

# DIGITAL SAVIOUR

*Arts admin has never been more complicated, but the Masque Arts software range comes to the rescue. Andrew Stewart reports*

Arts administrators certainly could be forgiven for thinking that even Imperial Russia and Kafka's Prague demanded fewer filled forms from their officials than today's requirements. In these times of rampant regulations, red-tape and endless emails, anything that might ease the burden of bureaucracy has to be welcome. A new line of software packages for the performing arts appears well set to organise, analyse and harness the sort of information required to soothe administrative headaches. The Masque Arts range, developed by Systematic Marketing, promises arts companies of all shapes and sizes the computational tricks required to convert raw data into material suitable for a multitude of uses. In short, Masque can handle everything from website publishing and contacts management to box-office services, digital archiving facilities and merchandising systems.

According to Systematic's managing director, Russell Weetch, Masque products combine functions conventionally handled by different software solutions. Masque Repertoire, he says, amounts to a formidable tool when it comes to distributing information throughout a company. 'At one end, Masque Repertoire is about archiving; at the other, it's about publishing, and in the middle, it's about analysis. The idea is that you only need to enter the data once and the software can use it for multiple jobs.' The product's flexible configuration effectively means that any employee can access information from any company department.

Masque Repertoire's structure includes information categories for people, productions and venues. Weetch cites the example of a musical stage event, referring to a slice of the information that an average show might generate. 'With Masque, you can record in one place who owns the credits, when it was first performed, who first performed it, when your company first performed it, an act-by-act synopsis of the production, orchestration information, and so on. The software can handle as much information as you want to store, not just pictures and sound. We've always developed our systems in response to what clients need, so everything in Masque is there as an answer to a practical problem or requirement.'

He moves on to the 'people' part of the archiving equation, which can deal with information on everyone from composer and director to back-stage and front-of-house staff. The system also allows links to be made, for example, from an artist's pen picture or a venue's written description to a related media library. Touring information, directions to theatres, details of disability access and buying tickets can also be covered by the same software umbrella. 'Essentially, this is an archiving system for holding information,' Weetch says. 'But the software also offers a web-production module, which allows you to use that information to produce and drive your website, and much more besides.'

Systematic was founded in 1990 to develop software devoted to marketing and customer relationship management (CRM). It has since built a solid portfolio of work with charities and commercial organisations. 'The aim of our CRM packages is that they should be completely integrated,

in order to deliver a whole view of the customer,' Weetch says. 'We were already working to develop that system when Birmingham Royal Ballet came to us at the beginning of the noughties. They were looking for, among other things, a content management system for their website that was specific to the performing arts. We produced it for them and Masque came about as a result.'

In 2007, Systematic decided to focus on the development of software for the performing arts market. Masque Repertoire, a related CRM programme called Masque Patron, and a Masque online merchandise sales package are among the company's dedicated arts software products. Masque's most recent developmental phase has delivered a series of analytical tools to the mix, allowing company-wide access to daily statistics on audience capacity, figures for target audience returns, seat reservations, advanced sales, ticket income and other operational details. 'That links in with our Masque Patron system, which means you can build sections of your website, for example, that are only available to members or friends.'

The value of archiving large amounts of information, notoriously labour and cost intensive, clearly relates to accessibility. Masque software promises open access to whatever its users choose to store, without the need for duplicating information on different systems or chasing facts and figures from one department to another. 'The system is totally configurable, which essentially means that the bits of information you don't use often can be tucked away,' says Russell Weetch. 'Also, it's not obligatory to use every function the software offers: you don't have to enter historical information into it at once, for instance. It does allow you to do that over time, however, and add to information about a repertoire of productions. Once you've done that, the information is there for as long as you want to retain it. Above all, you only have to input information once and it's there for as long as you want it to be there.'

And what of Masque's claims to uniqueness?

Surely, there are other contacts management software packages that can store and sort multiple layers of information. Artifax, OPAS and Blackbaud Software here spring to mind as purveyors of various arts administration, archiving and events management software packages. 'I think it's fair to say that Artifax doesn't have anything that can take Masque Repertoire head on,' Weetch replies. He adds that Systematic has looked closely at the software solutions produced by its three main rivals and still considers that Masque is unlike any other arts administration package in the market.

'We're building event management and sales management systems into the latest version of Masque Repertoire, which will stand alongside its archiving, stats management and publishing functions. We really believe that this level and spread of information organisation and management is unique in performing arts software.'

[www.masque-arts.com](http://www.masque-arts.com)



Masque man:  
Russell Weetch