

# Here Come The Tablets!



BILL BOOTHE

**Cell phones, SmartPhones and now tablets (Apple iPad, Samsung Galaxy, Google Nexus, Microsoft Surface) are invading the private club environment and a growing topic of discussion these days is whether to allow members to use their mobile devices at the club.**

Unquestionably, it's putting boards and management at odds with member lifestyle demands.

Many clubs simply ignore this reality, explaining that "only a small fraction of our members use those things anyway." Other clubs have recognized that mobile communications is a major part of their members' lifestyles and hindering that lifestyle is a mistake.

Just to put the "no big deal" excuse to rest, here are some recent statistics regarding mobile device use:

- 68 percent of U.S. adults with household income of \$75K or greater own a SmartPhone.
- 31 percent of U.S. adults age 50-64 own a tablet.
- 18 percent of U.S. adults age 65+ own a tablet.
- 57 percent of U.S. adults with household income of \$100K or greater own a tablet. (Pew Research Center, September, 2013)

**Modify the rules to separate voice from data. Keep the voice rules to limit/prohibit annoying cell phone conversations, but modify the rules to allow data usage (texting, Internet access, use of apps) that are silent and should not annoy others.**

In other words, a significant portion of your club's membership owns a SmartPhone, a tablet, or both. So it stands to reason that restricting the use of these devices at your club will impact a large portion of your membership.

But, you say, are the members really using these devices to access the Internet or are they just using the cell phone features? Valid question. That's why I included the tablet ownership statistics. Very few tablets sold today include a cell phone. They are used almost exclusively to access the Internet and to operate apps downloaded from the Internet. For tablets, access to the Internet is key.

So here's the reality: A large portion of your members has mobile devices. They use them constantly (they are "tethered" to their SmartPhones and tablets), and they don't expect to be cut off from their normal lifestyle when they visit the club. What should you do?

Many clubs are turning this potential conflict with members into an advantage – a member amenity if you will – by making the use of mobile devices easier and more enjoyable for members. Clubs are adding wireless services for members to provide fast connection speeds to the Internet for SmartPhones and tablets. And not just in specific areas of the club, but everywhere – throughout the clubhouse, on the patio, around the pool – anywhere that members might be, wireless service is there.

In the *July/August edition of The Boardroom I* addressed the relatively minor costs associated with adding Wi-Fi service. From a low of \$2,500 for a small country club to a high of \$6,500 for a larger club with more coverage areas, the cost to add Wi-Fi is miniscule compared to the member value derived from this investment. But you ask, what about our rules prohibiting the use of cell phones? We don't want to go back to the days of loud, annoying one-sided cell phone conversations. No problem!

Simply modify the rules to separate voice from data. Keep the voice rules to limit/prohibit annoying cell phone conversations, but modify the rules to allow data usage (texting, Internet access, use of apps) that are silent and should not annoy others.

Statistics tell the whole story. Your club's membership is already using SmartPhones and tablets. The proportion of your members using these devices grows daily. So go ahead, tap into that behavior pattern and provide a much-appreciated member amenity for a very small investment - today! **BR**

*Bill Boothe is president of The Boothe Group, LLC, an independent consulting firm that helps clubs understand computer technology, make good decisions and receive the highest value from their technology investment. During his 25 years in the club industry Bill has assisted more than 350 private clubs with the planning, evaluation, selection and implementation of computer technology in all facets of their operations. Bill can be reached at [bboothe@boothegroup.com](mailto:bboothe@boothegroup.com).*