

Review: Webervations (webervations.com)

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Overview

Webervations, a sister company of BedAndBreakfast.com and RezOvation, is primarily an online booking software, designed to interoperate with other property management software, rather than to be your property management software. It is marketed toward properties of all sizes. Most properties, and certainly all larger properties, would use it only as an online booking piece and use something else as a PMS. However, some smaller properties are happy with the more limited feature set in Webervations as their PMS. To take advantage of availability information offered by some online directories (see below), some properties use Webervations to display availability for that purpose.

Webervations is an entirely web-based technology, which allows it to be used without regard to operating system (Windows, Mac, Linux). Shortly before Webervations was acquired by BedAndBreakfast.com, it was rolling out a new version of its software to certain customers (currently the newer version is approximately three times the price of the older version). That rollout was never completed, so we will be looking at the older version in this review. As with most web-based systems, some features are either not present, or of rather limited capability. Webervations provides most of the basic features needed, though is priced higher than some competing products with more features and more intuitive interfaces.

User Interface

There have been a number of newly-released reservation/booking/guest management systems in the past year or so. All the newer systems we've seen have been web-based (as opposed to a stand-alone system you install on your own computer), most have a clean, simple appearance, and seem to be easy to use. Next to them, the Webervations interface appears very dated, though it is reasonably usable when the user becomes familiar with it.

In evaluating the user interface, we consider the layout of the screens (or web pages), ease of navigating the program, ease of entering (or changing) booking or guest information, the usability of “snapshot” or calendar views of bookings, and availability of sorted and filtered guest lists (for marketing purposes).

Webervations has been around for a long time. Unfortunately, in the fast-changing world of internet software, that means that the technology is quite dated, and the administrative screens feel cumbersome and are not intuitive. The basic system is designed for administering an online booking system that is connected to a separate property management system. Consequently, the majority of the menu items are geared toward configuration of rates, rooms, property information, email messages, etc. To add a reservation you must go to the Your Guests menu, then to the Night Clerk link. Night Clerk is a bolt-on piece that provides some property management capability. Reservations can be added, modified or cancelled,



Clicking the Qbook menu item brings up a new window, for the date, number of nights and number of guests. If there is no availability for the selected dates, it is difficult to go back, so the easiest course is to close the window and start again. If there is availability, you are shown available rooms and rates, make a selection, and a confirmation window appears.

Next guest contact information can be added, but beware, when you click on Continue, the reservation is

recorded, even though not all the information is complete.

Weberervations can display an availability calendar, either through Night Clerk, by selecting Occupancy Calendar and then entering the desired date range, or a more elegant calendar can be viewed from within the primary part of Weberervations, by clicking Your Guests, then Availability Report.

Weberervations allows you to review bookings by month of booking (not month of arrival), or via Night Clerk, by clicking Guest Tracking and searching by various criteria. None of these methods produces a full list of guests

Rate Capabilities

Booking systems should allow for different rates for each room, seasonal rates, specials or discounts, packages, additional items to add to a reservation, and have a way of handling bookings for multiple rooms, such as a group booking. If larger properties are also to use the booking system, the group booking capability becomes even more significant, and there should also be the ability to create rates by room type.

Weberervations allows for individual room rates, seasonal rates, and, via the Inn Store menu's Packages entry, add-on purchases, packages, discounts, and specials can be configured. Weberervations scores moderately well in the rate capabilities area.

Guest Communications

Modern booking systems allow for a number of guest communications to be sent from within the system – usually as emails. The most common are confirmation emails, cancellation confirmations, reminder and follow-up emails, invoices, and marketing emails. We feel that all these items, with the possible exception of marketing emails (due to the common use of stand-alone email marketing programs, such as *Constant Contact* and others), are sufficiently important that they should be included in the booking system.

Weberervations provides a limited set of communications: an email confirmation, a request for reservation, an email declining the reservation and an email cancellation. Weberervations administrative screen show their age in the email configuration page. The text is configurable via text boxes, without formatting of the text in any way.

Weberervations can not create a guest invoice or folio. The closest it can come is to locate a guest on the occupancy calendar of Night Clerk, then click the Reports button, and print a confirmation showing the amount due. You can modify the data to be printed, so you could convert it to a folio or invoice at that time.

Reports

To evaluate a property's performance, report taxes, and track marketing results, reports are a key source of information for the innkeeper. Different booking systems provide for different numbers and types of reports. Of

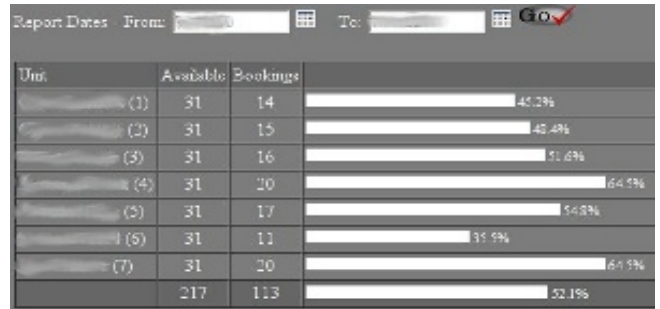
Guest Reports	
Select a Report: <input type="text" value="Confirmation"/>	
From:	<input type="text" value="info@brewsterhouse.com"/>
To:	<input type="text" value="xyz@yahoo.com"/>
Subject:	<input type="text" value="Reservation - Brewster House Inn Bed & Breakfast - Arriving July 7"/>
<p>Dear ABC XYZ,</p> <p>Reservation Confirmation Report</p> <p>Room: Four</p> <p>Arrival: 7-7-2010, Normal check-in (after 3 pm and before 9 pm)</p> <p>Staying: 2 nights</p> <p>Guests: 2 guests</p> <p>The charges for your stay will be 0.00 (including taxes). We need a deposit of 0.00 in order to hold the room and we will charge the deposit amount to your Visa card within the next day or two.</p>	

course, if the system doesn't capture the information in the first instance, it will never be able to report on it. At a minimum, a booking system should be able to generate reports of reservations for the coming month/day/week/year, revenue for specified periods of time, occupancy (total and by room) for specific periods of time, and revenue by date (and by room). Many innkeepers also require reports of gift certificates sold or redeemed, housekeeping issues, and additional financial reports, such as taxes collected.

Reporting is not the strongest area of most web-based systems. Webervations is certainly no exception. In itself, Webervations offers no reporting, as the data is intended to be downloaded into another Property Management System, from which reports can be generated. However, Night Clerk offers a tiny, but useful, amount of reporting.

Night Clerk's Occupancy Report asks for a date range, then quickly displays a nice graphical view of occupancy numbers and percentages by room and total for the property.

Theoretically, the Revenue Report gives revenue over the desired period by room, in much the same way. However, our report generated all zeroes, for the revenue report. Perhaps that is due to our configuration, however.



Finally, you can edit the standard guest reports. This does not allow creation of new reports, but simply changes to be made to standard guest reports (Initial Contact, Confirmation, Followup, Check-in report, Check-out report, marketing report and rejection report).

While these reports are useful, they are hardly adequate to provide a detailed picture of revenue, guests, etc. It is possible to create a partial guest list, by locating the guests by different criteria. That information can then be exported to a CSV file for importing into a spreadsheet.

Accounting

Most booking systems provide some way to use the revenue data in an accounting or bookkeeping system, such as Quickbooks or Peachtree. In a few cases, the revenue data is directly linked to the bookkeeping product, but most booking systems export the data to a file, which can be imported into the bookkeeping software.

Most likely due to targeting smaller properties, and the older technology employed by Webervations, exporting the reports to bookkeeping software, or to a CSV file, is not supported.

Online Booking

Modern web-based booking systems generally provide their own online booking interface, and rarely interact with other online booking systems (such as *Webervations* or *Availability Online*). By contrast, most stand-alone guest management systems will interact with third-party online booking systems, even if they provide their own online booking module as an option. A significant drawback to not interacting with other systems is that the property is precluded from taking advantage of group booking and availability opportunities, unless they pay an additional fee for a second system.

For example, *BBOonline.com* shows availability (using *Webervations*) for all properties in a locality who use

Webervations. If a property uses another system, their availability will not appear on *BBOnline.com* unless they purchase a subscription to *Webervations*, and keep it up-to-date, as well as their own booking system.

Webervations requires the property to link to Webervations's site (in other words, the guest must leave the property's web site) to check availability and complete the booking. Minimal customization of the Webervations pages can be done, so they do bear a slight resemblance to the property's web site, and the visual impact may be less of a concern. Alternatively, more advanced users or web designers can incorporate the Webervations pages into their website more effectively.

Somewhat cumbersome in its approach, Webervations requires the guest to select a date from the availability calendar, then select an available room, then they can complete their information and select any add-on items, before completing the booking. The booking is either a confirmed reservation (meaning the guest receives an immediate confirmation email) or a request for a reservation, determined by the innkeeper in setting up the system. Some innkeepers prefer that the guest booking create a request for a reservation, so they can review the details and confirm after reviewing it themselves.

Pricing

Webervations is priced by range of numbers of rooms, monthly. For a seven room property, the rate is currently \$10.99 per month (\$131.88 per year), but it is free for at least some *BedAndBreakfast.com* members. In addition, since they are sister companies, *BedAndBreakfast.com*'s \$100 per year charge for a link to your onling booking and availability page is waived for a link to Webervations.

Final Thoughts

Webervations is clearly not a full-featured property management system. It's features are very skimpy indeed, and its reporting is extremely limited. Still, when you consider that its cost is only a fraction of most web-based systems, some, especially with only a few rooms to manage, may find that its features are adequate for them.

There is no question that, when it comes to managing guest reservations and bookings, one size does not fit all. Most systems provide an evaluation copy of the software, or a free trial account. We strongly urge anyone considering purchasing a booking system to evaluate several different products before making a decision.