



Susanne Marchese

Paperless Contracts and the Digital File Cabinet

Do you have drawers, boxes and file cabinets full of paper? Are you tired of having to run across your club to access member files or repeatedly retrieve them from storage? A digital file cabinet may be the solution for you – why not create a paperless contract system?

A paperless contract system allows clubs to electronically store contracts (also called digital contracts), waivers, forms and other documents with signatures that can then be viewed and printed from any workstation.

The Benefits of a Paperless Contract System

Save on the cost of printing membership agreements and forms.

Every time you want to change your logo, change verbiage in an agreement or simply change a layout, you may hesitate knowing that the printing costs could be significant. When using a paperless contract system, you are able to edit any form quickly and efficiently. Changes take effect as soon as they are made, and you no longer have to worry about running out of forms. When a member joins, you can print their copy of a contract right from the computer. Since a paperless system is integrated to other modules in most club management systems, simply posting or accepting a digital contract or agreement will then automatically update the member's information and store the contract electronically.

Get peace of mind in knowing the agreements used will all be the same, and no member information is missing. A paperless contract system allows you to keep control of the content and who has the privilege to edit it, eliminating the need to spend time checking and double-checking. Once the club contract is reviewed and accepted, there usually isn't any more data entry required. In some systems, a club can "pend" a member contract while waiting for missing information – eliminating the need to put sticky notes on a printed agreement. A simple report from your club management software would let the back office and sales reps know that information is missing from a contract.

Your information is easily accessible. A complete, paperless contract system will not only facilitate the signing and storage of forms and agreements, but also the scanning and storage of other important documents. Every contract or scanned item is attached to a member's record for easy retrieval. If you are using the paperless system to store all correspondence created, you will have the ability to view these documents and print them from any workstation to which a printer is attached or networked. When a staff member is not near the back office and has a member inquiry, he/she can go on a paperless-contract enabled workstation, access the member's

"digital file cabinet" and view any items in it. For clubs that have multiple locations, this becomes a major benefit because there is no need to fax or make calls back and forth to verify information. Staff can simply look-up a member and see all the items in the digital file.

Your members' information is secure. Paperless contract systems should comply with the CISP (Cardholder Information Security Program) standards and information should be digitally encrypted. As part of the scanning feature, when obtaining and storing images, a "graying-out" tool should be available to hide or cover sensitive information. These types of features keep sensitive information safeguarded from unsuspecting eyes.

You choose how far you want to go paperless. There are many ways to use a paperless system based on your business needs and your comfort with a paperless society. Some clubs prefer to use a paperless system only to obtain essential member information, and they will print the agreement to be signed in ink. Other clubs want to obtain information and capture the signature electronically. Or, clubs may choose to have information filled in, printed, signed, scanned and then stored in each member's digital file. You choose which documents you want kept electronically and which are kept as hard copies. When making your paperless decisions, always remember that any agreement that is printed with member information and then signed in ink will not be stored with the signature. This choice is often made by clubs that aren't quite ready to go paperless, but they want the contract to prefill with the member information. After an agreement is signed, the clubs can then store it in a physical file.

Something to Consider When Going "Paperless"

Club management systems typically include a paperless contract feature as part of their core product, thus there is no additional software cost. However, there may be hardware requirements, such as: a reliable back-up system; a signature capture device, and a scanner. If you are going completely paperless, then all information typically on paper will be stored in your computer. If your computers malfunction, become damaged, or are rendered inoperable, be sure that your information is safeguarded and the information can be recovered in the event of a loss.

Paperless contracts can provide big benefits for many clubs. Consider these benefits and evaluate your needs to develop a system that works well for your club and for your club's bottom line! **CS**

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