

National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain

The National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain (NYO) is an organisation with the important and influential role of developing dedicated teenage musicians to make changes for themselves, their artform and their generation through orchestral music. NYO is a community of 164 exceptional teenagers from across the UK whose lives are immersed in music. Together they engage a further 10,000 teenagers every year. The orchestra is internationally celebrated as ‘the world’s greatest orchestra of teenagers’, embodying what young people are capable of when given opportunities, support and a platform.

NYO delivers a year-round programme of activity ranging from ‘NYO Inspire Days’ to two-week rehearsal residencies, tours to major concert halls and whole-school takeovers. They have 18 staff based in Central London, and are supported by a wider team of freelancers including tutors, conductors, pastoral staff, a nurse, a librarian and stage managers. Over 70% of their income comes from fundraising, including grants, sponsorship and donations from individuals.

The Challenge

NYO had been battling with inadequate IT infrastructure for several years and had been reliant on expensive private remote servers. Having scaled up activities, expanded their team and moved to bigger offices, it became apparent that their IT provision needed a complete overhaul as well. Tim Foxon, Finance and Administration Director at NYO, explains that:

“With the team delivering residential projects at different venues for substantial periods each year, we needed a system built for efficient remote working. The platform we were using, with remotely-hosted apps, was dependent on ‘always-on’ broadband, making it impossible to do



any work on the train and equally challenging anywhere that Wi-Fi was slow or intermittent. We were also in the process of migrating our CRM database and accounting software to cloud-based solutions, leaving us with very little rationale for maintaining a server.”

The Solution

After some thorough research it was decided by Tim that a migration to Microsoft 365 would be the best solution for NYO, both from an efficiency and value perspective – recognising Microsoft’s cost-effective non-profit licensing model. Tim says:

“Academia’s charities team came forward with a tightly-costed proposal and a clear demonstration of expertise in the not-for-profit and educational sectors. They undertook an initial diagnostic and put together a migration plan, working with our previous IT provider to achieve as smooth a transition as possible.”

NYO is now working with Office 365 in a fully integrated way, using Microsoft SharePoint for centralised file storage. Tim says:

“The team noticed an immediate improvement in speed and efficiency, and have valued the collaborative features that Microsoft 365 offers.”

NYO has also been using Academia’s IT helpdesk and have been impressed with the response rate and the successful completion of IT support tickets. Tim commented that “Issues that might once have taken days to resolve are now fixed in minutes.”

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Tim Foxon

Outcomes

The migration to Microsoft 365 happened in the middle of 2019. Little did NYO know that one year later they would be running their operation remotely due to COVID-19. Tim says:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted so many projects and plans, but as soon as lockdown hit we made a decision to focus on digital engagement with our community of young people and donors. It is inconceivable that we could have made such a successful shift to remote working and digital delivery if we hadn’t made that upgrade when we did.”

In order to maintain the community and to try and keep young people engaged with Music during the COVID-19 pandemic, NYO produced a short video of musicians playing ‘Ode to Joy’ remotely, which also featured on BBC News¹.

On working with Academia, Tim says:

“Our IT infrastructure has been completely transformed. It is a huge relief that we made the decision to switch to Academia last year. Staff are now spending less time trying to resolve IT issues and more time on the things that matter. Ultimately the increased efficiency enables us to deliver greater impact for more young people.”

Why Microsoft 365

Moving to Microsoft 365’s cloud-based productivity, collaboration and management platforms is so beneficial to organisations. The benefits of the cloud are endless and you can finally untether your establishment from office-based working and relying on old servers sitting in your office. This not only gives you the flexibility to work

from anywhere and access all of the resources you need regardless of your location but it also removes the maintenance, management and updates that come along with your current server estate. The technology that sits behind these cloud services has developed rapidly over the last few years and the cloud is not the mystery it once was. Furthermore, your move to the cloud doesn’t have to be one big bang; it can be gradual over a period of a few months, maybe starting with migrating your mail, followed by your data and then followed by your user and device



management. Whilst some of your staff may be reluctant to change, with enough planning, communication and guidance, it doesn't have to be scary. Moving to Microsoft 365 is very powerful and Academia can help you get there.

Looking Forward

The pandemic has led to profound shifts in thinking about the opportunities of digital engagement and the importance of data. Whilst the experience of live music performance and personal interaction will remain at the heart of NYO's work, they have now seen how technology can enhance relationships with their communities, keeping everyone – whether their teenage musicians, donors, audiences, freelance team, trustees and others – in touch and engaged between and during projects. Tim mentions that:

“We have seen an overall increase in confidence in using digital tools and I hope that this will continue. I am particularly interested to see how this can create more efficiency and what impact this will have on all aspects of our work, from governance to project delivery, partnership development and fundraising.

Data-driven decision-making is another frontier we are focused on. In the space of a few years we have grown from an organisation working intensively with 164 young people, supported by a small pool of donors, to reaching 10,000 young people a year and a community of thousands of donors. This creates huge opportunities to gain insights into the needs and wishes of both key stakeholder groups, and to communicate the impact of our work. We are only at the start of the IT journey required to maximise this opportunity, but the building blocks are now in place, thanks to Academia.”



Links

164 musicians from the National Youth Orchestra perform the classic piece 'Ode to Joy' -
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/entertainment-arts-52319534/national-youth-orchestra-s-ode-to-joy-across-great-britain>

Photos by Jason Alden