

PRE-PUBLICATION DRAFT

STAGE DIRECTIONS

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We've featured several articles on the computerized theatre ticket industry, including Astor Street (Box Office in a Box) and New Concepts Software (Tick-It! 2K) offering stand-alone PC-based ticketing products that run on local networks (SD - March 1998; November 1999; and October 2000). The ability for theatres to offer ticket sales via the Internet has become increasingly important to attract new customers, and serve the needs of existing ones. Both companies have developed Internet features to help expand the reach of your box office, while enhancing fund-raising and donor management. Dynamic web-based ticketing and integrated patron management tools are essential in order to develop more effective ways to retain subscribers and develop new audiences.

Astor Street's principle products are Box Office in a Box™ and ADAM (Arts Donor Activity Manager) sold separately or in a popular deluxe combo with their Thermal Ticket Printing Package. Astor Street offers an Internet component called "Box to Go," an add-on program to facilitate off-site sales via laptop, and another new product designed specifically for advanced data mining and manipulation. Box Office in a Box offers you the option to sell available tickets via a link from your website for real-time 24/7 online sales.

New Concept's Tick-It! 2K was originally designed to run on your own network using Novell or Windows NT, and their product can put your box office window on Web through their marketing agreement with CyberSEATS™, making it possible for ticket sellers to seamlessly guide the customer's interactive experience during the ticket purchasing process. The patron can view your available inventory in real-time, select his or her seats and purchase them online quickly and easily.

Among the other advantages gained through going out on the Internet with your ticket operations are: 1.) Unlimited maximum number of events; 2.) Seating charts; 3.) Multiple venues (e.g. auditorium, playhouse, black box, studio); 4.) Multiple performances of different shows (e.g. Broadway tour series) and 5.) Multiple outlets (e.g., downtown and branch ticket offices).

There are many companies providing a wide range of ticket and patron management services for large market clients such as stadiums, museums and multi-venue performing arts centers. Among them are giants such as TicketWeb (American Conservatory Theatre, Louvre Museum in Paris), Tickets.com (Smithsonian, Kennedy Center for the Arts), TM Vista (Museum of Modern Art in New York, Guggenheim Museums) and Paciolan (Boston Ballet, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston). Few of them offer reasonably

priced ticketing, fundraising and patron management products for smaller regional, repertory and university theatres.

If your theatre is looking for ways to improve your box office functions, you might consider two additional, moderately priced, ticket and donor management providers, Choice Ticketing and Blackbaud, along with the affordable product lines of Astor Street and New Concepts.

Choice Ticketing is a relative newcomer to the theatre ticketing market, although they have been around since 1991. Choice's software is written in FoxPro, a very powerful PC database language. Choice Ticketing for Windows is a true 32-bit application with an integrated fundraising module, membership and volunteer management functions. This version runs on any Windows desktop (from Windows 95 to Windows 2000) and any PC network system including Windows NT/2000 and Novell.

Choice Ticketing has over 100 clients including colleges and universities, symphonies, opera companies and theatres. The company promotes itself as "the logical choice" for mid-sized performing arts and entertainment organizations. Choice Ticketing's slogan suggests fair pricing for the company's products, as the service includes bundled software, on-site installation and training. The cost of converting names from your current database is included in the price, but you cannot convert seat charts and patron seat history, although you can build the data again using Choice's software.

I got in touch with Choice Ticketing like many prospective clients – by filling out a form on their website. Brian Feldman, VP of Sales and Marketing, contacted me almost immediately. He said, "Choice has carved out a niche as an in-house company. It is not an Internet applications software program (ASP), but a traditional in-the-box office software package. Like New Concepts, we have a partnership with CyberSEATS™ to offer online features."

According to Feldman, Choice Ticketing is aimed at LORT B or C categories. LORT theatres are generally categorized according to certified actual weekly box office gross receipts averaging between \$40,000 and \$105,000. However, according to the LORT website there are also non-revenue criteria: the theatre must be incorporated as a non-profit; each production must be rehearsed a minimum of three weeks; there must be a playing season of at least twelve weeks and the theatre will operate under a LORT-Equity contract.

The cost for a 1-user system is \$5500. The next level is for a 3-user system at \$9500. This includes software, but not hardware or specialty items such as thermal printers and barcode readers. There is an optional integrated credit card module. Common practice is to swipe the credit card and then enter the transaction into your database. Choice lets you enter credit card data just once, and their software will do the rest.

Clients include the Chicago Opera Theatre, Foothills Theatre Company in Worcester, Massachusetts; The New Repertory Theatre in Boston; The Midland Theatre in Ohio; The Portland Stage Company; Theatre Cedar Rapids in Iowa; The Berkshire Theatre Festival, and Brandeis University's Spingold Theatre Center.

Technical support is provided by telephone and Internet 24/7. Choice Ticketing's minimum configuration is listed below. Generally, it is Choice's policy that the client acquires all hardware and networking services, with the exception of ticket printers and credit card swipe devices.

Blackbaud is a leading provider of relationship-building software, services and Web-based solutions to the nonprofit and educational community worldwide. Founded in 1981, Blackbaud is headquartered in Charleston, South Carolina, and has offices in Glasgow, Scotland, and Sydney, Australia. More than 12,000 organizations use Blackbaud products and services.

The company recently acquired the assets of Intelitix, an integrated patron management solution designed for performing arts organizations. The result is the formation of a business unit focusing on technology solutions that assist clients in raising money and selling tickets, an indication of their eagerness to adapt to new business models and embrace new technology to benefit nonprofit organizations. With this acquisition, Blackbaud will also take over support for existing Intelitix customers, addressing immediate needs of clients for additional functionality. Blackbaud offers three product families – The Raiser's Edge®, The Financial Edge™ and Education Administration™, in addition to a wide range of consulting and educational services.

I contacted Chris South, General Manager for Blackbaud. He indicated their reason for purchasing the assets of Intelitix was because “we believe in the integrated fundraising and ticketing concept that the product is built upon. Key Intelitix customers obviously believe in the vision as well because they stayed with the product during some tough times and are very excited to be working with us to enhance forward-looking solutions. We are taking the move into patron management very seriously and have formed a separate division to focus on the product, the market and customers.”

The Intellitix iDonor product has many of the same features used in The Raiser's Edge. The key difference is that iDonor, when combined with iTix, integrates the entire view of the patron in one database. Their plan is to extend iDonor to have the necessary functions for an integrated fundraising application. In addition, another feature the Patron Management solution provides is integrated Web capability (iWeb, iXML) for promoting and selling tickets over the Internet.

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Minimum System Requirements for Choice Ticketing Software:

The following specifications represent the minimum requirements to run the system effectively on a Novell network. Please note that Memory (RAM) should be doubled to run effectively on a Windows NT or Windows 2000 network.

Network File Server

- Pentium 400Mhz CPU
- 64 MB Memory
- 500 MB Hard Drive
- SVGA Monitor
- 101 Keyboard/Mouse
- 3.5" Floppy Drive and CD-ROM Drive
- 10/100 MBit Network Card
- System for Full Server Backup (Tape or CD)
- Windows NT/2000 Server or Novell NetWare

Credit Card Server

- 486 33Mhz CPU
- 16 MB Memory
- 120 MB Hard Drive
- SVGA Monitor
- 101 Keyboard/Mouse

- 3.5" Floppy Drive and CD-Rom Drive
- 10/100 MBit Network Card
- 28.8 Modem
- Windows 95/98/ME/NT/2000

Workstation

- Pentium 166Mhz CPU
- 32 MB Memory
- 200 MB Hard Drive
- SVGA Monitor
- 101 Keyboard/Mouse
- 3.5" Floppy Drive and CD-Rom Drive
- 10/100 MBit Network Card
- Windows 95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP

Peripheral and Optional Items

Report Printer (Laser or InkJet)

High Speed Broadband Connection or 56K Modem for Support

PC Anywhere 9.2 for Support

Patrick M. Finelli is Professor of Theatre at the University of South Florida where he teaches in a traditional classroom and on the World Wide Web. He holds the Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. His academic and professional performing arts experience spans a wide variety of stage and arena productions, including drama, dance, opera, symphony, jazz, summer stock, television, film and political debates. He has served as editor and author of textbooks, CD-ROMs and over 300 articles and software reviews. He is the managing partner of Finelli/Lee Theatre Consultants and is the founder of the Theatre Arts website, connectedcourseware.com. You may contact him at pmf@pfweb.com