

Philadelphia. Gateway Ticketing also launched a new loyalty program, which helps the zoo track the behavior of card-carrying members and target specific groups for rewards and “compelling offers.”

The zoo also hired BrightStar Partners Inc., an IBM business partner based in Chicago, to implement a data warehouse as well as the business analytics software -- IBM Cognos 8.4. The entire project began in July last year and went fully live last October, Lucas said.

“In the initial project, there was not going to be a data warehouse,” Lucas said, “but [BrightStar was] actually able to develop one for us within our budget.”

Pricing details for the IBM Cognos and data warehouse implementation were not disclosed, but Lucas said the point-of-sale systems and loyalty program cost about \$250,000. The zoo projects that the project will lead to 50,000 new visitors in the first year and will pay for itself by 2012, Lucas said.

The zoo now has the ability to quickly determine what individual people are doing at the park, how much money they’re spending and what they’re spending it on. For example, staff can see who the lowest spenders are and offer them incentives to make more purchases. They can also identify who visits the park most often and reward those patrons for their loyalty.

“Some of our VIPs, when they arrive, maybe they’ll receive a text message thanking them for their visitation, or maybe we’ll send them an offer just to thank them for what they’ve done,” Lucas said. “Whether you’re running Best Buy or whether you’re running a zoo or IBM, if you can create that unexpected reward where [the consumer] didn’t even know it was coming, that is a key ingredient for retaining them as a long-term customer.”

Look out for the polar bears

The Cincinnati Zoo is now heavily focused on getting some “quick wins” from its investment in analytics software, but it’s not all business all the time at park’s 71-acre campus. Occasionally, after closing time, Lucas will sip a glass of wine and enjoy some of the park’s many exhibits.

“My personal favorite is the polar bear,” he said. “They’re one of the only known animal species that have not, through evolution, developed a fear of man.”