

# Ravinia's New Partner, For A New Era

8 MIN READ



Ravinia Festival, a storied institution in Highland Park, Illinois, has been enchanting audiences for over a century with its world-class musical performances. Each year, it hosts everything from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to beloved artists like Norah Jones and Jason Isbell, providing a summer haven for Chicagoans and visitors, alike. Behind the scenes, however, managing the festival's success and growing operations wasn't as seamless as the on-stage performances. Ravinia was dealing with siloed systems for ticketing, fundraising, and CRM, which made day-to-day tasks harder than they should be.

To keep pace with their expanding audience and increasingly complex operations, Ravinia needed a solution to streamline their workflow. That solution came in the form of AudienceView Unlimited, which has since transformed how the festival manages ticketing, fundraising, and audience engagement. By integrating all key functions into a single system, Ravinia has transformed not only its internal operations, but also the experience it offers to its patrons.

[What is AudienceView Unlimited?](#)

## The Need for a Smarter System

Before the summer of '24, Ravinia operated on multiple systems that didn't communicate with each other. The team was juggling ticketing, donor management, and customer relationship management (CRM) on separate platforms, leading to inefficiencies across the board. Greg Walters, Chief Development Officer, pointed out how this impacted their ability to fully understand and engage with their audience. "We had completely separate systems, and we weren't able to look deeply at our audiences outside of our donor base or see the connectivity between them."

In practice, this made it time-consuming to accomplish simple daily tasks and, in turn, impossible for the team to spend their time evolving and improving the Ravinia experience for their attendees.

Heath Warren, Ravinia's Annual Fund Campaign Manager, echoed these concerns. "I had to log into two or three places just to talk to a donor. It was time-consuming and not efficient." Heath described how having disconnected platforms made every task take longer than it should have, and how it has been a major time-

unlock to have AudienceView Unlimited power all those areas. This disconnected system didn't just affect donor relations—it also slowed down Ravinia's ability to make data-driven decisions, which are critical to every team from Marketing to Ticketing Operations, Fundraising to the C-Suite.

## Fast-Tracking a Solution

When Ravinia decided to adopt AudienceView Unlimited, the goal was to consolidate all their data and operations into a single platform, streamlining their processes and providing better insights into their *all* of their audiences, including attendees, donors and marketing subscribers. Transitioning a complex organization with multiple venue spaces, restaurants, disparate data sources, and a massive team of both full-time employees and season volunteers is no easy task. Doing that in less than half a year made that task seem nearly impossible...to some.

Typically, an organization of Ravinia's size would plan for a 12-18 month transition period to onboard and be fully operational with a new software backbone to the entire organization. But that wasn't in the cards for Ravinia's move to AudienceView Unlimited. Ravinia needed to make the switch before their season went on sale in June 2024. With a contract signed in January, that just left both teams 6 months to operationalize a brand new, all-in-one platform that powers nearly every transaction, every team, and every ticket. It was a challenge that Ravinia posed, and AudienceView stepped up to, and within 6 months the AudienceView team had rebuilt the Ravinia.org website to be hosted entirely on AudienceView Unlimited, migrated all the necessary historical data, and setup the team for success to go on-sale and start their 2024 season.

Heath was quick to praise the AudienceView team for making the transition as smooth and efficient as possible, saying "The AudienceView team consisting of Zach, Adam, and David were amazing to work with. They understood our business, asked the right questions, and worked hard to make sure we were fully operational by day one.". The support from AudienceView ensured that the festival's operations didn't miss a beat, even as they transitioned to a completely new platform.

Heath also highlighted the importance of having such a reliable team during the fast-paced transition. "They were unflappable," he said. Heath went on to explain that every time the Ravinia team had an unexpected unknown or new challenge arise, "Zach, Adam, and David [on the AudienceView team] said 'Yes, we can do that'. It had a very calming effect on us in the short transition that we had."

The speed and success of the transition were put to the test when Ravinia kicked off its season in June, with two sold-out nights shortly after implementing the system. Despite the tight timeline, the festival has been running smoothly all summer long — a testament to both the joint efforts of the Ravinia and AudienceView teams, as well as the power of the platform.

## Unifying Data for Better Decisions

One of the biggest advantages of AudienceView Unlimited is its ability to consolidate all data into a single system, giving Ravinia a 360-degree view of their patrons. This was a game-changer for the festival, as they were previously working with disjointed systems that made it difficult to connect the dots between ticket sales, donations, and audience behavior.

Greg Walters emphasized how critical this shift has been for their organization. “Having our data consolidated has been a real eye-opener,” he said. Like any organization with difficult to access data, Ravinia was doing the best with what they had. With such a fantastic team, they were, in fact, doing a remarkable job getting right right, but to Greg the AudienceView Unlimited difference is, “The difference between data and guesswork. We were 90% right in our guessing, but being able to make large decisions for the organization based on reality and actual data has been a great thing .” Ravinia can now gain insights into how different types of visitors interact with the festival—whether they’re attending concerts, making donations, or simply visiting the grounds for one of the countless activities from the immersive [Ravinia Music Box](#) to the delicious [Park View Restaurant](#).

For Heath Warren, this consolidation has made managing donor relationships far more efficient. “I can look at a donor record and know exactly how much they donated, when they last gave, and what tickets they bought—all in one place,” Heath explained. The ability to access this information quickly and easily has not only improved internal workflows but also strengthened relationships with donors, enabling more personalized and meaningful interactions.

The sheer impact of consolidating data into AudienceView Unlimited, enabling it to be actionable and accessible by the team entire team is best stated by Greg as he reflects on how much easier it is to make data-driven business decisions. “I can ask my team a question that used to take a week to get an answer, and now they’re able to pull it in an hour or less”, Greg said.

## Enhancing the Patron Experience

While AudienceView Unlimited has certainly made life easier for the Ravinia team, the benefits extend to the organizations attendees as well. With everything integrated into a single platform, managing tickets, donations, and account information has become a much smoother experience for event-goers.

In counting the reasons why he would recommend AudienceView Unlimited to other organizations, Greg has the improved attendee experience at number two (just behind unifying platforms). “We had a very positive response to the overall user experience”, Greg mentioned.

Ravinia has also been able to introduced new features that enhance the donor experience, including the ability to set up payment plans for donations. This feature, which wasn’t even advertised to their donors, has already been a hit. “We didn’t even promote it, but over 100 donors have used the payment plans already,” Heath shared. The introduction of payment plans has made giving more accessible for patrons at various levels of support, resulting in nearly \$400,000 in donations through this feature alone.

## Supercharging Marketing with Real-Time Data

With a diverse lineup that spans multiple genres—ranging from classical to pop—Ravinia’s marketing team needs to be able to target specific audiences with the right messaging. AudienceView’s integrated system has made this not only possible but highly efficient.

Drew Jaffe, Marketing and Promotions Manager, explained how the platform has transformed their ability to reach the right audiences. “We have a newsletter audience of about 400,000 people, and we’re constantly

working to acquire new patrons,” Drew said. “We can create prospecting lists which is usually just folks who are attending Ravinia concerts who are not donors. We can send them information about what our nonprofit does, the music education, and try to appeal to them as prospective donors.” Something that was much harder to do when your donor data is in one place, ticket buyer data in another, neither of which can pass data back and forth with your email platform.

The real game-changer for marketing, according to Drew, has been the integration between AudienceView and MailChimp. Lamenting about how difficult it was to build audience lists before AudienceView Unlimited, Drew explained that “building a list in [our previous platform] was a big thing. I had to really block out time to do it, and it wasn’t something that I could easily do on the fly. As we’ve integrated more with the AudienceView Unlimited platform, I’ve seen a huge increase in the power that we have with MailChimp because it’s in my hands now. I can create new connections between AudienceView Unlimited and MailChimp to send data over and I don’t have to rely on anyone else to do that.”

As a modern digital marketer, Drew is always focused on deploying his resources, both time and money in the most efficient way possible to drive his business goals. And he uses AudienceView Unlimited to do just that. In explaining how they’ve setup automatic reports on the platform to democratize their data, Drew says “We get daily reports of our sales for every single show, and of movement since yesterday, and we also get a weekly report of movement since last week.” Reporting alone can sometime be a readout, but armed with the right information at the right time, the marketing team can amplify their impact tenfold. “We do responsive ad buying at Ravinia, because obviously we don’t want to buy ads for shows that sell themselves, but certain shows sometime just need that extra boost. We need ongoing sales data to drive those decisions.” With AudienceView Unlimited, Drew can easily access that data and put it to use driving their marketing strategy.”

As any good marketer knows, the ability to pull the data you need and seamlessly pass it over to the platforms you use, is invaluable. It’s the difference between guessing then watching and testing then learning. The power to both continue improving and react instantly is the power that all marketers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need, historic music venue or not.

## **Looking Forward: Tapping into New Possibilities**

While Ravinia has already seen tremendous benefits from implementing AudienceView Unlimited, the team is excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. With all of their data now in one place, they are well-positioned to continue refining their strategies, from donor engagement to marketing campaigns.

Greg Walters is particularly enthusiastic about the insights they’ll be able to glean about donor behavior. When asked about what he’s most looking forward to learning with AudienceView Unlimited, the answer was clear “What motivates our donors and ticket buyers”. A simple question, but many times not such a simple answer. “We have this perception that all of our donations are generated by our classical audience, but I know that’s not the case,” Greg states. “We previously didn’t have the capability to dig into that, but now we can shape our offers to them, and understand that sort of demographic breakout of motivators.”

While the opportunities to unlock audience, donation, and efficiency growth are too many to list here, Heath sums up Ravinia’s eagerness and AudienceView Unlimited power well by saying, “We’re just scratching the surface of what AudienceView can help us achieve.”

As the festival looks ahead, the flexibility and power of AudienceView Unlimited will undoubtedly continue to play a key role in driving Ravinia’s success.

## **A Model for Success**

Ravinia's successful transition to AudienceView Unlimited offers a clear blueprint for other live-event organizations looking to modernize their operations. By consolidating ticketing, donations, and CRM into one unified platform, while unleashing marketing efficiency and improving the attendee experience, Ravinia has unlocked new opportunities for growth.

As Greg Walters looks to the future, he says "I think AudienceView Unlimited will boost our productivity and give us a lot more options and opportunities."

When Ravinia decided to switch platforms to unite their teams, unify their data and better engage their audiences...with just a 6 month runway...AudienceView Unlimited was the partner they needed. The festival's ability to transition so quickly and see immediate benefits is a testament to the non-stop collaboration and world-class team members from both Ravinia and AudienceView. Now, with a partner as dedicated to their success as they are, Ravinia is poised to continue delivering exceptional musical experiences for years to come.