

ENTERTAINMENT SOLUTIONS SUCCESS STORY

Solar delivers efficient and flexible telecoms and IT system

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Theatre Manager,
Chichester Festival Theatre

Chichester Festival Theatre (CFT) is a very well-known theatre in Chichester, West Sussex, which produces its own work during the world famous Festival Season and then receives touring work during the autumn and spring period.

The business is situated in Oaklands Park and comprises the Festival Theatre, Minerva Theatre, Administration offices and the Steven Pimlott Education and Rehearsal Building. There are approximately 80 employees currently using the system at their busiest times.

The business climate in the theatre sector is currently competitive with some regional theatres having grants cut by the Arts Council resulting in closure. CFT is funded by the Arts Council and is still showing growth year on year, a situation which has continued since 2006. This is a testament to Jonathan Church their Artistic Director and Alan Finch their Executive Director who took over in the latter part of 2005 and put on their first festival in 2006.

However, CFT can never be complacent in this climate and overheads are being constantly challenged and reduced where possible while standards are being raised. They need to continue to offer exciting work every year and to be sure that their Box Office can cope efficiently with the increased number of bookings. This is vital if CFT are to retain their customers and also to grow their audience in the future.

It is really important that customers have a good experience from the moment they book to their arrival at the theatre, and watch a first class performance. CFT believes it is critical that they have good telecoms and IT systems.

The last time CFT changed their telephone system was approximately 20 years ago when BT Meridian was put in. They then relied on simple periodic upgrades because it was a cheaper solution and the theatre was not showing such dramatic growth.

The driver for change was when the Theatre Manager Janet Bakose, was given responsibility for the management of phones at the theatre approximately 5 years ago. She suddenly had to understand how a 20 year old system worked and this proved a huge never-ending mystery! The major drawbacks were the lack of reporting in the Box Office and the lack of flexibility with the old system. There was no auto-attendant menu in place and to make simple changes meant using a TTY DOS based computer which was totally user unfriendly. The costs to maintain such an old system were enormous and over 20 years of things having been added with no trail to discover if they were still in use or not it was proving a real headache!

CHALLENGES:

- 20 year old BT Meridian telephone system.
- Lack of reporting functionalities and flexibility.
- No auto-attendant in place.
- Administration was complex and user unfriendly.
- High costs for maintaining an EOL system.

SOLUTION:

- A ShoreTel Unified Communications System that would support Chichester Festival Theatre through their year on year growth.

BENEFITS:

- The ability to cope and deal efficiently with increased bookings.
- The flexibility to make regular system changes.
- Greater customer satisfaction achieved.
- Easy intuitive system for staff to use.

**CHICHESTER
FESTIVAL
THEATRE**

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It was through a personal recommendation that Janet contacted Solar, as they had installed a system at Plymouth Theatre Royal. In 2006, Simon Edwards, Solar Senior Account Manager, visited Janet and has been involved with the project since that time. CFT wanted a new digital system which would be more cost effective and easier to manage. They contacted two other local companies and did touch on VOIP based systems with all three companies but they were not convinced it was the right choice at the time as it was seen as a relatively new technology. At the time, CFT's preferred system was Avaya Office and Solar were clearly the 'partner of choice'.

The project was put on hold whilst the new Steven Pimlott Education and Rehearsal Building was built, a process that began in January 2008 and was completed in October 2008. During this time Simon Edwards kept in touch and CFT continued to revisit the project, always confident that it would happen they were just unsure of when. As things moved forward in the telecoms industry they became aware of the excellent feedback concerning the Shoretel system and again it was recommended by Plymouth Theatre Royal.

In late 2010 it became apparent that the project would recommence and Janet met with Simon and for comparison with BT who quoted to upgrade the existing system. CFT chose Solar because of their flexible approach, dogged determination and continuity of staff throughout the years. CFT recognised that Shoretel was the market leader and would give them the system they wanted which could grow with them over the years.

The decision to go ahead was given in December 2010 and the project was to be completed by mid-February. The heavy snow in the December caused the project to be delayed and rather than press on to meet the deadline CFT chose to delay and go for install in March once the priority booking period had passed. This was a good decision and the install was smooth and superbly managed by David Alderman, IP Convergence Consultant, who again had been involved since 2006. The feedback from their IT Consultant who worked with David was excellent and the staff feedback concerning the system was also great. The 2.5 days on site were straightforward and Solar's knowledge was first class exceeding Janet's expectations.

The system has enabled CFT to provide a better service for their customers with a more efficient, flexible system. All of their staff find the ShoreTel 'Communicator' a brilliant computer based telephony tool and their Box Office are now able to handle more calls as the auto attendant filters out calls for other departments. This situation will continue to improve as CFT intend to introduce more upgrades such as a link with, Enta, (their Box Office system) which will allow caller recognition which will be a great tool for them.

The most compelling reason for choosing Solar was the personal recommendation and the fact that the same people who Janet met in 2006 were still involved in 2010 when they seriously began to revisit the project. This gave Janet confidence that once installed there would be back up and continuity in place.

Janet says *“For our employees the ‘ShoreTel Communicator is fantastic and the information that it provides re calls missed etc. is invaluable. The link with ‘Outlook Contacts’ is brilliant and very quick and easy to use. The system is very intuitive; we had 90 mins training for all our staff and little more for our Stage Door because they are less used to dealing with IT.”*

Janet and James Morgan, the Box Office Manager, have been trained in managing the system and find it relatively easy to use. If there is a problem they are able to make use of Solar Support which provides an efficient and quick service and Janet has found all the team very helpful.

"We are a relatively small site and David was the right person to work well with our staff."

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At this early stage of implementation it is difficult to comment on financial improvements but Janet is confident that when all the transfer of lines is complete she will see good savings. Operationally, Janet finally has knowledge of the phone system and what it can do and can add people easily. More people can have direct dial and can access their voice mail remotely. The voice mail system can be tailored to meet a variety of situations and their Stage Door/Switch Board can see exactly who is in, on a call or out of the office. It provides a better service for customers and is an easy, intuitive system for staff to use.

CFT are very happy with the level of service provided by Solar and certainly Janet's expectations were exceeded with the smooth install. Janet says:

"We are a relatively small site and David was the right person to work well with our staff."

Since the install any queries have been managed quickly and efficiently. A network failure occurred within the first 3 months due to a fault with a power supply. Solar were able to diagnose the problem remotely and visited site with replacement parts and had us back up and running again within 6 hours.

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ABOUT SOLAR COMMUNICATIONS LTD

Established in 1988, Solar Communications is an award winning trusted communications partner for SME and enterprise businesses throughout the UK and Europe. With offices in Chippenham and London, Solar Communications has been "ShoreTel European Partner of the Year" for the past four years and is first and only European Partner to join the "ShoreTel Circle of Excellence."

Solar's knowledge and experience allows bespoke solutions tailored to business requirements that enable customers to improve productivity, reduce costs and increase profitability. Solar has a reputation for excellent customer support consistently scoring over 97% Customer satisfaction through independent analysis. For more information, visit solar.co.uk

ShoreTel European Partner of the Year 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011

Outstanding Customer Service Award 2009, 2010 and 2011

ShoreTel Circle of Excellence 2010 and 2011



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