CBS Television City Increases Productivity, Speeds Invoice Payments

Overview

Country: United States
Industry: Media and Entertainment

Customer Profile
CBS Television City, in Los Angeles, is a U.S.$100 million a year television production facility. Over the past 50 years, it has hosted the production of many of television's most famous shows.

Business Situation
The facility needed to replace nine outmoded administrative systems that were contributing to higher costs and inhibiting increased customer service.

Solution
Xytech Enterprise software running on the Microsoft® Windows Server™ 2003 operating system and Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 relational database.

Benefits
- Scheduling productivity up
- Real-time data enables better decisionmaking
- Customer service enhanced
- Invoices paid faster

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> David Strouse, Director of Finance, CBS Television City

CBS Television City has hosted some of television's most legendary productions. It recently upgraded the facility's administrative procedures to delivering an equally award-winning performance. To increase efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance customer service, the facility replaced legacy administrative systems with Xytech Enterprise software running on the Microsoft® Windows Server™ 2003 operating system and Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 relational database. The solution has increased efficiency in the scheduling department, allowing resources to be more profitably deployed. Studio managers and customers can see how resources are being used at any time during a production, enabling them to manage production budgets in real time. Invoices are more accurate and comprehensive, enabling customers to pay those invoices faster.

Situation

Much of the history of television was produced at CBS Television City in Los Angeles. Over the past 50 years, the fabled television production facility—a part of New York City-based Viacom Inc.—has hosted legendary shows including The Twilight Zone, The Carol Burnett Show, The Smothers Brothers, The Sonny and Cher Show, and television's longest-running game show (30 years and counting), The Price is Right.

The stages at CBS Television City have been graced by stars including Jack Benny, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Doris Day, Elvis Presley, Steve Martin, George Burns, Lily Tomlin, Elton John and Bob Hope. Today, CBS Television City hosts the production of such popular shows as The Young & the Restless, The Late Late Show, and The Bold and the Beautiful.

To support the production of these shows, CBS Television City is indeed a small city. Its eight soundstages range in size to 15,000 square feet. Its more than 600 Operations employees work in more than 60 departments that provide virtually every service a television producer could want, including cameras, props, wardrobe, lighting, set construction, stage hands, post-production, and make-up.

Several of the legacy budgeting, scheduling and billing systems used by the departments at CBS Television City were paper-based and almost as old as the facility itself. The west coast billing system was hosted on a mainframe; other applications were hosted on proprietary systems or on a variety of PCs. Some of the applications were no longer supported. And few if any of the systems were integrated.

As a result, it was difficult or impossible to give the facility's customers—the producers of the entertainment programs—timely information on spending while their shows were in production. But while a show was in production was exactly when producers most needed this information, in order to determine whether they needed to make change to stay on budget.

When invoices were produced for completed projects, they often lacked the detail that producers wanted to see for productions costing U.S.$1 million or more. Those producers would request backup and detail from CBS Television City, driving up costs while the facility manually researched and delivered the detail, and delaying payments by as much as six months. Meanwhile, the manual integration required to produce consolidated invoices also meant that invoices were subject to inaccuracies.

These were not abstract concerns for the facility. "We are in a very competitive marketplace for television production services," says David Strouse, Finance Director, CBS Television City. "Our customers want a state-of-the-art production facility—and they also want us to make it as easy for them to do business with us as possible. We weren't always doing that and we knew it was an issue with some of our customers."

"We needed to replace our isolated systems with a single, integrated solution for order entry, costing, project management, scheduling, and invoicing," says Strouse. "In addition to integrating information from throughout our departments to deliver a single, comprehensive financial picture for the customer, we needed a solution that was easy to use, easy to implement, and cost effective."

Solution

CBS Television Studios considered a UNIX-based solution running on Oracle software, but rejected that solution on the basis of cost, as well as its inability to integrate data

among the facility's backend departments, such as scheduling and payroll.

Instead, CBS Television City chose Xytech Enterprise software running on the Microsoft® Windows Server™ 2003 operating system and Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 relational database.

A Solution based on Windows

"Having a solution based on Windows and SQL Server was important to us," says Lynn Altman, V.P. Information Services Technology. "We're familiar with Microsoft technologies. We know they're stable, reliable, and cost effective. Knowing we could support this solution on Windows was a big plus."

Having a solution from Xytech—a leading provider of workflow and media asset management software—was equally important to CBS Television City. Xytech's software systems are used by large media conglomerates, movie studios, major television networks, independent postproduction companies, television stations, and rental houses, as well as by corporations in the aerospace, automotive, retailing, restaurant, semiconductor, and paper products industries. And one of those customers was CBS's east-coast operation.

"The company already had some experience with Xytech and we had good reports about it," says Strouse. "We got our 'toes wet' by trying the solution for tracking projects. Our Program Coordinators liked it. We went ahead and deployed it."

"We had excellent success with our implementation at CBS on the east coast," said Richard Gallagher President and CEO of Xytech Systems Corporation. "In speaking with the people at CBS Television City, we felt our workflow management core,

partnered with other core Xytech modules, was an ideal fit for this project."

A Modular Solution

The central module of the solution is the Enterprise Workflow Management Core System. It creates and tracks all jobs and work orders and supports an unlimited number of facility- and client-specific rate cards. All activities can be tracked and invoiced through project billing codes. Sales reporting tools in the core module allow managers to track efficiency and profitability. The module also supports extensive job costing and budgeting.

A contact manager module provides a single repository for data on customers, vendors, and prospects, ensuring that all users have the same data, up to date. Enterprise Alerts allow users to send electronic notifications—to themselves or to co-workers—about deadlines, customer requests, or other event-driven information.

Because the single, central solution replaces the variety of systems CBS Television City formerly used, security is necessary to ensure that users throughout the facility only have access to the portions of the solution to which they're authorized. The solution provides that security through the creation of user-defined security groups with read, write, and view privileges

CBS Television City augments the Enterprise Core module with the Enterprise Scheduling module, which addresses the facility's time-based scheduling requirements, including scheduling of people, equipment, stages, edit bays, and other resources.

Strouse and his colleagues decided on the solution in February 2004 and the design, development, and deployment were completed by January 2005. The solution runs on a single Dell 2850 computer server with two processors. Most of the solution's

application logic is contained primarily in the client, which is supported on desktop PCs running the Microsoft Windows® XP operating system. The solution also takes advantage of SQL Server stored procedures, which enables centralized processing and fast response times.

Looking Ahead

Xytech is migrating its solution to the Microsoft .NET Framework, an integral component of the Microsoft Windows® operating system that provides a programming model and runtime for Web services, Web applications, and smart client applications. We decided to move to .NET as we recognized it is the platform of the future, Gallagher stated, our clients expect our technology to run on industry standards, and Microsoft products are the standard

"We're very interested in the .NET-connected roadmap for Xytech Enterprise," says Altman. "It means that we've bought technology that will continue to work for us for years to come."

Benefits

"The Microsoft and Xytech solution is the biggest change in CBS Television City since color television was introduced," says Strouse. "We are seeing this solution benefit virtually every aspect of our operations."

Productivity up

The Microsoft and Xytech solution is increasing the productivity of CBS Television City's scheduling and billing operations, according to Strouse.

"We're able to handle our scheduling and billing functions faster, more effectively, and more accurately than ever before, thanks to this solution," says Strouse. "And we're able to do so at lower cost. We're doing this without layoffs, by redeploying some scheduling personnel to more strategic

functions and allowing some positions to go unfilled. This is a win for us, for our customers, and our employees."

Enhanced Workflow Increases Efficiency

The increased productivity in scheduling operations is only one example of efficiencies that CBS Television City sees throughout its operations, thanks to the Xytech solution. The new solution eliminates the trail of paper that the facility formerly used as schedule information that was pushed out to the departments, used for recording of time and resources expended, and then pushed to accounting for invoicing—with the potential for late, lost, and inaccurate data.

Instead, a studio manager now creates bid/budget templates for shows using Xytech's Enterprise Workflow Management Solution. Schedulers produce schedules directly from those templates, with the information remaining online and available to all authorized users. The schedule information feeds into CBS Television City's telephone dial-in system, so studio personnel who are offsite can check schedules by phone, without having to come into the facility to check a posted notice.

Employees enter information about actual personnel and resources used while the production is underway, and that information is always available for online review by studio managers. At the end of a production, this online information is used by accounting for invoice generation. Because the initial purchase order is linked to the invoicing process, the solution eliminates the problem of purchased resources getting dropped from the invoice.

"Given the enormous complexity and range of resources to produce a television show, we suspected that we weren't always

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invoicing for everything we should and we knew there were data entry and calculation errors—but it was very difficult to track and correct these errors before," says Strouse. "Now we can, and this alone provides justification for the new solution."

But it's not the only financial justification that Strouse sees. "For the first time, we can see actual resources used, at a very detailed level, while a show is in production, rather than having to wait until after the fact," he says. "That gives us the opportunity to tighten our scheduling and make better use of our resources, person by person, machine by machine."

Better Customer Service, Faster Payments

The solution also enables CBS Television City to provide better customer service—and to receive faster payments on invoices.

"Just as we can see detailed production information while a show is being produced, we can share that information with our customers," says Strouse. "That enables them to make timely decisions to help contain their costs while their productions are underway. This is an extremely important service to provide. We can now provide better customer service and increase customer satisfaction and competitiveness, as a result."

And because that detailed production information can also be reflected on the invoices of CBS Television City for the first time, customers can receive detailed bills that answer their questions, without the need for the facility to go through the time-consuming process of generating manual backups and justifications.

"We expect to cut one to two weeks off the time it takes for customers to pay us, since they won't need to request backup

information any more—it will all be there in their invoices," says Strouse. And we still have happier customers. That's a real win-win."

For More Information

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For more information about Xytech Systems Corporation products and services, call (818) 767-7400 or visit the Web site at: www.xytechsystems.com

For more information about CBS Television City products and services, call (323) 575-2902 or visit the Web site at: www.cbs.com

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