

PEAK PERFORMANCE: Choosing your database wisely

When you started in the tour operator business, you probably never imagined you'd be faced with making vital information technology (IT) decisions that would impact your company for years to come. Few people enjoy thinking about technology, especially in the travel business when you'd much rather be talking with your customer or scouting out that next amazing destination. In this issue of PEAK PERFORMANCE we are going to talk about the foundation for modern information systems: the database.

You might think, why should I care what database a system is built on? If it works, it works, right? Without getting technical, the database is like the foundation of a building. You want a foundation that will not only support your business today, but also one that can support your business as it grows.

In today's market, there are three dominant databases: Oracle, IBM DB2 and Microsoft SQL Server. Many small tour operators use lightweight databases like FileMaker and Access to build their first internal systems as a replacement for spreadsheets. A few commercial systems are also built on FileMaker. These systems are initially popular, in part because the simple database can easily be customized by adding new fields. What many companies eventually find, though, is that this ability to customize comes at a cost. They are finding it hard to integrate with other systems and produce meaningful marketing and financial reports. By contrast, PEAK 15 is built on Microsoft SQL Server 2005.

So, what are the strengths and weaknesses of lightweight databases like FileMaker compared to relational databases like Microsoft SQL Server?

| FileMaker | Microsoft SQL Server |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple applications can be built very quickly • Limited programming experience needed | <p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to exchange information with other systems • Easy to create linkages between information in different parts of the database • Very fast even with large amounts of data • Created by the largest software company in the world • Support by the largest developer community in the world |
| <p><i>Weaknesses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to exchange information with other systems • Difficult to create linkages between information in different parts of the database • Poor performance with large amounts of data | <p><i>Weaknesses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overkill for simple applications • Requires extensive programming experience |

To summarize, when choosing your system, consider the following questions:

- Do I need this system to exchange information with my accounting system, website or other distribution partners?
- Do I need this system to support analysis and reporting across various aspects of my business? Examples might include database marketing and ROI analysis or trip profitability.
- Do I anticipate significant growth in my business?

Answering yes to any of these questions is an indication that a relational database like Microsoft SQL Server should be at the foundation of your system. Contact us to learn more about how a robust information system can elevate your tour operator business to new heights.



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