

Sapphire Case Study: The Royal Academy of Dance

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*Richard Thom
Director of Finance
The Royal Academy of Dance*

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About The Royal Academy of Dance

The Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) promotes knowledge, understanding and practice of dance internationally. RAD does this by educating and training students and teachers and providing examinations to reward achievement as well as promoting dance worldwide. Established in 1920, to improve standards and re-invigorate dance training, initially within the UK - now globally - and with approximately 13,000 members spread across 79 countries, the Royal Academy of Dance is one of the largest and most influential dance education and training organisations in the world.

RAD Membership supports the advancement of dance and includes professional dancers, students, teachers, benefactors and friends. There are currently over 1,000 students in full-time or part-time teacher training programmes with the Academy and each year, the examination syllabus is taught to more than a quarter of a million students worldwide.

The requirements

The finance team at RAD has been using SunSystems since 1991. Prior to that they had been using a bureau service, but needed faster access to accurate management information. Outlining the requirements of RAD Richard Thom, Director of Finance, said “As an international business we deal with many foreign currencies and perform two consolidations on our accounts: one for the UK and one worldwide. We were after a cash based system since students and members make payment up front, on applying to the Academy, rather than us issuing invoices. We don’t have much demand for traditional sales ledgers and invoicing.”

With the assistance of his accountants, Richard reviewed solutions available on the market and conducted a formal tender process. Pegasus, Sage and Multisoft were shortlisted along with Infor FMS SunSystems.

On the subsequent decision Richard said “Of the systems reviewed, SunSystems had the most flexible chart of accounts. We have a pretty complex business model – 10 departments and a significant number of activities within each department. The T & A codes [Transactional analysis and Account analysis codes] in SunSystems enable proper drill down into data to provide the information we require.”

Richard also liked the fact that SunSystems is an open system: “Traditional accounting systems have set ledgers, but with an open system you can set it up as you want it. There is a high level of analysis available in SunSystems and it is a scalable solution.”

He went on to say “SunSystems was more expensive in comparison with some other financial accounting systems, but price shouldn’t influence a decision like this, rather how a system can do the job it is intended for. As a charity cost is certainly an important factor for us, but we must balance overall requirements. The return on our investment in SunSystems has certainly been there over the last 20 years.”

RAD also implemented an add-on solution to SunSystems that would enable self generation of invoices for the 200 examiners – essentially a purchase invoice system.



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SunSystems in action

“We find SunSystems very versatile” said Richard, “the flexibility of the system and the ability to enhance it as our requirements change and cost allows make it an ideal fit.” Since the initial implementation RAD has also taken on the Asset Register module; as well as eConnect – “this gives us the ability to send invoices and statements by email, fax or print; we save a great deal of time with the use of the email scheduler” – and also Vision, which facilitates importing data to SunSystems and is a highly effective reporting tool. “With the use of Vision we are benefiting from even greater efficiency and faster processing” commented Richard.

Currently SunSystems is in use solely on RAD’s main site, but Richard and the management team are reviewing the possibility using SunSystems for RAD’s overseas offices; SunSystems could be used as a global database. Some offices are quite small though, so a thorough analysis of costs will be undertaken.

“SunSystems is working well for us and we are very satisfied,” says Richard “it does exactly what we want, though we probably under utilise it’s capabilities as we don’t use all of the functionality available. The ability to import data into SunSystems from other third party systems, whether using Vision or other databases is great – and means that we don’t need to keep two sets of data. From a control point of view the audit trail is very clean.”

There are two databases that the team at RAD run journal imports from. The first is the membership database, Profile Concept, which holds information on members, training and exams. The second is MICROS Retail management system which is integrated with SunSystems. “In a sense they are used as sales ledgers with SunSystems as the central database” said Richard.

Of the advantages SunSystems brings RAD Richard tells us “A key benefit for us is reporting. We have some restricted, or limited access, licences for the use of budget holders and other departments so that they can access their figures easily, are able to understand them and they can run their own reports as required.

SunSystems is easy to use and we do a fair bit of in house training; we go to Sapphire for our formal training requirements – some of the team recently attended Ledger Accounting and Admin courses.”

Working with Sapphire

On the subject of RAD’s SunSystems partner, Richard added “We did not start off our SunSystems implementation working with Sapphire; in fact we worked with four other SunSystems VAR’s [Value Added Resellers] before Sapphire, but had service issues with the others. Sapphire is the longest VAR relationship (seven years) that we have had and we are very happy; as an organisation Sapphire is quick and efficient. Sapphire provide flexible training options to suit our needs, whether it be public training courses, or individual on-site training for us, and our account manager is very good at keeping in touch.”

Richard concluded “The level of service that we receive from the Support Team is very good and the excellent service provided by Sapphire overall would be a key reason for recommending Sapphire to others. If you want anything bespoke, one to one training for example, they will discuss it with you to see how they can help. Sapphire keeps in touch at the right level, providing information on software developments and seminars, without being overbearing.”

