The Actors Centre & Tristan Bates Theatre

Case study: venue, membership and online event management and bookings

Summary
The Actors Centre are a charity based in London who have used an internet based system to increase value for their members. They have successfully reduced their administrative costs associated with training thousands of actors and running a leading London theatre with cutting edge performances.

About the Actors Centre

The Actors centre was founded in 1978 by a group of actors including, Sheila Hancock and Clive Swift. In 1994 it moved to its current building in the heart of the West End.

A former industrial building, the space was transformed into a creative hub with a 70 seat theatre, presenting a year round programme of new and experimental work. It also has five studios including a fully equipped media studio with edit suite, a vocal studio, a dance studio, and rehearsal studio. There are 12,000 members of varying levels of which 2300 are typically active with access to over 1500 workshops each year.

From its modest beginnings it has grown to occupy a unique place in the performing arts in the UK and further afield. The current Patron is Julie Walters and the advisory board and Vice Patrons contain many of the "Who's Who" of British dramatic arts.

Functions required

The Actors Centre needed a flexible already developed and supported package to replace their custom developed in-house information system with its associated spreadsheets and many paper processes. One was a collection of A1 boards with room booking calendars. These were the subject of much confusion as they were not always accessible by people who had a client on the telephone with a potential booking. If the board the booking person needed was available, the hand written entries and overwritten edits were not always legible. The picture shows the celebration when the booking boards were finally "retired".

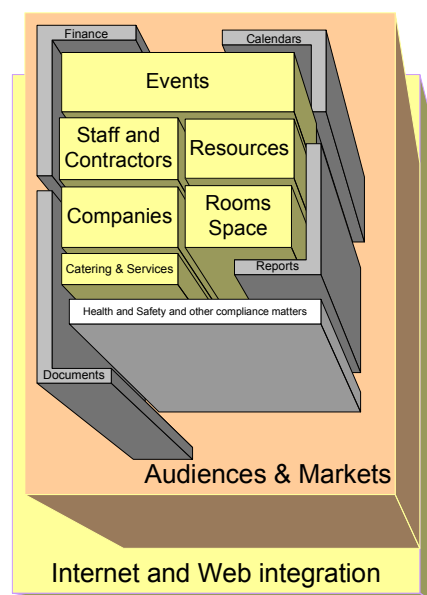The features required by the organisation included the following.

Award winning systems for fast moving businesses

- Data management and profiling for members, funders, trainers, performing companies, customers & sponsors and other contacts and organisations. Data stored include their membership status, qualifications, *Equity* and other references, payments, course and/or theatre attendance, their preferences for communications and miscellaneous other items.
- Venue management including the theatre, the green room, the training studios and their equipment
- Course bookings and waiting list management. There are about 500 to 1000 course bookings in an average month but the system had to be capable of many times that average amount for peak periods where hundreds can come in within a day.
- "Factfind" questions need to be customised for every course/session so that students can provide information about themselves for the tutor (e.g. previous experience or preferences) before arriving.
- Tutor management and creation of contractual documentation for tutors to sign up for their teaching obligations.
- Marketing and member communications and mailings.
- Two websites for the Actors Centre with online training course bookings and members' portal and for the Tristan Bates Theatre.
- Full event, venue (rooms resources) and calendar management.
- Bookings, accounting, tutor/performer management.
- A database that "drives" multiple venue or line of business websites differentiated by class/event type. Public views with search and booking facilities all driven by and integrated into the database.
- Document management such that files can be attached to courses, tutors, members, venues, rooms, etc. (This is getting more and more necessary for safety and other compliance issues)
- Job tracking for maintenance and other safety related matters.
- Reporting and decision support on every aspect of the events, membership, transactions and debtors, venues, tutors, sponsors, performances, as well as financial reporting
- Private members portal where each individual can log in securely and may see account balances and past courses.
- Full administrative facilities for all course bookings and cash collections.

System selected

The Actors Centre management team selected AXLR8, a software company specialising in this area. The AXLR8 system has all the above functionality "out of the box".

Functional overview of the AXLR8 event management system which provides a comprehensive solution for membership and accreditation associations and other organisers of theatrical, sports, tradeshows, conferences, user groups and training course events and sessions. It includes a powerful CRM and has features for marketing events to targeted individuals.
It also helps organisations comply with important health & safety and environmental regulations at their events.

AXLR8's system is hosted and hence avoids the cost of in-house servers and integrates easily with the websites of both Tristan Bates Theatre and The Actors Centre.
The Actors Centre staff can book the courses and performances with their venues and rooms on the system, preventing clashes. Each event and session can be templated. That means, if you run a similar one, you do not have to re enter all the details. Just "clone" it for another date or build on it. Likewise, if you update a tutor's details, all courses where that tutor is teaching will be updated. Change the venue and the website will present the new location.

It also "knows" that performances are to be presented and booked online on the TBT website yet the training courses are to show up only on the Actors Centre's website. Both websites were developed by AXLR8 from a similar template so that the second website cost very little more in addition to the first.

This efficient way of working was extended to the maintenance of content on the site: Actors Centre staff can easily update it using a content management method without having to pay external designers.

Previously, much of the previous cost of changing the site was updating courses and event details. This no longer has to be done as these details are "database driven". Staff simply add a course, venue, dates, tutor name and all the information is immediately available for the website (once checked and approved). Adding all the

courses and performances to the site using the AXLR8 system can provide a list of all details for the printer to set as well as all the events on the website.

New developments include the ability for Tutors to see their balances and booked courses and to update their profiles. The Actors Centre will also use Trigaware™ in due course to alert people to news, events, subscription renewal and other debts, new events and attendance, etc.

The site is optimised to attract new members and achieve other marketing objectives. Courses and events can be promoted by being "showcased" on the front page as well as added to scrolling news.

The above screen shots show that a public site has a calendar and course search facility. However, there is also a secure private login so that each member can see data held about them. This includes their contact details, their account balance and their course bookings - past and present.

Reduced hardware and systems requirements

Because the AXLR8 system is all on the internet at data centres in London, Gloucester, Manchester and Washington DC, there is unparalleled security, redundancy and unlimited room for growth. This means that all the Actors Centre require for a member of staff to run the system is a web browser and their security credentials (username and password). Not only does this reduce the cost of in-house systems support but also, the whole organisation was able to move into temporary accommodation during a recent refurbishment and then move back again with absolutely no interruption. All support, back ups, etc are available

Further information

You can find out more by contacting the Actors Centre on 0207 634 8000 or visiting their website at www.actorscentre.co.uk or tristanbatestheatre.co.uk.
AXLR8 can be contacted at www.axlr8.co.uk or 01344 776500