

Marina Park in Newport Beach California is owned and operated by the City of Newport Beach. Like any other waterfront development, Marina Park was a long time in the making. Constructed over the last 3 years, the facility is Newport Beach's newest award winning marina. Located in the heart of the area's vibrant city beaches, dining, shopping and harbor-front promenades, this world class marina offers an elegant charm and the relaxing lifestyle of beach side activities.

The building is a state of the art architectural dreamscape designed for the city. Featuring a wide open guest friendly approach with windows adorning the walls, the focus is on the waterfront activities. This approach minimizes the transition from indoor to outdoor activities on the docks and surrounding areas.

Featuring a sailing center for beginners and experts alike, the center is a draw for local sailors wishing to brush up on their skills, or beginners just getting their first taste of salt water sailing. Other amenities include The Lighthouse restaurant, 10 acre park, children's playground and fitness areas for basketball and other sporting activities.

The Balboa Bay area, of which Marina Park is a part of, has long been the home to sailors and power boaters alike. Traditionally focused on long term moorage, the area features many options for local boaters to permanently store their vessels. For short term guest moorage, there were far fewer options available, especially for visitors from outside the area to the bay. One of the goals of the facility was to offer an affordable option for visiting boaters to explore the scenery and idyllic setting of the Newport Beach region.

While promoting the marina via magazine and newspaper advertising was on the agenda, another approach was needed to capture and manage the visitors. Shannon Levin and her staff at Marina Park developed a set of PDF based forms for collecting the information needed to provide the appropriate level of service for a world class marina. Much like the repair and boat sales business model migrated to automobile business practices in the 1980's and 1990's, Marina Park decided to use the modern practices and techniques of upscale hotels. While simple in concept, this path led to the conclusion that an enhance guest experience would require more attention to detail and an online real time reservation and billing system.

In order to implement the hotel concept, Shannon Levin's team looked for a software vendor that had a similar vision and experience in the marketplace. After meeting with MarinaWare at the Marina Recreation Association of California's annual conference, the staff pursued a working partnership with the software provider. By leveraging MarinaWare's 30 years of experience in the marina software market with a state of the art facility, the partners launched a plan.

The guest experience was promoted to the forefront of the management systems and procedures. This started with an online reservation system that allowed the boaters to choose the dates of their visit and the exact slip they wanted. Once the slip was selected, the customer enters their credit card information and pays the deposit for their upcoming stay. To complete the reservation, the boater agrees to the marina practices/ policies and PDF confirmation letter is emailed. The design of the software allows the booking of individual slips in the same manner that travelers book a seat on an airplane. This allows for tighter control of the dock and minimizes last minute shuffling of the boats.

Other marina reservations systems require an email to be sent to the marina, a response from the operator, a payment taken, and then a confirmation notice. In a best case scenario, this can take up to 15 or 20 minutes. What's needed for marinas is to have an online status of all the available guest slips, all the time. This gives the Internet guest the same view as the marina operator. As each booking is made, that slip is marked as reserved and its availability is removed. This is very similar to the way an airline books their seats on a specific flight or a venue sells seats for an event. An added complexity exists when the length, beam, draft and electrical requirements are considered. By having the guest enter the specifics of their requirements, it reduces time and effort for the marina staff.

Because of the real time nature of the software, the boater does not have to wait to hear back from the marina by phone, text or email. They receive the email confirmation letter and are assured of their space within seconds of making the reservation. Of course "taking" the reservation is not as important as "holding" the reservation. There is nothing more frustrating than arriving at a facility to find your reservation has been "lost". With a written confirmation letter and corresponding reservation number, there are no angry customers with "lost" reservations.

Once the boater arrives at the marina, they are met on the dock by the staff using a wireless device. Utilizing the wireless pad to access the marina's central reservation system, the staff member confirms the customer's information and checks the boat into their reserved slip. During this process, security access cards and information about local activities are provided to the guest. These include local restaurants, parking, current events and activities. To further ease the burden, the well-lit walkways and signage are explained so the way to the showers, restrooms, laundry facilities along with handicapped access for all the customers is clear. This is the start of the concierge service that travelers have grown to expect when they stay at a well-run hotel.

During the course of the any visit additional charges can be billed to the customer's account, this could include power, extra lines, cords or other necessary items from the office. When the guest makes the initial reservation and sets up their account, the marina requires that a credit card is put on file. This card is then used for any charges while the boat is at the dock. It also has the added convenience of being used during the check-out process. Many times after the boat has left the dock, the meter is read and the electricity is billed to the customer. Again utilizing the hotel model, the card on file is charged for any un-paid items and the customer account is reconciled by the marina operator.

After the initial account creation and visit to Marina Park, the customer can continue to make reservations for future visits. This includes the ability to use the card on file and book multiple slips over different dates. Generating reliable, consistent repeat customers is the basis for long term growth in a guest oriented marina.

The goal of the Marina Park development was to bring guest boaters from other areas into the Newport Beach peninsula for short visits. This enables the boaters to explore the idyllic location and bring additional revenues into the adjoining business. By emulating the strategy of a well-run hotel business, the marina is well on its way to continued success.