CHRISTIE'S: Worldwide subscription and catalogue management using ADvance

Founded in 1766, Christie's is a world-renowned auction house. Supporting the company's one hundred specialist departments which organise some five hundred auctions each year is a powerful and rigorously efficient publishing operation, responsible for designing, printing and distributing catalogues for each and every sale worldwide. And whilst for other publishers it may be irritating if a subscriber fails to receive an issue, for Christie's ensuring that the right catalogue reaches the right recipient at the right time is fundamental to the success or failure of an auction at which a work of art, for example, may sell for millions of pounds: the traditional catalogue remains the company's principal sales tool.

At the heart of Christie's catalogue publishing activities is ADvance, the cloud-based audience management system, from Abacus.

ADvance, more generally known as a digital engagement platform for publishers, provides a central portal for the management of all aspects of subscription and catalogue distribution for Christie's worldwide auction business. This includes:

- ↘ **Handling one hundred and twenty different subscription models**
- ↘ **Managing constantly changing subscriber lists for the catalogues to support the five hundred auctions held each year**
- ↘ **Two-way integration with Christie's existing CRM system**
- ↘ **Providing a vibrant and user friendly e-commerce shop-front managed by Christie's own staff, using the ADvance back end**
- ↘ **Producing 'zillions' of reports covering finance, management and individual department requests.**

Christie's

Polly Knewstub, Head of International Business Development at Christies: **"Our professional ability to support the Christie's business since the introduction of ADvance is beyond recognition. There has been an absolute step change in how we are able to deal with supporting our clients."**

Replacing a bespoke system

Polly Knewstub joined Christie's in 2010 as the company's International Head of Business Development. As a publisher with particular expertise in subscriptions and marketing, the opportunity to work with such an acclaimed brand and **"such a fantastic product"** was enticing. Enormous success had been achieved despite a **"woefully inadequate system"** for managing subscriptions and the distribution of the catalogues. Developed as a bespoke system several years before, it had become increasingly **"clunky and time-consuming to operate, unreliable, unable to produce reports and incapable of supporting any marketing activities."**

Initial plans to replace it included looking at outsourcing to a bureau but none were able to offer the flexibility or cope with the sheer weight of work required by Christie's. **"We are the opposite of most publishers: we have low volumes and high product value".** Print runs of the catalogues vary and the size of the catalogues reflects the number of items at a specific auction – again varying from just a few pages to a recent Impressionist Art sale catalogue which resembles a coffee table book – and sells for £50 as a one-off purchase.

Moving to ADvance

Polly Knewstub: **"As a publisher, I know how frustrating it can be to work with disparate legacy systems which make it incredibly difficult or downright impossible to innovate. When I saw the ADvance system, I knew that it could work for Christie's. It was revolutionary, powerful and extraordinarily flexible – and Abacus themselves were enthusiastic, smart and completely engaged in what we wanted to achieve."**

The decision to implement ADvance was taken in early 2013, and the system went live in November 2013. Migrating the data – amounting to hundreds of thousands of records – from the old system to ADvance was challenging and time-consuming but was achieved with Christie's and Abacus working closely together. Polly says that Abacus showed **"astonishing technical competence"** in this traditionally difficult process.

Abacus also integrated ADvance with Christie's client relationship management system, a project which went **"very well, and the results of which works seamlessly, despite having to work around major transformational programmes which were taking place at the same time out of Christie's office in New York."** Records can be changed in the CRM system and are immediately accessible in ADvance where they

can be used, for example, to produce new campaigns. Unlike many other publishers, subscriber lists for Christie's are constantly changing to reflect the contents of an individual sale catalogue. It is now possible to see, instantaneously, who has received which catalogue and when – which was impossible using the old system.

Abacus also developed Christie's new online shop which has allowed the Business Development department to manage the site independently of any input or support from the IT department. Online sales have increased dramatically by an average of 90% year on year since the introduction of the new shop.

Working with ADvance

Day-to-day activities

ADvance is used to provide a single system (integrated with the CRM) to pull together all the different disparate elements to ensure the timely production and despatch of the catalogues to the appropriate subscribers.

Three members of the Business Development team use ADvance to meet the needs and constant requests for information from one hundred sales departments worldwide. Working from London and with each of the departments running between two and eight auctions each year, they manage audience and fulfilment on an ongoing basis. ADvance is also used by Christie's client services staff in London, New York and Paris to handle enquiries and generate sales for clients Worldwide.

Polly Knewstub: **"Using ADvance has made people's jobs more challenging – but that's been a good thing! We used to have eight people doing administration. Now there is half a person doing this and the other team members are managing data, providing answers to our customers and taking responsibility for the output. We are in control of our own destiny with ADvance, which was most certainly not the case before."**

Report production

Producing reports from the previous system had been time consuming and a largely manual process. ADvance is used to produce vast numbers of reports, both standard and one-offs. These include financial reports covering tax and VAT for the UK and US, together with management reporting, DHL delivery reports, and analyses fulfilling the "constant demands for data and reports from the sales departments.

"The reporting functionality and flexibility of ADvance is a joy to use. We can produce far more sophisticated reports than before and, critically, provide answers to the departments which they can then use to help them target their sales activities.

Christie's

> "The reputation of our department has changed beyond recognition. We used to be regarded as purely administrative – now we are an important partner in the Christie's business. We are able to be at the table and be part of the conversation – which was inconceivable before."

Looking to the future

ADvance, the online shop and its associated e-commerce capabilities provide Christie's with the ability to create new products or bundled offers quickly and easily. This so far largely "untapped potential" of ADvance will be used for more merchandising and maximising other e-commerce opportunities. ADvance will increase the sale and renewal of subscriptions online.

The use of ADvance will shortly be extended, initially to staff at the company's auction house in London's King Street, to record direct sales of catalogues. These will automatically update the ADvance back-end system, replacing a manual process, saving another administrative chore and avoiding errors in data re-entry.

Steve Feigen, CEO, Abacus: **"It is fantastic to have such a high profile company making such great use of ADvance, in a sector that is so far removed from our typical publishers and membership clients. Publishing, whether digital or print, is now a key activity for most companies and I hope that reflects the flexibility of our product and validates our vision for a multi-channel digital engagement platform."**

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