



Scheduling Can Be Easy

The key is the right software.

If you're like most nonprofits, you use some sort of scheduling system. Maybe it's just paper and pencil. If so, it may be time to purchase software to make scheduling easier.

But which scheduling software should you choose? The decision can be tough. There are low-cost packages such as ResSched for as little as \$180 and complex systems like Wallchart for up to \$250,000.

No matter whether you are scheduling facilities, people, equipment, or all three, you need a reliable system that books the resources for a specified time frame, and guarantees they'll be there, no excuses. Facilities can range from a barn containing 2,500 cows to a meeting room for 10 people. People can be farmhands or installers and technicians. And equipment can be a fleet of vehicles or aircraft or a large inventory of audiovisual equipment used by a university.

The key to choosing the best software is to clarify your scheduling needs. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Are you planning to acquire more resources (people, equipment, facilities) to meet demands? Before you do, be sure you're maximizing the resources you already have. A good scheduling system may take the place of resources you think you need. Chances are that such a system will minimize further capital expense or increased overhead.

2. Have you ever double-booked a resource? If so, you know the cost can be high in terms of lost time, bad PR, and the like. A reliable, conflict-free scheduling system may be inexpensive in comparison.

3. Is scheduling one of many functions you'd like to perform? If so, is there a multi-function software package to meet your needs? A word of caution: Such packages are usually expensive and can have weak scheduling components. If scheduling is your main concern or if you have other software programs that you want to continue using, a low-cost package dedicated to scheduling may be better suited to your needs. Besides, some dedicated scheduling packages can be linked to other software programs to provide the functions you seek.

4. How much time do you spend on scheduling now? Can a new system reduce that time?

5. Which people will be using the new system? How fast can they learn to use it effectively?

6. Are you prepared to pay for and learn all the bells and whistles some programs offer? Or do you want a quick, comprehensive, reliable solution?

7. Is there a full-function trial version of the software available?

8. Is the software reasonably priced? Does the price include support and updates? If not, what do they cost?

9. Does the system scan, present, and print bookings graphically in a variety of views?

10. Does the software offer group and repeat scheduling with conflict checking?

11. Will the system expand as your needs grow?

12. Is the software easy to install? Is it network-friendly (trouble-free for network administrators)?

13. Can the system export information to other applications and palm® devices?

14. Does the software let you customize the terms used in windows and reports to suit your organization? ■

This article is courtesy of Madrigal Soft Tools, creators of ResSched, the award-winning scheduling software. Download their 21-day trial version from www.madrigalsoft.com/fresmulti.html. For more information, contact Chris Gower-Rees, Madrigal Soft Tools, P.O. Box 8838, Victoria, B.C. V8W 3S3.