Track it Hub Dissertation

Walter K has asked me to put together a bit of a critique/observation on the good and not so good points of our Club’s experience with Track it Hub.

First a bit of background. The West Kelowna Pickleball Club is a fairly new entity. We operated as an unorganized but ever-expanding group of players on municipal courts for about 6 years. In 2017 the City built 8 courts in a central area and asked us to organize, pay rent and provide our own insurance coverage etc. For the 2017 season we processed all memberships on paper, expecting 70-80 signups and ended up with 130+. The paperwork involved was extensive, so we searched for a way to process online membership signup. For 2018 we anticipated 180 members and ended up with more than 320, so we are glad we went digital. Still, over 30 of our members chose to sign up on paper as they were uncomfortable with the Online process. The provider we chose dealt only with Membership Registrations, and nothing else that we thought we might have to grow into as the club evolved. As our club expanded so rapidly and we do have a limited number of courts to provide to our members we began preliminary investigations into court management software providers and I build profiles in Hold My Court, TrackItHub and a few others. I also contacted several of our Pickleball acquaintances in Arizona over the winter to seek their experiences with various providers.

Having the opportunity to test several Court management systems I ended up choosing Track It Hub for a couple of reasons. It was a program several of our Members were familiar with as the Kelowna Club uses it already. It was able to handle Court scheduling, Event planning, Invitations to events and general Club email (though I still use MailChimp for some email as it handles Graphics much better). And best of all for me it was a One-Stop shop as all the above were built into a single program plus it could process a paid Online Membership process and eliminate the need for Paperwork.

First a couple of items about the Program itself. TIH went through a major upgrade late this winter. While they have many online YouTube videos available to assist both Club administrators and individual players with setup, most of these videos are not indicative of the current layout of the website. I can only assume this will be corrected over time. One other aspect of the upgrade is that I believe they went ‘Live’ with it a bit early. It was undergoing significant tweaks and upgrades during our Membership drive in April and I swear that screens I could find and manipulate one day were either gone or significantly changed the next. These issues have mostly disappeared, but I am still waiting to be surprised on what I can and cannot do some days. Also, at times during the early rollout of the revised version the response time to input would be much delayed. This caused people to re-enter info or keep pushing the various buttons or tabs and that didn’t help things as the system went into a Snit (a highly technical term). In my recent experience this issue has significantly improved lately. What has not improved is the response from their support department. Every time I send in a Support Request, I immediately receive a Welcome to TIH email asking me to sign up to the service. I still have not heard a response for any of the 3 or 4 support requests I have sent in. Their step by step instructions in the Support FAQ section **are** very good though and have walked me and other event administrators through several issues.

We have also found that the program does not react well to those users who prefer a Mobile Platform. iPhones and Android cells, most Tablets, Windows computers using Internet Explorer and Apple Products using Safari as a browser can be difficult to use. Microsoft Edge, Firefox and Google Chrome work well though.

Track it Hub process:

The initial Club Administrator profile in TIH was easy to set up, and the ability to format a Paid Membership Group for our club was relatively simple. It was not as elegant as our previous provider but covered all necessary our requirements. It also allowed us to set up a 2-tier payment process so those members of other clubs who already pay their PCO/PBBC fees elsewhere don’t have to double pay their membership fees. I immediately set up two segregated groups within our Club umbrella to allow Ladies and Men within our club access to Gender specific events. It is possible to set up as many individual groups as you wish within a club if you desire to target specific levels of players or addresses or whatever criteria you desire for individual contact.

Prospective Club members first have to build a personal profile in TIH and this has proven difficult for some. The largest amount of time I have spent assisting members is due to them mis-spelling their own email address on their initial application and Fee payment. When they log in later and find that they can’t get access they usually build a new profile with the correct address. Now armed with a new profile they are asked again to pay for Club Membership when they try and join the club which has obviously not gone over well. One of the security features of TIH is that all members **must** have a unique email address (Spouses can’t share an email address in the system). Now, when I am trying to correct those memberships with the mis-spelled addresses, I cannot change them to the valid address folks have now added on their second attempts. It has proven to be tiresome waiting for folks to delete their second profile before I can ‘Fix’ the issue. As of the date of writing this letter we have 263 members for 2019. Only 6 have proven capable of signing up online (5 of the above have no ready access to email which precludes them joining TIH anyway)

Once the initial profile is built, TIH automatically asks you if you want to join a Club. The player is provided with a search box. In our case, I instructed people to search for West Kelowna Pickleball where they are directed to our membership page and walked through the signup process including a link to PayPal to pay dues. Most of the info required by our club is provided from the initial profile the player provides. Many people were able to handle this process on their own, but several had problems, mostly related to the platform they were using to access the site (phones, tablets etc.) or misspelling of their own information and required hands on help. This should be only a start up issue for our members and once they are in the system things seem to run smoothly. Players can now choose to join the segregated groups I set up for Men and Women and many did (most but not all joined the group for their appropriate Sex). It is easy for the Admin to download the membership database, sort it by gender, and populate these groups if desired, or move folks confused about their Sexuality between appropriate groups.

Once the Membership Group starts to grow it is time to plan events and activities for the club and publicize them. You will need to create an Event from the drop down menu on the home page and Choose it’s Name, Type, Description, Which Group you want to Invite, Date, Time, Location and Capacity (including how large a waiting list you wish to have). Once that is all correct and saved the Admin will have to physically press the Go button to send out invitations to the Event. It is best to make sure it is correct and accurate the first time (Ask me how I know). Players can now choose to attend, cancel their attendance if necessary or ignore the request and not attend. When they log into TIH they will see events on their personal Calendar that they have been invited to only (Men won’t see Ladies events etc.) and can also see who else is coming to the event if they wish.

Once the chosen registration time for a specific event is closed there are several options available to the Admin. Emails can be sent to the successful attendees, Scoresheets can be generated prior to the event if it is competitive (these sheets are very flexible, and if you have a printer and internet access at the courts they can be adjusted for no-shows or inequities in layout right before the event), and once the event is complete results can be input onto the Scoresheet to provide a Permanent Record.

From within the Gender groups I previously built I chose people designated as Administrators of the Groups. These people can build their own announcements, events and invitations and send Group Specific emails if they so desire. This takes the burden off the Club Administration to handle all ongoing club activities and places it in the hands of those in charge of individual events whether they be competitive or Social.

The automatically built Membership database is easily exportable to Microsoft Excel for record keeping and data screening purposes. Ours has been downloaded several times to build paper Membership lists and Ratings records and to send along to PBBC for processing.

On the Support side of TIH, their response time to requests for assistance is endless. I have not received replies to any of the 3 entries I have submitted. However, their extensive online YouTube tutorials are quite useful, but not yet updated to reflect the current layout of their website. The step by step instructional guidelines available in the FAQ section of their site are excellent and up to date with the current layout of their site and have helped me immensely.

In conclusion, we have found TIH to be a useful tool for our club in both Day to Day operations and overall administration. As our various Administrators are becoming comfortable with the process, Club Announcements, Registration, Invitations and Court Management tools are available to us all in one central location and format. We had a bit of a rough start with TIH as they were going through a major upgrade just as we were starting our registration process, but the site is now stable and consistent. We feel that the features we use are helpful and simple to maintain now that we have gone through the original growing pains. We are exploring some of the more advanced features of the program as we go along and are investigating the possibility of using it to sell merchandise online through our club (T-Shirts etc.)

Rod Williams

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