

Outlook Management Case Study:

Leisure Sector – Bristol Zoo



Roaring Success

Bristol Zoological Gardens is one of the world's oldest and most successful zoos. To help with extending and enhancing its food service offering to visitors, the zoo has turned to Outlook Management Services to review and restructure its entire vending operations.

Bristol Zoological Gardens' twelve acre site lies in the heart of the city. Founded in 1835, the zoo is now home to nearly 10,000 animals and is one of the major tourist attractions in the south west. In addition to providing a unique experience for its half a million visitors every year, the zoo supports a wealth of vital conservation, research and education programmes around the world.

To help the zoo's catering and food service operation cope with increasing visitor numbers, vending machines were introduced in 1998. Not wishing to disturb the distinctive environment of the gardens, this first programme was very discreet, bringing in just three machines - two coffee and one chilled can drinks - in two low-profile locations.

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Results of the venture were closely monitored. In addition to providing a valuable new source of revenue, the vendors were successful in taking pressure off the zoo's four existing staffed kiosks at peak times and allowing a more efficient service during low demand periods. It was also recognised that the machines provided a versatile and cost-effective platform to extend the range of products the zoo could offer.

"The initial programme reinforced the idea that vending could prove a real asset to the zoo. The decision was made to broaden the offering by increasing the number of machines; but again it was important to preserve the unique atmosphere of the zoo's surroundings," says Head of Commercial Operations, Alex Page. *"To avoid putting additional pressures on staff, it was agreed at the time that servicing and filling be outsourced to a local vending operator."*

Three Wall's® branded ice cream vendors were brought onto the site. Again the offering proved popular, but with more machines, managing every aspect of the operation proved to be increasingly difficult.

Achieving a consistent level of service was key to building the vending programme. Having some machines in house and others managed externally, the zoo struggled to achieve a harmonised approach, and returns, although good, were not as high as expected. Management were keen to bring in a healthy drinks brand, but needed a new operational approach that would allow it to be achieved effectively.

The Abbey Well® range of mineral water and fruit drinks was an attractive choice for the zoo's next move. The brand had an established nationwide vending package developed and operated by Outlook Management Services (OMS).

"Through this initial contact, it became clear that the OMS team could work closely with the zoo's team to realise the full potential of a growing vending operation," says Alex. *"In addition to bringing in the Abbey Well package, the OMS team also proposed some significant changes that would enhance both product offering and day-to-day management."*

OMS brought in two glass-fronted Abbey Well merchandisers and replaced the three existing ice cream vendors with two new Wall's machines and two new Ben and Jerry's® units. All the vendors were telemetry-linked to the OMS service centre which monitors individual stock lines within each machine, calling the local OMS operator to the site the moment product needs replenishing.

OMS also recommended re-designing the machine line ups at each vending station, increasing the visual appeal to visitors and presenting the new products in a logical format. New locations were also established, capitalising on high foot-fall areas with attractive machines that harmonised with the sensitive visual settings.

"The results of these changes were tremendous. Weekly sales doubled compared with the same period in the previous year – despite unseasonably bad weather - and the revenue projections increased considerably," says Alex Page. *"The operational benefits contributed greatly to this success. Reducing machine down-time and having a reliable, fast response to stock filling allowed us to achieve the consistent, high service level that we were seeking."*

Confident that the commercial structures put in place by OMS could deliver far more, Bristol Zoo has now expanded its vending operations yet further. The latest addition to its portfolio is a Pourmoi™ 'coffee shop concept' dispenser. The subtly styled vendor delivers a complete range of premium, high-end coffees and hot beverages in larger size 12oz paper cups – a size familiar to the 'to-go' coffee consumer – using fair-trade ingredients. Early results are that the new machine, which is located in the 'Activity Area', is proving extremely popular delivering exceptional volumes and levels of user satisfaction.

"With the continuing support of OMS we feel confident that we can expand further and enhance the visitor experience."



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