Technology Motivators and Usage in Nonprofit Arts Organizations

Client: Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council

The Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (GPAC) works to expand the reach, influence and effectiveness of the cultural community in the greater Pittsburgh region. GPAC is actively engaged in advocacy for the arts; providing arts professionals with access to resources such as volunteer lawyers and accountants; and educating arts professionals through workshops and training sessions.

Problem Definition:

What is preventing arts organizations from embracing the technology innovations that are revolutionizing the rest of the non-profit sector? What will it take to create a sector-wide awareness of the power of communication technologies? To answer these questions, this study will investigate the motivations behind the technology decisions within arts organizations.

Over the past ten years the gap between the technology “haves” and “have nots” in the arts has steadily increased. On one side, the astounding success of Tessitura¹, a software package designed and managed by performing arts organizations, indicates that some arts organizations are able to conceptualize and act on the dramatic improvements in management and communication that technology can bring. On the other end of the spectrum are the small volunteer-run organizations with no ongoing communication with constituents, no technology-based efficiency drivers and no indication that change is immanent.

While there is clearly a financial explanation for the inequitable distribution of technology use, this motivator can not fully account for the gap as many technologies such as blogging or group document editing are free².

This study will examine a broad range of arts organizations within the Pittsburgh region, from small volunteer-run organizations to large performing and visual arts institutions. By taking a case-study approach, the study will provide a much-needed baseline understanding of the both the technology decision making processes at work in the non-profit arts sector as well as the perceived value technology brings to arts organizations.

Scope of Work:

1. Case study development

   Making use of the robust body research on measuring motivation, the team will develop a case study framework that addresses the motivations and decision making processes behind organization-wide and department-specific technology choices.

2. Data gathering

   The case study framework will be applied to the selected organizations and data will be gathered through traditional qualitative measures including, where possible, interviews, ethnography techniques, focus groups, etc.

3. Analysis
Analysis of the gathered data and information including conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Expected Deliverable:

A publishable research paper presenting the research methodology, data results, in-depth analysis and recommendations for future research.

Skills Required:

- Working knowledge of non-profit management processes
- Qualitative research techniques
- Writing
- Public speaking

Advisory Board:

To ensure objectivity, the advisory board will be comprised of research professionals, technologists, and non-arts, non-profit sector professionals.

Notes

1 Designed for and by performing arts users, Tessitura is licensed by Impresario, L.L.C., a subsidiary of the The Metropolitan Opera, to arts organizations and is supported by the Tessitura Network, Inc., a nonprofit corporation. http://www.tessiturasoftware.com/index.asp
2 Tools such as Writely (http://www2.writely.com/info/WritelyOverflowWelcome.htm) and ajaxWrite (http://ajaxwrite.com/) allow groups of people to edit documents online. Ongoing, frequently updated communication with constituents can be facilitated through any number of free blogs (www.blogger.com, http://wordpress.org/), which often have RSS to email capabilities.