

Case study

Edinburgh International Festival



Edinburgh International Festival is an annual performing arts celebration in Scotland's capital during August, showcasing high-quality dance, opera, music and theatre from around the world.

The challenge

Move on from an inflexible on-premises system and get better reporting

Edinburgh International Festival – the city's world-famous celebration of music, theatre, opera and dance – takes place over three weeks each August, using around eight venues for approximately 200 events. It employs 50 core staff year-round, rising to around 200 in the summer.

The festival has an annual turnover of around £12m-£13m, approximately three-quarters of which is spent in three months of the year. The day-to-day demands on the finance system include bank transactions, purchase orders and invoicing. Grant funding comes in large lumps, while ticket sales are handled in a separate system and added to the journal at month-end.

A new Director of Finance and Commercial, Susan McIntosh, joined just before lockdown and was keen to move the organisation on from Sage 200, its legacy finance system. "Sage 200 is so inflexible and cumbersome to use," says Andrew Brownlie, Head of Finance. "We wanted to change to something where the reporting could be so much more customisable and flexible and easy to use. And we wanted better project reporting around our productions, to try and report on costs a bit better."

The solution

Team saves time and delivers real-time information

The team looked at all the high-profile products, including NetSuite ("too complex and very expensive"), Dynamics, Intacct (both also "quite expensive" with functionality that didn't impress) and Access before deciding upon iplicit.

iplicit scored for its simplicity and flexibility and the fact that it was designed for the cloud, whereas Access "felt very much like their previous Access server product that has just been refreshed and moved to the cloud", says Andrew.

Previous system: Sage 200



1

Real-time data

The biggest challenge for the finance team before was to make valuable information available early. Most parts of the organisation spend none of their budget until the summer. iplicit now gives them that real-time view.

4

Cloud security

The festival no longer has to maintain “old servers in the basement that are fast approaching the end of their operational life”, while the move to the cloud has made remote access much easier and no longer requires using a temperamental remote desktop connection.

2

Project reporting

The finance team can see the spending associated with each production in the festival. “We can pull that information out early enough now to be usable. Otherwise, when everyone’s so frantic trying to deliver the festival, getting them to pay any attention to it is difficult,” says Andrew. “At the point when you’re spending most of the money, that’s when you need more accurate, up-to-date financial reporting, which is what iplicit now gives us. Budget holders can see their expenditure live in the system.”

5

Expense management

The easy importing of credit card data from RBS has saved the organisation’s credit card holders time every month on submitting expenses. Instead of requiring people to file claims manually, the system generates a draft claim to which they add receipts. The ease of the process was an early way to show people how much time could be saved across the organisation with the new system.

3

Time-saving automation

iplicit’s automation features alone save around two days’ worth of work each month. Payment runs can be done in a fraction of the time they took previously, while bank reconciliation is “phenomenally easier and quicker”, says Andrew.

6

Easier audit

The system saved time again at year-end and at audit time. Data transferred from Sage was available to auditors’ satisfaction. And with invoices and workflows all stored in iplicit, auditors could be given access to inspect anything they needed to see and to raise reports.



The outcome

Better data informs programming decisions for future years

The festival needs to be able to tell funders and stakeholders how much of its spending goes into Edinburgh’s economy, how much to Scotland’s and how much to the wider UK and the rest of the world. This would previously have involved a laborious trawl through Sage but now can be done easily.

When the organisation reviews a festival after it is over, iplicit makes it easier to see how each event and venue performed. “We pull out some of that information and use it to try and inform some of the programming decisions for the next year,” says Andrew.

“We can have a coherent conversation about it, using numbers that we are confident in. That will really help us in years going forward as we build up that history. That was one of the key reasons for the switch to iplicit.”

“We’ve been happy to recommend iplicit to other people who are looking at it. I’m more than happy to say that I think iplicit is a good option that they should be considering.”

