# TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

*By Bill Boothe*

# Creeping Featuritis

Today's club management software has passed an important milestone. For the most part, it offers much more functionality than the average user will ever need. A number of software providers have spent thousands of hours adding features and functions requested by their club customers, as well as adding innovative technology invented by the company's own designers.

Where does all of that effort leave us? With creeping featuritis - software that is so overloaded with features that, for the average user, it's practically impossible to learn – or use - all that each application offers.

This is a good thing. The appearance of featuritis in any vertical market signifies a high water mark for software serving that industry segment. Manufacturing, distribution, financial institutions, retail, health care, hotels and resorts, and others all hit the featuritis milestone years ago. It means that the software providers have listened to what their customers want, and have built into their software the features needed to satisfy those requests. Unfortunately, featuritis often carries with it a design and process that is difficult for the typical user to grasp.

Where do we go from here with club software? Well, if we look at other industries with mature vertical market solutions, the post-featuritis emphasis shifts to individualization. That is, the ability for users to customize their own software views, procedures and output to meet their individual work demands.

The simplest example of individualization is the ability to hide data fields that are of no interest to the user.

Take for instance the club's membership secretary, responsible for entering and maintaining member demographics and billing information. Let's say that the member information screens have a total of 100 data elements available for entry, but that the club's secretary only needs 60 of those elements to satisfy their needs. With traditional software designs, the user must skip over and ignore the 40 unneeded data elements. With individualization, the user to avoid confusion and distraction can mask those data elements.

Another example of individualism allows users to arrange where data elements are displayed on the screen. Users are able to create their own "screen designs" to place individual data elements right where they want them, to better serve the user's individual work style.

Different users operate the same screens in completely different ways. One user may be responsible for creating new data records, touching all data elements of the screen and entering information in a structured fashion. Another user may be focused on updating only certain data elements of that same screen, thus needing only to touch a limited number of data elements. Individualization allows both users to design their screens to best fit their specific needs.

It also provides the ability to quickly and easily redesign standard printed output. Let's say that the club's accounts receivable clerk isn't happy with the existing account aging report, and wants to delete a column and add another from a second report. Individualization allows them to make those design changes, which would appear only for that user (or globally for all users if desired). Such a simple change could eliminate the need to use two different reports to get the job done, thus increasing efficiency and accuracy.

Individualization let's users control their own software work environment – just like they can control where things are placed in their offices or on their desks, or in what drawers certain items are stored. Individualization increases productivity by streamlining the daily routine, and improves accuracy by eliminating distractions. It's a sign that an industry's software has graduated to the next level, focusing on individual productivity rather than offering a dizzying array of impressive, but possibly unneeded, functionality.

Club software providers are just beginning to address individualization. We see it appearing in its earliest forms, as providers begin to experiment with adding the flexibility needed for user-designed screens, procedures and output. Keep your eyes open for more developments in this area, as the club software industry moves to the next level. **BR**

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