



CRM makes beautiful music for orchestra coffers

The Queensland Symphony Orchestra maintains a giving relationship with donors using Maximizer CRM...

Who knew that former Australian prime minister Malcolm Fraser was the spitting image of 19th-century Hungarian composer Franz Liszt? Chances are if you were a supporter of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra you'd be aware of the uncanny likeness between the two.

The Brisbane-based QSO is skilled at reaching out to supporters and potential donors, using such tidbits of information on its website to grab visitor attention. The hope is to turn site browsers into ticket buyers, and better still, repeat donors.

But the orchestra doesn't just rely on hope. It

has a powerful software tool, Maximizer CRM, to manage its relationships with concert-goers and private and corporate donors.

Birgit Willadsen, the QSO's philanthropy officer, says pressure on state and federal funders to keep a lid on spending means performing arts organisations such as the orchestra are having to work hard to find other sources of income.

Concert ticket sales bring in about 10 percent of the orchestra's revenue. In 2012 more than 100,000 people attended performances, forking out about A\$1.8 million for the pleasure.

Not far behind in revenue terms were

sponsorship and donations, which together accounted for about A\$1.6 million of income. In times of government stringency, Willadsen says, those sources of funding are critical.

"Private giving becomes much more important to make up the shortfall and to help the organisation to grow. It's a pressure all arts organisations are feeling."

Not that the orchestra is crying poor. Willadsen says it's in comparatively good financial heart, but it continues to look for ways to drive up donations. A balance has to be struck, however, between parting patrons from their money and avoiding having their wallets snap shut in the face of too many demands.

Maximizer CRM, implemented by Brisbane reseller CRMcentral, is a crucial tool in keeping relationships sweet. It records details of all contact between the QSO and its roughly 1500 donors, which the philanthropy team can call up in minutes.

"It's important for us to be able to see when was the last time we had contact so that we don't end up chasing people. Similarly, if someone has told us they only want to have contact when they choose, it's important that information be clear," Willadsen says.

“Almost all we need to know about donors is stored in there and if my manager or the CEO requests details about a particular individual or group of donors we can readily find it and assess it and track progress.”

Birgit Willadsen, philanthropy officer for the Queensland Symphony Orchestra

Maximizer CRM is a big step up from the orchestra's previous patron database.

CRM central director Brian Wolstenholme says the company has installed the same system at two other performing arts organisations, Queensland Ballet and Opera Queensland, but the QSO's setup is the most sophisticated.

“One of the things we did, for instance, was create an automated way of sending receipts to donors for tax purposes,” Wolstenholme says.

The orchestra is a registered charity so donations over A\$2 are tax-deductible. Within 48 hours of a donation being received, the donor is sent a thank-you letter and a receipt.

Maximizer CRM's single biggest benefit is the wide range of data it can store and the many ways it can be filtered, Willadsen says.

“If you take a given individual, Maximizer CRM records every donation they've made, how and when they made it and how much it was. It contains information on what tickets they've bought and for which shows, and when they booked those tickets.”

The individual record might also detail invitations the donor has been sent; it might have information about other communications the orchestra has had with him or her, such as newsletters, emails or Christmas cards; and it might contain personal notes such as the donor's preferred contact method.

“In other words the database records any information in regard to our interaction with donors,” Willadsen says.

“Almost all we need to know about them is stored in there and if my manager or the CEO requests details about a particular individual or group of donors we can readily find it and assess it and track progress.”

A report showing the top 10 donors, for

instance, would take minutes to produce.

The system is highly customisable but the question always has to be asked whether a new information type – a donor's musical taste, for instance – warrants its own database field or whether it is better recorded as a note on a donor's record.

“If we know someone has an interest in a particular type of music – baroque, say, which is not everyone's taste, but those who love it really adore it – we might note that and contact that person if we have a concert or series coming.”

The orchestra ranks donors by the amount they give – a A\$50,000-plus donation makes you a ‘maestro’ – and lists them on its website and in its annual report. But whatever they give, they all count, Willadsen says.

“Keeping them interested in us and wanting to come along to our concerts and participate in the orchestra is very important.”

As the orchestra builds up to the September unveiling of its 2014 concert programme, Maximizer CRM is being put through its paces.

“It's a large event for media, partners and people in the arts industry. We invite everyone along and tell them what we'll be doing in the new year. The database has been getting a really good workout as we send all in the invitations out,” Willadsen says.

And by the way, which 19th-century German pianist and composer is a lookalike of Australian actress Pia Miranda? That would be Clara Schumann, wife of another famous composer, Robert.

Website visitors can find more composer lookalikes at qso.com.au. If moved to become an orchestra supporter, they can sign up on the spot and their details will duly make their way into Maximizer CRM. 

CASE STUDY//

Queensland Symphony Orchestra

AT A GLANCE//

INDUSTRY

- Performing arts

BUSINESS OBJECTIVE

- Ensure a reliable flow of donations.
- Help maintain appropriate level of contact with supporters.
- Efficiently provide reports in response to management queries.

SOLUTION

- Maximizer CRM

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Maintaining funding base in face of a squeeze on government support
- Sophisticated management of supporter relationships
- Ready access to donor information.

FOR MORE INFO//

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