Introduction

This guide will walk you through the configuration and use of the Calendar Sync feature of your SOAR website.

The Calendar Sync feature of your SOAR website is available in the Advanced Package and allows your members to keep their personal digital calendars in sync with your unit website calendar through use of the iCalendar standard.

Members will go to the Calendar Sync page on your SOAR website. They will click on the subscription link and your unit website calendar will then be synched with their personal digital calendar. All future updates to the calendar on your SOAR website will show up in each member's personal digital calendar !

This feature provides the following benefits:

- It will save a lot of time for your members, because they do not need to manually add unit events to their personal digital calendars.
- It will ensure that your members always have an up to date version of your unit calendar.

Security

Just like your SOAR website, keeping your Calendar Sync secured from public view is very important.

While SOAR has the capability to use the same username/passwords members login with to protect the this feature, a number of popular calendar services (Google, Yahoo, Windows Live/Hotmail) do not support "authenticated" calendar subscriptions.

To make the Calendar Sync feature easy to use for your members, SOAR has added a random 16 character string, called a UUID, that is unique for each account on your SOAR website. Example:

```
/ical/feed/4c4300e4-e36f-4177-bb2b-330992724c84
```

While the format of access to your site's calendar subscription may be known to the public, trying to guess a UUID that works will be very difficult. This method will:

1. Secure your website calendar from the public.
2. Get around the lack of "authentication" features in many popular Calendar services.
3. Increase usability for members by making it easy to subscribe to your website calendar via single click, independent of which calendar service they are using or if it support authentication.

When accounts are deleted from your SOAR website, their associated UUID will also be removed, thus disabling their calendar sync to your website calendar.

We also provide the following options for additional security:

- Resetting UUIDs on account password changes, thus forcing members to re-subscribe to your website calendar.
- Manually resetting all UUIDs, thus forcing all members to re-subscribe. This should be used once a year, most likely sometime in August.

iCalendar standard

iCalendar is an Internet standard file format for sharing calendar information. Files of this type usually have an ".ics" extension. More information can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ICalendar.

Each event is described within the file in a common manner that all calendar applications that support the iCalendar standard can understand.

Configuration

By default, the Calendar Sync feature is turned off.

To turn on the feature, go to Admin/Control Panel on your SOAR website and click the Cal Sync button. You will see the following options. This page is only available to those with Administrative permissions.

Enable – This will turn on the Calendar Sync feature and make it available to your members. When members are logged in they will see a "Calendar Sync" menu option in the User block of your SOAR website. This link will allow them to subscribe/download the unit website calendar.

Full Details – This option allows you to control what information is available within each Event included in the Calendar Sync function available to your members.

By default the Event Details (the content you type in for the Event) is not included in the Calendar Sync. The basic information that will be included by default is:

- Event Title
- Start/End Date/Time
- Location
- Den/Patrol Filters
- Details - Link back to Event on website
- Registration - If Event Signup is turned for the event, it will be noted
- Attachments – If the Event has attachments, they will be listed.

If you turn this feature on, by checking this box, the full Event Details for each Event will be included in the Calendar Sync.

There are a few reasons why Event Details are not included by default.

- Most calendar applications/services do not support Rich Text/HTML within iCalendar subscriptions. Most of the Events in your unit website calendar are using HTML. Graphics/pictures are also not supported. Thus you are only getting the text version in Calendar Sync and it will often not match the "layout" of the version on your SOAR website.
- While the Calendar Sync feature is secured by a 16 character random UUID, it is still susceptible to attack. Thus not including full details in your calendar feed is an additional security measure.

Reset on password change – For security reasons, whenever an account is removed from your SOAR website, its associated UUID is removed thus disabling the deleted member's calendar subscription.

This setting will also reset a member's calendar subscription when they change their account password, forcing them to re-subscribe to your website calendar.

This is especially important for those using Shared Accounts. You should be changing the shared "member" and "leader" account passwords each year. With this option, when you change those passwords it will also trigger member's need to re-subscribe to your website calendar.

This option is on by default.

Force Re-subscription – This button will remove all UUIDs from your website and force all members to re-subscribe to your unit's website calendar. This can be used at any time.

What will members see?

This section will describe what your members will see in their personal digital calendars after they have used the Calendar Sync feature on your SOAR website to subscribe or download your unit website calendar.

Example #1 – Single day event with start/end times, Den Filters, and Event Signup on an iPod Touch.
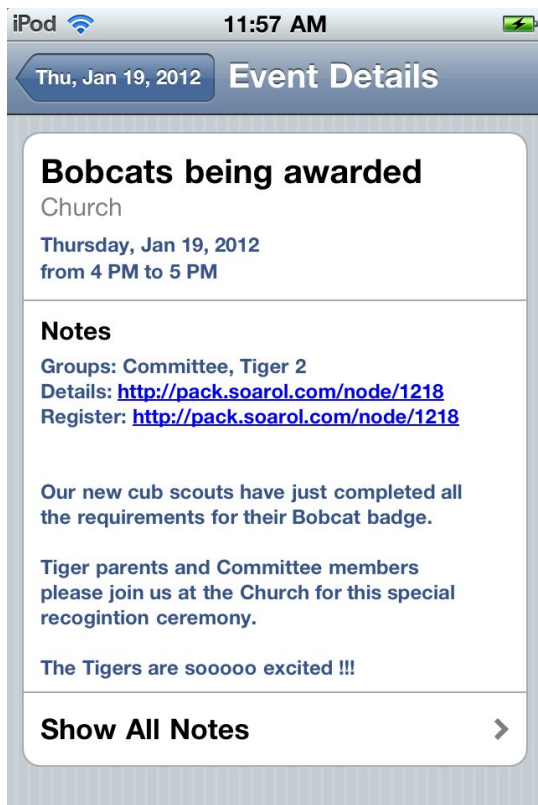
The title "Bobcats being awarded", location "Church", start/end date/time are part of the native application.

The rest is contained in the "body" of the event.

- Groups – Then Den/Pack filters that are associated with this Event on our unit website calendar.
- Details – a link back to the actual Event on your unit website. While this is transferred as just text, the majority of calendar applications will turn it into a link automatically. Guess which one doesn't? Yep – Android phone's calendar application !

- Register – If Event Signup is turned on for this event, there will be a line indicating you can register for the event and a link to your unit website.
- Attachments – If there are document attachments to the event, their names will be listed next. You cannot access the attachments directly from the local application. You need to go to the unit website to access them.
- Details – If you have the *Full Details* option turned on, the content of your Event on your unit website will be shown last. This will be in simple text format. All HTML/Rich Text has been removed.

If the "body" of the event does not fit on a single screen, most calendar applications will have a "show more" type feature at the bottom of the screen. In this case the iPod Touch gives you the "Show All Notes" option to see the full content of the event.

Example #2 – Multi day event with no time, no Patrol Filters, and attachments on an iPod Touch.
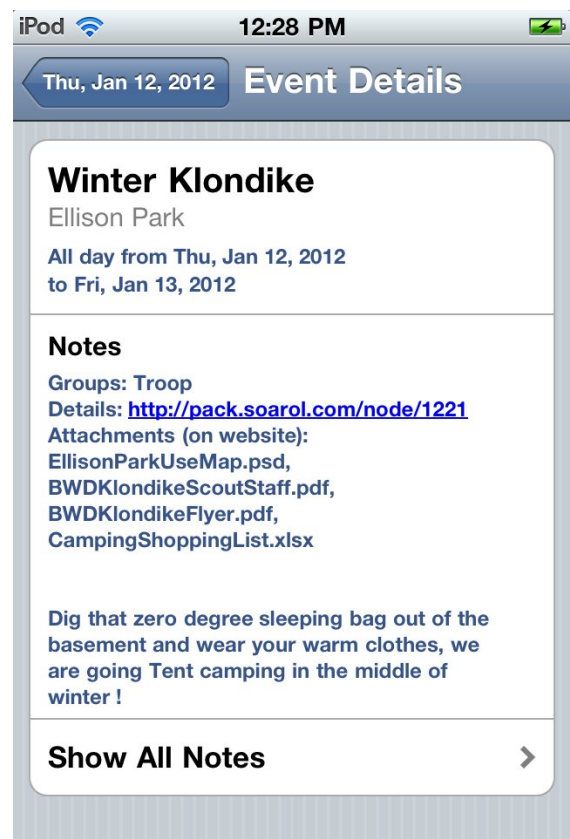
Subscription/Download

After you have enabled Calendar Sync, members can click the Calendar Sync menu item in the User block. This will give them the following page.

Calendar Sync

This feature will let you keep your personal electronic calendar in sync with the Troop website calendar. As events are added/deleted/changed on your Troop website, your personal electronic calendar will automatically be updated. No more need to manually add Troop events to your personal calendar.

This features implements the iCalendar 2.0 standard and creates a calendar feed in the .ics file format.

┌─ Calendar Type ──────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Choose which type of Calendar application/service you use and would like to │
│ synchronize with. │
│ │
│ [Apple iCal   ▼] │
└──┘

┌─ Patrol Filters ─────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Select from the following event categories to include in the synchronization with │
│ your personal calendar. │
│ │
│   ☑ Troop │
│   ☑ Committee │
│ │
│   ☑ Badger │
│   ☑ Eagle │
│   ☑ Ghost │
│   ☑ Koala │
└──┘

[Create iCalendar Feed]

First, members will choose which type of personal calendar service/application they use. This will allow the SOAR website to give them personalized instructions for using the Calendar Sync feature.

Next members will select the Den/Patrol Filters that want included in their Calendar Sync.

- If you do not have the Den/Patrol Filter feature enabled, members will be automatically taken to the next page and all events will be included.
- The following order will be used for picking defaults for the Den/Patrol Filter.
  o Previous calendar subscription (UUID).
  o Current Den/Patrol Filter settings
  o If using an Individual Accounts, patrols and positions for all family members.
- Like the Den/Patrol Filter, the Pack or Troop filter cannot be unchecked. This prevents members from accidentally missing the most important events – Pack and Troops.

When members are done with their filter selections, they click on the "Create iCalendar Feed" button.

The next page contains the links for the iCalendar Feed (subscription), iCalendar Download (one-time import), and instructions specific for each calendar application/service on how to use this information.

Calendar Sync

iCalendar Feed: webcal://troop.soarol.com/ical/feed/6c22389d-a008-431a-9200-39cb10c41b2b

Note: You should NOT set the update frequency to anything greater (more often) than once a day.

iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch

Add Calendar
1. Using the native browser on your device, navigate to this page.
2. Click on the iCalendar Feed link above.
3. Click "Subscribe".
4. Click "Done".

Remove Calendar
1. Navigate to Home screen.
2. Click on Settings button.
3. Click on "Mail, Contacts, Calendars".
4. Click on "Subscribed Calendars".
5. Click on your Troop calendar.
6. Click "Delete Account"

The instructions will be personalized based on your choice of the Calendar Type. Instructions for adding the calendar subscription and removing it will be provided.

In most cases, simply clicking on the iCalendar Feed link will add a subscription to your unit's website calendar to the member's personal digital calendar.

Update Frequency

We do have some concern with tens of thousands of calendar applications updating with the Calendar Sync feature and causing performance problems.

The reality is that your members don't need to update from your unit website calendar more than once a day.

Included in the iCalendar specification is the ability to specify the update period. We have set that within each iCalendar Feed for 1 day. Some calendar applications do not follow this or allow members to override it. Please help your members understand they don't need updates more than once a day.

To address the performance issue we have also tested the Calendar Sync feature well to make sure it is "lean". We have also made some architectural changes to the SOAR website service to handle extra load.

Subscription Errors

If any of the following conditions are met, the calendar feed will produce an error.

- Mis-typed calendar subscription URL or UUID.
- UUID is no longer valid because password was reset (option) or manually cleared by the website administrator (option).
- UUID is no longer valid because account was deleted by an administrator or import.
- UUID is not valid because someone is trying to gain unauthorized access.

In all cases, a calendar will be provided with a single event. The event will be on the next day with a title of "Calendar Sync Error". It will contain an alarm, for those applications that support an alarm, that will help bring the error to the member's attention.

The "error" event will look like the following.
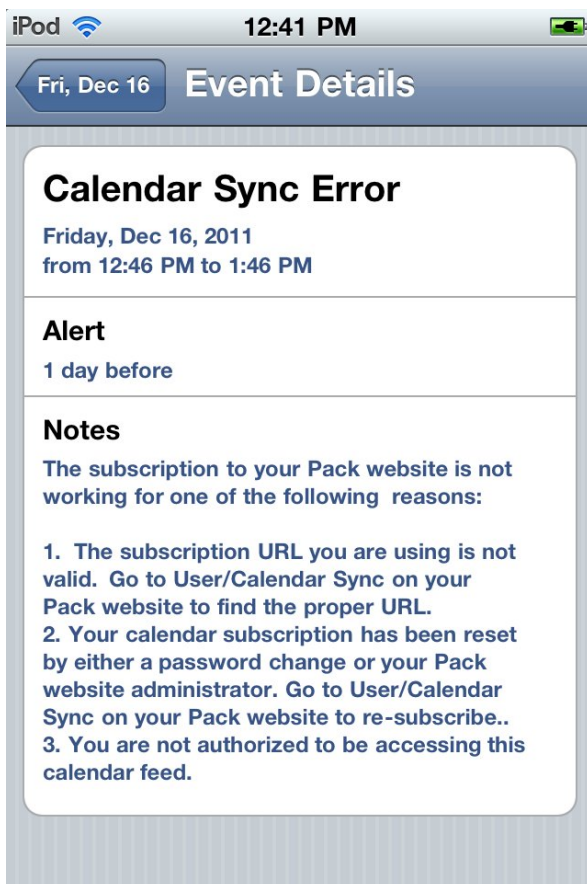
The alarm will look like this and will occur (if supported) in about 5 minutes after the next calendar update.

Limitations

The following are known limitations of the Calendar Sync feature that administrators should be aware of.

- Only future events, up to 1 year, are included.
- Attachments are not included.
- Events in personal digital calendars will only contain text versions of what exists on your SOAR website.
- Windows Live/Hotmail Calendar and Windows Mobile phone requires manual setup.
- Yahoo Calendar requires manual setup.
- Den/Pack Filters do not integrate with native calendar application categories.
- Event registration cannot be done natively from personal calendar applications.
- While the Calendar Sync feature has been secured with a random 16 character string (UUID), it is not fully secured. You should not use the *Full Details* option for this reason.
- If you are using Shared Accounts, the security (UUID) is not tied to an individual member. You should reset UUIDs annually.
- While some calendar services/applications do support "authenticated" calendar subscriptions, SOAR chosen to not use these features to provide a single consistent simple user experience independent of calendar type used.

Force Updates

We know you want to test that subscription update is working, so here are some pointers for getting the various calendar applications/services to refresh their subscription to your website calendar.

Apple iCal – Remove the calendar and re-subscribe to it on your SOAR website.

Apple iPod, iPhone, iPad – Each time the calendar app of these devices is restarted, it will check for updates.

- Close the calendar app by using the Home button.
- Restart the calendar app by selecting it.
- Within 30 seconds you should see the an update icon is the status bar, which indicates the calendar file is being downloaded from your unit website.

Google Calendar – To our knowledge there is no consistent schedule which Google Calendar will update from your unit website calendar, nor any way to force it to refresh. If you delete the subscription from Google Calendar and re-add it, Google seems to use a cached version that it had previously so that will not work either. Have patience, it will update !

Android –You can force a sync between an Android Phone and its Google Calendar by going to Settings -> Accounts & Sync -> (select your Google Account) -> Sync. This does not guarantee that Google Calendar itself will do an update though – see above.

Microsoft Outlook – Outlook is very good about listening to the default refresh time period (1 day) contained within the Calendar Sync. You cannot do a one-time force refresh. You can remove the calendar at Tools -> Account Settings -> Internet Calendars. Adding the calendar back in will then create a refresh.

Yahoo Calendar – After you add a calendar subscription, you will see a Reload button next to your calendar's name. You can use this to force Yahoo to update your calendar subscription.

Windows Live/Hotmail Calendar – Removing and adding the calendar subscription seems to force an update. We cannot guarantee this though there may still be caching involved. If you look at the settings for your calendar subscription in Windows Live/Hotmail Calendar by clicking on it, it will display the date/time the calendar was last refreshed..

Windows Mobile Phone – On your Windows phone, go to Settings -> System -> Email + Accounts. Press and hold the Windows Live ID for your Windows Live/Hotmail calendar. Click Sync. This will only update information from your Windows Live/Hotmail Calendar to your Windows Mobile Phone. It will not force Windows Live/Hotmail Calendar to refresh its calendar from your SOAR website.

Common Issues

iCalendar Feed no longer gets updates/works.

> If you are using Shared Accounts and have updated passwords, then members most likely need to remove their existing calendar subscription and re-subscribe via the Calendar Sync menu option.

> Same holds true for members that have changed passwords on their Individual Accounts or if the administrator has used the *Force Re-subscription* option.

Google Calendar is not updating events.

> Give it time.

> Google Calendar provides absolutely no documentation on their update scheduling. Removing the subscription and re-adding it also seems to have no effect as a cached version at Google is still used. Be patient, it will update.

Frequenty Asked Questions

When will Google Calendar/Android support
"authenticated" iCalendar subscriptions?

Absolutely no idea. This has been an issue for quite
a few years, with lots of complaining by customers.
If they haven't fixed it by now they may never.

Can I update the unit website calendar from my
personal digital calendar?

No. Calendar subscription is one way, from your unit
website down to your personal digital calendar.

Can members register for events via the subscribed
calendar in their personal digital calendars?

Not today. We took a brief look into this, but have
not yet been able to determine if this is technically
possible.