



Birmingham Arts Information Technology (BAIT)

Major Art venues turn to Tek Response

The Client

Formed over seven years ago, Birmingham Arts Information Technology (BAIT), was set up as a not-for-profit internal IT consultancy by and for a city-wide network of Arts venues across Birmingham.

BAIT on behalf of various venues throughout Birmingham, such as parent company Audiences Central, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Hippodrome, Birmingham Royal Ballet and Birmingham City Council - designed, implemented and provided ongoing maintenance and support of the Birmingham Arts Network (BAN) - a city-wide network that centrally hosted venues IT BackOffice Services such as Microsoft Exchange email and, most prominently, a centralised ticketing system called Enta, supplied by a vendor called Galathea. BAIT provided 1st, 2nd and 3rd line BackOffice and Enta support, and would be heavily involved in providing the ticketing for major events, such as StreetICE, the outdoor ice rink set up in Birmingham's Centenary Square over the festive period.

The Journey

The contract for the Enta ticketing system was due to expire on the 31st March 2008, with a view to all parties simply renewing at this time.

About 18 months prior to the contract expiry date, BAIT became aware that several of the larger venues involved, had decided that they would implement their own independent ticketing systems at the end of the contract, as the centralised nature of the existing system meant that all venues had to work with the same system as each other, and thus move at the same pace in terms of ongoing development.

All this meant that from the 1st April 2008, BAIT was due to lose half of its existing income. Being not-for-profit, it was already break even, so the situation placed BAIT and its entire staff in clear jeopardy - not to mention the future IT needs of the venues remaining.

In March 2007 the BAIT board invited a number of local companies to address the issue of keeping the BAIT service going after the contract expiry. This was no ordinary IT maintenance task, but instead was a huge strategic business consultancy challenge.

Having heard what each of the companies had to say, the BAIT board selected Tek Response to steady the ship, because in addition to demonstrating that they were qualified to deliver the best solution, they stood out clearly as the organisation that actually cared. They weren't greedy and had the right calibre of business acumen to help.

"Having held discussions with a number of consultancies, BAIT ultimately chose to entrust Tek Response with the responsibility of maintaining our services to the arts venue community throughout Birmingham.

The decision was based on the fact that not only were they able to offer knowledge and experience in IT that is second to none, but also for the fact that they actually cared. The commercial expertise and all round business acumen that Tek Response Director Dave Graesser was able to afford to us in taking on the temporary role as CEO, not only ensured that our service continued efficiently, but also allowed our key staff to continue in their roles, retaining a number of clients going forwards.

The results speak for themselves and I'm sure that all parties would agree that our decision has been fully vindicated by a job well done." Jackie Booth, BAIT Board Chair



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The Challenge

As if the challenges they faced weren't enough, the CEO of BAIT had left in January of 2007, thus leaving the board without any real commercial or strategic day-to-day leadership.

Dave Graesser of Tek Response knew the immense size of the task, but with his extensive knowledge and experience of IT, as well as that of running a business, he offered to personally steer the ship as CEO on an 8 month contract from August 2007 to March 2008.

In this capacity, he would be responsible for the management of all of the staff within BAIT and BAN, as well as maintaining the service delivery to all of the contracted venues.

There were two sides to the coin - first of all Tek Response needed to create a more stable environment to allow business as usual to continue, and prevent staff flooding out the door, and secondly to solve the imminent issues that everyone was aware of. They needed to develop a new business model that would allow the functions and services currently being provided through BAIT and BAN to be absorbed elsewhere, thus allowing them to continue from April 2008. All of this also involved a great deal of financial planning, and a lot of work out of Graesser's own time.

On the other side of the coin, there was a lot of potential jeopardy being faced by the venues that were not seeking to move away from the Enta ticketing system. Their IT infrastructures, Box Office ticketing systems and ticketing web sales were heavily tied in to the centralised Birmingham Arts Network, and as such they were completely reliant on it.

Tek Response needed to find a way to make these venues self-dependent from a back office point of view, to ensure that everyday functions like printing, email and file management all worked smoothly and independently from other venues.

From a ticketing perspective, Tek Response would also have to find a manageable and affordable way to allow the remaining venues to move from the ticketing solution that was centralised on the BAN, over to an independent alternative.

Most of these venues, having relied on the centralised Birmingham Arts Network for a long time, were dependant on it for either their back end IT needs, their ticketing, or both. Each different venue had a different level of reliance on the service or even the hardware provided by the BAN, but across the board, all of their systems spoke directly to those on the BAN in daily operations.

Solution

In order to create the stable working environment required, Graesser set about creating a vision for the future, to consider the needs of the BAIT's own staff, and the venues they were servicing. Tek Response presented their vision, and formed a team from the loyal remainder of staff, offering to employ them as Tek Response staff who would work in the same capacity, continuing to service the venues in the same way after March 2008. In addition, Tek Response hired extra staff to work in the same capacity, to ensure that the venues would be properly serviced.

From a financial perspective, things were run in a far more commercial way - good business sense is one of the key things that allowed continuity in both the short and the long term.



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Tek Response set about assessing the back office and ticketing needs of each of the respective venues, migrating their data over to their prospective individual networks. In a couple of cases, they found that the hardware in place was fairly old and outdated, and replaced it accordingly, in agreement with the venues.

In the case of Audiences Central, Tek Response migrated them to Tek's hosted and Managed Server platform in a purpose built, physically and environmentally secure data centre - saving Audiences Central large capital outlay for the hardware, whilst also vastly improving the service available to them, which could now be securely accessed by staff both internally and remotely, from anywhere they required. In addition all of their day-to-day support requirements were covered by Tek Response.

For the venues that were happy to continue using Enta, Tek Response worked closely with Galathea, to move each of the venues over to a hosted version of the service, to which they could independently prescribe. Again, this was all Project Managed by Tek Response, who provided support from the end of March onwards.

The Results

In January 2008, Tek Response delivered two major server migration projects, to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. In addition, during January, Tek Response migrated Audiences Central to their hosted and managed server/Windows desktop solution.

They managed to seamlessly transfer their data and set up their server based networks all over a weekend, on time and without any major issues - making for a number of happy customers:

"In January 2008 Tek Response undertook a project to upgrade our server systems. This project was delivered on time, on budget and with minimal disruption to the operation of our IT systems. The minor teething problems which arose were all resolved swiftly and, following the project, our IT systems are now more efficient and robust than was previously the case. I am happy to recommend Tek Systems to any prospective client." **Alistair Scott, Director of Finance at the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO)**

From early 2008, a number of key Birmingham Arts venues and Birmingham City Council signed up to typically 3 year support contracts with Tek Response:

"Tek Response is an organisation that came to the timely take over of our technical support and Help Desk function in peril. It is never easy taking over mid stream but Tek Response management, under Dave Graesser, quickly assessed the needs of the client base and delivered a seamless solution that enabled the clients to continue their business operation effectively. Staff management has been excellent, ensuring loss of key skilled staff is negligible." **Sheila Clarke from Birmingham City Council (BCC)**

In choosing Tek Response as both their IT and Business consultant, BAIT made a decision that allowed their staff to remain in work, continuing to provide the high levels of service that the remaining venues had come to expect.

Tek Response were able to view and discuss the key business requirements and goals of BAIT, assess their IT strategy and through their vast experience, make them fit together and deliver the best possible solution with the minimum of fuss.



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As a result, from April 2008 the functions and services of BAIT are now delivered wholly through Tek Response, who have ensured continuity for both the original team from BAIT and the venues they service. Based on the high quality of service and continuity provided by Tek Response, many of the original venues have signed up on support contracts of three years or more, safe in the knowledge that they are in good hands;

“Our organisation is currently operating within a change environment with strict time constraints. Tek Response is effectively project managing our transition. I look forward to using the services of Tek Response for the foreseeable future.” Shiela Clarke (BCC)

“From April 2008 we will be using Tek Response to support all of the Company’s IT systems and we look forward to working with them for many years to come”. Alistair Scott, Director of Finance at the CBSO