

Online Registration Brings Your Class-Based Organization into the 21st Century

By Mark Mahoney, Co-founder and President of Jackrabbit Technologies

More and more class-based organizations are responding to their customers' demand for online registration to access vital information and activities in an on-demand format.

Martial arts school owners are discovering that online registration is tremendously appealing to their customers, and offers them and school owners significant benefits.

Online registration lets your Web site do all the work, freeing your staff to focus on daily business tasks; eliminates the "6 a.m. lines," so customers can register at their convenience; automates a previously tedious, time-consuming process; and improves the accuracy of registrant information.

Online registration—popular as it is—may not be the answer for absolutely every type of class-based organization. Consider some of the basics of online registration, as you decide if it serves your school and its customers.

Online Registration – Defined

Online Registration is NOT a printable PDF of an application on your Web site and the collection of information from your Web site that isn't connected to an enrollment database.

With either of the above-mentioned processes, the registrant has no idea if the class for which he is registering is available and the registrant's information must be re-entered into an enrollment database.

A good online registration solution DOES:

- Place all the students and parents' information into an enrollment database automatically (no re-keying).
- Allow registrants to review and choose classes and any options (one-time information input).
- Give registrants the option to be placed on waiting lists for full sessions (keep students interested in class).
- Allow registrants to pay a deposit and/or full-class fees (eliminate billing and collections).
- Provide registrants with registration and payment confirmation (eliminate confusion).
- Allow registrants to complete registration and make payments at their convenience from home or work (make processes easier for customer).

While you want to make this process easier for you and your customers, you don't want to

create problems by employing a process that automatically accepts all applications. You cannot automate the complexities that often accompany the acceptance of registrations. Your process can create a "hold" of online forms for review and enable you to quickly scan them, make your application decisions, and then communicate with registrants via automatic or personal confirmation.

The Decision To Offer Online Registration

Online registration's ultimate benefit is convenience: for your customers and to reduce your staff's registration workload.

A well-designed online registration process can:

- Eliminate data entry and hard-to-read handwritten forms.
- Encourage prompt registration by allowing the process to be offered directly from your Web site, e-newsletters or emails 24/7.
- Eliminate hard-copy forms and, therefore, reduce your postage costs.
- Allow your customers to be involved with a more professional organization.
- Give you a succinct and understandable view of the enrollment levels and remaining capacity across all of your classes.
- Fulfill the expectations of your customers.

School owners/managers generally benefit from several factors with the use of a well-designed online registration process:

1. Consistent or growing registration numbers.
 - Ease of process makes registration less of a "decision," since it occurs at customers' convenience. (None of our survey customers has seen a drop in registration, since implementing an online process.)
2. Significant savings for owner/manager and staff.
 - During registration seasons, the staff time consumed by registration details is cut by as much as 75%.
 - Automatic commitment and payment.
3. Greater accuracy of information.
 - Better accuracy of account information.
 - Responsibility for account information is shifted to the parent/student.
4. Increased customer satisfaction.
 - Easier on parents, since there is a larger window of opportunity to register and choose payment options.
 - Gives customers a choice of when and how to register.
 - Gives them control over account information and payment options.

You and Online Registration

Organizations have different types of classes and, therefore, make varying demands on an online registration process. You may offer short-term classes in addition to classes that span a season or a year.

Often customization can be required to create an online registration solution. That customization is, of course, driven by your needs, but many solutions offer considerable flexibility. If those solutions are not flexible

enough, then the provider may be able to tweak the forms for a reasonable, additional cost. You must determine if the added cost is a good investment for your organization.

Online Payments Make Good Sense

Online registration doesn't have to include online payment, but it does make sense to include payment options when applications are submitted and consider the process complete. A credit card is the simplest payment method. You may offer secure payment processing via e-check (known as Automated Clearing House, or ACH payment) or PayPal® (a company that provides fee-based payment processing).

When considering online payments, be aware of the following:

The Security of the Payment Process—Securing all data collected in an online payment process is critical. You're collecting sensitive data from customers, such as credit card numbers. The industry continues to impose more stringent standards for the handling and storage of credit card information. There are several initiatives in place by the credit card industry:

- Payment Card Industry (PCI)
- Cardholder Information Security Program (CSIP)

Information Storage—You should not store credit card information unless it is absolutely necessary, and if it is necessary, then it must be securely stored. Technically, this means that the information must be protected by passwords and encryption. If you store paper records, then equivalent precautions should be taken.

The Insecurity of E-mail—Remember that any process that transmits this information using e-mail is not secure and subjects you to fines for data that is misappropriated.

Additional Payments—You should also consider how you would issue and collect any additional payments, such as those required for classes offered outside your normal class tuition. You can always resort to mailed checks as a payment method in unusual situations; however, a good online system should eliminate this as a sensible option and accommodate payments that are not standard. These online options are more secure and convenient for both you and your customers.

Two options for alternative payments:

- **E-invoices**, with an online payment option: E-mail invoices to customers to communicate charges/outstanding balances that also include a built-in "pay online" link that will direct them automatically to a payment page where the same secure system that accepts your tuition will collect credit card information. Robust technology can do this with virtually no data entry by you or parents.

- **Pre-authorized payment collection**: Parents can agree to have subsequent/unique payments processed automatically when they are due. If you've employed secure storage processes for credit card information, then this

Please see ONLINE, continued on page 40

that currently gross \$30,000/month or more at a single location. As a member, you have clear goals to grow and systemize your school, build wealth and provide a substantial career ladder for your staff members.

How You Benefit:

- Take your school business to the highest rung on the NAPMA Success Ladder with your participation in the most sophisticated mastermind meetings in the industry.
- Establish your school as the pinnacle of local business success and yourself as a community leader and local safety expert and celebrity.
- Maximize the long-term value of your school business, with top-performing business systems for every aspect of your business.
- Achieve the highest level of personal success, as you join other martial arts millionaires to lead the industry into the 21st century.

What You Receive:

Everything you need to become one of the elite school owners in the industry!

To apply and receive a Free 30-Point, 1-on-1 Business Analysis, call 727-540-0500 or apply online at NAPMA.com/InnerCircle.

ONLINE, *continued from page 33*

type of payment processing can be accomplished without extra effort or cost.

Methods of Payment—Credit card and debit card payments are convenient and popular, but organizations are required to pay a discount percentage fee. It may make more sense (if you're in a situation where the cost of offering credit cards is prohibitive) to offer payment by ACH (sometimes referred to as e-checks). These are direct debits to the person's bank account and can be less costly, since they typically involve just a small per-transaction bank fee rather than a percentage of the payment amount. Make sure the online solutions you choose have been approved for payment processing and display their secure certificate status for authentication.

In Closing

This article has explained the basic issues of online registration and payments. Detailed review of any solution that you're considering and the confirmation of providers' individual security certifications are imperative. You also should be aware of options, such as accepting and managing electronic signatures and secondary forms (medical data) for students. For more information, visit jackrabbitech.com. **MAP**

Insurance. Fast.

martialartsinsurance.com

888-875-3817

