

REALLY WILD

Marwell Wildlife's InfoGenesis POS™ by Agilysys improves customer service and enhances operations at a popular UK visitor attraction



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Marwell Wildlife depends on visitor income to support both the running of its flagship zoological park in Hampshire and its vital conservation work. Income from foodservice and retail outlets across the site forms a significant proportion of this. When Marwell revamped its foodservice operations to improve service and provide greater business insights for managers, Agilysys provided the answer. Park management can now ensure the right goods are being sold in the right place at the right time, with the right staffing levels to meet customer demand.

“The Agilysys solution provided a number of benefits, including a measurable increase in visitor spend per head,” says Simon Cox, Commercial Operations Director, Marwell Wildlife. “We are a visitor attraction so we talk about guest experience management a great deal and work hard to make continual improvements. Agilysys is an important cog in the machine: the right cog in terms of retail and foodservice. We can serve more customers more accurately.”

Business background

One of southern England’s most popular animal attractions, the park is owned and operated by Marwell Wildlife, a charity dedicated to conserving biological diversity. Over 250 species from ant to zebra live in 100 acres of parkland. The park is open every day except Christmas Day, with a typical year seeing over 500,000 visitors. In the park, a range of busy retail and beverage outlets serve large numbers of visitors.

Revamping foodservice and retail was one aspect of a wider programme to build a park fit for 21st Century guests. From management making significant investments to update facilities and developing new exhibits, such as the stunning ‘South East Asian Biome’ – the new home for Marwell’s family of Siamang Gibbons and several other animals from that corner of the world.

“Previously, each outlet had an individual cash register – and not very good ones!” says Cox. Before December 2006, catering was outsourced to a succession of contract caterers. “We decided to bring it in-house and inherited a multitude of equipment,” says Cox. “Marwell Wildlife has grown considerably from when it was founded 35 years ago. Over the years it developed piecemeal and it was time for new investment to support growing visitor numbers and ensure we delivered a great guest experience.”

When it came to updating existing catering units and providing new ones, however, the mix of ageing cash registers caused problems. “Cashing up each day was a headache,” Cox says. “We had machines from different manufacturers so we had to maintain stocks of different till rolls, for example. Our approaches were inconsistent and inaccurate, there was cash shrinkage and unfortunately the potential for theft was high.



Marwell Wildlife



Outlets covered include:

- Lions Den – hot pastries, fresh organic cappuccinos and lattes
- Penguin Coffee Hut – freshly ground Fair Trade organic coffee, tea and ice creams
- Africa BBQ – 100% beef burgers in toasted Sour Dough Buns, chicken breast burgers and Roasted Mediterranean Vegetable burgers
- Tiger Junction Snacks – this restaurant with undercover marquee seating offers filled jacket potatoes, soup and bread, and deep-fill sandwiches
- Red Panda Kiosk – freshly ground organic coffee, tea, ice creams and hot dogs
- Bush Tucker Bites – hot and cold food, fresh baguettes, subs, smoothies, panini's, salads and soups, with outside seating and children's play area
- Kiosks and Carts – 'grab and go' outlets serve produce ranging from beech-smoked hot dogs to ice cream

"Cash control was the biggest driver, to ensure a tight audit trail. We are a registered charity and we need to know where every penny goes. With our previous approach there was a huge lack of data and information: we only had a rough idea about what we were selling, where and when. We wanted to gain an accurate picture of our sales, to identify top sellers, better deploy staff to the busiest outlets. But we had no data to support that. We also wanted to introduce credit card payments with chip and pin to improve service and generate higher revenues."

Why Agilysys?

Originally, Marwell Wildlife was looking for a one-stop solution to cover gate incomes, access control, ticketing, retail sales and foodservice sales. "After speaking to other attractions we decided to take a different route," says Cox. "Agilysys had responded to the tender for the one-stop solution and when we decided to go 'best of breed', we got in touch." The Agilysys solution, which includes award-winning InfoGenesis software, is flexible and easy-to-use, with the high performance software element supported by industry-leading hardware that includes 14 IBM SurePOS touchscreen terminals in all the outlets including the Retail shop.

The solution was implemented in time for the following summer season. "It was an absolute dream," recalls Cox. "The installation was fantastic. What made the difference was the planning and support by the Agilysys team. They understood our requirements and carried out a lot of work before the go-live. We bought a new server, which Agilysys set up offsite. Back at the park they worked quickly and professionally with an Agilysys representative staying with our IT people for the first weekend, guiding us through minor problems. We had lots of support – they were very hands-on."

Improving the guest experience

"We saw a massive improvement in service, something we test monthly with a mystery shopper programme," Cox says. "Results were great: customers served more efficiently, change is correct, they get an accurate receipt. And because all data is captured and we have an audit trail, if a customer has a query or think they have been mis-served we can see what has happened. It's also very flexible. In one case we were aware guests might end up queuing at a popular new outlet that had replaced a busy small kiosk, so we put in an extra terminal to speed up throughput. The solution clearly provides opportunities to improve service."

Ease of use is also important. "We have 12 full-time food and beverage staff year-round and hire 30 more for six-to-eight weeks to handle peak seasonal demand. Staff are trained very quickly and small things can make the biggest difference. For instance, with the terminals, we put on screen the specific products an outlet sells and nothing else. This helps to make service faster and is less stressful for staff."

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Other benefits are provided by sales reports based on real-time transactional data and the real-time consolidation of data from multiple outlets. “We can pull sales data for a particular period and look at the theoretical cost of goods,” explains Cox. “For example, the sales data says an outlet sold 400 units of something, the stock says it sold 420 – so what’s the issue? We can highlight potential shortcomings. For instance, a recipe could be wrong: we may think it takes one box of tomatoes to make 400 baguettes when, in fact, it takes two boxes. And there may be certain products we assume will sell but the data tells us otherwise, so we can stop selling them fast. We can make better decisions.” In another case, Marwell had introduced an ice cream kiosk selling a locally sourced product. “We saw

immediately this had become our top-selling product. We can also see if we’re succeeding in our up-selling efforts: for example, getting staff to offer biscuits with coffee, then seeing how that relates to actual sales.”

In workforce management, each employee has a log-in to a terminal, so their performance can also be tracked. “Previously, you could set sales targets but it was difficult to measure performance against them. The data we now have means we can do that.” The real-time aspect is also useful in moving staff to sales hotspots. “We can see what we’re selling minute by minute, which outlets are busy and getting through stock. If Tiger Junction is particularly active, I can call the Catering Manager and ask for staff and stock to be directed there, possibly

by closing a quieter outlet. I can do this without having to walk around the park, so I have more time for planning and strategic activity. And you can learn new things. For instance, sales reports showed the Penguin Coffee Hut was busiest for the first two hours of the day before getting much quieter. So we can decide to close it at noon if we want and move staff and stock to places where they can have more of an impact.”

Cox adds, “With the system, I can see where and when the terminals are filling up and if we need to lift cash, which means less risk and improved security.”

Return on investment

“We saw an increase in spend per guest,” says Cox, “and this wasn’t due to increased pricing



either, as we have to be very competitive in pricing. This result is especially impressive as the Treetops restaurant was closed – a larger outlet with higher value transactions. The fact we later integrated Chip & Pin facilities helped too, as transaction amounts typically increase when guests use plastic. We couldn't take cards before – now, ten percent of guests use a card to pay”.

“Visitors to Marwell Wildlife want a great experience and they want value for money, or they won't come back. We've made real progress in improving the attraction and there's still more to do. With wireless communications throughout the park, we added the mPOS by Agilysys handheld devices to catering operations as well. This provides even more opportunities and greater control of

foodservice carts and the ‘hawkers’ who, on hot days, sell ice creams from ice-bags in picnic areas.”

Saving money, making money - and helping Marwell do more

Cox adds, “We also extended our solution into retail operations for The Ark Gift Shop, including Chip & Pin. Linking the retail and catering together with one EPOS system has helped Marwell to become more commercially astute. It now helps me to monitor the sales within both areas of business and also gives me an indication of where the best places are to sell items.”

He says that while economies of scales are always likely to help you save money, Marwell's Agilysys solution not only helps the charity save hard-earned cash but also

helps management by delivering major time savings. “Back office reporting at the click of a button, not only from a management perspective but also on the ground, has sped up the way in which the cash office works and our end-of-day procedures are much quicker. We can identify mistakes and misdemeanours if they occur, which in turn means we can retrain or remove employees if necessary. Our teams use the system to motivate their own areas to sell more products and this, in turn, helps generate extra monies for the charity.

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Agilysys..

Who We Are and What We Do

Agilysys is a leading provider of innovative IT solutions to the retail and hospitality sector. The company offers proven software, services, hardware and consultation for hotels, casinos, destination resorts, condominiums, cruise lines, stadiums and arenas, and conference centers to streamline operations and enhance guest satisfaction while maximising profitability. Agilysys' hospitality solutions provide unparalleled reliability, functionality, efficiency and control over multiple aspects of operations – from reservations, check-in, point-of-sale and business intelligence, to inventory and procurement management to document management. Agilysys' U.S. corporate headquarters are in Cleveland. We operate extensively throughout EMEA, with a main office in Cheshire, UK and additional sales and support offices through partners across Europe, South Africa and Dubai.

**For more information, call +44 (0)1925 401310;
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