

THIS IS HOW i CRM: **Program Productions** **Scores With Automation,** **Project Management**



INTRODUCTION

Think about the length of a second.

Seconds matter more in some businesses than in others. Aerospace relies on measurements in seconds. Horse racing hones down to tenths of a second, and computers count rapid-fire in nanoseconds.

Broadcasting notably depends on seconds. Advertising is sold and programming is scheduled based on timing down to the second. So when a cue is missed or equipment malfunctions for a just one of those seconds, the TV screen goes black or the radio suddenly drops into silence. Those seconds of dead air can mean millions in lost advertising revenue, a nightmare for the network.

Program Productions relies on preventing those seconds of darkness. The Chicago-based company provides freelance technical talent for live broadcast coverage, ranging from sports and concerts to corporate productions. Clients include most of the major sports networks, some of the nation's premier concert venues, and leading Fortune 500 corporations.

It is little wonder then that Steve Spurlock, General Manager of Program Productions, thinks a lot about managing seconds.

From a business standpoint, seconds mean dollars to Steve because it takes time to assign the technicians and work out details for the more than 3,000 live events his company staffs each year.

ABOUT PROGRAM PRODUCTIONS:

Description: Program Productions is a highly specific and sophisticated staffing organization dedicated to helping produce live events with technical expertise and experience. The company provides crewing, labor, and data management for nationally televised sporting, concert, and corporate broadcasts.

Headquarters:

Lombard, IL

Customers Include:

Fox Sports, MLB Network, MLB International, Live Nation, Mobile Television Group, AXS.TV, Chicago Bears, Big Ten Network, Intersport, Comcast Sportsnet, NBC Sports, Turner Sports, Freeman AV, PSAV, The Ellen Degeneres Show

Founded: 1982

Staff: 19 core employees, with more than 4,600 contractors

Website:

www.programproductions.com



Not to mention the seconds that matter in client response time, both on-air and off. Minutes are manageable. Seconds are better. But hours to respond make a production company look slow and disorganized, uninformed, or even disinterested. Every moment the Program Productions team can save during the estimating, staffing, and management of an event means increased confidence with their network and corporate customers – and more dollars they can generate.

For Program Productions and many others, the clear answer is a Customer Relationship Management platform that is both user-friendly and scalable. CRM provides a centralized way to manage staff and customer relationships: from hiring to payroll, from inventory to invoicing, and from opportunities to wins.

**PROGRAM PRODUCTIONS'S
CUSTOMERS INCLUDE:**



F R E E M A N

CHALLENGE: Improve workflow processes to manage staffing for more than 3,000 live events, and coordinate hiring and payments for more than 4,600 freelancers annually; increase data integrity while responding to rapid market changes; and improve internal and external information visibility.

SOLUTION: Sugar Professional Edition, hosted on-site; customized with ability to project staffing needs based on event types and respond to staffing and equipment variables, such as union or non-union rates and rules based on the event location.

RESULTS: 50% decrease in data entry time; reduced time to staff and manage events by 33% - recovering 6,000 staff hours per year; created at-a-glance listing of freelancer talent specialties to resolve on-demand hiring needs; automated estimating and invoicing saves an additional 100 staff hours each year; increased transparency with clients.

MAPPING THE NEEDS FOR CRM

As Steve worked to plan the CRM rollout, he brought a process mapping perspective based on experience in the field.


Steve worked most of the jobs in the business along the way to his leadership position at Program Productions. As a result, he felt keenly the needs of all members of his team when considering the processes and applications needed for the business to run smoothly.

At one point, the company had 15 spreadsheet tabs. Data entry was a massive time-eater, information consistency was limited, and invoicing was more approximation than reality.

“Every workbook was its own entity; there was no central house for data, and we relied on people to manually input the data, which led to errors,” recalls Steve. “The only way we could pull the data together was to take every workbook, open it and pull data into one place. We basically relied on summary data we pulled into QuickBooks, and it wasn’t always accurate.”

As the company grew from staffing Chicago-area jobs to a national technical talent agency for major networks and arena operators, gross revenue soared 650%, projects became more complex, and its talent database bulged to 7,000 freelancers.

The spreadsheets and calendar notations had to be benched.

A black and white portrait of Steve Spurlock, a man with short dark hair and a goatee, wearing a dark suit, a striped shirt, and a patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera.

“Everything originates from our crew invoicing. So when our job data is right, our accounting and invoicing is right, and the client can look at it at any time and know what to expect in terms of costs. We’re more reliable in the clients’ eyes because of Sugar.”

Steve Spurlock
General Manager

THE RIGHT FIT FOR STAFF AND CUSTOMERS

Program Productions chose Sugar Professional Edition after considering other broadcast management and CRM options.

“We looked at broadcast-specific management tools, but they were more focused on managing editing suites or production trucks,” Steve remembers. “There was no platform out there in the broadcast industry that could take us from estimating to crewing to invoicing.”

Program Productions needed an enterprise platform that was flexible enough to respond to the fast-paced, multiplying changes typical of the broadcast industry.

Among the company’s needs: a one-click view of staffing patterns and staff availability; geographic considerations; venue layout; client formatting choices (timing between commercials and cutaways) and other variables, including cost estimating that reflects the subtleties of union/non-union rates and rules that vary by market.

Working with SugarCRM Three-Star Platinum partner Highland Solutions on customization and modifications, Program Productions created a Sugar-driven platform it calls ProCrewz.

“With Sugar, we do our staffing in one-third to one-half of the time it used to take, because so much of the information is in the system: names and tax information for freelancers, rates for major cities, union rules,” says Steve, who used to manually build the staffing charges for each and every event.

Today, his rate card is automated. The system pulls the latest information on union rates and rules based on the location of the event, position titles of the staff required, and scheduled event coverage hours.

“Everything originates from our crew invoicing. So when our job data is right, our accounting and invoicing is right, and the client can look at it at any time and know what to expect in terms of costs. We’re more reliable in the clients’ eyes because of Sugar,” Steve says.

The Sugar transparency also breeds confidence because clients can use a portal to view their upcoming events and pull real-time reports on job estimates, costs related to crew members, names, call times and travel expenses.

“Sharing that information with the client and giving them their own limited access through the portal enhances our reputation. They can see we know what we are doing, and that we can adapt as needed,” Steve says.

Nothing builds confidence among clients like a winning combination of performance and transparency.

CUSTOMIZATIONS AND INTEGRATIONS:

ProCrewz is the internal name for the customized Sugar Professional platform used by Program Productions. It handles freelancer contacts and hiring, staff deployment, expenses, travel, calendar management, and client billing.

SAVING TIME FROM THE START

When Lisa Migala, a national accounts director, first began working at Program Productions, she found spreadsheets, emails, and calendar notations being used to build production teams and manage events.

"I felt like I was set back 20 years; it was kind of old-school where you had to type in everything. Now that we have Sugar, we're on top of everything, and it is all in one place," says Lisa, who is responsible for determining staffing needs for events, hiring the freelance crews, and making sure everything and everybody is on site and ready to go live at the right moment.

A football game may require a technical staff of up to 30 people. About half that number is normal for basketball.

Staffing an event used to involve dipping in and out of spreadsheets to collect data about client requirements, venue peculiarities, equipment needs, and available freelancers. It could take up to six hours to pull together the details for a single nationally televised event.

Just outlining the technical positions needed was a time-eater.

"It used to take 45 to 60 minutes to build staffing for a show," says Lisa. "Now, sometimes we can do it in five minutes."

Working in Sugar, Program Productions has cut the total time spent planning event production by 33%, saving the business nearly 6,000 hours each year.

SMART ABOUT PROCESS

Using her Sugar databases today, it only takes Lisa minutes to estimate the cost of an event, especially if there is a similar event at that location in their database.

"With Sugar, when I create one show at a location, it is easy to copy and edit the show for future events because a lot of times the same client has the same requirements," says Lisa. "All I have to do is change dates and call times; the system supplies all the other details, and it saves a lot of time building the show plans for an entire season."

As the Sugar information resources grow, planning becomes easier.

The company is hoping to begin tracking the specialized equipment contained in the production trucks it rents in various cities.

Knowing what equipment is already available in the truck will allow the Program Productions team to use the staffing database to match freelancers who have training on that equipment.

"It used to take 45 to 60 minutes to build staffing for a show. Now... we can do it in five minutes."

Lisa Migala
National Accounts Director

THERE WHEN MINUTES MATTER

Ask national accounts director Keli Dora about what Sugar does for her and you'll get a harrowing story about miscommunication, deadlines, and pressure to perform for a major new client.

On the night Keli talks about, perennial contender Kentucky was playing at home in Lexington on national television. It was the start of the college basketball season, and Fox Sports, which was broadcasting the game, was newly signed on as a Program Productions client.

The game production may have looked smooth to millions of viewers. But that was only because the Sugar-driven platform made a key play before tipoff.

"Six hours before the game started, the technical director didn't show up. He had the wrong day on his calendar and he was too far away to get there in time," says Keli.

"I went into the system, found a technical director within driving distance and had him on the road to the game in 45 minutes," says Keli. "When minutes mattered, I had Sugar."

Keli's success managing this event set the tone for a successful relationship with Fox Sports spanning multiple seasons. This story – and others like it within Program Productions – are emblematic of the company-wide process changes that continue to reinforce the power of CRM within the organization.

ENVISIONING BEYOND THE FINALE

Steve Spurlock isn't finished orchestrating this particular production.

He plans to totally integrate accounting and sales, but for now, his emphasis is on refining processes in the staffing arena.

Next on the agenda is amping up social media, which the company uses for text messages but wants to expand into an interactive portal for freelancers that would be linked with top social media sites.

"We can increase our crewing speed via social media. We want to make it a place where freelancers can maintain a work calendar, indicate availability, add new skills, and look for work," Steve says. "We couldn't pull this off without Sugar."

"I went into the system, found a technical director within driving distance and had him on the road to the game in 45 minutes. When minutes mattered, I had Sugar."

Keli Dora
National Accounts Director

SOLUTION PARTNER

HS Highland Solutions

Program Productions' customized deployment has been developed, implemented, and managed by Highland Solutions, a Chicago-based enterprise technology and business solutions consultant. A three- star VAR Award Winner and SugarCRM Platinum Partner, Highland Solutions creates highly effective business systems. By gaining a deep understanding of clients' business processes, Highland develops custom CRM, e-commerce, cloud and social business solutions.

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CUSTOMIZATIONS

In addition to using Sugar's off-the-shelf functionality, Program Productions developers easily created new modules or customized existing ones to fit their needs.

MODULES

- **Rate Card:** Used to set contracted rates and benefits for freelancers in each city (i.e. union/non-union, base pay rates, rate type, rate per day, rate by position, contract validity date ranges, etc.). Special rates and benefits information can be applied on a per employee basis.
- **Invoicing:** Integrates labor detail from a specific job to create accurate estimates and custom invoices.
- **Positions:** Catalogs all crewing positions, facilitates staffing planning for each event.
- **Employees:** List of W-2 freelancers, searchable by location, specialties, and project history.
- **Job Opportunities:** Used to monitor events. View estimates and actual labor costs in real time (accessible through a custom subpanel and displayed in a grid).
- **Pricing/Expenses Module:** Contains pricing and expenses related to equipment rentals. Tied to specific job opportunities and invoices to fulfill event needs and apply job costs accurately.
- **Estimated Labor:** Estimates an employee's call time, crewing dates, and scheduled hours on each event.
- **Labor Actuals:** Records actual hours worked, used for invoicing and job records.
- **Job Calendar:** Modified to pull in opportunities and show event status.

PORTALS

- **Freelancer:** Once hired, freelance team members are given two-way access to relevant documents related to the job. Documents include crew lists, crew contacts, sign-in/-out sheets and trouble reports.
- **Client View:** Displays all upcoming events for the client, with option for detail view on each. Clients can pull reports for estimates of each job and applicable costs related to crew hours, travel expenses, and other related fees.

PLANNED INTEGRATIONS AND PORTALS

- **Payroll and Accounting System:** Automate data flow to accounting systems for payroll, vendor payments and financial reporting.
- **Social Media:** Application linked to top social media sites that would allow freelancers to post their locations, availability, and specialties as well as review current openings and easily apply to opportunities.

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