

Saint Louis Zoo | Managing a menagerie of data



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY



ASD designs a BI reporting system that helps tame the problem

The Saint Louis Zoo prides itself on being one of the few zoos in the country that doesn't charge an admission fee. Instead, the Zoo relies on city and county tax revenue, earned revenue, philanthropic support, and a unique membership program that brings in money from tens of thousands of members.

For years the Zoo has collected membership fees and in return given members a host of benefits like new animal previews and parties, parking passes, animal shows, free train rides, guest lectures, newsletters, and discounts in the gift shop and restaurants. Money comes in from members, and money goes out in the form of member benefits.

The bottom line? No one knew.

Zoo officials had never been able to easily identify the overhead of the membership program. The information to make the determination existed, but it was spread throughout the Zoo organization—on cash register tapes at the gift shop, in the accounting system in the main office, on spreadsheets in the parking department. All reporting was done manually, but never collected and consolidated into useful information.

"All of their IT systems are islands," says Brent Hoover, leader of the Business Intelligence practice at Advanced System Designs. "They input everything manually in each silo, then have to pull reports for each different silo and manually identify its connection to the members. Here we are, almost through 2005, and the Zoo membership department had compiled data only up until the end of 2003."



“In less than a week, we had data from all of 2005. Before that, we hadn’t even compiled information from 2004. Now we can use that data to analyze the membership program’s worth to the Saint Louis Zoo.”

—Ginnie Westmoreland, Director of Marketing, Saint Louis Zoo

Technology People

- Executive Scorecards and Dashboards
- Query and Data Analysis
- Enterprise Reporting
- Data Mining and Statistical Analysis
- Desktop Integration

Business Results



The solution? Business Intelligence.

Business Intelligence allows companies to use their own data to better understand their business. It offers better access to information and enhances management reporting to ultimately improve decision-making and the bottom line. But full-blown BI systems can be expensive, and as a non-profit entity, a costly upgrade wasn’t a viable option for the Zoo.

“We knew we needed to do something,” says Ginnie Westmoreland, the Zoo’s director of marketing. “As a non-profit organization, we have to account for every dime. And with our existing system we weren’t able to do that. On the other hand, spending a lot of money on new hardware or software wasn’t an option either.”

Hoping to learn more about Business Intelligence, the Zoo sent its IT staff to a Microsoft Business Intelligence seminar hosted by ASD. They were surprised to learn that their BI solution was already in place—they just needed some help to activate it.

The Zoo had already implemented a Microsoft SQL Server 2000—equipped with Analysis Services that had never been deployed. “We wanted to help them exploit their existing tools,” says Hoover. “We showed them how we could present an image of their membership on their existing hardware and software.”

First ASD consulted with Zoo staff to determine what data they needed to gather, where to find it, and how they hoped to use the information. Then ASD built a process to extract the data from the many different locations and bring it all together on one server.

ASD set up processes across all the Zoo’s platforms that collected and categorized member usage data into a single database that can be used to generate useful reports about member activity during visits to the Zoo.

The reporting platform—Microsoft Excel—is ideal for the Zoo’s needs. The spreadsheet program is already on everyone’s PC and many employees have been using it for other things. For those who aren’t familiar, it’s an easy program to learn.

“If we had to learn a whole new way of doing things, we might be more hesitant about making good use of the information,” says Westmoreland. “But this is easy for us to use, so I’m confident we’ll be diligent about doing it.”

The benefits of BI

The new system allows the Zoo to see the costs for membership and the services that members use, providing a true profile of the revenue stream. They can compile data on the member program as a whole, or tailor it to see the history of just one member.

“Let’s say we give members a free pass for a special show at the Zoo,” says Westmoreland. “Are we losing money on that pass, or is the member spending money at the restaurant to offset the cost? Now we know. We can answer all kinds of questions about the membership program. For example, we give away free parking passes. Now we know how many are actually being used. And we know too if the member who uses that free pass spent any money in the gift shop.”

Westmoreland is confident that all this data will be put to good use when it comes time to evaluate the membership program. Management may decide some benefits don’t net the Zoo a return on their investment. Other member benefits may make more sense economically, so they’ll be continued or expanded.

“Instead of just doing things the way they’ve always been done, now we’ll have a reason—

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and concrete results—for everything we do,” says Westmoreland. “I’m excited to see what we’ll learn as we continue using our new Business Intelligence system.”