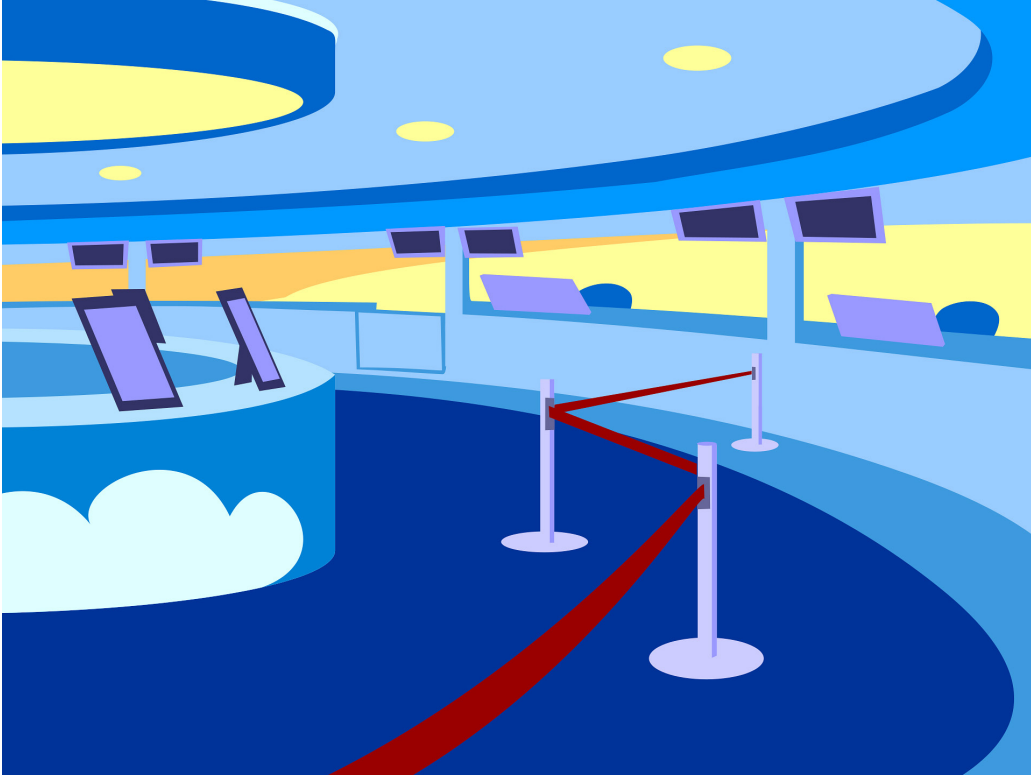


THE WAY FORWARD

HOW DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE ARTS IS HAPPENING 'BEHIND THE SEEN'



An interview with
Dougie Scarfe, Chief Executive
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Extract from a report commissioned by:



Powerful Accounting Software

Introduction

We're going back stage, or to be more precise, back office.

And instead of looking at the digital revolution in the arts through the prism of on-line performances and production values, let's look at the impact of technology in being able to transform the finance function and administrative tasks.

That's in terms of the use of data for strategic through to granular decision-making rather than score-keeping, at how the customer experience can be improved.

In a report commissioned by iplicit, the cloud accounting software company, to be prepared and published by DECISION magazine later this year, the chief executives and chief financial officers of arts organisations across the UK will be highlighting the issues, sharing their thoughts on the way forward.

This is one of the interviews to be included.



Reaching audience with key change

Vocalist and lyricist of the rock band Rage against the Machine, Zack de la Rocha said that music is a way to empower and re-humanise people who are living in a dehumanising setting.

Easier said than done when the pandemic lockdowns turned concert halls dark.

Technology though meant that the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra could introduce a key change in how they delivered their performances, enabling the BSO to also turn itself into a high definition, broadcast company, with its concerts watched in eighty-two countries worldwide.

Something which is now providing the orchestra with an interesting cross-selling opportunity in the region where it performs most. “We have some twenty-two concerts in our season in Poole, but for example perhaps eight in Portsmouth,” explains chief executive Dougie Scarfe, an OBE for services to the arts. “Now we can also live stream selected concerts from Poole which we promote to our audience at Portsmouth and other locations.”





Dogie Scarfe

“That’s because a really interesting, slightly life changing consequence for us of the pandemic was being able to engage with our audience using marketing tags in our CRM system to create an effective paywall. It meant we could sell the live streaming of concerts direct to our customers in their homes.

“Now, instead of relying on individual box offices, we are also selling most of the tickets to our concerts at the venues where we perform, which is providing us with data that otherwise as a touring organisation we wouldn’t easily have had access to for audience development.”





That's not because of reluctance to share information on anyone's part. A typical year will see the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra give one hundred and eighty performances across forty towns and venues, each of which will have their own box office.

"A challenge for any touring company can be getting hold of the data and being able to make sense of it when it can come from so many different systems," says Scarfe, who reveals a real fascination about using technology to reach those audience members who have not come back to the concert hall since the pandemic.

"We have the biggest live stream audience of any orchestra in the country, so could we also tap into a potential audience which



has not gone back to the concert hall in their locale, wherever that might be?" he ponders.

"The big challenge is that digital comes at a cost and requires an awful lot of work as well as additional people, but we no longer live in an age when sending out a printed brochure with a covering letter will sell on subscription sixty per cent of the available seats for the whole season.

"Buying patterns have changed. People now think maybe only a month ahead so our communication has to be much more individual in terms of content, who receives it, and how.

"Of course, digital communication also makes it easier to antagonise people with too much information, no matter how relevant, and we have to be really conscious of that. But data identifies in granular detail what will enable us to really increase our understanding of buying patterns, to be sufficiently on top of it in order to consistently get the message out to the right people at the right time."

Data and streaming aren't the only big ticket technology considerations. "Is there any arts organisation anywhere in the world which is really prepared for robotics and artificial intelligence?" asks Scarfe. "Seriously, technology is increasingly part of how we are able to function, so we have to be.

"Music is subjective, and I don't think artificial intelligence can yet gauge potential audience reaction to a piece it has yet to hear



when we are considering programming. A work by Franghiz Alia-Zadeh, the most influential Azerbaijani contemporary woman composer would probably be described by AI as a challenge for our audiences, but actually feedback tells us they loved it.

“Music is all about the human condition, not just in the reaction of the audience but how it is performed. Why is it that orchestras playing the same piece can sound differently from each other? Why does the performance of the same piece by the same orchestra and conductor take three minutes less or longer one night compared to the next?

“Could AI help us in matching soloist with conductor for a particular work? It would provide us with granular data about how many times they have performed it separately and together, where, with which orchestras, and perhaps the audience levels at each. But, for example, AI wouldn't provide us with emotional intelligence in how they would bond with our orchestra.”

www.bsolive.com



About iplicit

Providing a cloud-based finance and management software solution that allows multi-academy trusts to focus on what really matters. Tailored for those frustrated by on-premise legacy software, iplicit provides greater flexibility and enhanced levels of reporting, integrating with other cloud applications for a seamless migration path from a user's existing system, enabling organisations to 'step up' to next generation finance software without losing the functionality they currently enjoy. iplicit received the Accounting Excellence award for mid-market and enterprise software of the year in 2020, and the top product for enterprise accounting/ERP in the Accounting Web software awards, 2021.

124 City Road, London EC1V 2NX
County Gates House, 300 Poole Road, Bournemouth BH12 1AZ

0207 729 3260
info@iplicit.com
iplicit.com

Unit F7 Riverview Business Park, Nangor Road, Dublin 12, Ireland
info@iplicitireland.com
(+353) 1 592 0850



The interview with Dougie Scarfe was undertaken with Luke McKenna, specialist at iplicit in working with arts organisations.



About DECISION magazine

First published in 1988, DECISION magazine reflects the business lifestyle, the trials and tribulations, the hopes and aspirations of directors and managing partners responsible for businesses with a turnover of £5million and above.

07737 308371

mail@decisionmagazine.co.uk

www.decisionmagazine.co.uk

