

Pull together

Arts and cultural organisations worldwide are joining forces as users, owners and governors of a technology services company

The Sydney Opera House in Australia (below), and the Capitol Theatre in Salt Lake City, USA, (right) are members of the Tessitura Network

In these times of failed business models, unobtainable bank financing, and revenue maximisation on the backs of consumers through service fees, one company is bucking the trend with a very unconventional approach. Over the eight-year history of the Tessitura Network there has been no investor funding, no bank debt and fees for services have been reduced over time.

The story began in the mid-1990s when New York's Metropolitan Opera (The Met) realised it needed to upgrade its customer relationship management. "It was no longer viable to store vital donor and ticket buyer information inefficiently in different systems and it was virtually impossible to provide great service unless a user was able to know everything about each donor, prospect, subscriber, ticket buyer and other constituent categories at a glance," says Jack Rubin, president of Tessitura Network. The Met could find no system on the market that it deemed capable, and so spent several years and

several million US dollars building a system in which the right customer is always in the right seat, a complete view of all information for any user of the system could be found in a few seconds, fundraising and sponsorship capabilities are built in, and actions taken anywhere automatically update related records.

The launch of The Met's system would normally have been the end of the story – The Met got what it wanted and could have stopped there. However leaders at the Met, together with senior managers from six other flagship arts organisations, decided to take a non-traditional path for the business and create a technology services company for the arts and cultural sector owned and governed by its users.

The concept went from a utopian idea for a user-driven technology support and development company to reality in 2001. Today, there are over 290 arts and cultural organisations in six countries that not only license and use Tessitura Software and Tessitura Network products and services, they also own and govern the not-for-profit company. The users drive future product direction by voting and participation in the process.

The founders of the company were the early adopters of the software. "They wanted a company structure that would protect them from the uncertainties, surprises and high fees associated with commercial software and technology providers," says Rubin. "Users thrive in the cooperative environment formed, and a passionate, professional, experienced team of Network staff members provide support, consulting, education, training, product development, internet, community-building



and knowledge-sharing services for the arts and cultural organisations who are members.”

Arts and cultural organisations benefit in many ways. “We are a collage of unique artistic venues united by uncommon software,” says Roger Boltz, IT support specialist at the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Not only is the company a technology services provider, the Tessitura Network is a community enabler in which users interact online and in person to share ideas and best practices. “This member-owned cooperative company accomplishes a total congruence of goals and culture between the community-driven company and the member organisations,” says Rubin. “The industry is being remade with a company concept not reliant on traditional funding methods, structural restraints and outside investor demands.” ■

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