

INTERACTIVE SESSION: ORGANIZATIONS

ANALYTICS HELP THE CINCINNATI ZOO KNOW ITS CUSTOMERS

Founded in 1873, the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden is one of the world's top-rated zoological institutions, and the second oldest zoo in the United States. It is also one of the nation's most popular attractions, a Top 10 Zagat-rated Zoo, and a *Parents Magazine* Top Zoo for Children. The Zoo's 71-acre site is home to more than 500 animal and 3,000 plant species. About 1.3 million people visit this zoo each year.

Although the Zoo is a nonprofit organization partially subsidized by Hamilton County, more than two-thirds of its \$26 million annual budget is paid from fundraising efforts, and the remainder comes from admission fees, food, and gifts. To increase revenue and improve performance, the Zoo's senior management team embarked on a comprehensive review of its operations. The review found that management had limited knowledge and understanding of what was actually happening in the Zoo on a day-to-day basis, other than how many people visited every day and the Zoo's total revenue.

Who is coming to the Zoo? How often do they come? What do they do and what do they buy? Management had no idea. Each of the Zoo's four income streams—admissions, membership, retail, and food service—had different point-of-sale platforms, and the food service business, which brings in \$4 million a year, still relied on manual cash registers. Management had to sift through paper receipts just to understand daily sales totals.

The Zoo had compiled a spreadsheet that collected visitors' zip codes, hoping to use the data for geographic and demographic analysis. If the data could be combined with insight into visitor activity at the Zoo—what attractions they visited, what they ate and drank, and what they bought at the gift shops—the information would be extremely valuable for marketing.

To achieve this, however, the Zoo needed to change its information systems to focus more on analytics and data management. The Zoo replaced its four legacy point-of-sale systems with a single platform—Galaxy POS from Gateway Ticketing Systems. It then enlisted IBM and BrightStar Partners (a consulting firm partnering with IBM) to build a centralized data warehouse and implement IBM Cognos Business Intelligence to provide real-time analytics and reporting.

Like all outdoor attractions, the Zoo's business is highly weather-dependent. On rainy days, attendance falls off sharply, often leaving the Zoo overstaffed and overstocked. If the weather is unusually hot, sales of certain items such as ice cream and bottled water are likely to rise, and the Zoo may run out of these items.

The Zoo now feeds weather forecast data from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Web site into its business intelligence system. By comparing current forecasts to historic attendance and sales data during similar weather conditions, the Zoo is able to make more accurate decisions about labor scheduling and inventory planning.

As visitors scan their membership cards at the Zoo's entrance, exit, attractions, restaurants, and stores, or use the Zoo's Loyalty Rewards card, the Zoo's system captures these data and analyzes them to determine usage and spending patterns down to the individual customer level. This information helps the Zoo segment visitors based on their spending and visitation behaviors and use this information to target marketing and promotions specifically for each customer segment.

One customer segment the Zoo identified consisted of people who spent nothing other than the price of admissions during their visit. If each of these people spent \$20 on their next visit to the Zoo, the Zoo would take in an extra \$260,000, which is almost 1 percent of its entire budget. The Zoo used its customer information to devise a direct mail marketing campaign in which this type of visitor would be offered a discount for some of the Zoo's restaurants and gift shops. Loyal customers are also rewarded with targeted marketing and recognition programs.

Instead of sending a special offer to its entire mailing list, the Zoo is able to tailor campaigns more precisely to smaller groups of people, increasing its chances of identifying the people who were most likely to respond to its mailings. More targeted marketing helped the Zoo cut \$40,000 from its annual marketing budget.

Management had observed that food sales tend to trail off significantly after 3 p.m. each day, and started closing some of the Zoo's food outlets at that time. But more detailed data analysis showed that a big spike in soft-serve ice cream sales occurs during the last hour

before the Zoo closes. As a result, the Zoo's soft-serve ice cream outlets are open for the entire day.

The Zoo's Beer Hut concession features six different brands, which are typically rotated based on sales volume and the seasons. With IBM analytics, management can now instantly identify which beer is selling best, on what day, and at what time to make sure inventory meets demand. Previously, it took 7 to 14 days to get this information, which required hiring part-time staff to sift through register tapes.

The Zoo's ability to make better decisions about operations has led to dramatic improvements

in sales. Six months after deploying its business intelligence solution, the Zoo achieved a 30.7 percent increase in food sales and a 5.9 percent increase in retail sales compared to the same period a year earlier.

Sources: Justin Kern, "Analytics: Coming to a Zoo, Museum, or Park Near You," *Information Management*, August 28, 2012; IBM Corporation, "Cincinnati Zoo Improves Customer Experience and Enhances Performance," 2011; Nucleus Research, "IBM ROI Case Study: Cincinnati Zoo," July 2011; and www.cincinnati-zoo.org, accessed May 26, 2012.

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What management, organization, and technology factors were behind the Cincinnati Zoo losing opportunities to increase revenue?
2. Why was replacing legacy point-of-sale systems and implementing a data warehouse essential to an information system solution?
3. How did the Cincinnati Zoo benefit from business intelligence? How did it enhance operational performance and decision making? What role was played by predictive analytics?
4. Visit the IBM Cognos Web site and describe the business intelligence tools that would be the most useful for the Cincinnati Zoo.