PatronBase helps The Wanneroo Repertory get ahead by streamlining ticket sales
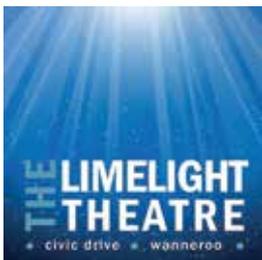
Vibrant community theatre in Western Australia

Established in 1973, the Limelight Theatre is a 169 seat single auditorium with around 250 members, and is situated in the heart of the Wanneroo townsite, 25km north of Perth. It is managed and operated by Wanneroo Repertory Inc., a not-for-profit organisation.

Each year, the Repertory present six major production seasons – two musicals and four dramas which are very well attended and often sell out soon after opening.

Existing arts management system needed an overhaul

The Wanneroo Repertory operated a ticketing system developed in-house. Several business risks were identified and needed to be mitigated to ensure the system was sustainable for the future.

This system was difficult for anyone other than the developer to operate. This became a real risk to the organisation, because the knowledge and expertise resided in only one or two individuals. Also, the system had been slowly developed over a 10-15 year period, the technology was dated and it wasn't keeping pace with changing business needs.

"Fortunately, I'd previously project managed the implementation of one of the arts industry's largest customer relationship management systems so I was familiar with arts management CRM capabilities. That enabled me to see the deficiencies in the existing system," says Nigel Rarp, Information Systems Support, Limelight Theatre (Wanneroo Repertory).

"There were quite a few of us on the team that weren't happy with the way it operated or the fact that we weren't getting any useful information out of it."

Things really came to a head when series of technical problems meant that the Repertory had to fall back on manual ticketing processes. It was obvious that the system was no longer sustainable. *"This was not a situation we could allow to continue,"* says Nigel.

The Wanneroo Repertory went out to the market to look primarily for a ticketing system. But they also wanted to look at other capabilities such as memberships and the potential to offer season tickets. One of the things they weren't getting out of the existing system was detailed reporting.

"It's all very well to put data into a system but it's equally important to be able to get that data out the other end as information which you need in order to manage" says Nigel.

> "PatronBase has enabled us to greatly improve how we manage our theatre. We are doing a lot better than a lot of theatres in WA, so we must be doing something right."

Nigel Rarp,
Information Systems Support, Limelight Theatre (Wanneroo Repertory).

PatronBase ticks all the boxes

Initially doing some research on what systems were available, a sub-committee of the management team came up with 10 potential arts management systems. *"We developed a list of what functions we required and came up with a list of mandatory requirements plus a list of desirables. Out of the 10 initial systems, we got it down to three - PatronBase, TryBooking and Sabo,"* says Nigel.

They then analysed each of those top three systems in depth. That involved contacting the companies and requesting specific information on how these systems could meet the Repertory's needs.

Primarily, the Repertory were looking for system with support for online as well as box office sales, group bookings, memberships, and the ability to get comprehensive reports. Nigel says reporting was a major requirement – they needed to be able to easily pull data, analyse it and use it to support management decisions.

The system had to be integrated with their website, which was also being upgraded at the same time. It had to be intuitive for their online customers, and secure.

"Quite a few of our patrons come in groups from lifestyle villages and retirement services, so it was imperative that the system could also handle group bookings," says Nigel.

They also needed a system that had no fees for the issue of complimentary tickets. *"That was one of the differentiating points as some systems charge per ticket irrespective of whether there is a charge on the ticket itself,"* says Nigel.

Some of the desirables they hoped to find in a system included social media integration, mobile compatibility, donations, and subscriptions.

As a result, PatronBase was selected as the preferred option as it met all the criteria. *"PatronBase ticked all the boxes for us in one way or another,"* says Nigel.

Increased efficiency and better managed sales process

In the past 12 months since PatronBase has been implemented, not only has the ticketing process become a lot more efficient, the reporting functionality have enabled Wanneroo Repertory to manage their sales a lot better.

PatronBase has enabled them to store far more information about the patrons, which has made the Repertory a lot more responsive to patron needs. The Repertory now has access to a wide range of information that improves the sales process; they know who's buying the tickets, what their preferences are, and can look at the reports or screen map of the auditorium to get an instant picture of how the sales are going. *"We can now watch ticket sales and see how they are progressing, and because we can see exactly what's going on we can do special offers to try and fill the theatre if we need to,"* says Nigel.

Patrons also benefit as they are now able to select their own seats online using the seat map. The Repertory is also able to manage the allocation of seats suitable for patrons with accessibility needs.

It has also made the Repertory re-evaluate some of their business practices. For example, by using PatronBase, they now have the ability to handle ticket sales for multiple productions. Previously they only sold tickets for the current production. They can now reveal box office and online sales at different times, or even sell some events online only. The format of tickets has also changed dramatically with the Repertory able to provide information about both the Theatre and each production. *"It was really a case of us looking for a system that incorporates industry best practice, then seeing how it compared to our current business practices. When you start bringing in best practice that has been implemented in lots of other organisations and as a result is built into the software, it forces you to look at the way you are running your own business. It challenges us to rethink the way we do things and this has made us more efficient",* says Nigel.

They love the fact that PatronBase integrates with the existing website so well. *"You start the online booking process on our website then, without realising it, you're in PatronBase. It's so smooth and seamless,"* says Nigel.

Nigel adds that the support they receive from PatronBase is outstanding. *"Most of our support emails get answered quickly by Brad in Melbourne. He's very responsive."* They also love the online guide where you can submit a support ticket and if Brad's not around it can get referred to somebody else within the organisation. This was especially helpful during the initial implementation – along with the training they got in person, and over the phone.

"Even in 12 months we are still coming to grips with a lot of the functionality in PatronBase. We are still learning about it and finding out what it can do. For us, we wouldn't be without PatronBase now. It has changed the whole dynamics of the theatre," says Nigel.

He adds, *"It has enabled us to greatly improve how we manage our theatre. We are doing a lot better than a lot of theatres in WA, so we must be doing something right".*