SKI RESORT TECHNOLOGY
IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Introducing new technology in your ski resort can be a complex and challenging process, but it also holds the potential to revolutionize the guest experience, streamline operations, and enhance efficiency. With so many software advancements being made in ticketing, digital guest service management, data utilization, rentals, snow school management, and so much more, the right technology can help a ski resort stay ahead of the competition and meet the demands of today's tech-savvy skiers and snowboarders. This guide is a best practices overview of an ideal technology implementation process for all ski resorts. We'll cover the three main steps of the process: preparation, selection, and implementation. Here, you'll find everything that you need to have a successful implementation and a thriving modern resort.
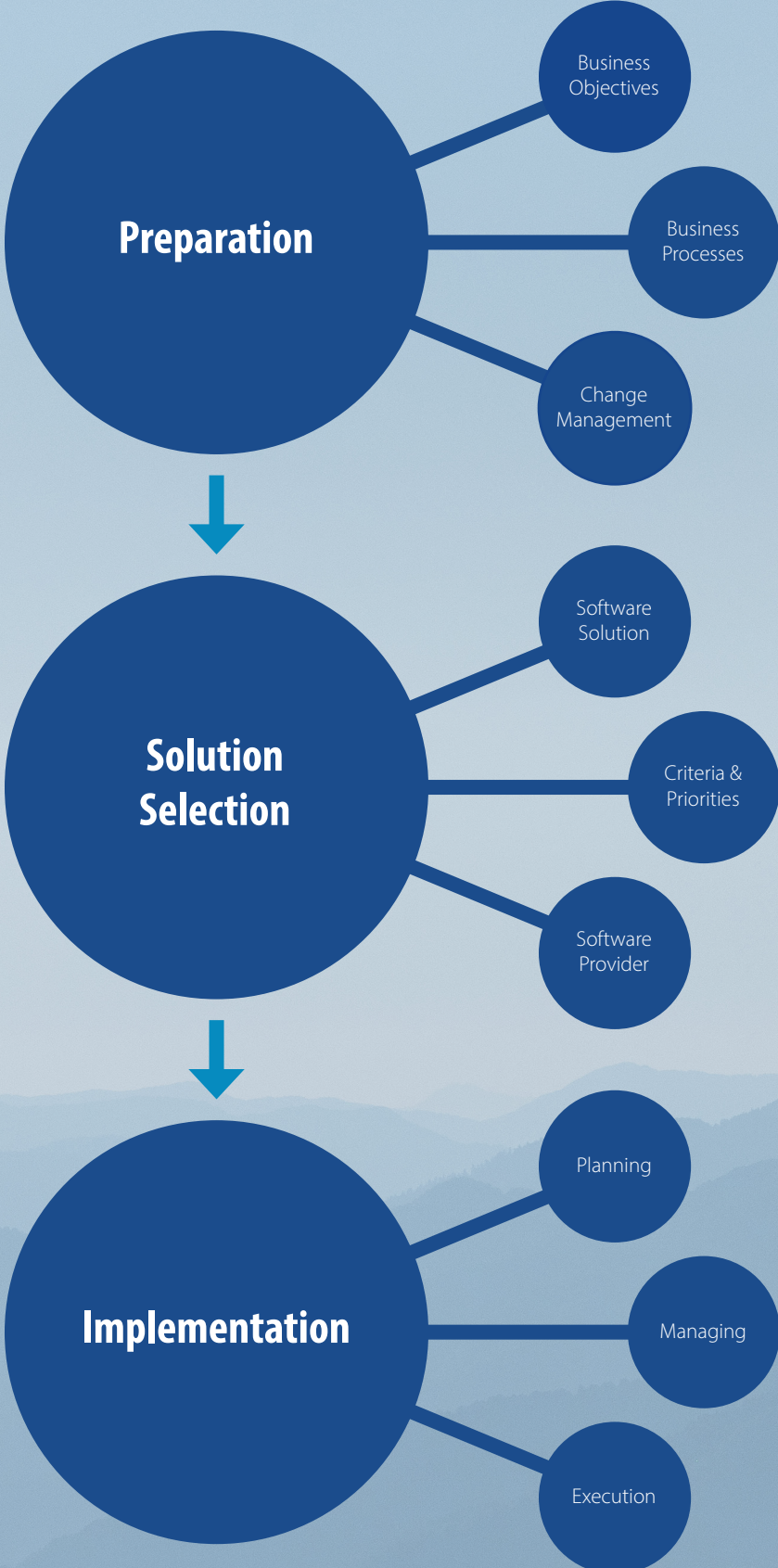
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PREPARATION

Although often overlooked, preparation should be the most important part of any new implementation. It is therefore the area where the management team should be strategically investing their time and efforts. When properly executed, this step can ensure a smooth rollout for your new implementation and save you a lot of time. The technology is there to leverage your strategic plan and your business goals, not the opposite.

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THE JOURNEY TO A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Preparation

- Business Objectives
- Business Processes
- Change Management

Solution Selection

- Software Solution
- Criteria & Priorities
- Software Provider

Implementation

- Planning
- Managing
- Execution

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1.

DEFINE BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

If not already determined, you will need to define your ski resort's main business objectives. These objectives will guide the organization, ensuring that all business decisions are aligned toward their success. These objectives could include things like revenue growth, adding new winter/summer activities, terrain expansion, modernization, improving customer experience, increasing employee satisfaction, etc. Here are some important things to consider when defining your business objectives:

- Have a clear understanding of where your business is and where you want it to be in the next 3-5 years, and perhaps beyond

- Make your objectives clear and specific. A good way of doing this is by creating "SMART" goals.

  Specific
  Measurable
  Achievable
  Realistic
  Time-bound

- Verify that the objectives are aligned with your business' DNA. Are they appealing? Unique from your competition? Compelling for your future guests?

- Make sure the objectives are coming from senior management to ensure they are aligned with the direction of the business.

2.

DEFINE YOUR RESORT'S CURRENT AND IDEAL CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Providing a good customer experience is one of a resort's top objectives, so it's imperative to be aware of how you can improve the satisfaction of your guests. From the moment someone enters your website or sees one of your ads, to the moment they leave your parking lot, they are in what we call your "customer journey". To create an optimal customer experience, it's important to assess the current state of this journey and identify the key elements you'd like to incorporate. Using surveys and day-to-day interviews may help with collecting this information. With the current state of your customer journey in mind, you can now start to see o pportunities for improvement and map out your ideal customer experience.

Some things to consider are, making sure customers have all the information they need and processes are as simple and convenient as possible in order for them to reap all of the expected benefits of the resort. It's also of value to ensure that every interaction they have with you (direct or indirect) reflects the image and experience you want to provide.

3.

DEFINE YOUR CURRENT AND IDEAL EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Enhancing the employee experience at a ski resort encompasses various important aspects outside of technological resources. However, to maintain our focus on implementing cutting-edge technology, we will emphasize on providing employees with the essential equipment, proper training, and ample resources necessary to execute their responsibilities effectively.

To get an idea of what your employee experience looks like presently, have intentional conversations with supervisors and other staff. Ask specific questions about their daily tasks, their resources, how they think things can be improved, etc. This will also allow you to come up with your resort's "ideal employee experience". For example, frontline employees may feel like the technology they are using should be more streamlined and automated. This could allow them to simplify their daily tasks, focus on providing excellent customer service, and provide more business value. This can look like having a "one-stop-shop" style service where an employee is able to meet all the needs of a customer from one location including ticket sales, snow school reservations, etc. This will not only provide better and faster customer support but also a more positive experience for your employees. When you take care of your employees, they take care of your customers.

4. IDENTIFY PROBLEMS, GAPS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Identify any pain points that may be faced in your processes, areas of dissatisfaction, and opportunities to enhance your services. Make sure that there are no obstacles that impede the customer experience, such as difficulties in purchasing and redeeming tickets or accessing amenities. Bottlenecks are a common occurrence that leave guests frustrated and employees stressed. In this stage, the information you have should reveal where bottlenecks exist at your resort, and implementing measures such as online ticketing, direct-to-lift, and more may be the key to elevating your resort experience.

It's easy to focus on solving the problems at hand but it is also crucial in this step to take into consideration your long-term plans for improvement and how they might be impacted by new technology. Adopting new technologies often presents opportunities to improve your resort's master plan, so consider investing in software that has features you foresee needing in the future. Having a single, centralized software approach will simplify your operations and eliminate the stress of juggling multiple software solutions.

This step is also a great opportunity to review and map your resort's internal processes and make changes where needed throughout all of the relevant operations. After this analysis, build a list of requirements that will address these gaps in your ideal experiences. Use this list in the next step to help narrow down what technology solution to select.

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5.

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS FOR EVERYONE: SENIOR MANAGEMENT, EMPLOYEES, PARTNERS, AND CUSTOMERS

It can be tempting to dive headfirst into new and exciting opportunities, especially with a plethora of cutting-edge technology available to explore. While these advancements may be impressive, it's crucial to stay grounded in the reality of your unique resort to maintain reasonable expectations. For instance, if you aim to introduce a new rental system and hype up the latest ski-tuning technology to employees but later discover your budget won't stretch that far, employee morale may suffer. It's essential to recognize that what's available on the market may not always be the best fit for your resort.

It's also important to communicate which solutions are «good enough» to solve the problem and compare them to a more tailored and complex solution to get a complete picture of the situation and available options. By doing so, realistic return-on-investment (R.O.I.) estimates can be presented to senior management to make informed business decisions.

6.
CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLANNING: SELECTING A PROJECT MANAGER/COMMITTEE

Your resort's senior management team is key when it comes to accomplishing the organization's objectives. It's their leadership that should be moving everyone in the right direction and providing people with the information needed to keep employees, stakeholders, etc. on the same page. Therefore, it's important for senior management to select a project manager or committee that aligns with their mindset and can effectively lead the implementation of new technology at the resort.

When selecting a project manager or committee, consider their experience, and knowledge of the resort's needs or the potential product's solutions. Whether internal or external, this person or group's goal should be to develop a strong understanding of not only the business objectives and company culture but also of the technology being implemented. They should be involved in the entire implementation process to ensure they can effectively instruct and guide other employees in the use of the new technology.

Collaboration and effective communication skills are also essential when selecting a project manager or committee. They must be able to work well with various stakeholders, including resort staff, vendors, and other project team members, to ensure a successful change management process during the implementation phase.

By carefully selecting a project manager or committee with the right experience, skills, and mindset, a ski resort can ensure the successful implementation of new technology and improve overall performance

SOLUTION SELECTION

1. Research and evaluate software options

When researching and evaluating software options for your ski resort, consider many available options and their potential benefits, by conducting a thorough market analysis to identify the latest industry trends and technologies, as well as assessing your resort's specific needs and objectives. Evaluate the scalability and flexibility of the technology. This includes asking the important questions of whether it will meet your specific needs and what its longevity looks like. You want to make sure it lasts the test of time and fits into your long-term goals. Another factor that any resort must consider is the compatibility of the new solution with existing systems it will have to work with at your resort. A "best of breed" approach in software technology is often needed in order to meet your modern-day requirements at a reasonable cost.

Research the various vendors and their track records of performance and reach out for references from other ski resorts that have implemented similar technology. Most importantly, consider the cost-benefit analysis of the technology, including the cost of implementation, maintenance, and returns on investment. Ultimately the software you choose should be with the intent to grow and improve the business, whether it is the bottom line, top line, or both. This could present itself as new products and online sales, an increase in customer and staff retention, heightened business efficiencies, etc.

«It's important to look critically at all presented solutions and evaluate their longevity.»

- Rebeckah Hornung Whitewater Ski Resort

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SOLUTION SELECTION

2. Clearly state your needs and expectations to potential vendors

When meeting with technology vendors, be clear about the requirements and needs of your ski resort. Do not rush into a demo, take the time to fully communicate the needs you want to be met and how they align with the features you are looking for. This includes outlining the specific features and functionality that are required, as well as any pain points or challenges that the resort is currently facing. Additionally, describe the unique needs of the employees and how the technology will be used to support them in their roles. Furthermore, communicate any integration needs with existing systems and provide a clear picture of the technical infrastructure of the resort. Discuss any compliance, security, and data privacy requirements the resort has.

By being clear and specific about your needs, the technology vendor will be better equipped to understand your requirements and provide a solution to meet them.

«*For us, it was important that the chosen supplier had a good understanding of the industry, more specifically of our respective activities and our future development.*»

- Pierre Bourdages Owls Head

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SOLUTION SELECTION

3. What to look for in a software provider

The ski industry is a specialized niche within the tourism and action sports industries, which is why many tech companies prefer to diversify their focus and not limit themselves solely to skiing. It's essential to partner with a company that has a deep understanding of your needs, either through dedicated attention or due to their extensive experience in the industry. Partnering with a company that understands what you are looking for will save you a lot of miscommunication and will ultimately give you peace of mind.

The ideal software provider is able to prove that their product is continuously being developed and moving forward with time and trends. The last thing you want is to get left behind.

The provider's goal should be to help you see your projects fulfilled and your business succeed. To do this, they should have procedures, training, documentation, and/or videos in place to make sure you are fully equipped to use the software to its full potential. A proven software provider will also help you in building a detailed implementation plan and provide constant support throughout the entire process.

«I think it is important to choose a provider who can be adaptable to the quickly changing technological landscape in an innovative way to adjust to the new trends in technology.»

- Robyn Mitz
Selkirk College

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SOLUTION SELECTION

4. Make an educated and confident decision

Now that you have done your research and have evaluated all available options, put the information together and make an informed decision. This may involve creating a shortlist of the top options and then going over the previous steps again until a singular product/provider becomes the clear choice. It may be beneficial for the senior management to additionally involve other key stakeholders such as employees and other managers in the final selection process, to ensure that all perspectives are taken into account. Ultimately, the goal is to choose a solution that best meets the needs of the resort and its stakeholders, and that aligns with the resort's long-term growth goals.

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IMPLEMENTATION

1. Implementation Plan:
To make sure the new technology is implemented successfully, you need a comprehensive plan that outlines all the steps and tasks that need to be completed. The project manager or committee should be coordinating the roll-out of this plan with all relevant parties. This plan should have a timeline, a list of deliverables, and a budget that details all of the costs involved. Additionally, the plan should also specify the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the project, including the project manager, resort staff, and vendors. This plan will serve as a roadmap for the entire implementation process, ensuring that the project stays on schedule and within budget.

2. Training and Communication:
For the new technology to be adopted smoothly, it is important to provide proper training to all staff members. The project manager or committee should be taking charge in this process and ensuring supervisors have all of the information they need to then pass the training down to other employees. They should know how to use the technology and understand how it will help them perform their daily tasks more efficiently. Good communication is also crucial for the success of the implementation, both within the resort (with staff members) and outside (with vendors and customers). This will help ensure that everyone is on the same page and understands the goals of the implementation.

3. Testing and Quality Assurance:
Before going live with the new technology, conduct thorough testing and quality assurance to ensure that the system is working properly and that all of your products and use cases are not bringing up any issues.

Test scenarios can include aspects such as:
- Online sales and how they communicate with on-site systems
- Hardware (Ticket scanners, RFID gates, tablets,etc.)

Any issues that may arise during testing and quality assurance should be addressed promptly.

4. Go-Live and Post-Implementation Support:
Once the testing and quality assurance phase is complete, it's time to roll out the new technology. This is a crucial stage, as it will impact the entire operation of the ski resort. It is important to have a well-planned process for the go-live, with clear communication to all stakeholders and a rollout plan in place. Additionally, the project manager or committee should be prepared to provide post-implementation support to address any issues and ensure the system is working as expected. This includes ongoing maintenance, support, performance monitoring, and making necessary adjustments.

5. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:
After the implementation, it's important to evaluate the technology's performance and monitor its impact. This involves gathering feedback from staff and customers to ensure that the technology is aligned with the resort's business objectives and meets the needs that were presented to the provider. If everything is satisfactory, continue seeking new opportunities for improvement and staying up-to-date with the latest industry trends and technologies both with the provider and beyond. However, if any issues arise, it's essential to maintain a strong relationship with the provider and have open discussions about any shortcomings. Together, identify areas for improvement and work towards addressing those issues to ensure the technology is performing optimally.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, incorporating new technology into your ski resort can provide significant benefits. It has the potential to transform the guest experience, optimize operations, and give you a competitive edge. It's crucial to emphasize that preparation is key to achieving success. Establish your business objectives, understand your customers and employees' journeys, pinpoint areas for improvement and growth, and appoint the right project manager or committee. By following these steps, you can ensure a smooth technology implementation and a prosperous ski resort in the modern era.

Recognizing the challenges that many ski resorts may face in this process, we are committed to sharing our knowledge and supporting those who seek guidance. If you have any questions or would like more information after reading this guide, we invite you to contact us using the information below. We would be delighted to learn more about your resort and offer complimentary consultation as you explore new technology solutions.

CONTACT US

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REACHING THE TOP

SOLUTION SELECTION

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Research the various vendors and their track records of performance and reach out for references from other ski resorts that have implemented similar technology. Most importantly, consider the cost-benefit analysis of the technology, including the cost of implementation, maintenance, and returns on investment. It should be noted however that the R.O.I of new technology might not be evident financially but may show itself in your overall efficiency, customer retention, safety & incident metrics, employee satisfaction, etc.

«You want to make sure it lasts the test of time and fits into your long-term goals.»