



At a glance

Organisation

Sydney Opera House

Industry

Arts

Location

Sydney

Solutions

INFOR BI- business intelligence and performance management solution

Objective

Bring greater consistency and robustness to business reporting and processes, and reduce risk by removing dependence on spreadsheets for management of large, complex projects and events.

Challenges

- The difficulty of consolidating several hundred spreadsheets during budgeting and forecasting process
- Complex production planning process managed by 150 separate workbooks
- Inability for multiple users to access either system at one time

- The difficulty of maintaining version control, accuracy and consistency of spreadsheets
- The imperative to manage the high financial risk of staging productions
- Dynamic nature of planning not adequately supported by standard annual budgeting and planning process.

Benefits

- A single, reliable and trusted source of real time data
- Introduction of improved, consistent processes supported
- Time savings in managing, maintaining and running process

INFOR BI DELIVERS A VIRTUOSO PERFORMANCE FOR SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

Sydney Opera House is a global icon, the most internationally recognised symbol of Australia and one of the great buildings of the world. Sydney Opera House attracts an estimated 8.2 million visitors to the site each year. Some 1.2 million people attend performances and over 328,000 people take a guided tour to explore the magic inside one of the most recognised buildings in the world.

Sydney Opera House is one of the busiest performing arts centres in the world, with some 2,500 events and performances each year. With seven primary venues: the Concert Hall, Joan

Sutherland Theatre, Drama Theatre, Playhouse, the Studio, Forecourt and Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House offers audiences an opportunity to experience the best of every performing art form.

Sydney Opera House is home to resident companies including Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Opera Australia, Sydney Theatre Company and the Australian Ballet as well as hosting many other important Australian and international companies and artists. Sydney Opera House has also increased the profile and reach through its own programs, with more than 800 performances produced this year offering an eclectic mix of artistic and cultural activities for all ages from the educational through to the experimental. Aside from its performance spaces, Sydney Opera House offers a range of additional facilities such as cafes, restaurants, bars, a recording studio and retail outlets.



MANAGEMENT BY SPREADSHEET

For many years, Sydney Opera House's financial, operational and management reporting was carried out using Excel spreadsheets. The budget and forecasting process alone involved several hundred spreadsheets. This led to major effort to effectively manage consistency, accuracy and version control. There was also significant manual review and cross checking to identify and correct accidental formulae changes.

Joanne Daffron, Manager, Planning & Analysis at the Opera House admits, "Consolidation was a particularly challenging and time consuming issue for us."

Spreadsheets were also being used to help manage a variety of planning and forecasting processes across the organisation. One of the best examples of this was ETHEL, a complex group of 150 workbooks that, when linked together, formed a Program Book that was used to manage the life cycle of "Sydney Opera House Presents" productions. The spreadsheets covered planning and reporting across venues, revenue plans, marketing costs, ticket prices and more.

With so many inputs, ETHEL was becoming unstable. Worse, each spreadsheet could only be accessed by one person at a time. Kim Bluett, Finance & Business Manager, says, "It was increasingly temperamental, crashing so often that stability was a real issue, and reporting was incredibly time consuming."

Daffron adds, "We'd talked about replacing spreadsheets for years and it was those two monsters, the budget and forecasting system and ETHEL, that were driving the need."

Eventually an upgrade to the organisation's financial management software (SunSystems) provided the impetus to address the problems. A tender was conducted and Professional Advantage appointed to assist with implementing an Infor BI business intelligence (BI) solution.

FOCUS LEADS TO FAST RESULTS

The first project to be developed using the BI platform was a new budgeting and forecasting system. Workshops with users to discuss the design of the solution began in September 2013. Four months later, in January 2014, the system went live, ready for the FY15-18 budget cycle.

Bluett says the fast implementation was possible because the project team remained tightly focused. "Along the way, we identified ways the functionality of the software could be used more broadly in the future but we knew it was important not to get side-tracked by the opportunities the solution provided. There were so many opportunities that there was a high risk

of scope creep, so we had to stay focused on getting the key functionality in place before looking at how it could be expanded in the longer term."

Daffron notes, "It was a good project with which to start our change process. It involved a relatively small group of users. There wasn't a lot of change management required. We knew we could get it up and running with a minimum of nervousness. And it was a good proving ground before moving onto the Program Book implementation. At the end of it, we had a structured system that gave consistent, reliable results without any danger of crashing on consolidation."

AN AGILE BUILD

The next project was the big one – replacement of ETHEL with a new Program Book to budget and track shows.

"The Program Book is a huge part of our business," Bluett states. "It represents a significant proportion of our turnover and is the highest risk portion of our business. It's also our most dynamic business stream. Closely monitoring results and forecasts is key. What we'd had in the past was limited, almost non-existent integration with the general ledger, so we really relied on manual processes to bring general ledger data into those ETHEL forecasts. This meant the forecasts were not necessarily comprehensive nor were they always up to date."

Under Professional Advantage's guidance the project team adopted an agile approach to the development. Bluett explains, "This was a much more complex process because of all the data sources that existed and the fact our end users were from outside the finance space. We have marketers and producers using this system, all with slightly different needs revolving around quite complex deals."

To ensure success, it was essential to consider input from all users and that meant involving them right from the beginning.

"A key part of the Professional Advantage approach was their iterative build. People would provide input and within the first stages of solution development, they could see something concrete. They could see how the development was going and how it would work,"





INTRODUCING PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Daffron believes one of the most valuable aspects of the project was the process improvement facilitated by Professional Advantage. "Their approach wasn't about replicating Excel spreadsheets in Infor BI. They helped us take a step back to look at the processes involved to see if any improvements could be made. We didn't look to slavishly replicate what we had," she says.

The ETHEL development took three months to complete. It was, Bluett admits, "an outrageously tight time frame. It was an extraordinarily intense period, but we did it."

The success of the budgeting and forecasting system, and the program book have since led to additional BI projects. To date, Sydney Opera House has used Infor BI to create month end management account reporting, broader expenditure tracking systems and procurement analytics.

A MORE EFFICIENT WAY

The replacement of spreadsheets with a BI platform has delivered stakeholders with new efficiencies around time spent managing, maintaining and running processes.

A single quality source of the truth, improved master data and data integrity have given Opera House management and staff greater confidence in budgets and reports. Forecasts are available to all users in real time. Reporting limitations over multiple financial years have been removed, and finance staff have more time to spend on value-add activities.

The use of consistent processes has improved the commercial management of the business and is enabling the organisation to build its core competencies and skills. And the improvements are continuing, with new enhancements continually being identified.

"As with all projects, the work doesn't just stop when you go live," Daffron states. "These developments are organic. There are always tweaks and ideas for improvement."

The ease of use of Infor BI has enabled Opera House Staff to take internal ownership over the creation of new reports. Where the requirements are more complex, Professional Advantage continues to provide guidance and skilled consultants ready to take control of development.

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"We've still got heaps of ideas for BI in the future. Right now we're looking at cash flow and balance sheet models. We're also looking at setting up expenditure trackers for other parts of the business. Over time, the plan is to get as many parts of the business as possible away from Excel and onto Infor BI," Daffron concludes.





Enabling *High Performance* Workplaces

About Professional Advantage

Professional Advantage is one of Australia's most awarded solutions providers, with over 20 years experience in helping organisations improve their business systems through industry leading software solutions. Our 250-strong team in 6 offices across Australia and internationally has successfully worked with over 1000 organisations.

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