

Value Proposition: ASF Payment Solutions

This payment processing and club management software provider has excelled for 41 years by focusing on fitness facilities

By Jon Feld

When Richard Reed founded ASF Payment Solutions in 1973, he had little idea of the remarkable promise it held.

His goal, at the time, was to help automate the member collections and cash flow processes for ATA, his martial arts franchise. But, by 1983, his pursuit had led him to develop one of the first computerized, check-in programs that integrated payment processing with club management applications.

In the process, Reed had inadvertently become one of the industry's information technology (IT) pioneers.

Today, ASF's singular focus on the fitness industry remains a cornerstone of its unique value proposition.

"ASF, though, is much *more* than a software provider," points out Vice President Sean Kirby. "Efficiency translates into dollars, and we facilitate efficiency. Our products help clubs increase revenue with online payment programs, cloud-based club-management software, interactive marketing tools, and strategic partnerships.

"We view ourselves as a true relational partner, and have spent more than four decades perfecting the art of *listening*," he explains. "That translates into excellent customer service—our biggest differentiator. We're true to our own integrity and professionalism when working with customers, and committed to constantly building those relationships."

Apparently, its focus has served ASF well. Since 2005, the company, based in Highland Ranch, Colorado, has grown its sales by nearly 50%. Today, it has more than 3,000 clients, who serve millions of club members throughout the U.S., Canada, and Puerto Rico.

The partnering process

What does it take, on the part of ASF, to become a *relational partner*?

Before the firm provides any service to a client, it conducts a due diligence process that's designed to help it understand the club's business model and its specific



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Still Blazing Inroads

As it moves forward, ASF Payment Solutions intends to stay ahead of the industry technology curve, stresses Vice President Sean Kirby. "Since our founding, we've pioneered the switch from check payments to automated clearing house (ACH), and we've maintained that leadership as ACH volume has shifted to credit and debit cards. Some of the newest processing technologies—Visa (EMV), MasterCard, Europay, Near Field Communications (NFC), and application programming interfaces (APIs), along with other software and mobile apps—have pushed ASF and the industry to improve their software and processing techniques. ASF will continue to help its clients take advantage of all the benefits those new technologies offer."

The company's most recent innovation?

ASF's revised Pass A Friend program, which has now gone digital. Pass A Friend is a complete electronic marketing referral program that allows clubs to track e-mail passes sent to members, passes redeemed at the club, members enrolled, and revenue generated. The functions are integrated into the ASF software via an easy-to-use, step-by-step wizard set-up. —

goals. The inquiry begins with an internal review, initiated by a range of meetings, which generally include the club's contact person, training coordinator, transfer coordinator, and sales staff; these discussions help identify and define the services to be provided.

As the training and transfer procedures get under way and take hold, ASF and the client review and fine-tune the process on an ongoing basis.

Its approach not only teaches ASF much about the client's specific needs, but, beyond that, has also helped the company to fine-tune, refine, and enhance its products and services.

"Simply listening to our clients describe their desires is the key to realizing them—to transforming their dreams into real functionality. And the ideas that work for one client generally work for others, as well," notes Kirby. "As a rule, we strive to pay close attention to all of the notions, thoughts, and requests that are aired every day.

"As a result, we're constantly innovating."

As in any relationship, there are occasionally barriers to surmount.

One of the concerns that clients may have about outsourcing IT services has to do with the apparent loss of control. ASF works to alleviate their fears by applying its relational partner protocol, and also by depositing some control in the clients' hands.

"It's about instilling confidence in us as a partner," says Kirby. "It involves using dedicated account representatives, who act as trusted advisors and solution-oriented problem-solvers. In addition, we don't lock clients into a contractual term; instead, we believe in earning their business every day. We emphasize that clients can specify a number of things, including the number of times they want ASF to resubmit. This helps minimize their fear of losing control.

"Time is money, and our clients started their businesses to help people

ASF puts marketing referrals in club members' hands



reach their health and fitness goals—not to spend hours in the back office chasing down late payments," Kirby continues. "ASF takes this critical piece of work off their plates, and works diligently to get them the highest dollar amount possible from their outstanding receivables."

ASF continues to strive to strengthen its client relationships with "lifetime" training. Essentially, for as long as a club operator is an ASF client, they'll receive ongoing instruction on any software and service upgrades, at no extra cost. "The more familiar our clients are with our software, the better they can take advantage of the many updates and services we offer," Kirby adds. "We place a high value on support and training. Any software tool is only as good as the client's knowledge of it and their ability to use it effectively."

Product line extensions

While ASF is famous for its billing and club-management software, it also offers robust, automated, member-marketing functions, including new-member welcome postcards, member birthday cards, nonattendance retention cards, the TrialBOX lead generation system, custom design services, contract renewal/rollover, and more.

Pro Forma

Year founded: **1973**

2005–2013 overall sales growth: **48%**

Number of employees: **more than 200**

Number of clients: **over 3,000**

Markets served: **U.S., Canada, Puerto Rico**

Recently, the company diversified a little bit more, partnering with Lifestyle Technologies, which creates nutrition software and apps. "We believe that fitness is a lifestyle that requires focusing on nutrition, as well as exercise," explains Kirby. "This new relationship provides a way for our clients to help their members achieve a higher level of wellness, while, at the same time, creating a new revenue source." —

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