Event Booking, Back Office Systems Seamlessly Connect for Tulsa Arts Center

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>
> *– Jen Alden, Chief Financial Officer*

TULSA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER TRUST

OVERVIEW

When Tulsa Performing Arts Center operations were spun off from the City of Tulsa, a new event booking and financial management solution was needed. Desiring a solution that was easy to use, CFO Jen Alden chose Acumatica, which also provided seamless integration with VenueOps. The connected solution streamlined operations and automated the critical show and event settlement process.

KEY RESULTS

- Launched with a new integrated solution on time and in just seven weeks
- Eliminated manual data entry into different systems from prior paper-based process, saving hours of wasted time
- Provided automatic event settlement statements with VenueOps integration, shortening the event settlement process by more than 3 weeks
- Gained real-time financial view of the entire operation
- Avoided additional headcount needed with increased transactions, venue management

CHALLENGES

In a move designed to give the Tulsa Performing Arts Center (PAC) more financial stability and flexibility, the City of Tulsa turned the PAC over to the Tulsa Performing Arts Center Trust to run day-to-day operations in mid-2019. It's a move many cities are embracing to separate government operations from arts institutions, which operate quite differently.

The Tulsa PAC has six performance spaces and is the primary venue for the city's performing arts organizations including the Tulsa Opera, Tulsa Ballet, Tulsa Symphony, Theatre Tulsa, the American Theatre Company, Theatre North, Tulsa Town Hall, Chamber Music Tulsa, Choregus Productions, Theatre Pops, Tulsa Project Theatre and Celebrity Attractions.

The PAC opened in 1977, and The Trust was a separate entity that presented programs outside the scope of the facility's regular user groups, and ranged from children's theater to folk and jazz music to Broadway touring productions.

The 40-year-old center has plans underway to renovate and expand the center by 142,000 square feet, essentially doubling the facility.

COMPANY

- **Location:** Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA
- **Industry:** Nonprofit, Performing Arts

NO. OF EMPLOYEES

- Approx. 30 full time employees

PRODUCTS IN USE

- Acumatica Advanced Financial Management with Project Accounting, VenueOps

CUSTOMER SOCIAL SHARING DETAILS

Twitter   Facebook   Instagram

PARTNER DETAILS

mbs PARTNERS

mbsPartners, Los Angeles, California

One month before the official handoff by the City of Tulsa, the Trust hired Jennifer Alden as CFO. Her first task was to deploy a fully integrated financial operations solution and to be up and running in time for the August 21 opening of Hamilton, the Broadway hit that would be the PAC's largest show, bringing in just over $6 million.

"Previously, the accounting was all done by the city and the performing arts center staff had limited knowledge of financials," Alden says. "So, we really didn't have a financial system. The former director built an Access database to record sales and settlements for shows. It was not in any way, shape, or form an accounting system but more like a spreadsheet that stored a list of data."

Because the city handled the center's accounting under its governmental accounting procedures, the information the PAC staff received often came in three weeks or more after a show ended. They still needed to take the raw data and crunch the numbers to find cash balances, profitability, and whether the settlement reconciled with the cash balance.

"There was a lot of paper passing back and forth," Alden explains. "It was very important to have an events system that integrated with our back-office solution going forward".

SOLUTION

Easy-to-Use, Seamless Connection

The PAC general manager was reviewing event tracking and event calendaring systems and was focusing on Event Booking's VenueOps when Alden joined the PAC.

"Event Booking suggested Acumatica to us," Alden says. "Because I knew, at first, I was going to be the only accountant, I needed something efficient, easy-to-use, and that wouldn't take me a lot of time to learn."

Acumatica partner mbsPartners, which had forged a relationship with EventBooking.com, demoed Acumatica's seamless connection to VenueOps and the way information easily flowed through the two systems. They also walked Alden through the various functions and explained Acumatica's adaptable, open API architecture that allows companies with best-in-class solutions to easily connect.

Alden evaluated other software but none provided the connected business and third-party integration to VenueOps that Acumatica offered. "For me, the number one requirement was for a system to integrate with VenueOps," she says.

Because a person without a background in accounting entered accounts payable, "we also needed it to be user friendly…not a large Oracle-based system with so many steps that we couldn't maneuver around easily," Alden adds. She eventually decided on Acumatica's Advanced Financials with Project Accounting.

Fast Implementation

The VenueOps/Acumatica software configuration needed to be live within 30 days. Having a preconfigured solution for convention centers and event management was a great first step. But to pull off such a rapid cutover, it took the combined efforts of mbsPartners, the staff at EventBooking.com and the team at Tulsa PAC. Today, the cloud solution has about 30 users on VenueOps and Acumatica.

"We started working to set up the system from scratch," Alden says. "We didn't have a chart of accounts, didn't have beginning balances, so we started the income statement from scratch."

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Alden had been involved with other ERP implementations that dragged on for six months to more than a year beyond the projected timeline. "This was the first one that was actually done on time and by the deadline we set," she says.

BENEFITS

Connected Business with Real-Time Visibility

VenueOps allows the PAC to schedule and enter all the data for an event, such as rent, equipment rentals, usher and other staff needed as well as venue dates. With six theaters and three other event spaces, the new solution handles the thousands of events the PAC has each year.

Within each space, they can schedule and set up expenses due from the customer.

"At the end of the event, those expenses are automatically pushed to Acumatica's AR module, and if those are the only expenses, we just send the AR bill out," Alden explains. "We don't have to key in the information again. We just push a button and it sends the data over, saving us tons of time - more than you know."

The integration and seamless connection also takes care of the customer data set up in VenueOps, sending it to Acumatica automatically. For instance, what if the Tulsa Ballet puts on 10 events in various PAC theaters? "All the information is pushed automatically to Acumatica," Alden says, "We don't have to go back and figure out which event it is; it's just automatically done."

Real-Time Event Settlement

Alden settles an event within the project that flows and is booked in the GL thanks to a settlement customization in Acumatica.

"Now I don't have to go back and do anything like we would before," she says. "I have the cash balances and the proper accounting instantly instead of three weeks later trying to figure out the accounting. It's a great tool and it works smoothly."

Based on customer feedback so far, the PAC's settlements are much quicker, she adds.

Intuitive, User Friendly Software

Because Acumatica is so easy to use, Alden has not had to add to the accounting staff during the early startup phase. "Our clerk had no previous accounting experience and now she's doing all the AP work," Alden says. "I just hired an accountant and I didn't have to teach her at all; she just got on the system and easily uses it."

Alden anticipates adding more staff as the PAC grows but she won't have to worry about additional user fees because both VenueOps and Acumatica offer consumption-based pricing rather than expensive per-user licensing.

Solid Foundation for Growth

Now that the PAC has the solid financial foundation needed to operate efficiently, Alden is assembling the operational building blocks that will allow the arts center to grow. She is also getting ready for a major fundraising drive for the upcoming building expansion project. She is evaluating ticketing systems, one that will easily integrate with Acumatica. Currently, they use Excel and upload the information, she says.

Later, she will search for a donor application, and it too must easily integrate with Acumatica. To reference a song lyric from Hamilton, "There's a million things I haven't done, just you wait." Acumatica will be there for each step along with way, Alden says.

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