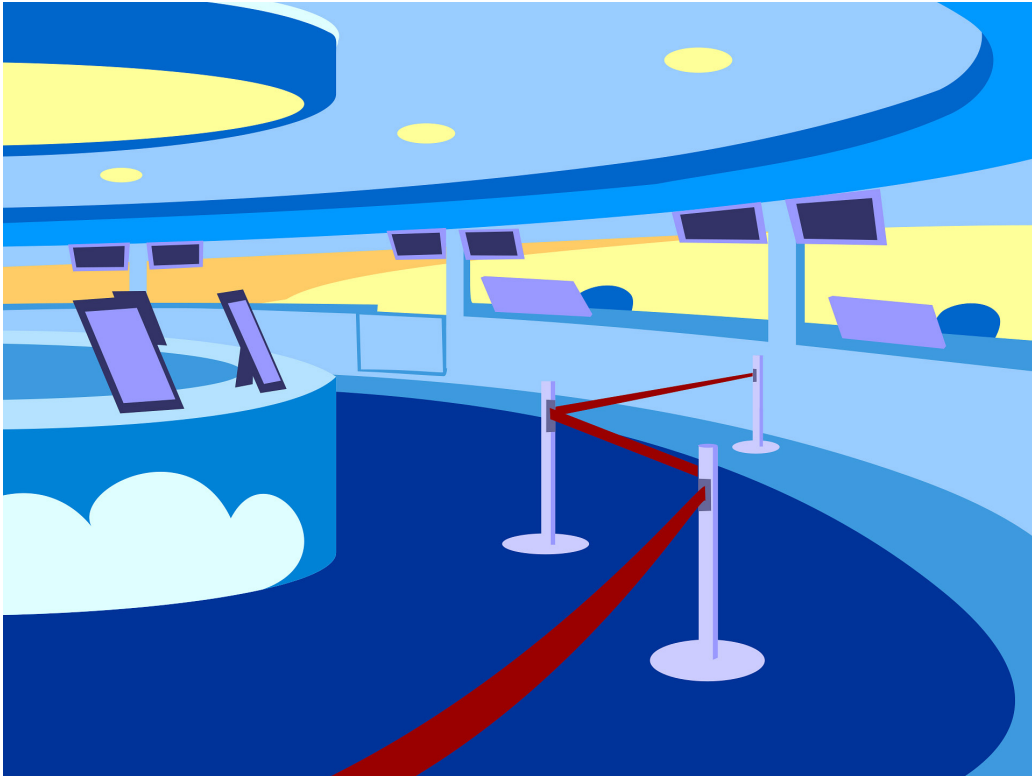


THE WAY FORWARD

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



An interview with
Stephanie Bradley, Executive Director
Welsh National Opera

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.



Everything identified and clearly visible

It was best selling author Terry Pratchett who suggested opera happens because a large number of things amazingly fail to go wrong.

If he'd peeked back office, he would have written those words in capital letters. Unless he happened to be visiting Welsh National Opera.

“During lockdown, we implemented an IT system which encompasses the whole operation, with everything in one place.,” explains Stephanie Bradley, WNO executive director.

“That streamlined integration stripped out unnecessary processes which makes us more efficient and dynamic, and importantly enables us to have a data warehouse approach which drives our audience based decision-making.

So, for example, every element of planning our repertoire for the next three years is in one place, visible, with all the resources identified and costed in the system, which feeds into us being able to monitor progress against budget at all times.



Stephanie Bradley



“Having those integrated progress reports means we see in snapshot our performance against our KPIs, and the system incorporates granular detail such as the requirement for rehearsal space and its availability and cost.

“I think from our point of view, the biggest advantage of technology is being able to have data at our fingertips which is in the right shape, in one place, and accessible across the company.”

“As well as our home at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff, we tour to eight other venues over a season and perform concerts at a further fifteen,” explains Bradley, “and we asked each of them to provide data in a specific way so with our data sharing



agreements we have consistency, even though we can be operating different systems.

“Our thoughts about artificial intelligence? At the moment it’s something to really explore in the future. Could it help with programming? Always there’s the argument that the ten most popular operas will sell. That’s not rocket science.

“Where AI can help is with analysis, including the likely size of an audience which would be attracted to a particular work to complement the experience and knowledge of our artistic directors.”

According to Bradley, it’s now a pre-requisite for an arts organisation to have a social media strategy.

“For us, it’s a digital first approach, with a data analyst being part of the marketing team,” she says.

“We’ve also got to take advantage of a fundamental change in financial planning which has come about because of IT. Historically it was based on looking back at what has happened, to see what lessons could be learnt from taking previous actions.

“Now we can utilise data to accurately predict the likely outcomes of a decision before it is made and implemented, and to be able to put together projections on that basis to secure transformational funding.





“Internally, because technology is developing so quickly, increasing people’s IT literacy, regardless of generation, is a challenge.

“Clear processes need to be in place to enable them to engage with technology if they are to have the confidence in their ability to use it.”

“Apart from cyber security, the biggest risk is the degree of adoption. The ability of an organisation to take everyone on the journey really needs to be an entry in the risk register.”

wno.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 Stephanie Bradley 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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