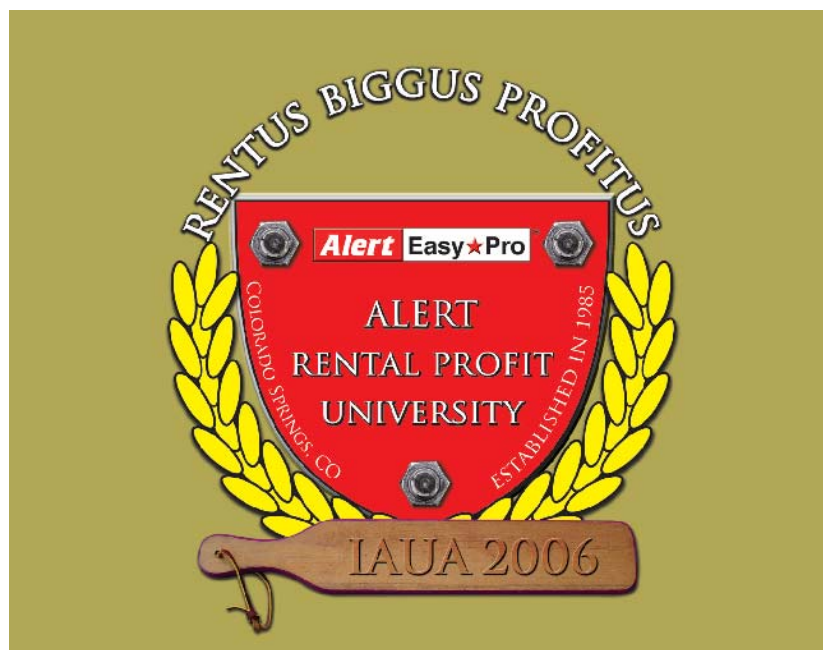


June/July 2006 Issue



## Alert Announces Rental Profit University Class of 2006 in Colorado Springs!



The Alert Rental Profit University (the theme of IAUA) is pleased to announce that YOU have been accepted for admission to the Class of 2006, November 16-18, at the beautiful Antlers Hilton Campus in Colorado Springs. Classes begin on Thursday, November 16<sup>th</sup> at 8 am, and continue through Saturday afternoon, November 18<sup>th</sup>. The format allows you to fly out on a Wednesday and fly back (with your diploma) on Sunday. Put it on your calendar now! Much like a college or university, the Alert IAUA Conference provides a chance for you to combine education with fun, fellowship and networking. You can even "make a difference" through voting on improvements to the Alert rental software and service offering. (Continued on Page 2, below.)

The Alert Newsletter is a periodic publication of Alert Management Systems, makers of the Alert EasyPro rental management software system. It is a service for members of the International Alert User's Association (IAUA). All rights are reserved. Contact Information: 555 East Pikes Peak Avenue, Suite 205, Colorado Springs, CO, 80903. (800) 530-8050. [www.alertms.com](http://www.alertms.com)

**Page 2- Alert Newsletter, June/July 2006**

(IAUA 2006, Continued...)

Now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year, the IAUA celebrates a proud history of accomplished rental alumni, break-through profit ideas, and memorable experiences for rental business owners and managers. Early Bird Registration begins in August. Optional Webinars (Summer School!) will be announced in September and October.

**In this Issue:**

**Bill Veneris Retirement Announcement**

**July 4<sup>th</sup> Holiday Schedule**

**Get Accelerated Delivery of Alert EasyPro 8.0 This Summer**

**Don't Archive Old Rental Contracts**

**Computer Stress: It's a Real Killer!**

**Bill Veneris Retires from Alert**

As you may have seen in several published press releases over the last month, Bill Veneris, our Founding Chairman, has retired from Alert Management Systems. A voluntary retirement package specifies incentives under which Bill has been invited to continue as a voting member of Alert's Board of Directors, attend its annual User's Association meetings, and make other positive contributions in the areas of consulting and training, at least through 2008.

Bill plans to take advantage of his well-known talents as an educator and expert in the rental business. He won the American Rental Association Special Service Award in 1995. He has been a regular columnist for industry trade publications and he was elected ARA Region 7 Person of the Year (1993) for his positive contributions to the rental industry. He founded Interactive Management Systems (d/b/a Alert) in 1976.

Rob Ross, President of Alert, said, "We congratulate Bill on his successful retirement from Alert and we look forward to Bill's evolving new role as a free-lance consultant in the rental industry. It is the natural continuation of a process Bill initiated in 1996, when he began selling stock to key employees to assure the perpetuation of Alert in experienced and capable hands. Thanks to Bill's legacy and foresight, Alert is a much stronger company today than it was 10 years ago."

Rob is joined by his brother Tom Ross (Chairman, CEO) as the top two Alert shareholders. Jean-Pierre Chastagnol (VP of Software Development) and Mary Crosslin (VP of Client Care) also have significant shares of the Company and are members of its Board of Directors. 100% of the company is owned by its full-time employees.

## Page 3- Alert Newsletter June/July 2006

### July 4<sup>th</sup> Holiday Schedule

Alert Management Systems will be closed in observance of Independence Day on Monday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>-Tuesday July 4<sup>th</sup>. After-Hours Support will be available under normal terms. Call the Help Desk and dial 911 for an explanation or to initiate a support call. Have a fabulous Fourth!



### Sign up for New Software: Accelerated Delivery 2006

Qualified Alert clients can install the newest revision (Alert EasyPro for Java 8.0) months before the free general release via CD. An Alert programmer will install it for you "by hand" on your system via Internet and work with you on testing—and improving—the new features. The return-on-investment can be huge. Not only do you get the advantage of using the new software sooner, you also gain critical input into the final implementation phase of new product development.

This is not a program for everyone, by any measure. We have also limited the initial program to 10 stores this year, in order to assure that our programming staff can work with each store personally. The cost is \$1,000 for most stores, depending on the integration of any custom code.

We will be selecting a mix of party, general, and heavy equipment stores, so that we have adequate representation for continued software testing. A preference will be given for IAUA members on Priority Support. For more information about how to qualify for the Alert Accelerated Delivery Program, contact the Alert Help Desk as soon as possible. A member of the programming staff will contact you to provide further information.

### Archiving Old Contracts: Proceed (or not!) with Caution

As your system ages and accumulates many years of rental contracts, it is natural to wonder if you could make it run faster or more efficiently if you could just clean out all the old ones.

In fact, an Alert EasyPro menu option suggests that you can "archive" old

rental contracts, effectively taking them out of day-to-day use.

Ironically, the purpose of this article is to explain why the use of this process should be your last possible resort. Fortunately, with today's dramatic improvements in server speed and

## Page 4- Alert Newsletter June/July 2006

### (Archiving Old Contracts, Continued...)

and disk size, no Alert client really needs to archive old contracts. We believe this feature is now obsolete.

We are also working hard to provide new features that make it easier and quicker to look up old contracts. (Alert EasyPro 7.2 included several of these, such as look-up by date range.)

First, here's an overview of the Archiving Old Contracts feature:

The process of archiving old contracts permanently removes the ticket information from the contracts files and moves that information to the archive contract databases. This process is similar to taking your printed copies of contracts and storing them in a cardboard box off-site. Accessing the information is possible, but it's not easy and the contracts are not readily available.

What are some of the limitations?

There are too many to list them all here. The file maintenance manual is being rewritten to thoroughly cover all the issues. It will be available for download from the web site soon. In the meantime, here is a quick summary of the most critical issues:

- 1) Archived tickets can only be viewed from the customer invoices screen on the customer maintenance side of the Alert system. (Not from the counter system.)
- 2) No report in the Alert system accesses the archived information. Therefore, any report that uses a date



range that would have included archived contracts will now be incorrect.

- 3) Some reports will generate an error message indicating that the report has failed to reconcile the data problems created by the missing archived contracts. Other reports will simply understate the values (such as counts, units, or turns) without informing you that there is a problem.

- 4) The process is irreversible. The only "Un-Do" option is to shut down the system and restore your entire system from backup.

For all of these reasons, we recommend that you never use this feature. In fact, starting with our next revision (8.0), this option may be activated only by calling the Alert Help Desk first. We are also happy to advise you on how to meet your goals for system speed and performance without archiving old contracts. As server performance has continued to dramatically increase, Alert clients who have implemented the recommended schedule of hardware upgrades have seen no need to archive rental contracts.

## Page 5- Alert Newsletter June/July 2006

### Is Your Computer Under Stress?

#### Two Common Issues and a Quiz

(And you thought stress was just your problem!) Believe it or not, your Alert server can feel stressed. In any case, the Alert part of your system wants to tell you how it is feeling every morning. It does so via a printed message that has been set to appear on one of your printers, letting you know that it had a good night's sleep, and that its "End of Day" routine completed successfully, including the backup. If you are not getting this message, please call the Help Desk right away. Most likely, this nightly performance indicator is still working, but it is no longer being sent to the correct printer. If you pay attention to how your server is feeling each day, it will serve you faithfully.

If your computer server or workstation is really feeling "down" you'll know it. Here are some of the symptoms: Crashes and system hangs, slow back up times and aborted backup, file corruption and data loss, boot up issues, errors in programs, ram use and cache problems, hard drive failures, and generally causing YOU to lose sleep.

Here is an Alert Quiz: What is a common problem that can cause ALL the symptoms listed above? First, a message from your friends at the Alert Help Desk. When your computer system is unhappy, we're unhappy.

Please call us right away. Even though "rebooting" often cures the symptoms, sometimes it means you have bigger troubles. We're here for you in emergencies, but we'd rather help you prevent them. By documenting each failure with a support call, we can also detect issues that might be related. For example, a printer lock-up might even be caused by a server or workstation problem. Your computers are just like your rental equipment: a little preventative maintenance goes a long way.

What's the answer to the Alert Quiz?

A phenomenon called Disk Fragmentation, which happens to all computer disks over time, can cause them all. Essentially, files are broken into pieces and stored randomly across your hard drive. Over time, this causes the hard drive to work harder and harder to do its job. It actually exerts more energy, and can be strained to the point of data loss, even though the disk is not full. Disk Fragmentation has even been documented to shorten the life of a hard drive by up to two years! Disk defragmentation (the cure) is a preventive maintenance procedure that has been proven essential for system longevity and performance. (Jeff Knoepke, senior support technician, provided the research for this article. If you would like to comment or read the authoritative White Paper, e-mail [jknoepke@alertms.com](mailto:jknoepke@alertms.com).)

