

EMA CASE STUDY



A world-class brand's evaluation path that led from 13 strong possibilities to selection of SymphonyAI's AI-powered ITSM and ITAM

EMA recently spoke at length with the head of IT operations about the challenges of finding a single enterprise-wide ITSM and asset management platform solution to serve a diverse variety of businesses. The company is a privately held, world-class entertainment and leisure company with high brand recognition. It owns/operates many varied restaurants, hotels, and entertainment venues. Each entity or division has unique business challenges, opportunities, and contexts combining the freedom to operate independently with the benefits of scale that come from some centralized services.

IT is one of those centralized services. Brian is the head of IT operations, which includes responsibility for the service desk, ITSM, and all level 2 support. He spearheaded the process of consolidating requirements across the diverse business entities and translating them into a system that would serve and satisfy – possibly even delight – all shareholders. This paper follows the path and reasoning that led Brian and his team from a starting field of 13 vendors to selection of SymphonyAI. The implementation is still young, but early results are quantifiably strong.

Context

There is a seasonal element to the business from Memorial Day through Labor Day, when the employee ranks swell from 1,500 permanent full-time folks to an additional 5,000 seasonal employees. IT handles the diversity of business requirements and HR load by standardizing wherever possible – where the standardization does not compromise the quality and type of service each business division needs. For instance, dining venues all use the same food and beverage system though the type of experience may vary greatly, from food stand to elegant fine dining. The divisions share the same HR systems and all are served by the same help desk and IT service management (ITSM) system.



A distinctive of this company is its core mission of funding a charitable foundation that supports underserved families in meaningful ways across years and streams of need. This underlying value has an impact on the culture. Collaboration and cooperation are expected and delivered. It is not unusual to find an executive manning a food booth if needed. As a result, the work environment is one characterized by low turnover. The downside of that benefit is that younger professionals must sometimes leave the company to gain managerial experience before returning to long-term employment.

Such was the case of Brian, head of IT operations, who recently shared his experiences in a lengthy conversation with EMA. Brian first joined the company as a college intern, rising through the ranks for eight years until he left for several more years to manage end-user services at a major financial institution. He returned to the entertainment and leisure giant with firsthand experience in the selection and implementation of a new ITSM system. The experience also gave him an understanding that, “you can do a whole lot more with ITSM than enter a ticket and send it off to the next person in line.”

The beginning

In his new incarnation at the company, Brian owned the service desk/help desk and level 2 talent. He inherited an ongoing Cherwell ITSM implementation. Was it perfect? “We had what we had, and we made it work.” There was no compelling reason to look at other ITSM systems until Ivanti acquired Cherwell. From Brian’s point of view, “the clock started ticking.” He knew that sooner or later, Ivanti would twilight Cherwell and his company would have to make a change whether they wanted to or not.

Brian began helping his management, team, and peers get comfortable with the idea of change. “We’ll have to change sometime. I want to get ahead of this.” The company signed its annual Cherwell renewal on December 22nd each year. The signing in 2022 gave Brian and his team one year to evaluate and choose ITSM and ITAM systems that would take his company through the next generation of growth and change.

Brian and his team made a thoughtful list of what they needed and what they wanted in both an ITSM and an ITAM system. They were scored separately to find out who was on top for ITSM and who was on top for ITAM. However, vendors did get “extra points” for combining the two.

ITSM requirements: core system hosted/SaaS with very high uptime. Web browser only – no fat clients. Mobile app. Chatbot, Knowledgebase, self-service portal for user access and requests. Self-service automation and orchestration so standard requests could also be auto-fulfilled. “Asset could help us with these goals and dreams.”

There were 26 categories in the ITSM RFP, including: incident management, tasks, ticketing, service requests, knowledge, change management, problem management, CMDB, service catalog, release management, portfolio management, portal, automation, orchestration, event management, emails, mobile app, chatbot, digital agent, surveys, and APIs. They also looked at core admin functionality and wanted a system that would give them room to grow.



Asset management requirements: core capabilities, agent on device, usage, but PoS PCI systems can't have an agent, hardware and software asset management, software deployment, OS deployment – Windows mostly, some Mac and Chrome, Raspberry Linux.

- **Vendors that received RFPs:** Atlassian/Jira, C2, EasyVista, Freshworks, Halo, IFS Assyst, Invgate, Ivanti neurons for ITSM, ManageEngine, ServiceNow, SymphonyAI (formerly called Symphony Summit), SysAid, and Team Dynamics.
- **Vendors that made the shortlist:** Fresh Service, Halo ITSM (working with a known partner, Excalibur), invgate, Ivanti neurons for ITSM because they were the incumbent, ServiceNow, and SymphonyAI.

Choosing

Each company did detailed demonstrations. “We’d ask a question and the sales people answering would say ‘yes, we can do it.’ And we’d say ‘no, show us.’ Some set up live demo environments – we recorded the demos and sent them to all IT people. Some cared. Some didn’t. Some didn’t and should have. Some don’t use the capabilities as much as others. After, we sent a survey to everyone who attended a demo.”

The company had a strong preexisting relationship with a partner that was selling and implementing one of the ITSM systems. The partner already knew the people, the organizations, and the nuances of the company, so that was attractive. In the end, SymphonyAI won. Brian noted that, to some extent, “All tools do the same thing. It comes down to how easy it is to use and admin...and cost.”

SymphonyAI won on a number of fronts:

- **Cost and value:** SymphonyAI checked almost all of the boxes for now and in the foreseeable future at a cost that made a high value proposition.
- **Ease of administration and configuration:** “It’s easy to make changes to configuration and presentation on the fly.”
- **Functionality:** SymphonyAI had a rich set of features that were available now and “a roadmap that is exciting. There will be growth.” It offers twelve ITIL verified processes.
- **Scope:** SymphonyAI has one platform for ITSM, asset, workflow automation, and digital agents. It is easily extensible to other enterprise functions, such as HR and finance.
- **Digital agent and chatbot**
- **Single tenant cloud-based SaaS**
- **Enterprise-grade platform for automation, orchestration, and AI:** The company sees orchestration and automation as high priorities that SymphonyAI does well. It is interested in AI and appreciates SymphonyAI’s dedication to harnessing advances in that area, but it’s not top of the wish list right now.
- **Ease of implementation and time to value:** Time to value was important. The company was on a tight timeline with its Cherwell license up for renewal, so it had to be done before Christmas.



Brian is very pleased with the decision and experience so far, but he had to be won over. “It was easy to get a high-level idea of the company. In all of the independent online review sites, such as Gartner Peer Insights, SymphonyAI (then known as Summit) was always in the high end of categories, recommendations, and satisfaction.”

He added, “There was also the ITSM community at events like Support World. It’s a chance to explore many options and learn from the firsthand experiences of peers. It is clear that what matters most is what works for your organization.” Brian met the SymphonyAI sales team at Support World and extended the conversation over more than a year. The sales team is made up of experienced ITSM professionals who are knowledgeable, honest, competent, and helpful. They personalized demos and never exerted pressure to act.

Implementation and early results

From start to go-live was less than 90 days, with both organizations working around limitations of the client company. For instance, HR was implementing a new system and Brian didn’t want to overwhelm them with change. ITAM launched in October 2023 and ITSM in late November. Service requests, change, knowledge, portal, and chatbot were the first priorities. Tickets were being entered well before the Christmas goal. It was a little slow at first as people made the change, but quickly adjusted.

About the implementation, Brian said, “Symphony did most of the work. They gave us datasheets to fill out and we’d test it the next day. We met daily and tested daily. It was good out of the gate. From ‘Tag, you’re it’ to go-live was just under three months. Symphony could have easily done it faster if we’d wanted. The whole process was really low on drama.”

Brian characterizes the implementation as early, saying, “We are babies on this path.” At this writing, the implementation is less than six months in, and they are already seeing results:

- 42% of service requests that would have normally gone to the help desk are resolved with automation
- Onboarding seasonal employees/account creation is automated
- 58% of tickets were phone calls – now down to 48% with further reductions planned
- Portal use moved from 28% to 37%
- Digital assistant launch is soon, which will “make it so that agents aren’t jumping from call to call to call...they can do more productive work”
- Analysis of call categories – seeing where time is spent and the reasons why – gives a basis for improving. Brian wants to cut down on the knee-jerk reaction to email. He wants people to stop emailing and go to the portal.
- CMDB is next

Brian says that working with SymphonyAI is good. Although he sometimes misses the in-depth, personalized knowledge a local partner brings to implementations, there are advantages to working directly with the company. He gets regular updates, can easily open tickets, and gets fast turnaround responses.



Buoyed by the early successes, Brian and his team already have plans for growth. They plan to leverage the platform's ITSM/ESM capabilities to serve other functions, such as HR and finance. Experience teaches that, when people see what's possible with automation and AI, adoption climbs and use cases expand. The combination of practical fitness for today's needs with a ready ability to accommodate future requirements is a large win in SymphonyAI's favor.

A word from the SymphonyAI Enterprise IT team

Enterprise IT is a business division of SymphonyAI. Founded in 2017, the company has grown to a team of 3,000 professionals and is a leading AI SaaS provider delivering packaged enterprise AI solutions for a range of critical industry use cases. The top 200 financial institutions, the top 15 grocers, and the top 25 CPG companies are SymphonyAI customers.

SymphonyAI Apex offers an AI-powered IT and Enterprise Workflow platform that integrates IT Service Management (ITSM), Enterprise Service Management (ESM), Asset Management, Enterprise Copilot, and Service Automation into a single, easy-to-use suite. It delivers a scalable, AI-powered platform that provides quick time to value with low code/no code capabilities. Features include omnichannel experience, service automation, workflows, powerful reporting analytics capabilities, and 100s of integrations with third-party applications. The suite helps simplify work, increase productivity, and deliver a delightful user experience.

It is realistic for enterprises using SymphonyAI Enterprise IT to experience 60% automation of service requests, 50% faster resolution, and 30% savings on hardware and software costs using their Apex platform. You can read more here <https://www.symphonyai.com/itsm/>.

About EMA

Founded in 1996, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) is a leading IT analyst research firm that specializes in going "beyond the surface" to provide deep insight across the full spectrum of IT management technologies. EMA analysts leverage a unique combination of practical experience, insight into industry best practices, and in-depth knowledge of current and planned vendor solutions to help its clients achieve their goals. Learn more about EMA research, analysis, and consulting services at www.enterprisemanagement.com or follow EMA on [X](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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