

MALTHOUSE THEATRE

Background

Situated in the heart of Melbourne's Southbank district, The Coopers Malthouse is one of the city's most vibrant centres for the theatrical arts. The building – originally a brewery, built in 1892 – was donated by Carlton and United Breweries to the state government in 1986, with the aim of providing a home for the creation and presentation of contemporary Australian theatre. The Malthouse opened in 1990 and was renamed in 2013 following the signing of a major partnership with Coopers.

The Malthouse contains three theatres as well as two rehearsal studios, meeting rooms, a bar and a café. It is home to a resident company, the Malthouse Theatre, which operates the building, and plays host to many visiting dance and theatre companies throughout the year. It is also a popular venue for conferences, product launches and corporate events – an exciting alternative to more conventional facilities and reception centres.

In 2012, The Malthouse decided to automate its venue booking process in order to streamline administration and make it more efficient. Although the organisation was not initially considering a comprehensive CAFM platform, it soon became clear that there would be long-term benefits in purchasing a system that integrated facilities booking with asset management.

"Malthouse Theatre is a company that produces its own work in a venue owned by the state government," explains building manager Peter Mandersloot. "Effectively, they also hire it out to other clients, and we manage and maintain it on their behalf." When Peter arrived at the theatre, it was still using an Excel spreadsheet to manage facilities bookings. "It was nice and they were using it well but I was well aware of the benefits of a data capturing system that could combine venue bookings with inventory management, and provide much deeper management information," he says. "We started with a clean sheet and looked at the options available."



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FSI's Concept Evolution™ quickly emerged as the front runner. Peter says that while the priority was to find a system that could crunch facilities booking data, the potential for adding asset management to a platform that was easy to set up, flexible and simple to manage was obvious.

"Concept™ came out on top in all our considerations," he says. "None of the other booking systems we looked at offered the same degree of functionality. It provided everything that all the others could, but I wanted to run things a bit differently – and our decision came down to the sheer flexibility of the product."

Challenge

The system was implemented in May 2012 and the theatre started using it in earnest for venue bookings in June. Peter says that this side of the project proceeded smoothly, with very few teething problems. The first time it was used to book in an external company proved a useful learning curve and allowed the theatre to request some tweaks and refinements to the system.

Using Concept™ to automate asset management is a second phase, mainly because of the data entry challenge.

"It is a long-term process because we are just starting to use it and I'm still getting my head around it," he says. "But having got to grips with the booking module so quickly, you soon get a feeling for the way the system runs – and for the benefits that come through almost immediately."

Benefits

The system has become a key point of communication for the organisation. Peter says the beauty of Concept™ lies in its ease of use.

"The reporting tool is one of the best things," he says. "I was given a password at the back end, which allows me to customise reports myself. Something like changing the sponsorship logo is quick and easy – and that would be unheard of with other booking systems. You'd have to call them up, request the changes, do a lot of to-ing and fro-ing – and probably pay for the consultancy! That simply doesn't apply with Concept™"

"You always get little issues with a new system but FSI and Connexion (FSI's delivery partner) has always been there to answer our questions. They respond straight away, are open to discussion and different views, and are really good with the tricky technical detail."

The system has had a positive impact on the day-to-day running of the operation. Peter's colleagues can generate their own reports, make sure venue set-ups are correct and add any relevant information.

"I've encouraged them to use it as the first point of information, so everyone is aware of what it can provide and they are as self-sufficient as possible when it comes to their reporting requirements – although the system is also very secure. Only colleagues with the right level of authority can log in," he says. "One important system development was required to replicate the visibility of the old spreadsheet. We have to be able to see two or three months at a time when we're booking productions, so we had to generate a calendar that pulls the information out of Concept™."

The ability to see the real-time status of any bookings throughout the lifecycle, from the initial pencilled dates to signed contracts and confirmation, has been a revelation. Scheduling the arrival and departure of visiting companies or clients, with all their equipment and asset-hiring requirements – the 'bump in and out' in theatre-speak – is easy and, thanks to colour-coded reporting, can be seen at a glance.

"Quite simply, we've got a lot more detail," says Peter. "We are saving time throughout the booking process. And there are financial benefits. It's wiped out double booking. We can allocate inventory to a room, and the data collection is complete. We can see what was done last year, compare and contrast cost and efficiency, and report accordingly."

"If you can see that you made x-amount of dollars from hiring out a particular piece of equipment, you can use that information to justify purchasing decisions about two or three new items, and to make decisions about repair and maintenance. I know that our 20 radio mics made us \$40,000 from hire last year. We had no way of reporting that before. There's just no comparison with our old spreadsheet – implementing Concept™ has been a fantastic investment."

What next?

Peter aims to have the asset management module fully populated and up and running within the next 12 months. "It's still early days, although I can already see the potential benefits," he says. "I haven't started entering the assets yet because I need to make sure that all the data is correct to begin with. There is nothing worse than a database system containing incorrectly-imported data!"

"But we're very much set in the direction I want to take Concept™. At the end of the day, we're using it to manage and operate state assets, and the cost-saving implications are considerable. It will help us to make better decisions about units at different stages in their lifecycle – and once they are documented and the information is formatted, it will be available as a constant resource."

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