



photo by Zane B. Williams



www.playinthewoods.org

at-a-glance

- ♦ American Players Theatre needed to replace its financial and ticketing software.
- ♦ They were wasting time and limited resources entering constituent information in two places and pulling reports from two disparate systems and had a cumbersome and time-consuming online ticketing process.
- ♦ They implemented Blackbaud's Arts and Cultural Solution, which integrated all their software, streamlined their operations, and improved service to patrons.
- ♦ Online sales increased by a half million dollars, staff work more efficiently, and patrons are happier than ever.

Blackbaud software and services used by American Players Theatre:

- ♦ **The Raiser's Edge®**
- ♦ **The Financial Edge™**
- ♦ **The Patron Edge®**
- ♦ **The Patron Edge™ Online**

American Players Theatre Boosts Online Ticket Sales, Improves Service, and Streamlines Operations with Blackbaud's Arts & Cultural Solution™

Every year, more than 100,000 theatergoers travel from all over the world to American Players Theatre in Spring Green, Wisconsin to experience outdoor Shakespearean performances. In addition to the first-class work on stage, the Theater's unique draw is its picturesque, rural setting just off the Wisconsin River. Founded in 1979, the Theatre has grown in popularity and is now among the most popular outdoor classical theaters in the country.

the challenge

American Players Theatre has used **The Raiser's Edge®** to manage its fundraising program since 1997. When Dale Manning was hired as information systems manager, it was clear to him that the Theatre needed to replace its third party financial solution, Peachtree®, by Sage, in order to centralize data entry and minimize errors. The Theatre's staff was entering constituent information in two places and pulling reports from two disparate systems, wasting time and limited resources.

Shortly after, the Theatre's ticketing package was acquired by tickets.com®. The resulting offering included many required options that didn't meet the Theatre's unique needs. Ticketing data analysis was crucial for the Theatre, but without a centralized data source, it was a daunting task. Manning needed to find a more efficient and accurate way to pull reports and research ticketing trends.

The Theatre's box office needed a robust solution that was capable of efficiently handling more than 115 performances in a little over four months. In order to better serve patrons, they were also looking for an online component that would enable choose-your-own-seat ticketing. "Our previous way of selling tickets online was through a Web form. Our staff would have to print it, manually enter it into their system and reserve whatever seats were available," Manning said. Due to the cumbersome process for online ticketing, those were often the last orders fulfilled. "I knew we had to do better," he said.

the solution

After researching many options, the American Players Theatre found that **The Financial Edge™** and **The Patron Edge®** offered just what they were looking for. The products could do very well



photo provided by American Players Theatre

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as standalone solutions, but the fact that data could easily be shared sealed the deal. “Based on our good relations with Blackbaud already, it was really a slam dunk for me,” Manning said. “I couldn’t even think about looking anywhere else.”

Integrating **The Raiser’s Edge®** and **The Patron Edge®** enabled the Theatre to see not only donor history, but also ticketing history. According to Manning, the complete solution benefits both development and box office staff by providing an opportunity to make more intelligent choices on how they approach donors and serve patrons.

“If development officers are looking for new donors and they see that a person has attended five shows, and brought 10 people with them each time, chances are good that we have a good prospect,” Manning said. “In the same way, when the ticket office staff can see that a particular ticket buyer gives at a certain level, they can offer the appropriate benefits — such as preferred seats — that go along with that giving level.”

the results

The integrated solution has provided the Theatre with the ability to seamlessly share information between offices and to better serve patrons. A key benefit, Manning says, is the inherent increase in data integrity — entering constituent information into just one system lessens the possibility of human error.

“The financial staff likes it because they don’t have to re-enter everything; the data they need shows up on the reports without the extra steps,” Manning said. “It helps us save money in the long run by minimizing the amount of training and the knowledge that people have to retain to do all those different tasks.”

The Patron Edge enables the organization to streamline processes. Training takes less time, phone orders have become more efficient, and customer service has been enhanced because less information is needed to complete each transaction. With the addition of **The Patron Edge Online™**, that same level of service is now extended to the Web.

According to Manning, once people got online and saw that it was choose-your-own-seat ticketing, they would buy tickets to one show, and they had so much fun that they went back and bought tickets to another show. “We could just see that with that ability for patrons to choose their own seats, that they were probably going to do more online and buy more seats at a given time,” he said. “Our renewal campaign did better than it ever had. It was this repeat business from people that couldn’t believe how easy it was, they just loved it.”

The first season that the Theatre implemented **The Patron Edge Online**, online ticket sales increased from 23 to 38 percent. “We increased online sales by almost a half million dollars,” said Manning. “It was more than I could have hoped for.”

By the next season, the Theatre launched its fully redesigned Web site. It sold more than \$50,000 in tickets during the first 24 hours of ticket sales — more than double the amount from the first

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day of sales for the previous season. The day after the record-shattering ticket sales, Manning received an email from a regular patron that further confirmed the Web site’s success. The email read: “Just a note to gush about your Web site and enhancements — it’s fabulous!! It’s easy to navigate, gives all the info one could need, and offers the best ticket-ordering process I have ever seen. Thank you for exceeding the expectations of your audience in all respects.”

“It has always been very clear to me that our patrons not only love the plays that everyone works so hard to put on, but they love the whole experience from purchasing the tickets, to driving out into the country, to picnicking, to watching the plays and every other little thing in between,” Manning said. “**The Patron Edge**® and the effort that has been put forth by Blackbaud have really turned around the way we sell tickets and serve our patrons.”



photo by Michael Broh

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about Blackbaud

Blackbaud is the leading global provider of software and related services designed specifically for nonprofit organizations. Approximately 16,000 organizations use one or more of Blackbaud products and consulting services for fundraising, financial management, Web site management, school administration, and ticketing. Blackbaud’s solutions include The Raiser’s Edge®, Team Approach®, The Financial Edge™, The Education Edge™, The Patron Edge®, Blackbaud® NetCommunity™, The Information Edge™, WealthPoint™, ProspectPoint™, and donorCentrics™, as well as a wide range of consulting, analytical, and educational services. Founded in 1981, Blackbaud is headquartered in Charleston, South Carolina and has operations in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Toronto, Ontario; Glasgow, Scotland; London, England; and Sydney, Australia.

For more information about Blackbaud solutions, contact a Blackbaud account representative. In the United States and Canada, call toll-free 800.443.9441. In Europe, call +44 (0) 141 575 0000. Visit us on the Web at www.blackbaud.com.