a work camper that already knows how to use Campground Master.

http://campgroundmaster.com/forum/

Q & A

Showing upcoming payments due

Q: On the "Payments Due" tab, I have "Show all with balances" checked. I know payments are due for some sites, but they don't show up unless I have already created a charge for that site, otherwise that site doesn't show up. Is there a way to get a report on all occupied sites that are due for payments irrespective of whether I created a charge for that site or not?

A: You can do this by adjusting the Options on the Payments Due tab. For instance, check the "Checked in" box and then select whether you want to see it a number of days "since" or "until" their paid-thru date. This also requires that the "Last Night" of the reservation be a later date than their current "Paid Thru" date, though, otherwise it assumes the reservation is paid in full. In other words, for reservations that owe for the month of July, you would typically have the Last Night be July 31st, and Paid Thru be June 30th. So then it knows they will have a payment due for July.

Handling seasonal campers

Q: How to I enter seasonal campers?

A: You would of course need to have all of the Sites set up for the seasonals, then enter the reservations for the campers. If they pay monthly, select the "Monthly" reservation type for those reservations. If they pay a fixed amount for the season but don't necessarily all stay the same length of time, then it works best to add a separate "Seasonal" reservation type (under Pick Lists / Reservation Types), which will make it easier to set up Rates for them.

Ideally you would want to set up the rates for those also, especially if you're using auto-rates. There is an example for seasonal stays in the documentation (Maintenance/ Park Setup / Rates / Rates Setup Examples). If you do charge them a monthly rent, then you may want to investigate the Monthly Billing function under the Transactions menu (see the documentation for details on that).

Using a touch-screen monitor

Q: Will Campground Master work with a touch-screen monitor?

A: We don't have specific support for touch-screens, but most of them now operate by simulating mouse clicks so it "works" as far as that goes. However the keyboard would still need to be used for entering data or numbers, and the mouse may have to be used for right-click menu functions (although you can sometimes simulate a right-click by a prolonged touch-and-hold).

We do sell a couple touch screens that have been tested with Campground Master and work as described above. We haven't officially advertised them yet, because we want to enhance the program for better touch-screen support before we promote this widely. If you're interested in using it now, we supply the Elo brand "AccuTouch" LCD flat screen monitors -- the 15" (model 1515L) is $550, and the 17" (model 1715L) is $650. Contact us for more information.

Disabling "Delete" for Reservations

Q: Is there a way to disable the "delete" button for reservations? Sometimes the employees delete rather than cancel a reservation, and then we have no record of the cancelled reservation.

A: You need to make your employees log in under an operator name that does **not** have Administrator access. They should not have an access level higher than Manager, and for the lower ones use the Reservation level. See Maintenance / Park Setup / Operators to add the appropriate logins and to change the password for the administrator login.

Different color on the Rack for owners when here

Q: How can we use a different color for owners when they're on site?

A: The way this is usually done is by using the "Free Stay" reservation type for owners when they're on site. You should have the owner reservation on the site for the long haul using the "Owner" reservation type, but then add another "Free Stay" reservation on top of that for the same person when they're actually on site. If you prefer it to be called something other than Free Stay, you can add a new Reservation Type (in the Pick Lists) -- just make sure the Base Type is still Free Stay (you can't add base types).

Free Stay reservations are already a different color according to the Color Key, so that should solve the color issue.

Tips & Techniques

Showing Customer Details during check-in

If you would like to have the Customer Details window open up automatically when a customer is checked in, for instance to verify their information, you can do it with a simple Event Action, under Advanced Customizations. (This requires Campground Master version 4.0 or later.)

1. Go to Maintenance / Advanced Customizations / Event Actions.

2. Click "Add event action".

3. Enter a name, like "Details after check-in"

4. For the Event Trigger, select "Check in reservation, after".

5. In the Action expression, put:

```
EditCustomer(ThisCust())
```

6. Click Save.

That should do it -- customer details will appear before the normal Transactions dialog so you can verify information before completing the check-in.

Note however that this is Customer details, not Reservation details, so changes to the number of people, discounts, etc. won't affect the specific reservation you're checking in. For that you would still need to go into Reservation Details. But whatever you do, don't be tempted to change this event to edit the reservation! That would cause problems because you might already be in Reservation Details when you do the check-in, resulting in reservation details being open twice and potentially causing data corruption!

Solving backup "temporary file" errors

If you get an error message when making a backup that reports an error writing to a temporary file, it may be due to a "stuck" file in your Windows "Temp" folder. Sometimes having too many files in the temporary folder can cause a problem, or it may be due to a file marked "read only" which Campground Master can't delete.

The steps below will left you clean out your Windows Temp folder, and hopefully solve the problem. This is actually something we do on a regular basis (at least once a month), because Windows and all sorts of other programs leave garbage files behind here, and it can cause problems with your system.

Note that these are for Windows XP. A similar procedure should also work under Vista, but the exact names and procedures might be slightly different.

1. If you have not rebooted your computer today (restarted Windows), reboot it before continuing.

2. Right-click on My Computer, and select "Explore"

3. Double-click on the C: drive (the first one under Hard Disk Drives) to open it. (Note: if you have trouble double-clicking, then right-click and select Explore)

4. Double-click on Documents and Settings to open that folder

5. Double-click on the folder with your Windows user name (not All Users)

6. Here you should see a Local Settings folder. If not, you need to show hidden files. To do this:
-- In the menu, go to Tools, Folder Options.
-- Click the View tab.
-- In the list, under Hidden Files and Folders, select "Show hidden files and folders"
-- Click OK

7. Now double-click Local Settings to open it.

8. Double-click the Temp folder to open it.

9. Select all files dated prior to today, and delete them (highlight them and press the Delete key). You should have a Date Modified column -- you can click on that column heading to sort by date modified to make it easier to select the old files. Don't worry about any folders in here, just the files listed below the folders.

10. Also, if you see a file that's just the one character "~", or if it shows a file named "~.zip", then delete that one even if it's dated today.

Now try the backup and see if it works.