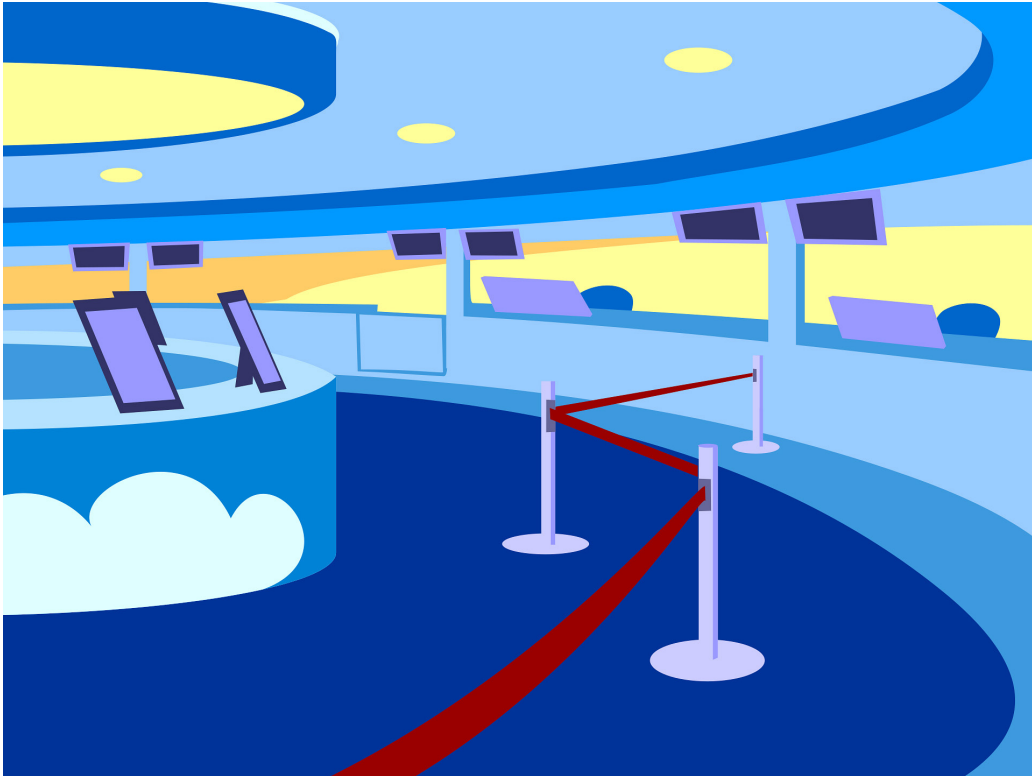


THE WAY FORWARD

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



An interview with
Charlotte Geeves, Executive Director
Bristol Old Vic

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.



A mission to provide clarity

“What will become top of our thinking, if it isn’t already, is how artificial intelligence will impact us as a cultural organisation.

“It’s all too easy to be drawn to the negative spin, and I don’t mean this in a detrimental way, but the arts aren’t going to be immune from needing to incorporate efficiencies which technology will continue to bring.”

Charlotte Geeves is executive director of the Bristol Old Vic. Originally the Theatre Royal when it opened in 1766, the name change happened when part of the Old Vic company from London took up residency in 1946.

“AI can do more than put in place ways to provide the finance team with information at speed,” she believes. “It will provide clarity which will enhance decision making. Already IT is enabling the sector to demonstrate its significant contribution to the economy in granular detail.

“The arts for example, contributes more to our GDP than the telecoms sector. Data will help us gently lobby to make the case for investment.





Charlotte Geeves

“The mission for any arts organisation is to be able to collect as much data as possible – whether it’s spend per head for specific shows, which audiences will order more white wine rather than beer – because the technology to provide that information should already be in place.

“We used to have a traditional box office structure with a manager, their deputy, and a team responsible for selling tickets. Those roles have changed because of technology, so to give one example, the box office manager is now our systems and analysis manager. For that to happen, an arts organisation has to provide its people with the skill-set to be able to interrogate the data.

“Technology enables us to analyse how far in advance people are prepared to book particular shows, and once they do so, we



can deliver their e-ticket, their programme, and their order for interval drinks to an app on their smartphone.

“Where technology has a significant bearing is in our pricing structure. IT means we can monitor closely sales for each performance so we can dynamically price tickets accordingly. We’ve been doing that for six years, but now with the amount of data available and having dashboards, we can be much more immediate.

“Previously we would make changes weekly; now we do it daily. If we wanted to, we could make price adjustments hourly.

“Data means when we put the budget together, we are informed as to how a particular production should sell, and to some extent that minimises risk. Over ninety per cent of our tickets are sold in advance, so a very small percentage on the day, which means an unpredictable factor such as the weather is less of an issue.”

“And we don’t make programming decisions without reference to what the data is telling us. The data is a guide, as I said a reference rather than being the determining factor. Otherwise, if everything is predicated by data, we wouldn’t have creative programming to attract people who aren’t yet going to the theatre or to introduce new ideas or challenge the status quo.”

Is technology enabling Bristol Old Vic to develop more of a digital audience? Actually they’ve taken a different extra-curricular approach.



“We haven’t live streamed since January 2023,” says Geeves, “but we have filmed a number of our productions which we have sold to broadcasters such as the BBC and Sky Arts.”

Interestingly, as part of a five-year project titled My World, in collaboration with the University of Bristol, which looks at how cultural organisations address technology, Bristol Old Vic have been identifying the different reaction of audiences to what they are seeing if it is live on stage or on screen.

“We put some monitoring devices on audience members in the theatre and on those who were watching online to measure how each reacted to what they were seeing,” Geeves explains.

“In the auditorium, you can see everything all of the time. With digital, you’re directed to look at certain things – there could be a close up on a piece of action – which meant at those particular times the on-screen audience’s experience was heightened compared to those in the theatre.

“From that it is a question of how we might use technology so that the audience in the theatre is able to focus on those specific moments which had that impact digitally.”

www.bristololdvic.org.uk



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.

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The interview with Charlotte Geeves 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.

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