

Database a bank of useful info

Databases allow you to segment, customize and manipulate data to your needs.

by JUDITH GUIDO & MARLENE EICHHOLZ

A database is a collection of data related to a purpose or topic.

Databases don't have to be computerized, but they are most often associated with computer software applications. Today, people need in-

formation quickly. The quicker they can find information, the better equipped they'll be to win over the competition. Computers are the fastest and cheapest way to do this.

Before you begin to organize your information in a database, answer these questions:

1) **Who** will build, maintain and clean (update for accuracy) the company database, and who will use the information you collect? Talk to all employees who will be using the system to get their input. A good database should be used by everyone in the company, from the secretary who looks for

phone numbers and addresses, to the bookkeeper who bills customers, to sales people who want to attract potential business, to the crew foremen who review site contracts.

2) **Where** do you go for help? Look in trade magazines; contact professional organizations; visit computer stores; local community college; computer consulting companies; other landscapers.

Some common databases are MicroSoft Access, ACT and TeleMagic.

3) **What** types of information do you collect? We collect addresses/fax/phone numbers of clients, suppliers, employees (past, present and future); site directions; contract dates; equipment and plant lists; maintenance schedules; material costs, and more.

4) **Why** do you need this information? We need it to better serve our internal and external customers. We can better understand their needs, schedules, expectations.

We generate and qualify leads, sell our products and services and maintain customer relationships through newsletter mailings, surveys, sending special occasion cards, company invitations and announcements.

5) **How** is data collected? Prospective client lists can be bought or expanded through networking. Present client information is collected from contracts. Industry contact lists are created from collected business cards. Suppliers are gath-


ered from trade magazines, trade shows and phone books.

Databases allow you to segment, customize and manipulate data to your needs. For example, you can differentiate your types of clients by economic status or geographic areas and then target them accordingly. This saves time and money. □

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To meet your information needs

Databases come in various stages and prices. Some are sold in a fixed format, which gives the user or installer little control over what information is stored, while others allow you to tailor the setup.

▶ Make sure it's compatible with your hardware and software systems, computer memory and processing speed and budget.

▶ Investigate the ease of installation, use and design (is it user friendly?)

▶ Is training provided?

▶ Keep your budget and staff qualifications in mind.

▶ Weigh the benefits of outsourcing against the benefits of training or hiring staff.

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