

Occupancy Statistics Vital to Learning About RV Sector

Woodall's Campground Management - From My View - August 2002

A couple of months ago this publication carried my article concerning ARVC's announced efforts to gather occupancy statistics from their member parks. That article prompted an e-mail from a reader who is an officer of a state association. In his e-mail he bemoaned the fact that many park owners either don't see the need for computers or for keeping occupancy statistics. "When asked for occupancy percentages," he wrote, "they have no clue."

He went on to say that it was also hard to get their state association members to be involved or to attend meetings.

Having in the past been the president of CTPA, as well as its executive director and a member of its board of directors for a number of years, I understood his comments very well. It is the same old problem that state associations and the national ARVC have faced for years without end. Some in this great industry are not willing to join because it requires them to pay dues. Others join and pay their dues but feel that is all that is necessary. They are willing to take all the goodies the associations can provide, such as member benefits, but are unwilling to put their shoulders to the wheel and help the few other willing ones carry the load.

I felt the letter writer's comments to me were all valid. In my reply to him, I said, "The only thing I know that can be done is for all of us who care about this industry to keep preaching the word." At times we may feel much like a minister who preaches the Word and keeps on preaching, even though he sometimes gets the feeling that no one is listening. So I am using this column as an opportunity to again "preach the word."

I built from scratch a small RV park and operated it for 11 years. When I sold it, I delivered to the new owner the occupancy records from day one. And I didn't have a computer. Perhaps my business background made keeping those records just plain common sense. Keeping those records took only a few minutes each month.

Here is how we did it: At the end of each day, the person checking out counted the number of RV sites occupied that day, including the extended stays. That figure was noted on a small calendar. Shortly after the end of each month, I added each day's camper nights together. If they totaled 1,500 camper nights and I had 75 total sites, I multiplied 75 times the number of days in the month, say 30, which equaled 2,250 site nights available. I then divided the actual camper nights (1,500) by 2,250, the available nights, and found out that our occupancy percentage for the month was 67%. The

counting of the camper nights each day took less than two minutes, and the final figuring took less than five minutes, just over one hour's time each month.

Perhaps it would help to define the terms as they are used in the industry. I have used a 50-site park that has cabins as an example.

Camper night. A site occupied by an RV or tent for one night. In the case of seasonals, the site does not need to be occupied by people. If it is not available to rent for the night, it is occupied.

Daily occupancy percentage. This is the number of camper nights each day divided by the total number of sites in the park. If 25 sites were occupied, that divided by 50 total sites equals 50% occupancy for that day. Note: Cabin sites should be counted as a camper night only when they are occupied.

Weekly occupancy percentage. The number of occupied sites for the week divided by the total sites in the park. Twenty-five occupied sites each day multiplied by seven days equals 175. Fifty sites available each day multiplied by days equal 350. And 175 occupied sites divided by the 350° available sites equals 50% occupancy.

Monthly occupancy percentage. Add the total number of occupied sites for each day and divide it by the total number of sites in the park times the number of days in the month. Twenty-five sites rented each day multiplied by 30 days in the month equals 750. Fifty sites available each day multiplied by 30 days equals 1500. Then, 750 divided by 1500 equals 50% occupancy for the month.

Yearly occupancy percentage. Add the total camper nights for only the calendar months you were open. Figure the total number of nights you were open. That should be simple. Divide the total camper nights for those months by the total number of days you were open. Let's say you opened on April 15 and closed November 15 (184 days). Multiply the number of sites your park has by 184 days, so 50 sites multiplied by 184 days equals 9,200 possible camper nights. Since your actual camper nights were 5,224, you divide that by 9,200 and find that your annual occupancy was 57%. If you wish to really refine the number, you set the adding machine to carry out four digits and the actual is .5678.

There is absolutely nothing complicated about figuring your park's percentage of occupancy for any period of time. It is a simple matter of adding, multiplying and dividing a few numbers. As I recall those simple arithmetic equalizations were taught to all of us by at least the third grade.

If you have a computer and a registration and reservation software program, it will probably figure most of the above for you. If not, it should. Ask the developer why it does not figure your daily, monthly and yearly occupancies for you in the report section. If you do not have that type of program, then any computer program with a simple spreadsheet can do it if you input the data and build a few simple formulas.

So I cannot imagine how any park with or without a computer can fail to do the simple arithmetic necessary to figure the occupancy percentage. I believe that every park operator should know his or her occupancy percentage for every night, week, month and year since opening or buying the park.

Once you have occupancy figures, a whole new world of business management efficiency opens its door to you. I will introduce you to that new world in next month's column.

[Return to John's Articles](#)