
Spa and wellness centers may be the game for some private clubs today. For others, there's another hot button...technology, and that's the story of The Union Club in Cleveland.

BY DAVE WHITE, EDITOR

"Technology isn't an afterthought and isn't a luxury for our younger members. "It's an expectation," says Joe LaMantia.

"The way people do business today, it's much faster," general manager Claudio Caviglia added. "They have to communicate quickly and access to so much more. You have to have the technology that provides that for them."

This thrust began with then-president William Coquillette, and LaMantia, managing partner of the supply chain software firm e-Ventus Corporation of Cleveland, and chair of the club's technology committee. They have been instrumental in bringing many technological innovations to the club.

"Several years ago we began to listen to the opinions of what our members wanted," said LaMantia. "The club's wireless system didn't work reliably, guests had little or no access...and there was limited access in parts of the building. So just by using this focus to increase member value we've developed a valuable, reliable service."

In recent years, the club has invested about \$200,000 into its IT push. In addition to arming servers with iPads to send food and beverage orders directly to the kitchen, upgrades include high-speed wire-



L-R: TIMOTHY M. OPSITNICK, CLUB MEMBER/TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
JOE LAMANTIA, CHAIR, UNION CLUB TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

less Internet connection, video conferencing capabilities, an overhauled website with a new member portal, widescreen video projectors, and iPad printing through Apple Airprint.

"There's definitely been a change in culture as we've worked with board of trustees, members and management. This has all happened in the last couple of years and it's been significant especially in Cleveland where The Union Club has been stereotyped as an old fashioned club.

"When potential members found out what our club was doing the demand for memberships and the facilities grew," LaMantia emphasized.

"We have video conference facilities available in all parts of club. And we've even used it to help sell weddings. In fact,



Cleveland's Union Club Thrives With Technological Innovation

there's been a case of where the bride's mother was ill and unable to attend the wedding, so the wedding party used video conferencing facilities in the ballroom. Mom was also able to see and talk back and forth with people attending the wedding."

The club has also completed a speaker series via Skype and a wireless projector to converse with people in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Video conferencing has also been used for board meetings to connect with board members elsewhere in the country, and virtual wine tasting has connected members with wineries in California's Napa Valley allowing for comments while sampling wines...undoubtedly a most innovative way to get wine offerings to club members.

As a for-profit club, The Union Club has used technology to generate revenue through increased events, especially weddings and video conferencing fees. The website directory linking, search engine optimization and website refresh have been directly tied to five-figure weddings, LaMantia says.

Technology or at least certain elements of it like cell phones have been a scourge for some private clubs. Technology often hasn't been a welcome element...but rather considered an interference with long time tradition and customs, because private clubs have been viewed as a refuge from the bustle and hustle of everyday life.

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That's changing as many private club boards realize they have to avail themselves of the latest technological innovations to attract prospective members. It's no longer a luxury...it's necessity.

The momentum of change has quickened recently and it's happening without destroying the sanctity of the private club.

Technology definitely has breathed new life into Cleveland's Union Club, which is a prime example of how innovation, creative thinking and a cultural change can be used for competitive advantage.

The club has not only freshened its image, it's a high-tech center attracting members like a magnet.

Today the 140 year-old for-profit club, a Cleveland mainstay, boasts 975 members, says general manager Claudio Caviglia. As part of its 140-year anniversary, the club launched an aggressive campaign last summer to bring in 140 new members, a goal that's been surpassed with 141 new members. Traditionally, the club enrolls about 45 members over a 12-month period.

"Any preconceived ideas of The Union Club, have been squashed," said Sally Weinberg, the club's marketing membership and program director.

"We have a good feel of what it is, why people want it, and how to use it. It's not what you spend but how and what you spend money on to get value and competitive advantage that counts," LaMantia stressed.

The club has concluded a strong fiscal year and GM Caviglia says the club's finances have been buoyed by strong membership gains and increased facility rentals, partially fueled by the club's investments in technology.

Yes there's been a cultural and technological change at The Union Club, however, the club hasn't abandoned its traditions or alienated older members with the glitz and glam of iPads and other innovations. The club has offered educational events to expose older members to Smartphone and tablet technology in the spirit of remaining relevant.



By the way, the club hasn't forgotten about fitness and wellness. The fitness center takes up about 4,000 square feet with full cardio equipment and resistance equipment and includes massage therapy and personal training. The manager and her assistant are certified personal trainers and certified nutrition coaches so they coach our members to develop an exercise program with a preliminary fitness assessment and training program, but also to guide them to better health.

"They monitor blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight and body mass index and give them nutrition coaching. We also provide yoga classes with another instructor and do daily group exercise at the club," added Caviglia.

"We're right in the heart of Cleveland, and we're grateful for where we were and where we've come to as a club," Caviglia enthused. "Some places have shut down, but we're still here and strong. We survived the Great Depression, the Great Recession and we're all grateful for that." **BR**