



Dallas Zoological Society

Visit the Dallas Zoo and you will find an atmosphere that nurtures the animals that thrive there. Visitors will also find programs that encourage a deeper understanding of our mutual responsibility towards biological diversity and the environment. The Dallas Zoological Society supports this outstanding center of education, entertainment, and wildlife conservation through fundraising, volunteerism, and promoting public awareness. Through these efforts, the Dallas Zoological Society also strives to broaden support for worldwide conservation.

Highlights

- Hosting an online auction has helped extend their fundraising reach to supporters beyond the benefit auction.
- Time spent on post-event reconciliation was dramatically reduced after utilizing Greater Giving Event Software and Auctionpay terminals.
- More funds were raised in 2008, after implementing an effective procurement strategy supported by Event Software reports, increasing underwriting efforts, and increasing auction efforts overall.

Challenge

For the past 18 years, the Dallas Zoological Society has held an annual gala, which includes a major auction effort. The proceeds from the event provide funding to support the operating efforts of the Dallas Zoological Society, along with monies to enhance Dallas Zoo programs and projects.

With such a large fundraising event, an efficient event software and credit card payment system is key. Yet, the Zoo's auction team struggled by with a manual system for years—actually writing down credit card numbers and then typing the numbers in after the event. “Oh, my goodness...it was time-consuming and frustrating!” stated Denise Thomas, Dallas Zoological Society's

database/IT coordinator. “For the event data, we had spreadsheets to track everything and it was very difficult to reconcile because everyone was tracking by different perspectives,” she continued.

In 2006 the Dallas Zoological Society purchased an event software package from an Greater Giving competitor to help reign in the disorganization they were facing. While it did improve a few areas, they were still challenged with getting critical information into their Raiser's Edge donor management software, and actually running the event from that software. Thomas was also dissatisfied with the customer service she and her team received. And, despite the investment in donor management software, they still had no solution for the long lines at check-in and check-out.

Solution

In 2007, the event coordinator presented the Greater Giving Event Software option to the team. The Society elected to invest in Event Software and Auctionpay at that time, and immediately found the system to be more user-friendly and efficient than the previous software package.

Once they started using the Greater Giving solution, they finally had a centralized tool to enter all the details of the event—no more spreadsheets! The event team also found Event Software to be self-tutoring, which cut down on time spent in training. A favorite Event Software feature for the Zoo's auction team was the ability to sync Event Software with the Raiser's Edge software. Now they can easily share information across the two platforms, which makes it easier to continue developing their donor audience.

Tips from the Dallas Zoological Society

- Sell small items, such as gift cards, at an online auction prior to the event.

- Don't be afraid to invest in your event infrastructure—for example, a software tool that saves time or a professional auctioneer who helps raise more money.
- Make your event more intimate by reducing the number of attendees and raising the ticket price. Restricting ticket sales makes your event more desirable, too.

Results

In 2008 the Dallas Zoological Society decided to spend more time training on Event Software, so they could take advantage of all its features. This new knowledge opened up many fundraising opportunities. First, they realized they could sell smaller donations, such as gift cards, at the online auction prior to the event. By doing so, they don't have to put time and effort into creating packages that incorporate the gift cards. It has also helped generate anticipation and excitement among their supporters for the main event.

Next they made a groundbreaking decision—to reduce the number of attendees at their event and increase the ticket price. This move made the event more exclusive and desirable, and would eliminate the space

constraints brought on by the growth in ticket sales. Now that they had the data under control and a slick new way to manage the event, it seemed like the right time to go in this direction.

The gamble paid off. In 2008 The Zoo raised more money than ever before—grossing roughly \$250K more than previous years.

The Dallas Zoo is now planning for their 2009 event, beginning with a new procurement strategy. Using Event Software reports, they are reviewing item performance and buyer history from previous years. From this information they can create a target list of items they want to procure and understand who will want to buy them. The procurement team is also armed with a deep knowledge of The Dallas Zoo's mission, a statement of exactly why they need the item and how the funds raised will be used. If they cannot get what they have asked for, then they are prepared to ask "what can you give." This kind of determination, creativity, and forward thinking is why the Dallas Zoological society has found fundraising success, and The Zoo will continue to thrive as a result.