Newsletter #13 (Sept 22, 2005)

Contents

What's New

Friend Communications testing

Although we've already included support for retrieving online reservations from Friend Communications, they still consider their side of it to be in beta testing.

If you're already using the Friend Communications online service (with or without Campground Master integration), or if you're interested in using them in the near future, please let us know! We need some more feedback and possible beta testers, and will do what we can to help you get set up.

We're also interested in hearing from anyone using the Online Reservations functions with their own web site or with Webervations -- how is it working, what would you change, or any comments you have would be helpful.

Q & A

Hiding the site number on confirmations

Q: Is there any way to print reservation confirmations without showing the site assigned? We sometimes have to change sites before the customer arrives and would prefer not to print the site numbers on the confirmations.

A: Yes, there's an option under Maintenance / Printing Options / Receipts : "Use the site Type on confirmations instead of the site name". Just check that option so it only shows the type of site and not the specific site name or number.

Are credit card details secure?

Q: I'm concerned about all of the credit card information on the computer if someone breaks in and steals it. Is there a way to protect the credit card information?

A: If you're using the actual credit card number & expiration date fields (in the Guarantee Info and Payment entry screen, for instance) then the numbers are encrypted in the database file -- so someone can't just browse the file to see the information. They would have to run the software and know the operator log-in to access the information.

However if you entered the credit card information in any other field, for instance directly in the Guarantee Info notes field (e.g. before the separate fields were available, or without clicking the "..." button when editing the Guarantee Info from Reservation Details) then that's not encrypted. If you have old data that's in these fields it might be a good idea to clear it out.

Getting to transactions on a linked reservation

Q: How do I get to transactions on a linked (synchronized or submember) reservation? I can see by the reservation history that there's a charge on it, but New/Edit Transactions always comes up with the transactions for the "Linked master" instead.

A: Just for clarification -- With changes in version 3.0 the transactions **should** always go on the linked master, not the sub-member or synchronized reservations. This is so that they will all appear on one receipt. However you may experience this problem if you already had transactions on these reservations prior to upgrading.

To get to the transactions on non-master reservations, you need to enable the option "Warn that transactions should go on the master" under Maintenance / Program Options / Prompt (because if the option is disabled, it always goes to the master reservation without asking). Then you can use New/Edit Transactions from the linked reservation -- it will show a warning about transactions on linked reservations, but click Yes to get past the warning. We recommend disabling that prompt again after you've resolved the transaction problem, to prevent transactions from getting in the wrong place again.

Selecting a Handicapped site for a reservation

Q: I've enabled the "Handicapped rating" Site field and put a rating number in the handicapped sites, and also enabled the "Handicap Access" Reservation field and put "Handicap Access" in the Quick-prefs so it shows as a checkbox when I make a new reservation. But when I check that preference, it doesn't limit the sites shown to the ones with a handicapped rating. What's wrong?

A: The "Rating" attribute fields for sites are a 1 to 5 rating (5 being "best"), but the reservation fields are either "must have" or "must not have". Checking the preference box for a new reservation makes this a "must have". What this will do is include any site with a Handicapped rating of 3 or more, and exclude any with a 1 or 2 rating.

However, this assumes that ALL sites have the Handicapped rating field filled in -- if the field is left blank, it's treated as "unknown" rather than "no access" -- and since it's unknown the site will be shown as a possible match.

To fix this, simply go through each site and enter a Handicapped rating of "1" if it does not have suitable handicapped access, and a rating of 3 or higher if it does. Don't leave any of them blank unless it does not apply (e.g. for Storage, Shelters, etc).

Rig Size is not limiting the sites shown

Q: When I right click on a site and go to a new reservation, why does it allow me to put a 40' rig in a site that is set up for a 30' unit -- or if I pick out a site before knowing the size, and then enter the size, it will remove the site from the grid but still allow the reservation to be made on that site.

A: First, the "Use Preferences" box must be checked in order for it to filter by the rig size (because the max length is an 'attribute' field in the site), and of course the max length field must be filled in for the sites. Then it won't show any sites that won't fit the rig size once the rig size is entered. Based on the second part of your question, though, it seems that you're already doing this.

You can also make sure "Use Preferences" is checked by default for new reservations -- go to Maintenance / Program Options / Reservations and select the option "Start New Reservations with "Use Preferences" checked".

However, as you've seen, if you select the site first and then enter a size too large for it then there isn't any warning if it won't fit (other than the fact that you won't see the "<NEW>" in the grid because the selected site will be removed). This is an oversight and will be corrected in the next version.

In the meantime, if this is a common issue then you might want to change your procedure so you go directly to New Reservation (click the telephone icon or press F2) instead of right-clicking on the site on the Rack or Map, and enter the rig size before selecting a site.

Faster check-outs with a hot-key

Q: Is there a way to check out people with a hot key (ie. F-8)? It would be faster than right clicking with the mouse.

A: There isn't a direct hotkey for checkouts, because you would still need to select which person to check out. However you can just press the "O" key to select the check-out function after you right-click on the reservation. Keeping one hand on the "O" key and one hand on the mouse, you can check out multiple reservations quickly.

In addition, you can keep the confirmation prompt and the Transactions dialog from appearing (unless they have a balance), so the check-out is immediately done. Go to Maintenance / Program Options / Prompts and uncheck the "Ask for confirmations..." option, and in the "Open a Transaction dialog" section uncheck the "Checking Out" option. Note that unchecking the first option will disable ALL of the simple confirmations, so you may not necessarily want to do this if your operators tend to get a little trigger-happy with the right-click functions.

Tips & Techniques

Showing all customers with a balance due

While the Payments Due tab can be used to easily show all Reservations with a balance due, there is no report available to show Customers with a balance due. For most users this is irrelevant because all charges go on the reservations anyway. However there are some users that allow customers to "run a tab", adding merchandise and other miscellaneous charges to customer bills, as some customers do not have reservations (e.g. day-use members).

While there isn't any "simple" way to get this kind of report (though it will be a piece of cake in the upcoming 4.0 release), here's a roundabout way to do it in the Transactions tab view. This will show all transactions for customers with a balance due (more information than you need, but at least it's comprehensive):

On the Transactions tab view:

1. Go to More Filters, click Reset All.
2. Uncheck all of the "if balance..." boxes (lower right) **except** the one for Customer transactions..."if balance > 0".
3. Click Sites/Reservations...
4. Uncheck all three "if balance..." boxes, click OK, and answer Yes to the warning prompt.
5. Select "All Dates" from the Dates drop-down list.
6. Click OK to save the filter.
7. If necessary, go to Detail Options and select the "Balance Due" field and Customer "Last Name" & "First Name" fields.
8. You may also want to sort by the customer (click on the "Name" column header) to group the transactions for each customer together.

Though this shows each transaction, you can easily go through them to see which customers need to be billed (right-click to go to Transactions, print a bill, etc.) Note that we excluded reservations charges in step 4 so it only includes non-reservation charges -- but you can leave the "if balance > 0" option checked in that step if you also want to see those with outstanding reservation balances.

Limiting a workstation to Point of Sale use

Some users with the POS option have one or more workstations in a store where they only do store sales, and don't want to show the reservation Rack. While there isn't a specific "POS-only" mode, you can achieve a similar result by limiting which tab views are available to the clerks.

1. Make sure the operators in the store are only given "Clerk" access levels, not "Reservations" or higher. This is done through Maintenance / Park Setup / Operators.

2. Go to Maintenance / Park Setup / Access Levels.

3. Edit the access levels for viewing the Rack, Map, and On Site tabs to have an override level of "Reservations".

Note that at least one of the tabs must be viewable by the clerk or else the Rack will show by default regardless of the operator's access. So you need to either leave the Transactions tab at the Clerk level (e.g. if they need to access this for reference) or else set the access level for viewing one of the other tabs, like the Unassigned tab, to Clerk level -- the Unassigned tab will likely be blank anyway, so that would be a safe view to show.

Handling POS sales for items without bar codes

The Point of Sale module is designed for rapid sales using a bar code scanner, but it can be slower than a normal cash register for items that can't be scanned (e.g. entering "Other Charges" for miscellaneous items or selecting inventory items from a list).

For things that don't have UPC bar codes on them already here are a few ideas to speed up sales:

- Print bar code labels to stick on the items. You'll need a bar code font if you're good with Word and can design your own label, or else you'll need software to print bar codes -- we sell a package for $99 that will print bar code labels or sheets.

- Print a sheet of bar codes for common things like ice, candy, day passes, etc -- you may have seen these the hardware store for bulk items like nails. Then you just scan the bar code on the sheet for that item.

- For the inventory item code, use a text or numeric code that you can type in easily (e.g. 3-digit product codes or words like "ice" and "wood"). If the inventory database only has one item with that exact "item code", it will auto-add it just like bar coded items so you don't need to use the mouse. If you have too many of these to remember, put the codes on the products as a labels (like on the apples in grocery stores), or print a reference list the way some grocery stores handle produce.

Miscellaneous

Computer Tech Support Services

We know that many of our customers don't have anyone to call on when they need help with general computer problems. Of course you can call us for any problems specific to the Campground Master program, but do you know who to call if your computer won't boot up, or if you can't get online? How about help with removing viruses or setting up a network?

A recent PC Magazine article reviewed several services which offer general computer support by phone or online. Most of them did not do well in their tests, offering little help or incorrect answers -- but one service, YourTechOnline.com, did do well and was awarded "Editor's Choice".

They can give you a free estimate based on your problem description, and they charge $39.99 for 30 minutes or $69.99 for 60 minutes. It appears that 30 minutes is enough to solve most common problems.

Call them at 1-877-717-7111 or go to http://www.yourtechonline.com/ if you need assistance.