

a Celayix success story for event management

Performing Arts Center Cuts Scheduling Time from Two Weeks to One Day



“Now, it takes me just one day to create schedules compared to nearly two weeks before. It’s like a dream.”

– **Bill Looker,**
**Admissions Staffing
Manager**

Solution Review

Organization

Portland Center for the Performing Arts (PCPA)

Challenges

Previous paper-based scheduling methods required two weeks each month of slow, methodical work transferring hand-written data from page to page.

Solution

Celayix eTime Xpress and Web Xpress automate schedule creation based on employee availability, established business rules and upcoming events, and the latter is available online for employees and volunteers.

Benefits Summary

- Scheduling time reduced from nearly two weeks to one day each month.
- Inevitable changes to events—timing, staffing levels—are easily adjusted and communicated with employees and volunteers.

In Portland’s thriving arts community, the performing arts have an impressive home at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts (PCPA), which is the fifth largest performing arts center in the nation and home to the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Keller Auditorium and Antoinette Hatfield Hall, which houses the Newmark and Dolores Winningstad theatres and Brunish Hall. Located in the vibrant downtown cultural district, PCPA hosts world-class music, theater, dance, lectures and more.

Each month, PCPA schedules 2500-3000 shifts for its 150 part-time employees in dozens of events at five theatres, a convention center and an exposition center, while incorporating union rules and employee availability. PCPA also schedules 550 volunteers for 1500-2000 additional shifts in five theatres each month using a very different set of business rules. Previous paper-based methods required the admissions staffing manager and the volunteer coordinator to spend two weeks of each month in slow, methodical work transferring hand-written data from page to page.

The part-time union employees include: ushers, greeters, gate people and lead supervisors. Volunteers include: office assistants, tour guides, gift shop attendants, ushers and greeters. Staff members and volunteers are therefore a diverse group ranging from college students to octogenarians, who all support the busy performance schedule.

Each month, admissions staffing manager Bill Looker builds the staffing schedule based on event labor requests, employee availability and union requirements. Factoring all requests and rules is like a puzzle. For example, those with more seniority get higher priority regarding shifts.

For years, Looker pieced together schedules manually using paper-based methods. Each month, staff came to the facility to provide their availability by hand, and then would receive resulting paper schedules by mail.

Volunteer Coordinator, Margie Humphreys had a separate process that included sending out two expensive mailings each month, a lot of paper and several hours. PCPA realized there had to be a better way for management and employees to handle the monthly scheduling cycle.

Celayix - ‘Fits Our Needs Better’

With an eye toward bringing schedules into the digital age, the PCPA team researched online scheduling software solutions. From the companies that presented to the PCPA, the team chose Celayix eTime and Web Xpress.

When Celayix representatives came on site to demo the software, Looker and other selected team members put it to the test. They showed Celayix reps their current schedules, volunteer preference process and relevant union rules, and asked how the software could accommodate it all.

Other Solution Benefits

- Employees can input availability and access new schedules from any computer.
- Scheduling enforces business rules, ensuring compliance with union requirements such as seniority and time off.
- Celayix easily interfaces with PCPA's event booking software.

From the demo, it was clear the flexible solution could handle virtually any business rules that PCPA needed to enforce.

"Other systems were nowhere near what Celayix had to offer," Looker said. "It can handle our seniority rules, allows for real time schedule updates online and fits our needs better than anyone else."

The system's flexibility allows Humphreys to create schedules using completely different business rules than Looker's team. For example, all volunteers must work a four-hour minimum shift each time and complete a certain number of hours per year, which Celayix helps track and ensure.

"Celayix helps keep our volunteers organized and provides a level of accountability that we did not have before with paper schedules," said Humphreys.

Easy for Managers, Employees, Volunteers

True to expectation, the team worked with Celayix to customize the business rules regarding scheduling and then automated actual schedule creation. The software ensures that PCPA schedules everyone fairly according to a mix of criteria, including seniority, availability, requested time off, leaves of absence, peak days and "free pass" days that employees can take any time.

Web-based Celayix provides a central location for employees and volunteers to input their availability. They can use any computer or a terminal set-up at PCPA. For the rollout, managers held training sessions over the course of a week.

Even those skeptical participants, who had "never touched a computer," learned the system relatively quickly.

"We trained 150 part-time staff and over 400 volunteers in one week, with a 99 percent success rate - even with people that didn't know what a mouse was!" Looker said. "Now they can sit at home in their pajamas with a cup of coffee and enter their availability. They don't have to go anywhere and can print out their schedules from home."

Faster Schedules, Happier Employees

Today, PCPA has dramatically reduced the time to create schedules each month. Looker also has more time at work to do the rest of his job, such as managing, hiring and any personnel issues that arise.

"Now, it takes me just one day to create schedules compared to nearly two weeks before. It's like a dream," he said.

Employees and volunteers also access schedules faster now by going online to the portal, rather than having to go to PCPA. Plus, the information is always accurate, compared to before when paper schedules could be outdated before Looker and Humphreys could make changes to them. Even those initially unsure about the switch wouldn't go back to the old way.

"We had an all-staff meeting and I asked by a show of hands how many would go back and not a single hand was raised," he said. "Now, they love it."