TIP*sheet*

Four Tips for Smooth Integrations

Written by Tom McKeon, Data and Integrations Manager at Convention Data Services. Tom has more than 30 years of experience providing custom and integrated client solutions.

Show managers work with a variety of partners so having various systems that need to be integrated is not unusual. CDS runs hundreds of events annually and most require at least one integration such as membership, housing, exhibitors, mobile apps, or beacons. Integrations can be complex, since they nearly always involve mapping data from one system to another, but these mini-projects can run smoothly if you follow four simple tips.

1 **Keep It Simple and Standard**

Data from partners such as a2z, Map Your Show, and onPeak generally comes in a standard format. Each show, however, uses that data in a different way. Create a single integration component to read partner data and use it across all events. Then create a separate custom component transforming data for a given event. If your partner ever updates the data format, then you simply update half of the integration. Or, if the data format on the show side changes, update the other half. This helps dramatically simplify integrations.

2 **Write Down Your Processes**

Documenting your processes may sound obvious but is critical for successful integrations. Collaborating with your partners is necessary during many portions of an integrations project. If you use a task tracking and project management system such as Jira, document your work in a corresponding collaboration tool such as Confluence or SharePoint. The key is to be clear regarding exactly what is being integrated (data mapping) and who is responsible for each piece of the integration. Adjust the documentation to match the project's scope.

Convention
Data Services®
Connecting People. Driving Events.

3 Stay Involved

Vendor partners can be like your kids. Sometimes you throw them in a room when they are having disagreements, and they figure out a way to work things out among themselves. But then there are other times when intervention is necessary. Stay close to the process, be available on calls with your vendor partners, and be ready to answer questions about vaguely defined or new requirements.

4 Seek Continual Improvement

Your events reoccur year after year. Using the first three tips lays the foundation for continual improvement. As you close each yearly cycle and start the next, think about what did or did not work well. Considering adding partners to work with next year. Decide if there are any new features to consider that may involve integrations, such as mobile apps or beacons. You should always strive to improve upon what was done last year.

Integrations are part of most events today. Understanding the best way to approach an integration with a vendor can make the process run smoother. Following these four tips is a great way to approach your show challenges.

Convention Data Services®