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INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP TO FIND THE BEST ONLINE TECHNOLOGY FOR THEIR CONSORTIUM

" ACTIVE Network software allows our school to cut down on administrative costs, engage our students with its online capabilities and increase our marketing capabilities while allowing us to better manage our business.

Chris Waterbury, Information Technology Manager

BACKGROUND

A successful, independent nonprofit organization in Minneapolis, MacPhail Center for Music is a community resource for education and performance experiences in the musical arts. From its inception in 1907, MacPhail Center for Music has grown to become a passionate organization at the forefront of music education and appreciation for the arts, and a leader in music therapy, SuzukiTalent Education, Early Childhood Music and community partnership programs. A certified member of the National Guild of Community Schools for the Arts, MacPhail serves 8,200 students per year, both onsite and through partnerships, maintaining its strong reputation as a comprehensive community resource of music education for all ages and levels.

CHALLENGE

To manage its classes and students, MacPhail originally used a desktop application called Art Pro. Designed and built by a music school director, Art Pro's functionality was a good fit for MacPhail, but there were some significant drawbacks: the system had not been updated in 10 years, it was difficult to operate from remote locations, data security needed improvement, and there was no flexibility when making changes or edits

MacPhail decided that it was time to upgrade its class software and replace Art Pro. Meanwhile, other community arts schools were having similar epiphanies. At the Annual Guild Community Schools of the Arts session in 2004, MacPhail and a handful of other organizations began discussing their collective need for newer technology. "We came to the conclusion that we would be better off banding together," explains Chris Waterbury, MacPhail IT Director. "It made more sense to pool our resources and work together since we all had the same objective." The original four schools of the Music Consortium included MacPhail Center for Music, Neighborhood Music School, Third Street Music School, Wisconsin Conservatory of Music (three others joined in 2006 to total seven schools in the Consortium currently).

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MacPhail CENTER FOR MUSIC

SOLUTION

The Consortium went through a considerable process to determine next steps and create an RFP that would be comprehensive enough to find online school management software that fit the needs of everyone involved. After examining several companies who either had the technology or promised to build it, the solution that rose to the top was ACTIVE Network. ACTIVE offers robust functionality suitable for music and arts schools and makes development updates frequently, ensuring that the product is continually improving. Plus, ACTIVE has a huge customer base and dedicated customer support, reassuring the Consortium that it was choosing a stable, long-term partner. In December 2009, MacPhail took the leap and became the second organization in the Consortium to implement and launch the new software.

RESULTS

"So far, the results have been great," says Chris. "We are learning as we go and I'm getting lots of positive feedback from staff and faculty." Here are the features that have made the biggest impact for MacPhail:

- **Accessibility:** It is easy and quick to find information!The software collects, tracks, stores and reports on every byte of data in one integrated system.The staff always has accurate, updated information that is accessible from any computer, in any location.

- **Reporting:** "The reports offer so much more than what we've had in the past," mentions Chris. Not only with classes and activities, but by remaining on top of the funds coming in and out, MacPhail can see exactly how to maximize their revenue and cut costs.

- **Scheduling:** The staff can enter all classes and lessons into the scheduler, which automatically organizes and books the calendar. No pens, papers or Excel pivot tables needed—saving both time and stress.

- **Support:** If MacPhail ever has a question, ACTIVE's support team is a mere phone call away. "The support team is always helpful and accommodating."

As the first member of the Consortium to be trained and activated, MacPhail took a judicious approach to the rolling out the software.The Center decided to spend the first year completely focused on the back end of the system—the modules directly impacting office operations. "We felt it was most important to have the back office working perfectly before we launched online registration to the public. It's the bedrock of our business." With operations humming along efficiently behind the scenes, MacPhail has been making concerted efforts to educate the community on the benefits of online registration, including email, postal mail and in-person communications.

The Music Consortium, and MacPhail specifically, has proven that looking to the future and implementing online school management software to automate and streamline operations will help keep arts schools a prosperous, integral part of their communities. This innovative partnership between the nation's leading music schools has set a new precedent for how community arts organizations can manage common challenges together.

Learn more about ACTIVE Network School Management Solutions:

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